

## **ON THE ROAD TO THE NORTH EAST!**

The month of November 2011 saw Bobby Besant and my self make the 670 mile round trip drive up to South Shields, in the north east of England to judge at the NEHU Show, which must be rated as one of the best one day shows on the British show Callender. Bobby is a postman and getting out of bed at 05.00hrs every day is the norm for this pigeon man. For me it is not quite so easy, but I managed to pick him up at his home in Worcester Park at 05.30hrs and we were soon on the M1 motorway, heading north. It was to be a very special weekend for Bobby and my self, as I had arranged two loft visits on our way up north, to two of the, what I consider to be two of the best lofts in Europe, in the form of Brian and Thelma Denney of Strensall and Mark and Dick Evans of Whitley Bridge. I must say, as usual I didn't sleep to well the night before, but such was the buzz with Bobby and me, I didn't feel at all tired on the long haul up the Motorway. The weather was brilliant for the long drive and two winter loft visits, and with the pigeon banter between Bobby and me, the four hour journey up to Doncaster for our first visit just flew by!

Our first stop was 'Myrtle Lofts' home of the Gaby Vandenabeele champions of Mark and Dick Evans of Whitley Bridge. In spite of my recent articles on this wonderful loft of pigeons, Mark and I had never met in person, with all our many corresponds over recent months being made on the telephone, text and email. It was a great pleasure to finally met this great fancier and I found he was the gentleman and outstanding stockman I thought he was. A real nice guy! On our arrival the kettle was put on and we had a cup of tea and an hour of pigeon banter in Mark's office / reception room in his house. I couldn't wait to get into the loft and handle all the M. & D. Evan's champions which have made them one of the premier breeding establishments in the pigeon racing world. The brick loft has a lot of character with its smart clock tower and massive flights. We were very impressed with Mark and Dick's loft as the sections and flight had loads of room for the inmates, and although the main loft was closed in, the ventilation was brilliant, and you could not smell pigeons. The sections and flights had to be 10ft high and the birds entered the flights by a tunnel system over your head in the corridor. The breeding sections had nice roomy two tier nest boxes and concrete floors, which had a dusting of litter on them to keeps it sweet. The massive flights had timber slatted floors and the stock birds are out there perching on poles in any weather, all the year around. The birds were in brilliant condition and were a credit to Mark and Dick!

We handled most of the Gaby Vandenabeele champions, but first to hand was my favourite Champion 'Shadow'. I was really looking forward to handling this wonderful dark cock and I must say, he did not disappoint, he was as good as he looks in his photograph, pure class! Champion 'Shadow' is of the all time best breeders at 'Myrtle Lofts' and was bred by Gaby Vandenabeele. He is sire of winners with 13 different hens and sire of over six generations of National & Classic winners. He is himself responsible for 1<sup>st</sup> Open NFC Messac, 1<sup>st</sup> Open NFC Angers, 1<sup>st</sup> Open London & SE Classic Bergerac, 1<sup>st</sup> Open BBC National Carlisle, 1<sup>st</sup> Open Welsh S/E National Oudenaarde, 1<sup>st</sup> Open MNFC Yearling Alencon, 1<sup>st</sup> Open Welsh National Bergerac, 1<sup>st</sup> Open MNFC Carentan, 1<sup>st</sup> Open MNFC G/R National, 1<sup>st</sup> National AU race Stockton California USA, 1<sup>st</sup> Open MCC Lessay, 1<sup>st</sup> Open CSCFC Lessay, 1<sup>st</sup> Open London & South East Classic Guernsey, 1<sup>st</sup> Open CSCFC Messac, 1<sup>st</sup> Open BBC Fougères, 1<sup>st</sup> Open NFC Nantes, 1<sup>st</sup> Open BBC Bordeaux, 1<sup>st</sup> Open BICC Falaise, 1<sup>st</sup> Open MNFC National Treble Chance, 1<sup>st</sup> Open London & South East Classic Club Tours and 1<sup>st</sup> Open London & South East Classic Club Carentan. That's 19 x 1<sup>st</sup> Open winners in Classic and National races. Even the latest top performance of 1<sup>st</sup> UK, 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Sun City Million Dollar Race winning \$75,000 (approx. £48,000.) was also a granddaughter from Champion 'Shadow'. A once in a life time pigeon!

After many successful years in pigeon racing Mark told me their most thrilling experiences in the sport is having the telephone, texts, and e-mails going week after week with winning reports from different fanciers all over the world achieving top performances by racing their bloodlines. Mark and Dick both decided to introduce the Gaby Vandenabeele bloodlines back in 1995 with the intensions of putting together a family of pigeons for middle-distance Classic & National racing. Their main ambition was to try and put a 1<sup>st</sup> Open National winner to their own list of achievements. Back then in the nineties when purchasing these birds little did they realise what outstanding bloodlines they had invested into and how famous they were about to make the name M. & D. Evans become world-wide. These bloodlines have amazed even Mark and Dick achieving far more than they could ever imagine. Fifteen years later and the father and son partnership are proud to pronounce they have to date 71 times 1<sup>st</sup> Open winners reported in Classic & Nationals which include 46 times 1<sup>st</sup> OPEN NATIONAL WINNERS that contain their M & D. Evans bloodlines. They have also had winners reported in America, Canada, Hawaii, South Africa, Taiwan, Kuwait, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Hungary and all parts of the UK. For Mark and Dick these outstanding results for other fanciers are far more rewarding than any 1<sup>st</sup> Classic or 1<sup>st</sup> National winner in their own lofts. A fantastic record! Thanks to Mark for most enjoyable loft visit, I'm looking forward to coming back to 'Myrtle Lofts' again soon.

Strensall, the home of Brian and Thelma Denney, is about an hours drive north from Doncaster and we arrived there at lunch time, to be greeted with a Yorkshire blue sky and autumn sunshine. When ever I've visited Brian and Thelma the sun has always shone! They both looked very fit and well, and Thelma put on one of her brilliant lunches, with home made cake. Thelma and I sat and talked about the families, and Brian showed Bobby his great collection of photographs of his wonderful long distance champions over his many years in the sport. Bobby was a bit disappointed, as he was talking about handling the great Champion 'Tuff Nut' on our drive all the way up the motorway and Brian had to tell him that he was a very old pigeon, and was now under the apple tree in the garden. The legend is dead! In my opinion 'Tuff Nut' was one of our greatest long distance champions of all time, being a champion racer and a champion in the stock loft, being responsible for density of long distance racing champions including, 'Northern Lady' winner of 1<sup>st</sup> sect K, 3<sup>rd</sup> open NFC Tarbes (748 miles) 2009, 'Dark Charm' winner of 1<sup>st</sup> sect K, 5<sup>th</sup> open NFC Tarbes 2007 and 'Dark Dancer' the winner many top National Flying Club positions including 1<sup>st</sup> sect K, 48<sup>th</sup> open NFC Fougères, 2<sup>nd</sup> sect K, 4<sup>th</sup> open NFC Tarbes . Some say that Brian Denney's Pau Grand National performance in the 2002 season, when he recorded 1<sup>st</sup> section K. 5<sup>th</sup> open, was one of the best performances of all time in the National Flying Club. John Ayling had the only bird on the day of liberation, in the form of his fantastic champion, 'Home Alone', and Brian clocked his dark white flight cock, 'Tuff Nut', on the second day, flying 738 miles, with north in the wind all weekend, to record 5<sup>th</sup> open. Brilliant stuff! 'Tuff Nut' was born at the loft of David Harrison from Brian Denney bloodlines. When I asked Brian about his wonderful pigeon at the time he smiled and said, 'That was a great day when we saw him coming from the Pau National and I knew that only one bird had been clocked on the night flying 519 miles. It must have given John Ayling the thrill of a lifetime to clock the only bird on the day in the Pau Grand National. 'Tuff Nut' had been clocked from Saintes, 573 miles on the day, flying 15 hours, in the 2000 season and from Pau I hoped that he had made it into England on the night, but that's one thing we will never know. After clocking him from Pau, he soon showed plenty of interest in his mate, so I knew he was right and when I phoned Sid Barkel to verify him I was told 'Tuff Nut' was the first bird clocked in Section K. Only four birds had beaten him with 4,085 birds competing and the fact that he had flown 738 miles on two hard days and still up with the leaders made me feel very proud of my pigeon. Not long after the race, Bill Harris, the N.F.C. president, phoned to congratulate me on 'Tuff Nut's' performance, which was very nice and for days after the phone never stopped ringing from fanciers with good wishes, from all over the U.K. The icing on the cake was the N.F.C. prize presentation in Blackpool when my fellow fanciers acknowledged 'Tuff Nut's' wonderful performance. Champion 'Tuff Nut' won 1<sup>st</sup> RPRA Region Long Distance Award and 2<sup>nd</sup> RPRA UK Long Distance Champion for his wonderful performance".

We were soon in Brian's loft and I must say, as I have many times before, his loft of pigeons is one of the best long distance teams I've ever seen in my time in pigeon racing. They looked just fantastic and are a credit the Brian and Thelma! I can understand why Brian is so successful at his beloved long distance National racing, as his enthusiasm and pride in the loft when showing you his birds are very apparent. Bobby was very impressed with Brian's 750 mile family of pigeons and liked his loft set up, and constantly remarked on the brilliant ventilation in the structure. We spent a couple of hours in the garden and we handled all the current champions including the RPRA UK Long Distance Champion 'Brian's Blue'. Brian put up another fantastic performance in the 2008 NFC Tarbes Grand National and clocked his blue widowhood cock, 'Brian's Blue', on the day of liberation, flying 748 miles, and recording 1<sup>st</sup> sect K, 61<sup>st</sup> open (4045 birds). This champion pigeon was clocked just after 22.00 hrs on the day, flying 16 hours 15 minutes and I believe, is the furthest flying pigeon clocked on the day ever in a NFC race. 'Brian's Blue' won 1<sup>st</sup> RPRA Region Long Distance Award and 1<sup>st</sup> RPRA UK Long Distance Champion for his brilliant performance from Tarbes in the 2008 season. A wonderful performance! Too follow his brilliant 2007 NFC Tarbes performance when he recorded several premier positions in the open result, including 1<sup>st</sup> sect. K, 5<sup>th</sup> open. Brian recorded 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> sect K. (240 birds) in the 2008 race. It is always a sorry time when I have to say goodbye to Brian and Thelma after a visit, but time was marching on and we had another 80 miles to drive to book into our hotel in South Shields. Thanks to Brian and Thelma for a great loft visit and lunch! (See 'Album' for the photos)

**TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT.**