

THE LATE, GREAT ERIC CANNON OF GODALMING.

At the 1999 National Flying Club prize presentation held at Bedford, my good friends, Eric and Pat Cannon of Wormley, were presented with their fourth N.F.C. Pau Certificate of Merit, which is won by a pigeon that has taken three positions in the first 100 open in the Pau Grand National result. Their fourth certificate winner was the blue hen, Champion 'Culmer Bess', whose record reads, 1996: 4th section, 47th open Pau / Saintes, 1997: 2nd section, 6th open Pau, 1998: 170th open Pau, 1999: 2nd section, 26th open Pau, to lift the Certificate of Merit. A wonderful hen! 'Culmer Bess' is a daughter of one of Eric's N.F.C. Pau section winners, 'Culmer Joan', and a cock obtained from Michael Spencer of Clitheroe. The Cannon / Spencer cross proved to be an excellent one, with '76956', a brother to 'Culmer Bess', winning 1st in the very strong Godalming club from Nantes, 17th open N.F.C. Pau, 184th open N.F.C. Pau, 161st open N.F.C. Pau / Saintes. The Cannon loft won its previous N.F.C. Pau merit award with the champion blue hen, 'Culmer Channel Queen' and she recorded 364th. open Young Bird National, 9th section, 98th open Pau, 3rd section, 29th open Pau, 5th section, 23rd open Pau, 14th section, 183rd open Pau. Another fantastic pigeon! She was a direct daughter of the champion stock cock, 'Culmer Producer', sire of many good Pau pigeons and son of 'Culmer Pat', when paired to a son of Tom Gilbertson's 'Treble Five'. The champion hen, 'Culmer Pat', won 27th, 80th and 104th open Pau N.F.C. for the late Gerald Stovin and was dam of his 1st open N.F.C. Pau winner. 'Culmer Pat' was bred by Gerald Stovin from two Cannon pigeons and was gifted back to Eric before Gerald's untimely death from cancer. The dam of 'Culmer Channel Queen' was '27444' and she scored in three Pau Nationals, recording 70th, 298th and 507th open, and her dam was 'Culmer Joan'. A brilliant family of long distance pigeons!

Eric started to keep pigeons in his early school days, with his first birds costing only a few pence each and trained his birds on a pushbike. He joined the local Godalming club as a junior member. The club comprised of some the best N.F.C. members, such as L. Raynford, winner of 2nd open San Sebastian in 1935, F. Seaman, winner 2nd open Mirande in 1937, H. H. Boshier, winner 4th open Mirande in 1938 and 2nd open Mirande in 1939, J. Pattman, winner of 5th open San Sebastian and C. R. Gush, who recorded 8th, 11th, 17th, 18th and 21st open from San Sebastian. Growing up with fanciers of this calibre enabled Eric to learn the trade of long distance racing. He always maintained that these great fanciers would take only one position inland to give novices encouragement and would always congratulate the youngsters when they won a prize card. Eric had to pack up pigeons due to four years in the Army, on war service and after picking up a bad foot injury, he met his wife, Pat, a nurse at a war time hospital in Liverpool. One of Eric's best pigeons after the war was the dark chequer hen, "Circle Queen". She was a late bred in 1949, bred by the outstanding Godalming fancier, the late Stan Edgington, who won everything in Combine and National racing. The name Edgington has long been connected to the fancy of the Godalming and Guildford countryside and it all started with Harold Edgington who passed away in 1961. Harold started up in pigeons in 1924 and was one of the founder members of the Godalming & District F.C., and was the secretary for 20 years. His son, Stan, started up with pigeons from Fred Seaman of Woking in 1932 and inherited his father's gift for racing pigeons. We called Stan, "the birds man of Eashing", because he loved all birds and had lots of aviaries in his big back garden. He was a first class carpenter and joiner, owning his own building firm. "Circle Queen" was one of the first pigeons Eric raced on coming out of the army after the war and she was outstanding on the north and south roads. In 1949 flew Doncaster, 1950: flew three races through to Berwick, 1951: clocked from the N.F.C. Pau, 1952: clocked from Libourne, 1953: 171st open N.F.C. San Sebastian, 1954: 136th open N.F.C. Pau, 1955: 112th open N.F.C. Pau, 1956: 7th British Section, 120th International Barcelona. "Circle Queen" was the start of 50 years of fantastic long distance pigeon racing by Eric Cannon. His family of pigeons started in 1950, when he purchased a blue chequer hen, '50 – 1753', from Mr. Wiggins of Ipswich, costing him 30 shillings, her dam being a big winner from Lerwick. This wonderful hen was dam and grand dam of 34 pigeons to score in channel races. One season, Eric paired a daughter and a grandson of 'The Wiggins Hen' and they produced Eric's champion hen, 'Pat', winner of 1st open Combine Bordeaux, 35th open Combine Bordeaux and 73rd. open N.F.C. Nantes. 'Pat' was the dam of 'St. Swithin', winner of 1st. open Combine Bordeaux, 8th open Combine Bordeaux and many more premier positions. The sire of 'St. Swithin', was bred by Mr. H. J. Chandler off a pair of big winners at Thurso and Lerwick. Eric's family of long distance pigeons went back to the originals although he brought in a cross every

now and then, but Eric always thought it better to have a family of pigeons, providing the base is sound. One of the best crosses was 'The Challen Hen', a pigeon bred in 1971. She bred 10 pigeons to score at Pau (540 miles) and a daughter of this champion bred Cyril Medway's 1st open Palamos B.B.C. winner. Another premier cross for the Cannon loft was the blue hen called 'The Wood Hen', a daughter of Mr. Wood of Horsham's, 'Pride of Sussex', a big N.F.C. winner. 'The Wood Hen' was the dam of Eric's champion blue hen 'Blue Bird' and she won, 98th open Young Bird National, 247th open N.F.C. Nantes, 1st section, 6th open N.F.C. Pau, 1st section, 28th open N.F.C. Pau, 57th, 118th and 251st open N.F.C. Pau. Another champion daughter of 'The Wood Hen' was the blue hen, 'Culmer Lady', winner of 26th, 27th, 48th, 135th and 140th open N.F.C. Pau and she was Eric's first N.F.C. Pau Certificate of Merit award winner. The wonderful 'Culmer Lady' is the grand dam of Champion 'Culmer Gold', who won 21st, 70th, 83rd, 103rd and 111th open N.F.C. Pau, 163rd open N.F.C. Nantes, winning Best Average Nantes and Pau, 1st Club, 3rd Federation, 9th open Combine (5,049 birds) Niort, 1st Club, 3rd Federation, 11th open Combine (4,248 birds) Bergerac and was the winner of the Cannon's second N.F.C. Pau Certificate of Merit award. Eric also used some of the best of Fear Brothers' bloodlines and one cock crossed into Eric's family produced the red cock, 'Culmer Sam', who won 6th, 6th and 8th section N.F.C. Nantes and 89th open N.F.C. Pau. When this great cock was stopped for stock he proved to be a champion breeder, producing many premier racers, including 'Culmer Rose', winner of 30th, 56th, 389th and 541st open N.F.C. Pau. This wonderful red hen was dam of 'Culmer Joan', winner of 1st section, 12th open N.F.C. Pau and grand dam of Champion 'Culmer Bess', Eric's fourth Pau Merit Award winner.

The Cannon pigeons were raced on the natural system with the Pau Grand National in mind, but Eric rated the widowhood system for races up to 400 miles. The birds were paired in mid- March, with the date being worked back from the Pau National, so the birds got a natural cycle up to the race. The shorter races were used for training and the birds were tossed along the south coast. Eric maintained it didn't matter where the birds were trained from, for if they were super fit, their minds would be right. Eric remarked that he enjoyed Combine racing years ago, but in later years all his energy was spent on the National races. In spite of that, the loft won the Combine four times in recent years, with the blue chequer hen, 'Pat', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Bordeaux, grizzle cock, 'St. Swithin', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Bordeaux, dark chequer cock, 'Evil Eye', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Le Mans and the champion blue hen, 'Culmer Lass', winner of 1st open S.M.T. Combine Bergerac, only bird on the day of liberation in the Combine. The Cannons won the Surrey Federation's longest old bird race shield outright for winning it three times. Eric's most recent Combine winner, 'Culmer Lass', went on to win 1st section, 12th open N.F.C. Pau the year after her Combine win. This game hen also won two more positions from the Pau National, plus 49th open N.F.C. Nantes and is the grand dam of Champion 'Culmer Marion', 1st open N.F.C. Sartilly in 1990.

The loft was a converted 48ft. x 12ft. stable divided into four sections and Eric thought one of the most important items of good loft design is good ventilation. The Cannons had a really bad hawk problem, living in the Surrey country side, so early in 1999 Eric and I built a massive 48ft. wire flight in front of the loft, so the birds could come out and bathe, but still be protected from the bandits in the sky. He liked to change the birds' diet from time to time, but mostly a good mixture of beans, wheat and maize was fed. His race team was his old family of pigeons he had since the war, with the odd cross in from time to time. When bringing in a cross he looked for pedigree of work, long lines of distance winning pigeons and not fancy ring numbers.

I was working through some old photographs recently and came across a picture of Eric's old champion, 'Culmer Gold'. On viewing this handsome blue cock's photograph, it made me reflect on his wonderful racing record and I wondered to myself how you measure to find the best when it comes to racing pigeons. Performance, I suppose. The great 'Culmer Gold', never won the Combine or National race, some might say, Ah, but he was super consistent in the fierce competition of our supreme English specialist organisation, the National Flying Club. My ol' mate, Eric, had countless champions in his lifetime in pigeon racing, including 1st open N.F.C., but 'Culmer Gold', was his favourite and I think probably his greatest champion of them all. A once in a life time pigeon winning, 21st, 70th, 83rd, 103rd and 111th open N.F.C. Pau (540 miles), winning the N.F.C. Pau Merit Award and

in one season recorded 163rd. open N.F.C. Nantes to win the best Average from Nantes and Pau, plus two premier Combine positions. A brilliant performance! Champion 'Culmer Gold' was sired by blue cock, '40799', one of Eric's premier stock cocks in the 1980's and a full brother to the champion blue cock, 'Culmer Lad', who flew Pau 10 times and was in the N.F.C. result 8 times, to record 22nd, 37th, 227th, 346th, 373rd, 467th, 614th and 761st open. 'Culmer Lad' also scored in two other N.C.C. races, putting 10 National positions to his name and he was also an outstanding breeding pigeon, being the sire of several premier N.F.C. pigeons, and was grandsire of 'Culmer Belle', winner of 4th, 76th, 131st and 428th open N.F.C. Pau. 'Culmer Lad' and '40799' were both sons of the first of Eric's four N.F.C. Pau Merit Award winners, Champion 'Culmer Lady'. The grandsire of 'Culmer Gold' on his dam's side was the blue chequer cock, '26792', who is rated by some as Eric's principal breeding pigeon. He is half brother to Champion 'Culmer Lass'. The stock cock, '26792', and 'Culmer Lass', were both sired by the blue cock, '13953', the sire of three 1st section and a 2nd section winners from the Pau National. The dam of '26792' was the famous blue chequer hen, 'The Challen Hen', who bred 10 pigeons to appear in the Pau National results, including 2nd open. The nest mate of '26792' was blue chequer hen, '26791' and she won 2nd section N.F.C. Pau, and was also the dam of the champion red cock, 'Culmer Sam', who I think was Eric Cannon's key breeding pigeon from the early 1980's.

'Culmer Gold' is typical of Eric's old blue family, being medium, long cast in the hand, with good, silky feather and a nice head. The old timer loved Eric, and was always up on his shoulder or hand looking for a bit of Maize. He won a great deal of money in National racing and bred a dynasty of outstanding long distance racing pigeons for the Cannon loft and others.

If the N.F.C. Pau Certificate of Merit had started a few years earlier, Eric would have won three other awards, with the three hens, 'Culmer Julie Girl', 'Culmer Beauty' and the great champion blue hen, 'Culmer Blue Bird'. My wife, Betty, and I have been good friends with Eric and Pat for nearly 30 years and out of all their many champions through the years, 'Blue Bird', was my favourite. She was perfect in the hand and in the late 1970's she recorded 6th, 28th, 57th, 118th and 251st open N.F.C. Pau, winning 1st. section twice.

The Cannon loft has won countless positions in the N.F.C. through the years, but the highlights have been: 5 times winner of the Langstone Gold Cup, for best average of three N.F.C. races, 16 times 1st. section in N.F.C. races, 1st open Sartilly, 2nd open Pau, 4th open Pau, 5th open Sartilly, 5th open Avranches, 6th open Pau (twice), 8th open Sartilly and so on. The Cannons had 74 positions in the first 100 open positions in Pau Grand Nationals and lifted the 3 bird Average from the Pau National six times. Eric and Pat had a lot of problems with sparrowhawks and had many top class pigeons ruined by these birds, including the Pau section winner, 'Culmer White Flight'. Soon after this handsome cock won 14th, open N.F.C. Pau, he came home from an inland training fly ripped open by a hawk and mentally he was never the same pigeon again.

Eric Cannon passed away in July 2000 and I was asked to arrange his three dispersal sales, which were held in Nottingham, Sutton and Paulton in the autumn of that year. The Nottingham sale produced the highest priced pigeon at £2,300 – 00 in the form of Champion 'Culmer Bess', Eric's fourth Pau Merit Award winner. Her sire was bred by Michael Spencer, who went to the Nottingham sale with the sole intention of purchasing 'Culmer Bess'. He won the bid and took this great hen back to Lancashire. When Eric passed away the sport of pigeon racing lost the 'King' of the Pau National and one of its greatest champions! (See 'Album' for the photos)

TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT.