

BRIAN AND THELMA DENNEY OF STRENSALL.

The 2010 NFC Tarbes Grand National turned out to be a very hard race with only 481 birds on the final result, but it was particularly hard for the lofts in the north of England. Whether it is a hard or easy race, Brian Denney's fantastic 'Bri-Den' 700 mile family of pigeons always hold their own and give a great account of themselves in any competition. Brian sent eight birds to the Tarbes National held in July and recorded 1st, 4th, 6th Section K, 80th, 241st, 317th open flying 748 miles to his loft in York. The first pigeon on the clock from Tarbes was a seven year old blue chequer hen named 'Maxine', raced on the widowhood system and this was her third time at Tarbes, previously recording 109th open in 2007. Brian's latest Section K winner is a full sister to his champion stock cock 'Maxi' and he is a son of Champion 'Classic Lad', winner of 1st open Northern Classic Saintes, and 'Lynnetta' a daughter of Champion 'Tuff Nut'.

I first visited Brian and Thelma Denney in 1999 when I went to the Yorkshire loft to video 'Mr Long Distance' for my 'Many Miles with Mott' video series and since then we have met up at the BHW Blackpool Show every year, and I keep saying, 'I will pop up and see you both this summer'. Well ten years have flown by and I still had not been back to Strensall, although a visit was arranged in November 2008, when I was to stop off on my journey up to South Shields to judge the NEHU Show, but had to call it off as I had Gout in my foot. In late April 2009, Peter Taylor and I 'bit the bullet' and headed north armed with my pigeon photography box and a battery of cameras, including the video units. We left Claygate on the Monday morning at 06.00hrs and had a really good 240 miles drive up to York and were greeted by Brian on his front drive at 10.30 hrs. The weather was brilliant and the thought of looking at one of the best long distance lofts of pigeon in the sport excited me and Peter! After some tea and a chat I set up my pigeon box in Brian's garage and photographed 13 of the current 'Bri-Den' 750 mile champions. I took over a hundred photos of Brian and Thelma, and the lofts, which has brought my file up to date on this fancier, who is one of our greatest long distance champions of all time. I shot nearly an hour of video and just like those ten years since my last visit, the time flew by and after a nice lunch put on our Thelma, it was 14.30hrs and time to make the 240 mile drive home. What a great day we had!

After my visit in April, Brian and Thelma enjoyed a brilliant 2009 season racing in the National Flying Club. Their first success was from the Fougères National in May when the convoyer released 9,686 birds at 06.30hrs into a light East wind. Brian, flying 394 miles, clocked two pigeons in under a minute and recorded 1st, 2nd section K (968 birds), 48th, 51st open. The first pigeon on the clock was the champion dark pied widowhood cock, 'Dark Dancer', and he set a bit of a record that day from Fougères, as he is nest brother to Champion 'Dark Charm', winner of 1st section K, 5th open NFC Tarbes (748 miles) in 2007, making them two NFC section K winners bred in the same nest. Absolutely brilliant! The 2nd section K winner from Fougères was a the dark widowhood hen, '44136' and she is a daughter of 'The Dark Cock', who is a son of Champion 'Tuff Nut' and winner of 2nd section K, 147th open NFC Tarbes (748 miles) in the 2008 season. The month of June saw Brian's favourite race take place, the NFC Tarbes Grand National, and the Denney's enjoyed a brilliant race of a lifetime! The 3,800 birds were liberated at 13.45hrs on the Friday in no wind situation and with adverse weather in northern France that evening, the convoy experienced a very difficult race, with many members not clocking in on the Saturday. Brian and Thelma sent a team of 20 birds and flying 748 miles in to Yorkshire, clocked seven of their entry on the Saturday, to record a fantastic 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 11th section K, 3rd, 4th, 12th, 19th, 30th, 56th, 153rd open NFC and 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th open North East 700 Mile Club. The Denney's first two birds were on the clock within three minutes, with the 1st section K, 3rd open winner being the five year old widowhood blue chequer hen, 'Northern Lady', and she has previously won 6th section K, 217th NFC Tarbes. She is a daughter of the sire of the Brian's loft, Champion 'Tuff Nut', winner of 1st section K, 5th open NFC Pau, when mated to 'Brian's Prize' winner of 4th open Northern Classic Saintes, being clocked at 573 miles on the day of liberation, and is a full sister to the champion breeding hen, 'Dark Jan'. Those who were present on our visit to the Strensall loft in April will recall that I picked out 'Northern Lady' as my fancy and I'm happy to say she hit the jackpot in the very hard Tarbes Grand National! This champion hen has every thing being appled bodied and medium sized, with wonderful feather, eye and good balance in the hand. She was paired up on 10th February, being raced on total widowhood and had three inland races up to 180 miles, before going in to the NFC Fougères and Alençon races for training, then went to the NFC Tarbes Grand National. A wonderful hen! The star of the Brian Denney loft in 2009 must be the champion dark pied cock, 'Dark Dancer', being clocked three minutes after 'Northern Lady' in the NFC Tarbes race to win 2nd section K, 4th open. A fantastic 750 mile racing widowhood cock and his full performance is: 2009: 1st section K, 4th open NFC Fougères, 2nd section K, 4th open NFC Tarbes, and previously won 6th section K, 27th open NFC Tarbes, 4th section K, 208th open NFC Tarbes, 4th section K NFC Fougères. An absolutely fantastic performance! Brian's third pigeon home from the NFC Tarbes race to record 3rd section K, 12th open was the

four year old blue cock, 'Blue Boy', and he is a son of Champion 'Brian's Blue', winner of 1st RPRA UK Long Distance Champion in 2008 when mated to 'Class Blue', winner of 2nd section K NFC Fougères (394 miles).

It's was a double congratulation in 2008 to my good friends, Brian and Thelma! Firstly, 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 1st sect K, 61st 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 1st RPRA Region Long Distance Award and 1st 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 1st sect. K, 5th open. Brian recorded 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th sect K. (240 birds) in the 2008 race. Well done to you both!

Secondly, congratulation to Brian and Thelma Denney who celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 26th July 2008. 'Mr. Long Distance' and Thelma were at school together at Yeddington in Yorkshire and started going out together in 1954. Brian went into the forces and he was posted to Malaya for three years, but the couple wrote to each other regularly. After the long period of just writing the young Brian returned and found his love for Thelma was stronger than ever. Six months later he was posted to Germany and after their marriage at Yeddington Village Church on 26th July 1958, Thelma move out to Germany to start her married life with Brian. They stayed at Osnabruck until Brian's demob from the services in 1961. The couple moved into Strensall in 1962 and they have two daughters, Susan and Lynn, and beautiful grand children, Matthew and Amelia. Our Thelma is a very special lady, with her taking a big interested in Brian's hobby and being an inspiration to him over the years. What can I say about my ol' mate, Brian, that I haven't said before? A great friend and one of our greatest long distance champions of all time, putting up brilliant performance in the major National races every year! Brian and Thelma are two of the nicest people we've ever met in our time in pigeon racing!

Brian Denney was born near Malton in Yorkshire and his father kept a few pigeons, but never raced them, although he enjoyed taking them for short flights on his bike. Brian first had pigeons when he was a school boy and used to visit two fanciers in the next village, who really got him into pigeon racing. He went into the army for nine years and started up racing pigeons in 1962, at his present home in Strensall, near York. Brian's first birds were obtained from Albert Witty and Derek Smith and both these fanciers helped him with eggs from their best birds. The Derek Smith 'Lolita' family are still in Brian's bloodlines today. He says he remembers his first winner, it was a little dark chequer which came like a rocket and won the first race he ever entered. In the 1960's Brian admired the performances of Frank Cheetham who flew 709 miles from Pau and says he was on the front page of the pigeon papers every year after putting up brilliant performances from Pau. His first club was the Acomb MWC in York and he has the same loft that he started with in 1962, though he has made it bigger through the 47 years he has been in the sport.

The 2007 National Flying Club Tarbes Grand National race saw Brian Denney clock nine birds on the winning day, to record 1st, 4th, 6th, 9th, 20th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, 32nd Section K, 5th, 17th, 27th, 31st, 109th, 116th, 130th, 134th, 205th open (3,477 birds), flying 748 miles to his loft in York. The Denney's 2007 NFC section winner is a handsome two year old dark pied cock, now named 'Dark Charm'. For his wonderful performance in the Tarbes National 'Dark Charm' won 1st RPRA Region Long Distance Award and 3rd RPRA UK Long Distance Champion. Brian tells me he had another five bird's home that day, that he didn't clock and they also would have been well up in the open result. A wonderful performance by Brian, who is one of the greatest long distance fanciers this country has ever produced! The first three birds on the clock from Tarbes were full brother, racing on Brian own widowhood system and were bred direct off the champion stock pair, 'Maxi' and 'Dark Jan'. The fourth bird recorded from Tarbes won 2nd Section K from Bordeaux N.F.C. in 2006 and he was another son of 'Maxi', who has in recent seasons has become one of the principal stock cocks at the Strensall loft. 'Maxi' is a son of Champion 'Classic Lad' and a daughter of Champion 'Tuff Nut', named 'Lynnetta'. One of Brian's best hens was 'Blue Pau' and she was a champion racer and breeder, winning 3rd Section K. 41st open N.F.C. Pau, 738 miles, 4th Section K. 201st open NFC Pau. She was the dam of many outstanding racers including 'Classic Lad', winner of 1st Open Northern Classic Saintes, clocked from 573 miles on the day of liberation. 'Dark Jan' is a direct daughter of Champion 'Tuff Nut' when mated to 'Brian's Prize', winner of 4th open Northern Classic Saintes, also clocked from 573 miles on the day of liberation. A fantastic loft of long distance racers!

Some say that Brian Denney's Pau Grand National performance in the 2002 season, when he recorded 1st section K. 5th 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, to record 5th 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 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 1st RPRA Region Long Distance Award and 2nd RPRA UK Long Distance Champion for his wonderful performance.

The loft is 'L' shaped and faces south. It has two sections for widowhood racers, with 16 nest boxes in each, a section for the hens next door, two sections for the stock birds and a large section for young birds. Brian maintains that space and ventilation are the main factors in good loft design. He says deep litter is O.K. He used it for many years and it can get dusty, hence good ventilation in the loft is needed. His family of long distance pigeons are now his own and known throughout the pigeon racing world as the 'Bry-Den' 700 mile family. This season he has 13 pairs in the stock section, which were paired up in late January, and his stock team are all retired premier racers, or children of his best pigeons, such as 'Dark Peron' and 'The Bordeaux Cock'. If he is trying new introductions, he prefers to race them first and if they stand up to the test on the road he will take a youngster off them. Through the years he has introduced some good crosses into the Derek Smith 'Lolita' bloodlines, the main one being Louella Van Hee pigeons. The main thing he looks for when bringing in new pigeons is that they have good 500 to 700 mile performances in their bloodlines.

Brian races cocks and hens on the widowhood system and normally keeps 25 pairs of racers, which are paired up in February. He likes the yearlings to fly from France a couple of times, which can be 350 to 400 miles, and the only time he would re-pair for Tarbes is if he had some good hens he wanted to send. Brian has raced hens and cocks on the widowhood with equal success, and says the disadvantage of re-pairing for Tarbes is they soon throw flights. The Denney pigeons are hopper Gerry Plus as a base, mixed with a good widowhood mixture and the birds get a lot of Hormoform. Sometimes the hens are let through to the cocks on basketing night and sometimes Brian just turns the nest bowl over. The short club races are used for training and on their return from a long distance race they sometimes stay with their mate overnight.

Brian says at one time he used to win at all distances, but he is now only interested in long, hard races where only the best come through. He likes the wait and as long as there is a chance of getting one home he is there ready to clock them in. Other principal pigeons in the Denney loft in recent years include: 'The Pau Hen' 1st section K, 118th open NFC Pau; 'Whitetail' 4th section K, 51st open NFC Pau, 5th section K, 234th open NFC Pau; 'The Bordeaux Cock' 7th section K, 109th open NFC Pau, 8th section K, 133rd open NFC Saintes, 3rd section K, 85th open NFC Nantes; 'Dark Peron' 3rd section K, 33rd open NFC Saintes and is the grandsire of 'Tuff Nut'. A wonderful loft of 750 mile racers!

Brian has about 40 young birds to race each season and they race natural to the perch. They are trained in stages up to 55 miles and are raced to the south coast, about a 220 miles fly, and are hand fed twice a day on the same mixture as the old birds. Brian is now retired from work and says his wife, Thelma, has always been interested in the pigeons. He told me that she is very capable of doing anything in the loft and has clocked in for him many times when he was working. Their two daughters, Susan and Lynn, have always taken an interest in Brian's pigeons. Brian is not interested in the eyesign method, although he likes to see a nice bright eye with plenty of colour, and he maintains the basket is the true test if a pigeon is good or not. He has been secretary of the local club for 20 years and says he thinks the sport is going backwards, with clubs getting smaller. The future is with the National if it gets it's house in order, with entry fees and prize money. He likes inbreeding and line breeding and practices it all the time, saying it is the only way to keep a good family going

strong. Brian likes latebreds for stock and in the winter months increases the protein in the feeding for the heavy moult period.

Once again this article has given me extra special pleasure to write as Brian and Thelma are good friends of mine and are two of the nicest people I have met in my time in the sport. (See 'Album' for the photos)

TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT.