

Liberation Sites 2010 by Keith Mott.

This time for a bit of interest I think we might have a run through the liberation sites I visited in the 2010 racing season and give you a bit of an opinion on them. I completed my first convoying stint for the Central Southern Classic Flying Club in mid-May and I must say it was one of the most enjoyable trips I've had to France with the birds. One of the main reasons that got me out of retirement and start convoying again this season, was the prospect of visiting some new liberation sites and our first destination was Messac, which is on the west side of France, midway between Rennes and Nantes. We had a good run through France and arrived at the Messac marina liberation site where the birds were watered on arrival. I was very impressed with liberation site at Messac and I think it is fair to say it is one of the best sites I've visited in France. The birds are liberated at the top end of the picturesque marina, on a raised tarmac area which is site between the water and open fields. The pigeons have a perfect fly out on their liberation, with no obstacles to hamper them at all and the site is very quiet, with only the odd person walking their dog passing the transporter. On our arrival on site we were given a code number to the lock of the Shower / WC block and I must say this facility was spotlessly clean. The liberation site at Messac is brilliant and is one that I strongly recommend!

I had my second race as chief convoyer with the Central Southern Classic Flying Club at the end of May and I must say the whole exercise was very stressful with a bad liberation site, bad weather and hold over's! We had a good run through France on our journey to the Poitiers car park liberation site and a very un-satisfactory thing I noted on our approach to Poitiers was the mass of wires and pylons which ran for about three or four miles along the motorway. This obstacle was north of Poitiers and the pigeons must negotiate this dangerous mass when they clear the liberation sight. I was very un-impressed with liberation site at Poitiers; in fact I think it is one of the worst I have visited in France! I can just imagine all the lads reading this and saying, 'Motty back on his soap box again, with another liberation site assassination'. The car park liberation area at Poitiers is nice and big, but for some reason the council had erected a wire fence right smack down the middle and compounded all the pigeon transporters in one corner. The smaller transporters can turn side ways on and release quite safely, but big vehicles like our CSCFC transporter can't turn. On one side you have a row of trees which are far to close, making the birds climb to steep on release and on the other side is the 6ft wire fence, which is far to close to the liberation. The wire fence has a row of trees behind it and the pigeons would not see it, and in my opinion would kill many pigeons on release. The site has a WC and wash hand basin, but this facility looked like it had not been cleaned for about twelve months! A few weeks after my return from Poitiers I was told, by a reliable source, that the wire fence had been removed from the car park and there is now plenty of room to liberate in safety.

The 'main event' from Tarbes was a hard race this time, with mostly light head winds and very high temperatures in France all over that weekend in June. Having said that I liberated in a very light south wind and on route home though France the wind seemed to me to be veering between south east and north east. On our way back to Caen we stopped off at Nantes for a 'taco' break and the heat was very intense, but when we stopped for the night at Fougères that evening, the temperature had dropped right down, and the wind had gone around to west / south west. Hard racing seems to be the norm this season, inland and continental, with the wind mostly having an easterly element in it and it has produced some really stinging races in the first half of the 2010 season. In spite of the Tarbes classic being a hard race, I think it is safe to say, it was a very good race! I made my first trip convoying to the south of France about thirteen years ago, when Doug Went and I took the L&SECC birds to Pau for the longest old bird race. Doug had a very bad opinion of the site at that time and I must say on my first visit I was shocked how bad this famous liberation site was. I had a good feeling about the Tarbes site, with the excellent results achieved by the National Flying Club out of there in recent seasons and Geoff Allan, the NFC convoyer at that time, had always said he likes the site very much. We, the London & South East Classic Club committee, gave Tarbes a try the 2008 season on my recommendation that the Pau site was a very poor liberation site and it proved to be a good move, as it was one of the best sites in France that I've visited. The liberation site is the very big car park of Geant Casino Super Market in Laldere, Tarbes and it is quiet there, being mostly empty as it is the over flow parking at the rear of the complex. The liberation area is vast, with a few light stanches in it, but they are not too close to the transporters and do not impede the safe release of the pigeons. The site has the supermarket, toilets for the convoyers, a limited water supply and no shower facilities. One of the best sites in France, I think! Tarbes is a lot closer to the Pyrenees Mountains than Pau and with some wonderful clear condition; the snow covered peaks make a brilliant back drop to the liberation site.

I couldn't believe how quick that season had gone! I must say convoying for the Central Southern Classic Flying Club in the 2010 season had it's ups and down, as we have had in all organizations, but on the whole it was an enjoyable experience! They are a great bunch of people to work with! The Classic's transporter has been a pleasure to work with this season and I know the classic members are proud of their magnificent vehicle. Having now used the CSCFC transporter for the whole 2010 season, I think it is a first class bit of kit,

with the most outstanding feature being the watering system. The lorry is self levelling and the birds drink out of nice plastic troughs that run the length of the centre isle of the trailer. I'm told the transporter has never run out of water, which I can quite believe, as the two tanks are huge. The trailer is fully air conditioned, but I did like to have the doors open as much as possible, so the inmates get as much natural air and light as I can give them. That is why you will read in my convoyer's reports that I get up very early in the mornings while on the road, so I can open up the trailer doors and the birds can see it get naturally light. I think this is very important! The CSCFC aluminium crates are designed to carry 30 birds, but because of the intense heat in recent weeks, the Tarbes and Bergerac pigeons were transported 20 to a crate. Geoff Biffen was my driver for the last old bird race from Bergerac and I must say he is a good man to go away with, always up for a laugh and he can certainly drive that arctic lorry well, so well in fact, they have nick named him 'sixpence'. He is a great cook and is always game to try something different, and on this trip to Bergerac he cooked horse in red wine. I was very impressed with the liberation site at Bergerac and when we pulled in to the sports centre the weather was brilliant. The field where the birds are liberated was nice and open, giving the pigeons a good clear fly out. The site has a WC, with showers and as I've stated several time before, is one of the best sites I've visited in France.

One of the main reasons for me coming out of conveying retirement this year was to see some new liberation sites in France and I was keen to visit Carentan as every one has been giving it rave reviews. I must agree with them, it is an excellent site, staged at the Cattle Market on the out skirts of the town. The car park liberation area is very spacious, with no obstacles and gives the birds a great fly out from the transporters. The site has a good water supply for the pigeons, nice clean toilets for the convoyer crews, but no showers. In my nine seasons conveying racing pigeons to France I've never met a woman site agent, but I did at Carentan, in the form of Brigitte Outrequin. She came down to the site early on the Saturday morning with her two young daughters and her husband, and brought us down breakfast and coffee. This young lady lives in Meully and is very keen on the pigeons, and quite rightly makes sure the liberation site is kept like a new pin. When I was cutting the basket strings in readiness for the liberation, Brigitte followed me around with a black rubbish bag, so I could drop the string and seals in as we went, something we would normally do our selves. A brilliant lady! Driving out of Caen dock early on the Friday morning and in to the Carentan liberation site at 07.15hrs, I was amazed how quickly we got there and if it could be arranged the CSCFC could possibly marking for this event on a Friday.

A racing pigeon convoyer's story.

On one cold winter's night in the mid 1990's my phone rang and it was good friend, John Tyerman, who at the time was the President of the London & South East Classic Club. After a few minutes 'chewing the fat' about the sport in general, Johnny asked me if I fancied joining the Classic's conveying set up and assisting Doug Went, who at that time I considered to be one of the best convoyers in the country. Although it was a job I had in the back of my mind, that I would like to have a go at, I had to think about it long and hard, because at that time I was suffering badly with Pigeon Fancier's Lung, and pigeon conveying was not the obvious thing to do. I decided that with a bit of common sense, using a mask and coat, and with all the feeding and watering being carried out on the outside of the Classic's lorry, I should get away with it, and if it did affect me badly I could resign at the end of the season. I first started when Doug Went and I convoyed the first Classic of the 1997 season from Alencon, which had a record entry at that time of nearly 2,400 birds. Doug Went was one of the greats of conveying racing pigeons, with many years experience on the South and North roads and I must say, working with him for 18 months taught me a lot about being on the road with the pigeons. I took over as chief convoyer for the young bird Guernsey Classics in 1998 and I think the best liberation site we visited was Bordeaux. It is very spacious and has full facilities for the pigeons and convoyers. This site is the main lorry driver's stopover car park in Bordeaux and has a truckers hotel and petrol station, so it's easy to water the birds and for the convoyers to get a meal and shower. This site is very near to a river and, like Pau, is prone to early morning mist.

I must say that in my time as a convoyer, I've never seen a perfect pigeon transporter or been to a perfect liberation site. We don't live in a perfect world and we can always find something to criticize! I personally like the old fashioned baskets, the like of which we used in the L&SECC for many years and were used by Catterells Pigeon Transport of Blackpool who served our sport so well for many years, before packing up about six years ago. When Catterells ceased to trade they sold off their vehicles and the L&SECC purchased one of them, fully kitted out with wicker baskets. But time moves on and the baskets are now thought to be out of date! I was well aquatinted with the new transporter, as it was the 7.5 lorry that Gary Haslem and I used when Catterells transported the London Classic's birds for a few seasons. In those days, Peter Coles was our hard working secretary and my good friend, Steve Appleby, was my race advisor, and they were two of the best at their pigeon job in the sport. When you are in France with the pigeons it's nice to know you have a good team behind you at the home end!

I love convoying the pigeons through France to places like Bordeaux and Tarbes, but it is very hard work, and is a young man's game! I retired from convoying at the end of the end of the 2008 season, as I thought at 58 years of age I was getting to old for the pressure and sleeping rough in lorries. I had no intention of ever doing 'big time' convoying again, but the Central Southern Classic Flying Club chief convoyer's job was offered to me at the end of 2009, which involved no driving and the prospect of the luxury of the use of one of the premier transporters in the country. I have convoyed South and North Road inland, but the main enjoyment for me is convoying the pigeons to France and it gives me a great buzz to produce good Classic racing from over the English Channel. It must be the 'gipsy' in me that made me except the CSCFC job in the 2010 season, which gave me the opportunity to visit some new liberation sites in France, including, Messac, Carentan and Bergerac. The Classic's transporter was a pleasure to work with last season and I know the classic members are proud of their magnificent vehicle. Having used the CSCFC transporter for the 2010 race season, I think it is a first class bit of kit, with the most outstanding feature being the watering system. The lorry is self levelling and the birds drink out of nice plastic troughs that run the length of the centre isle of the trailer. I'm told the transporter has never run out of water, which I can quite believe, as the two tanks are huge. The trailer is fully air conditioned, but I do like to have the doors open as much as possible, so the inmates get as much natural air and light as I can give them. That is why you will read in my convoyer's reports that I get up very early in the mornings while on the road, so I can open up the trailer doors and the birds can see it get naturally light. I think this is very important! The CSCFC aluminium crates are designed to carry 30 birds and these are the very latest up to date in pigeon transporter design.

I think convoying racing pigeons, whether it is for a big Classic or small club race is the most responsible and demanding job in the sport! The only advice I can give to any youngsters who have dreams of becoming a racing pigeon convoyer, is when you are away with the pigeons in France be your own man, with your utmost priority being the bird's welfare and producing the best race possible, with the situation you are presented with that weekend. Do not be influenced by outside voices or follow club rules if I think it will be detrimental to the welfare of the pigeons in your charge. Your paramount priority when convoying is the welfare of the birds!

I hope the Website readers have enjoyed this little in site into the French liberation sites I visited in the 2010 season. (Please see photos in the website 'Album')

TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT.