

BRIAN BATCHELOR OF ELSTEAD.

Brian Batchelor is a 'hardcore' long distance enthusiast and in recent seasons has been very successful in the National and Classic races from 550 miles. He races in the very strong Godalming club and the 2012 season has seen him win the longest old bird race from Bergerac (450 miles), and record 3rd SMT Combine. When I recently asked Brian about his family of pigeons he told me, 'my main family of long distance racers are the late Eric Cannon of Wormley bloodlines, with the sire of the loft being 'The Old Cannon Cock', which must be described as a champion breeder having produced a long list of premier racers from 550 miles. This handsome blue cock was bred by Keith and Betty Mott in 2004 from their Number Three Eric Cannon stock pair and he is a grand son of Champion 'Culmer Sam' and Champion 'Culmer Bess', the NFC Pau Merit Award winner. 'The Old Cannon Cock' is a full brother to the Eric Cannon stock cock, 'Foxwarren Fred', who is the sire of many premier long distance champions including: 1st Federation Bourges (581 miles), 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 3rd Federation Bourges, 5th Federation Bourges, 8th Federation Bourges and is grand sire of 1st and 4th Federation Bourges (581 miles) in the 2012 season. He is the sire of the champion cock, 'The Five Times Bourges Cock', winner of 3rd, 5th, 8th Federation Bourges and sire of 1st, 3rd, 4th Federation Bourges. Sire of 'The Old Cannon Cock' is 'Culmer Sam's Lad' bred by Eric Cannon, the last son of Eric's Number One stock cock 'Culmer Sam', who was the product of Eric's Fear Brothers cross. Champion 'Culmer Sam' was the ultimate stock cock and was the sire of Eric Cannon's highly successful 550 mile family. Dam of 'The Old Cannon Cock' is 'Culmer Fantasy' bred by Eric Cannon and she is a daughter of Champion 'Culmer Bess', winner of 6th, 26th and 170th open N.F.C. Pau (540 miles), 47th open N.F.C. Pau / Saintes, winning the NFC Pau merit award. This brilliant hen was top priced pigeon at Eric Cannon's dispersal sales, sold for £2,300. 'Culmer Fantasy' is a full sister to the dam of Champion 'Night Flight', winner of 1st open Saintes / Pau Grand National in 2003, for Mark Gilbert. The Eric Cannon blue chequer hen, 'Gruntty', has had a big influence on my loft in recent years and she was also bred by Keith and Betty Mott in 2004, with her sire being a full brother to 'The Old Cannon Cock' and 'Foxwarren Fred'. Her dam was the blue hen, 'Foxwarren Eventually', winner of several premier positions from Pau for the Mott loft and was killed by a Sparrowhawk. 'Eventually' was a daughter of Keith and Betty's famous Number Two Eric Cannon stock pair and was the grand daughter of Champion 'Culmer Marion', winner of 1st open NFC Sartilly, and Champion 'Culmer Channel Queen', winner of the NFC Pau Merit Award. Two main foundation stock birds of my present team are 'The Old Cannon Cock' and 'Gruntty'. In recent seasons I have had the second families of Jim Biss and Van Breemens, which have produced a few prize winners, but these have been phased out in 2012. The other long distance families in my loft are Brian Denney and the newly introduced 'Supercrack' pigeons, which have been successful straight away, having produced my 3rd SMT Combine Bergerac winner in the 2012 season'.

Brian owns the Post Office in the village of Elstead in Surrey and his very smart little loft is site in the garden of the premises. He is only a small team man, about 50 pigeons in all, including old bird racers, young birds and his stock team. The old birds are raced on a celibate system and the racers only see their mates on race day or returning home from training tosses. Brian says his system is very similar to widowhood, but he races both the hens and cocks. Working where his pigeon are he can keep to a tight routine, with the cocks getting an open hole for 3 hours in the morning, the hens getting the same in the afternoon and young bird team have their fly in the evening. They are fed on Buckton's Economy protein mixture and standard widowhood mixes. They also get Old Hand Golden Boost, Versalaga Pellets, minerals and only GSE purifier is added to the drinking water once a week. Brian tells me no medication is used in the off season, but during the racing season he has a medication regime. In the week between races the birds get one or two training tosses from about 30

miles, if possible in to the wind regardless of direction. His young birds receive ten tosses and then three or four races, before being stopped to finish their very import moult.

I was the Chief Convoyer for the London & South East Classic Club in 2009 and I was very happy to report that our Tarbes Classic that season was one of the best of all time, with a good number of my charges being clocked on the day of liberation. Brian Batchelor had one of the best pigeon weekends of his life, recording two birds on the day from the Tarbes Classic and timing his sole entry in the Pau International event. The first bird on the clock from Tarbes, to record 5th open, was a two year old blue chequer hen named 'Dani', after Brian's little granddaughter. He tells me she had always been a consistent racer and showed her potential as a young bird in 2006, when she won 2nd Portland in the very strong Godalming club. In the 2009 season she came from the BICC Falaise race with most of her secondary flights on one wing ripped out by a hawk, but bounced back and was the first bird on the clock from the BICC Alencon event. Brian's second bird from Tarbes, to record 10th open, was his good pied hen, 'Baby', and she is the tamest bird in the loft, being his pet, and flying to him outside the loft. She was his second bird clocked on the day from the successful 2007 L&SECC Pau race, when she won 56th open and was found in the loft after returning from getting his clock checked at Godalming. Brian says he had the ETS on training mode and it showed she had been home for 49 minuets before he clocked her. A very good hen! 'Dani' and 'Baby' were both Van Bremen hens. In the 2009 Pau International race Brian recorded his four year old blue white flight hen 'Patience' and she won 9th open BICC. She was a gift youngster from Darryl Luxford of Crawley and Brian said she had been late from every race she had been entered in, short or long, and was retained after she finally recorded 4th club Exeter on a dirty day. That year she was flying spare, after her mate was lost, and flew a 'blinder' from the Pau International.

The London & South East Classic Club enjoyed one of its best Pau Classics in 2007 when over 100 birds were clocked on the day of liberation, from the convoy I liberated that day in the South of France. Two of those day pigeons were recorded at the loft of Brian Batchelor, in his Elstead Post Office garden. To say Brian was chuffed at getting two day pigeons from Pau (540 miles) on his first attempt at this race point would be an under statement! The first bird on the clock from Pau was a two year old Eric Cannon blue hen named 'Jeanie', and she was bred from two gift latebreds from my stock loft. Brian told me he has named his wonderful hen 'Jeanie' in honour of his good wife, who puts up with the exorbitant amount of time Brian spends with the pigeons without complaint. This game hen was 12 hours 7 minutes on the wing from Pau and recorded 19th SW section, 35th open. Her dam was a blue hen from my Number Two Eric Cannon stock pair, was killed in Brian's garden by a Sparrowhawk, but has left some real quality racers behind her. I consider my Number Two Eric Cannon stock pair to be the best breeders I have ever owned, producing an ever growing list of premier long distance racers. The pairing is blue cock, "Culmer Prince", bred by Eric & Pat Cannon of Wormley. Sire of winners and a son of Ch. "Culmer Marion", winner of 1st open NFC Sartilly, when mated to a daughter of "Culmer Expected", winner of 22nd, 27th, 103rd, 231st open NFC Pau. The dam is blue hen, "Culmer Rocket Queen", bred by Eric & Pat Cannon. The best hen I've ever owned! Dam of winners and a daughter of "Culmer White Flight", winner of many positions in the NFC, including 1st sect, 14th open Pau when mated to Champion "Culmer Channel Queen", winner of 23rd, 29th, 98th, 183rd open NFC Pau and winning the NFC Pau Merit Award. The sire of 'Jeanie' is the champion blue stock cock 'The Old Cannon Cock'! 'Jeanie' flew the very hard Bergerac (440 miles) as a yearling in 2006 and showed some great potential by being second bird to the loft. In the 2007 season she was mated in mid-February and after rearing two youngsters was separated, after leaving her second round of eggs at the end of term. Her pre-race training was three tosses of the south coast, near Portsmouth, then into the L& SECC Alencon (193 miles) race, and then was sent to Poitiers (321 miles) with the SMT Combine, which turned out to be a very hard event. She appeared in the club and Combine result from Poitiers and the 9 hour 35 minutes on the wing set her up nicely for the Pau

Classic. The second pigeon Brian clocked to record 30th SW section, 56th open from the Pau Classic was his good pied hen, 'Baby'.

Prior to starting up with pigeons at Elstead in 2004 Brian had racing pigeon in New Zealand where he had lived most of his life before returning to England permanently, the country of his birth. In New Zealand he had pigeons off and on since he was eleven years old and tells me he had some good success at times. Two memorable races in New Zealand were in 1994 when he was 2nd, 3rd Young Birds National and 1st Section, 2nd overall Auckland Federation Timaru (560 miles), with the same pigeon recording 5th Section, 5th overall in the same race the following year, which was flown on the day in 13 hours 26 minutes. He also still holds the record in one club he belonged to, when his pigeon flew 453 miles in 8 hours 27 minutes. In the later years of his New Zealand pigeon racing he flew in partnership with Digby Riemann, under the flying name of Royal Oak Lofts and scored numerous positions including 3rd, 4th, 6th Auckland Futurity, 3rd Young Bird National on a hard day and 2nd section, 2nd Federation overall Timaru (560 miles).

In New Zealand the old birds are raced in the spring and the young birds in the autumn, so the weather conditions are often windy, with some rain. The numbers in the races down under are less than in Britain, reflecting the small population; never the less competition is fierce between the premier flyers. Members belong to a single club which is part of a regional Federation and that is; there is not the fragmentation of the sport into a proliferation of specialist clubs like we have here in Britain. Long distance racing is flown between the North and South Islands crossing the stretch of water between known as, 'Cooks Strait', named after the famous explorer Captain James Cook. Like channel racing in England, this water crossing can be treacherous when the weather turns bad, but generally the crossing is made in mid afternoon, rather than in the evening, like we some times do racing in the south of England. One major difference racing in New Zealand is that the Hawks are few and far between and clashing is the exception, consequently losses are low and they always end the season with surplus pigeons. Brian said, 'on a controversial subject in the U.K. the vast majority of pigeon racers in New Zealand use ETS clocking and clubs have made it available to all members on a normal rent to buy basis, so all can afford it'. Between 1950 and 1993 there were no pigeons imported in to New Zealand, so strains of pigeons were developed locally from the original imports prior to 1950, the most successful of these were developed from the Logans, Gooters, Stassarts, Van Cutsem and Vandeveldes, with the later being the most prominent strain. However over the years these strains tended to become 'stayers' and when the Janssen, Busschaerts and De Vriendts were introduced in the early 1990's via Australia, these new sprint families left the local pigeons in their wake up to 300 miles and none of the New Zealand strains could touch them. Eventually everyone had to introduce the new imports in to their lofts to compete and some of those crosses with the old strains performed well at the long distance. There you have it, the Brian Batchelor story!

TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT (www.keithmott.com)