

Pat Newell, Billericay, Essex.

Memories.

As DEFRA prevented us, the British, from participating in the International races during 2006 we have nothing left, apart from preparing for some possible future races, but to look back at past glories. The first to spring to mind was the last International race we were allowed to enter, Perpignan 2005, a race that produced some fresh features for the UK.



Pat at the loft.

Perpignan

Perpignan comes late in the season, very late, at a time when young bird racing is well under way. It is the last race in the international programme and this presents the particular problem of maintaining competitors in condition for the arduous task before them. The measure of that task is set by the location of the race point and the nature of the route home. Perpignan is squeezed between the eastern edge of the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean sea. When liberated these pigeons are left with little choice but to fly north along a narrow coastal strip. After about 30 miles or so some are presented with their first real option because pushing west is a narrow valley running between the great Pyrenean range and the Massive Central, a collection of ancient and fortunately extinct volcanoes to the North. It is this valley that carries the Canal du Midi on the first part of its journey from Narbonne, and the Mediterranean, across to Carcassonne where it turns north west passing through Toulouse before traversing the whole of France then finally linking up with the Atlantic Ocean at the Bay of Biscay near to Bordeaux. This valley provides one possible route for pigeons racing to England and North Western France. The question is, would those hundred or so pigeons have the experience and determination to pull away from the many thousands taking the other option, of continuing through the Rhone valley on line for Belgium and Holland. If the English pigeons take that second option they will have to find their way round the eastern side of the Massive Central before they can break away and fly across north eastern France to the channel. Whichever route they take the English pigeons will be obliged to fly many more miles than the result will recognize. So when an English pigeon takes first National from 210 pigeons and finishes as high as 3,553rd International from 17,653 pigeons and 961st from 4,859 hens at 626 miles and 259 yards you know it has done well. When that pigeon is on its first flight from Perpignan and its owner is competing in his first race from Perpignan you begin to realise it has done extremely well. Could it be beginners luck you may wonder? Well yes of course luck could well have played a part but this flyer is no beginner, no novice, this flyer, Pat Newell of Billericay is an expert. at preparing particular pigeons for particular races and for many years has been known as the uncrowned King of Futurities, its just that he has now turned his attention to International races.

London Docks

Pat was born and brought up in Stepney, the heart of the London's east end famous, amongst other things, for its blend of races, cultures and religions. This blending occurred gradually over many centuries making it appear seamless. Many of those ending up in Stepney, and its environs, arrived as a result of London's worldwide trade and the shipping that facilitated the trade. So another natural part of Stepney's fame lies with shipping, the docks and the river Thames which serves them. It was this river that called to Pat as a young man and he spent his lifetimes work either on it, by it or associated with it. The Thames forms its own small world that goes almost unknown and unnoticed by an outsider, rather like pigeon racing I suppose. For many years the Thames was the lifeblood of London and it was towards the end of this time that Pat started his career. Just as the sea can capture men's hearts so can this river and it captured Pat's.



He worked hard and learnt fast and was soon qualified as a lighterman, skipper of various types of barge and all kinds of river craft, granted freedom of the river and able to sail the Thames and its navigable tributaries. These were the heady days of the National Dock Labour Board when everybody was assumed to have a job for life in the belief that the London docks would go on forever. This was not to be of course as changes in the pattern of trade and shipping itself brought the work of the pool of London to an early demise. Under the delusion that things would go on forever jobs had been guaranteed and so a large workforce was left with nothing to do. No one could be sacked so an attractive severance package had to be offered but it took sometime to arrange and take effect. During this period of several years Pat says he did little more than go in each week to collect his pay. The workforce, which consisted of lightermen, dockers, stevedores and tally clerks was eventually reduced and those remaining were allocated to jobs that did not necessarily fit in with their training and experience. Pat's new work was as a land bound docker, but he soon turned his hand to the new environment navigating fork lift trucks rather than boats. Pat saw his time out as a docker and now, although retired, still maintains contact with his ex colleagues and retains his love and fascination for the river.

The beginnings

Pat was not brought up within a pigeon family although all around him in Stepney there would have been pigeons. As none of his family were interested in pigeons it is perhaps surprising that not only did Pat finally succumb to their charms but so did the son of his fathers brother. Pats first real introduction came from his workplace and a colleague. For a while Pat worked with Peter Doughty, already established as a fancier of repute, and after some general chat, lending a helping hand here and there and occasional visits to Peter's loft Peter brought a few youngsters round for Pat. Pat was now 26 years old, he had built a small loft, he had a few pigeons and he was hooked. At first of course he made his start with local club racing and it was not long before he was off the mark winning 1st Federation in his first race with young pigeons that he had bred himself, though he insists it was a fluke east wind that did it. Time came for Pat to make a move and it was to Wood Green. Now many might think this an ideal location for a London north road flyer but there was one big drawback, Alf Baker, to whom Pat now gave about

100 yards overfly. Pat recalls Alf Baker as the real top man of the day and although he probably did not attract an international reputation his name is still second to none in the UK.

Futurity King

Although Pat did his share of winning in those days and against that level of competition it was really the Millwall Futurity that made his name. Pat has always been something of a controversial figure and has never set out to court the favour of others rather, as he says himself, he was almost addicted to "Op—m", winning Other Peoples Money. The Millwall Futurity was for many years probably the biggest money race in London if not the country and as you can imagine keenly fought over. In the earlier days you could buy your own pigeon but as time went on it attracted pigeons from all over the country and that rule changed. Pat has either won the race outright or taken so many high positions that he has a reasonable claim to having won more futurities than anybody else in the country and it was no less than "The Magaphone" himself who credited him with the title "King of Futurities".

The North

Pats main love though, apart from winning other peoples money and a private hope that some of the not so nice people he has come across in the sport will choke on their toast when reading his name at the top of the results over breakfast, is long distance racing. All of his efforts for some time now have been directed to this end both North and South. Certainly I first came to know of his name many years back from his results in the London North Road Combine including 2nd LNRC Berwick in the days when there were 10,000 plus pigeons and 3rd LNRC Stonehaven, again in days with high birdage. Since his move out to Billericay, Essex he has managed an extraordinary tally of results in the Essex Combine as well. While a list of his winnings could go on forever probably his two most outstanding achievements on the north road are winning the Essex Combine Thurso and subsequently the London North Road Combine Thurso races, at just over 500 miles. Like many of us through that time he entered the occasional race from the South but it is only really from the year 2000 that he has taken to South road racing

seriously. His primary objective has been National racing and his current, major, outstanding ambition is to time from Pau on the day. As he says he has timed many pigeons from Lerwick on the day, roughly the same distance and debatably a more difficult race point, but up to now Pau has eluded him. That does not mean he has not achieved good results from the South or from Pau for that matter, but none yet on the day.

Fundamentals

In examining the career of "Fear Not", the Perpignan winner, we can see the fundamentals of Pat's approach to pigeons and racing. When contemplating racing from the South he looked carefully at those who had had some success both in racing from the South and from long distance racing in general. He then went to these people to acquire stock, which he has both bred from and raced. Not every acquisition brings success and he has found that even when selecting apparently good pigeons from successful lofts they have not necessarily brought success for him. So the first lesson is to be rigorous in the selection and acquisition process but you also have to be rigorous with what you keep. It is no good keeping pigeons just because they have good origins you must get the performances from them or you don't have anything at all. On the success side he has bought pigeons from several of the most famous names in British racing for instance the name Bush first attracted Pat, as it would anybody from a study of the North Road Championship Club results, then there was Jim Biss a legend in his own lifetime with an unparalleled record from both North and South and probably the finest collection of long distance pigeons in the country.

Closer to home Pat has bought from and exchanged pigeons with the late Cecil Bullard over several years. Pat would be the first to acknowledge the enormous contribution Cecil made to pigeon racing in the London area because he not only had a truly enviable record from Lerwick and Thurso with his own family of long distance pigeons but he was very hard to beat in the shorter races at club, federation and combine level as well. "Fear Not" though came from quite different origins. One of Pat's friends was going across the river to Gravesend to Mr & Mrs G. Bates to get some pigeons. Pat was aware they had a couple of good pigeons and asked his friend if he could obtain a pair

from them for him, which he duly did. They turned out to be an exceptional pair because, apart from the success of "Fear Not", the other one of the pair, GB2002F20856 a blue hen, took 31st Open, 8th Section E, in the 2004 National Flying Club race from Pau.

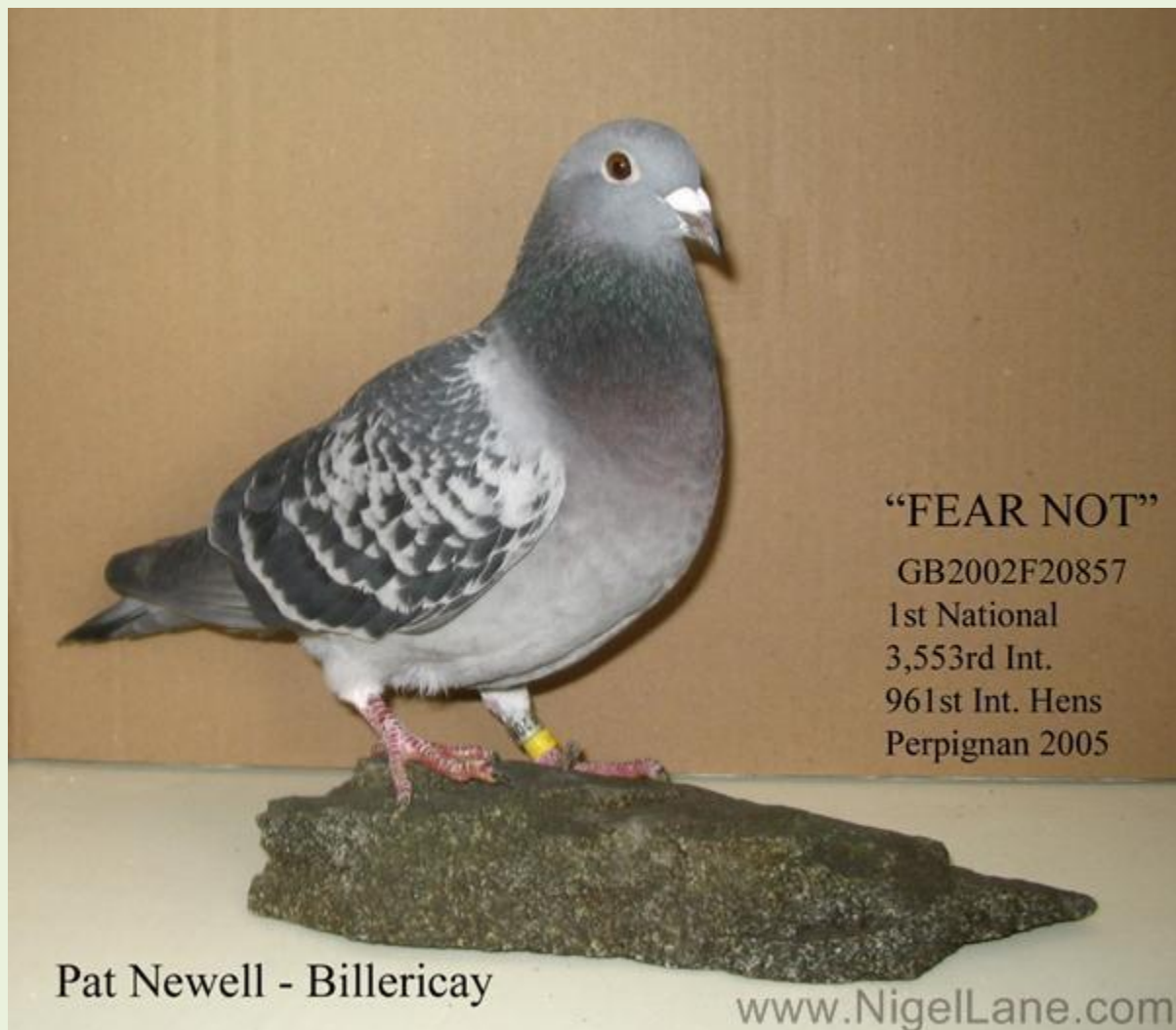


Some of the Biss blood.

"FEAR NOT"

GB2002F20857, a delightfully small, verging on very small, blue chequer hen was bred late in 2002 and did not actually see the inside of a basket until she was two years old. So much for the theory that pigeons must be raced as young birds or even trained as young birds. In 2005 she did go to some preliminary races but as Pat does not keep records of these we do not know which ones or how well she flew, although they were

probably some of the earlier BICC races. We do know that she was sent to the 2005 NFC Tarbes race because she beat GB2002F20856 by 90 minutes in finishing 338th Open and 89th Section E. This was a good performance for the day but did not itself make her a candidate for the Perpignan International, that only came about when, quite close to the race, Pat realized that she would be sitting on a small baby.



It was an experience at work on the river that first impressed Pat about the determination of a hen sitting a small baby. He was sailing a boat along the River Lee, and passing under a bridge, when he put up a flock of pigeons. One would not budge however and when he looked closer he found she was sitting a small baby. So there she was valiantly protecting her baby against a massive encroachment on her private

space, ready to challenge any attack even from such a giant. Since then Pat has always tried to send hens to long races on small babies, and it has worked.

Systems

Pats system does not sit on simple lines because he uses a variety of systems in with each other depending on what he is trying to achieve. Hens are important to him on these long races and generally speaking they are kept natural. Because he only keeps limited numbers of pigeons he can and does give them quite individual treatment. They are fed communally though with a hopper of beans and maize before them most if not all of the time. He does use a commercial mixture but this is given almost as a tit bit when calling them in from loft flights. The cocks and hens exercise well but part of his special treatment with hens, on the run up to a long race, is to shut a few out with the young birds when they go for their afternoon fly which provides them with all the exercise they need. He feels that as they have food before them all the time, and consequently are well fed, when they go out they will range with the young birds and get super fit. On occasions though he will leave the hen in with the young birds for a week or so effectively turning the cock onto widowhood and he has had great success racing the cocks at this stage, including a London North Road Combine winner. Beyond this everything is kept as simple as possible, they are kept clean but the process is not turned into an arduous task, food is before them nearly all the time, clean water at all times and good exercise with training tosses and races on an individual basis as and when required. He likes to take them down to the coast occasionally and single them up, curiously enough "Fear Not" nighted out from just such a toss before the 2006 NFC Tarbes race, she more than made up for that mistake though. The main criteria seems to be rigorous stock selection combined with providing the time and conditions for the racers to develop, but then they must perform. If they do not perform they do not stay and if the stock do not produce performers then they do not stay. Medication and treatments, well if they are needed they are given, but generally speaking this can be kept to a minimum by taking care of them in the first place.

Looking to the future

It was a tragedy that after such a great achievement Pat and "Fear Not" did not get the opportunity to try again in 2006. We can but hope that this winter will be kind to us and severe on Avian flu, allowing a full racing season in 2007. Pat will be ready for that and now that he has had a proper taste of International racing he will be looking for more and perhaps he will achieve his main ambition by timing a day bird from Pau and hopefully gain a high International position as well.

Nigel Lane 12/11/06