



***MR & MRS STEVE HARRIS & DAUGHTER
Of PORTCHESTER
1st OPEN BICC FALAISE 4,065 BIRDS 2017.***

The opening race of the 15 race BICC programme for 2017 took place on Saturday 29th April and what a good race it turned out to be! The entry of 4,065 birds enjoyed excellent flying conditions with good visibility, blue skies a helping south, south easterly breeze and so the vast majority made light work of the 150+ mile journey to the shorter flyers, near the South Coast, on their trip across the English Channel.

The eventual winner, a two year old widowhood cock, was clocked at the Portchester, Portsmouth lofts of Steve and Yvette Harris and daughter. The following loft report is based on an interview with Steve shortly after the partners' National win.



Steve Harris holding Yvette's Decision 1st Open BICC Falaise

THE BEGINNING.

Pigeons have always been in Steve's life whilst growing up, as his father had been racing for years. However, Steve never showed much interest until he was in his late 20s when he decided to take up the sport himself, that was in 1998.

Obviously with his father Fred being an already established fancier, he would have been the initial person that Steve turned to for advice on stockmanship. Steve's sister Linda has also been a great help over the years.

The first step was to have a loft which Steve built himself and measured 18 x 6ft. The next step was a visit along with his Dad, to the Ponderosa Stud in Weymouth where some Janssen stock birds were purchased. These initial purchases bred winners from the word go. One of these early wins included 2nd Open Central Southern Classic Guernsey Young Birds. Steve also won a 24ft loft in a Solent Fed race.

The family and pigeons have been established at their present location for just six years and during that short time have been extremely successful winning 4th Open NFC Fougères 7,000+ birds; 1st & 2nd Open CSCFC Guernsey Young Birds; 1st section NFC Cholet; 1st section BBC Coutances; 2nd section old hens NFC; 12th Open BICC Tours; 12th open BICC Guernsey young birds and now 1st open BICC Falaise. Add to these wins in National and Classic competition, numerous club and Fed successes and you have the CV of a top class fancier with an excellent set up.



The Harris Loft set up

The present loft was bought from Blakes and measures 40ft x 6ft with a pent roof with aviaries attached for young birds and the small team of stock birds. All lofts have gridded floors and are cleaned once a week. This suits Steve's available time due to work commitments. A team of around 40- 50 young birds and 12 stock pairs are housed along with a race team of just 12 widowhood cocks, although this season the partners have a section where they intend to race a team of 10 hens.

All birds, i.e. stock and racers, are paired on Boxing Day, as Steve has ample time at home over the Christmas Holiday period to spend with the birds.

MANAGEMENT.

The widow cocks are given just 5 short training tosses before the first race and they rarely see the training basket again thereafter. The widowers are never forced to fly as they are left to do as they please with the traps left open for them to come and go as they see fit. Exercise takes place twice daily throughout the season at 6 am and again at 5 pm when Steve returns home from work.



Widowhood Cocks Section

The 10 racing hens have however been trained extensively this season. These training tosses are rarely further than 20 miles keeping the birds sharp and ultra keen. When he is preparing birds for a specific race, Steve likes to build the birds up over a 2 week preparatory period.

Steve likes his young birds to have an extensive education in the year of their birth and as such they are expected to compete weekly throughout the young bird programme if fit and well. They are also trained as often as possible, with their training normally starting 2-3 weeks before the first race and then everyday thereafter, weather permitting. The young bird team are raced exclusively on the darkness system and Steve has not witnessed any deleterious effects on their later racing ability as old birds.



Aviaries at the lofts of Mr & Mrs Steve Harris & Dtr

FEEDING.

Widowhood cocks are fed in their boxes with a tablespoon of Versele Laga traditional widowhood mixture, the amount given at each feed varying with the distance of the race to be flown. All other birds are hopper fed. Young birds have Versele Laga Gerry plus as their staple diet when racing.

BLOODLINES.

At present Steve has a mixture of blood lines in the loft and over the years he has found that good pigeons come in all shapes and sizes. The birds are allowed to choose their own mates and Steve prefers not to interfere unless they are brother and sister etc. He has also found that crossing the birds works better as far as racing success is concerned. He likes a medium sized pigeon, apple bodied with good balance but, as he says, good pigeons come in different shapes and sizes and they all look good when they win!

SOME NOTABLE PERFORMANCES.

As Steve admits, his latest win of 1st Open BICC Falaise is probably his birds' best performance to date although, as mentioned in the early paragraphs, he has won the Central Southern Classic 3 times and been 4th open NFC Fourgeres 7,000+ birds and many other good positions. The race that gave him the most pleasure was coming 2nd open Sun City Million Dollar race in 2009 as he was there watching it in Sun City, South Africa!!!

"Yvette's Decision"

NL15-11080915

**1st Sect CS 1st Open British International
Championship Falaise 2017**

**Owned & Raced by
Mr & Mrs S Harris & Daughter**



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Some birds of note that have achieved some excellent performances for Steve include a Chequer Janssen cock called 'The Rocket' which won 7 out of 9 races in one season and his nest mate which won a new 24ft pigeon loft. More recently, Steve raced a pigeon called 'The Ghost' bred by Mr & Mrs Cross & Son, of Gosport. He won 4th sec 9th open CSCFC 2,258 birds; 2nd sec 4th open NFC 7,064 birds; 5th sec 12th open BICC 3,180 birds; 3rd sec 79th open NFC Cholet 2,877 birds; 40th sec 158th open NFC Cholet 6,537 birds; 47th section 79th open CSCFC Guernsey 3,180 birds; 2nd sec 7th open CSCFC Bergerac and many other club and Fed positions.

MEDICATION & SUPPLEMENTS.

All birds are treated for canker before pairing.

Multi vits are given the day before basketing and electrolytes on return from the race, along with garlic cloves in the water every day. Some peanuts are also added to the daily feed in the build up to the longer National races. His one product of choice would be garlic cloves in their water every day as he has yet to find a product on the market that has made his birds win a race. As he says “all animals thrive on routine. Look after your birds, keep them happy and the results will follow.”

Thanks Steve for giving such candid answers and here’s wishing you and Yvette continued success and enjoyment in the sport. My thanks also to Chris Sutton for some of the photos included with this report.

Gareth Watkins