

**COOPERS TRIPLE INTERNATIONAL WINNERS.
ON ACHIEVING THE GRAND SLAM - TWICE**

A loft report on Geoff & Catherine Cooper

1st Open BICC, 1st International Bordeaux 22,029 birds 2011.

1st Open BICC 1st International Pau 8,500 birds 2013.

by Gareth Watkins

The Grand slam! This is exactly what Geoff and Catherine Cooper achieved in June 2011 when they clocked their Dark Chequer cock to win 1st Open BICC and 1st Open International Bordeaux / Agen from a total field of 22,029 pigeons entered by the best fanciers in Europe. The partners had previously won 1st Open in BICC races and the King's Cup with the NFC when they won 1st Open Tarbes a few years back. Add to these wins at National level, scores of Club, Federation and Combine wins then the winning of 1st Open in an International race completes a terrific record of wins at all levels of competition within the sport – thus the title of this article THE GRAND SLAM.

That would be enough for most fanciers, who, in all probability, would have "hung up their scrapers" and taken a well earned retirement from the sport. Not so Geoff Cooper who then set about further refining this amazing team of pigeons with the aim of winning another International race. This second "Everest" was achieved in June 2013 when their good hen "Woolongong" raced directly out of the south to beat 8,547 birds entered by some of the best fanciers in Europe to win 1st Open Pau International.



Catherine & Geoff

I first met Geoff some 25 years ago when he was flying a highly successful team of pigeons to his then home at High Littleton a few miles from Geoff and Catherine's present home at Peasedown St John. At that time, the late 1980s, Geoff had a superb team of widowhood cocks bred around imports from Andre Vermote and Emiel Deweerdt & Sons. On the first and many subsequent visits I made to High Littleton, I handled all the loft's big winners - pigeons such as "John", "Silver", "Stumpy", "Bernard", "Little" and the incomparable "Bulldog" – one of the finest pigeons I have ever handled and with performances at National level to match.

The lofts at that time were built into the stone outhouses at the rear of Geoff's home and business premises and a deep litter of dry droppings was employed in all lofts. Since those days, a move has been made to Peasedown St John and a brand new purpose built breeze block loft built to accommodate the race birds and stock team. Despite the move and the change in home environment the winning of races at the highest level has continued without a hiccup.

That covers a little of the background to the present success story but what of the man himself?

Geoff is now retired from his butcher's business and had from an early age a love of birds, having pet jackdaws, owls and kestrels as a boy. He started in the sport at the young age of 13 when he used to clock his uncle's racers on their return on a Saturday. That's when the racing bug really bit deep. Geoff's first major influence was therefore his uncle, who, although he never enjoyed much success, "did the deed" and introduced Geoff to the sport of racing pigeons. Another fancier from the West of England who had a major influence on not only Geoff, but also many other fanciers in the area, was the great Reg Venner from Street. Reg and his wife Myrtle raced their team of birds with great success on both the north routes through to Lerwick at more than 600 miles as well as the south road through to Pau. However, probably the greatest influence on Geoff's development as a fancier was Emiel Deweerdt from Kortemark in Belgium. Geoff first visited the Deweerdt lofts in the early 1980s and was impressed both with the birds and just as importantly the man himself. On subsequent visits to Kortemark, Emiel and Geoff spent many evenings together talking about racing the birds and he told Geoff that the secret to racing pigeons was that there is no secret. There were certain "do's and don'ts" but no secrets. Even now Geoff still races his birds to the same principles as Emiel recommended all those years ago.



Home to 1st International winners

Geoff's first loft was a far cry from the present purpose built loft. It had an open front and was raised a couple of feet off the ground. There was honeysuckle planted at the front of the loft and as the honeysuckle grew and covered the loft front Geoff noticed that the birds' performances improved. He let it cover more of the front of the loft and Geoff realised that the protection from the draughts was why his birds were performing better. It wasn't long before he had the front of the loft completely covered so no air could blow directly in onto the birds. This was in the late sixties, so in all probability he had one of the first closed in lofts in the West of England. The stone built lofts at High Littleton were also designed on the same lines with minimal ventilation and the birds raced out of their skins.

The first birds raced were a mixture of top local birds, Fred Channing of Bristol and Reg and Myrtle Venner from Street. These formed the base of a successful family which won 2nd BBC National Palamos and 6th BBC National Palamos at 701 miles. Geoff raced the birds on the natural system in the 1970s, turning to widowhood in the early 1980s when he raced so successfully to High Littleton.



THE MOVE TO PEASEDOWN ST JOHN

Geoff has raced with his wife Catherine at his present location since 1994. The present loft is a block built structure, 32 m long and 2.5 m wide. This houses 60 widowhood boxes in four sections. The two young bird sections are fitted with 140 perches - 70 in each section. There is also a section for racing 18 hens plus a stock section with aviary attached. The loft faces due south so attracts the full benefits from whatever sun there may be in the West of England. All sections have hardwood grid floors which have loft granules underneath and

this is replaced as needed. The boxes and perches are cleaned every day and the corridor running along the front of the internal sections is also vacuumed daily.



THE RACING SYSTEM

This year Geoff and Catherine have the biggest team of race birds they have ever had as they are racing 27 hens on widowhood as well as 55 cocks. They rear a large young bird team each season, as they like to race as many of the inland races as possible with the young cocks whilst the young hens go to as many channel races as they can manage if fit and well.

All the old birds, both cocks and hens, are raced on widowhood, the cocks racing to their hens and the hens racing to their cocks. Geoff doesn't like racing roundabout as on too many occasions the birds can return and find an empty box. He doesn't have many hard and fast rules but one of them is that when the birds are raced widowhood, their mate must always be waiting for them in their box when they return.

The young birds are raced on the sliding door system, whereby the cocks and hens exercise and live separated in adjoining compartments during the week and then run together on basketting day. When they return from a race they can spend the race day and night together before being separated once again until the following basketting day.

The birds are paired any time between the beginning of December and the end of January. Whenever the birds are mated they are all mated at the same time both stock and racers. The cocks rear one round of young birds as do the racing hens. All the hens are removed from

the cocks section before they lay a second round of eggs and the cocks then finish rearing the young birds by themselves.

At this time all the birds, cocks and hens are exercised separately, once a day. Once the young are reared and the cocks are on their own they are on widowhood, exercised twice a day for an hour, as are the hens. If the birds are reluctant to exercise Geoff will put up a flag for the hour. All the birds are used to this routine as the young birds are flagged during the young bird season, so it is all part of the daily routine for them.

Prior to old bird racing the cocks will have two or three trainings tosses up to 25 miles, with five days minimum between each toss. Once racing starts, no more basket training takes place.

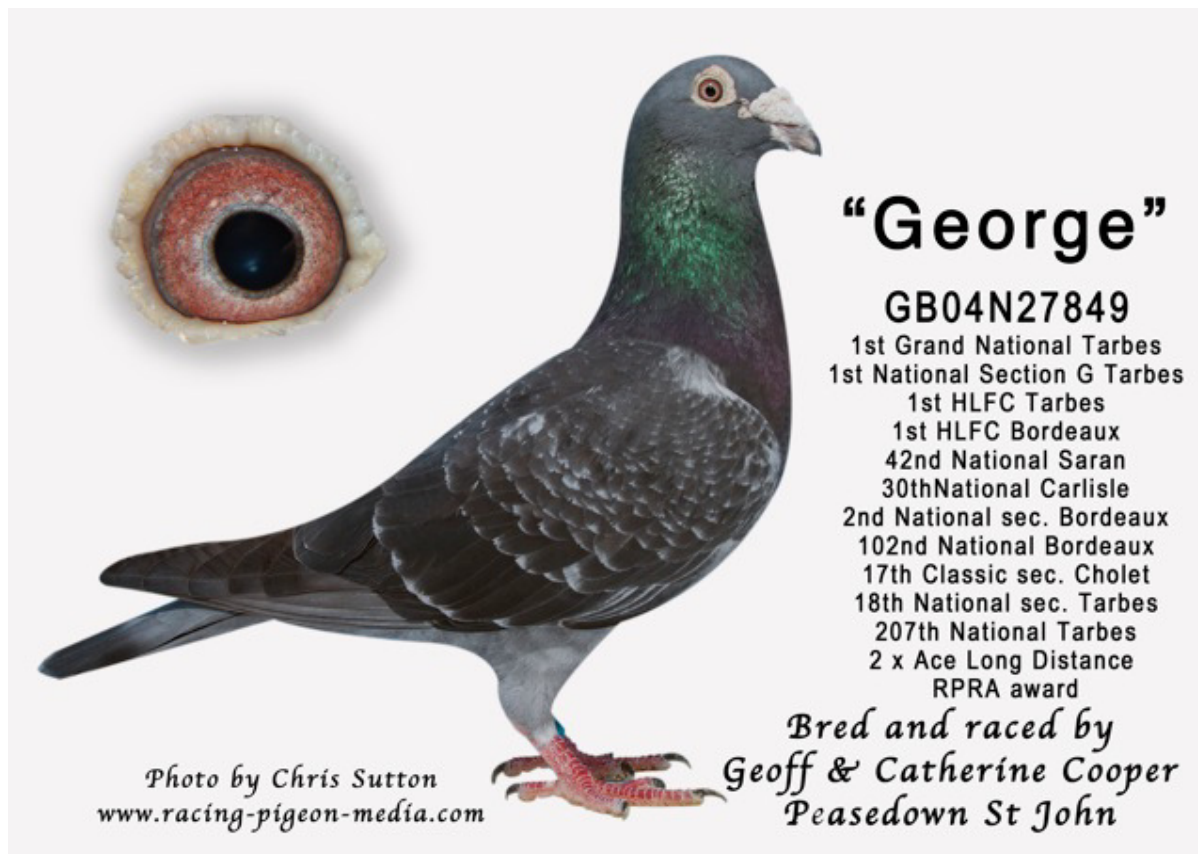


YOUNG BIRDS

The young birds have between eight and twelve training tosses prior to the young bird season and then no training once racing starts. The only exception is if they are going to a race from a different direction, then instead of going to a race the week before they will have a training toss on line for the next race. The young hens have every inland club race until the National and Classic channel races start and are entered in as many channel races as possible if they are fit and well. The young cocks normally race the inland club programme, occasionally having a channel race. This is because Geoff has found that the hens usually mature faster than the cocks. All young bird are raced on the darkness system, and Geoff has used this system with great success every year since 1994. The youngsters are separated as soon as they show signs of pairing and are then raced on a sliding door system, as outlined earlier.

FEEDING

All the birds are hopper fed and the stock birds have food in front of them at all the times. The race birds have 40grms [just under 1 ½ ounces] per day of Verse Laga widowhood mix, more if they need it. This is fed in two meals, morning and evening after exercise. Geoff always adds 5% barley to the mix - if they eat all the barley they are hungry and he feeds a little more, if they leave the barley they have had enough. Before each National (channel) race the fat content is increased for the last seven feeds prior to basketing.



MEDICATION AND THE USE OF SUPPLEMENTS

Geoff does not routinely treat for canker, worms or cocci, he only ever treats if there is a problem. He always vaccinates for paramyxo at the start of the year and does not like to see the misuse of antibiotics as bacteria soon become resistant to antibiotics if they are misused. Geoff controls problems like worms with good hygiene in the loft. Once you break the cycle the birds do not become re-infected. Nevertheless, he always keeps medication in the cupboard because problems can and do arise during the racing season and must be dealt with immediately if the season is not to be disrupted.

Supplements are used in the form of natural oils [ground nut and oregano], plus hemp, peanuts and the usual grit and minerals. No vitamins are fed, as the Versele Laga corn mixtures have all the vitamins the birds require. If Geoff could only use one supplement it would be natural oils, usually bought at the supermarket.



Three International race winners at the BICC Prize Dinner - Bullen & Son, G & C Cooper and Mark Gilbert

BLOODLINES HOUSED

The main bloodlines housed can now be termed the “Cooper” family. These are largely based on the Deweerdt from Kortemark, Belgium. As mentioned in the opening paragraphs, Geoff first visited Emiel Deweerdt in the early 1980s and purchased children of his top racers. Many more visits were made to the Deweerdt family over the following twenty years and Geoff introduced more children from the top performers. The children of these introductions were tested and the best racers were then retired to stock and from these the “Cooper” family has developed and grown in strength. Geoff gifted birds to Gordon Harding of Harding Bros who won the Pau Grand National with the progeny of these gift birds. He then had children back from these successful racers to pair to his own stock birds, thus increasing the strength of the stock loft. This has proved an excellent method for keeping the good bloodlines prominent within the loft.

Over the last thirty years many other birds have been introduced to try as a cross. If any of the young birds from these introductions prove good enough, they are then paired back to the original Cooper family. Not many have past the test but one notable exception was the fast flying Serge Van Elsacker birds. This pairing bred “Day Break” who scored four times from Pau 560 miles, winning a coveted National Flying Club Merit award. A Van Elsacker hen bred and raced successfully by Geoff was gifted to his very good friend and fellow International winner, Mark Gilbert, and bred Mark his 1st International Dax winner “Southfield Supreme”. Interestingly, the sire of “Southfield Supreme” was a brother to the sire of “Day Break”. Some of the multi International winning family of Heinz and Peter Brockamp have also been introduced to good effect!! As the sire of Woolongong the 2013 Pau International winner is a pure Brockamp bred by Clive Lister and Grand son of Euro Diamond and Marseille King.

The 2013 Pau International Triumph.

The Coopers have developed a team of pigeons that will fly in all winds and weather and the 2013 Pau International was a good example of racing in all winds. The birds were liberated in a north east headwind, turning east on route, a side wind, then southerly, a tail wind and finally in the UK south westerly. Their chequer white flight hen, called Wollongong, landed a few minutes before Geoff's expected arrival time and they knew then they had a good bird. They clocked two more hens, Georgia Jean and Carla Page to be provisionally 5th & 6th Open BICC and 8th and 16th Open International. Last year Georgia Jean was 1st Section 27th National BICC Pau International.

Prior to basketing for the Pau International, Wollongong and the other hens had four consecutive channel races then two weekends off before going to Pau.

Wollongong, is a 2010 hen bred from Gina, a half sister to George, the 1st Grand National winner and sire/g. Sire to many top birds, when paired to a grandson of Euro Diamond and Marseille King from Clive Lister. She has been an excellent racer, winning 4th High Littleton Open Tours as a young bird, not raced as a yearling then raced through to Pau International as a two year old where she won 3rd section, 35th BICC Pau International. As mentioned earlier in this article, all birds at the Cooper loft are raced on widowhood. The hens are raced exactly the same as the cocks, paired up in the early spring, some reared, some only sat eggs, then exercised twice a day when racing starts. They all see the cocks before basketing and they always have their cocks waiting for them when they get home. The racing hens are paired to cocks bred from the stock loft or retired racers. The widowhood cocks are raced the same, always seeing their hen before they go to the race and always their hen waiting for their return. Geoff and Catherine started this season with 55 cocks and 27 hens in the race team.

George the 1st Grand National winner has bred three different children which have bred 1st International Bordeaux Old Birds, 2nd International Bordeaux Yearlings for Mark Gilbert, and Scotty 3 x 1st National Section plus many other top performers.

Geoff and Catherine's two other hens clocked on the day in the Pau International this year were, as mentioned above, a three year old hen called Georgia Jean which wins 2nd WS 5th National and provisionally 8th International. In last year's Pau International race Georgia Jean was 1st West Section. She was raced widowhood, not roundabout, coming back to the cocks just as widowhood cocks are raced.

She is very well bred, her sire is Blue Legend, a son of Legend 1st International Dax 2003 for Brian Sheppard and her dam is a daughter of George, winner of 1st Grand National Tarbes and g/sire to Farmer George 1st International Bordeaux. She is called Georgia Jean in memory of Brian's wife Jean who was a good friend of Geoff and Catherine.

The next pigeon clocked was a two year old hen called Carla Page who won 3rd West Section, 6th National and provisionally 16th International. She is called Carla Page because she was bred by Alan and Carla Hudson, before Carla and Alan were married, hence Carla Page, and given to Geoff and Catherine to race. She was also raced widowhood.

Her Sire was a son of Mistral an exceptional racer for HP Brockamp when paired to a hen Carla and Alan bought from Geoff called Miss Magnus, who is a daughter of Magnus, a top International racer for Deweerdt.

Geoff's ideal pigeon is a light handling bird with long flights and good feather quality, anything else, size, shape, the back, is irrelevant. He has seen too many winning pigeons of all shapes and sizes to look for just one ideal shape.



Breeding loft

SOME WINNING PIGEONS

The Cooper family have bred birds to win from 45 miles through to 649 miles. Geoff and Catherine were 86th International from Perpignan with a seven year old widowhood cock called “Flipper”. Some of the founding birds were:-

“Bulldog”, 1st National section G Pau, 18th Nantes National plus many other prizes.

“John” twice 6th Nantes National, 2nd Nantes National and 12th Pau National.

“August”, who was 5th Nantes National, 1st Plymouth etc.

The above three birds were the foundation birds of the current Cooper family. Other super racers included :-

“Farm Boy” 12 th International Dax 3rd National Dax, 475th International Dax and 3rd National Dax. He is the sire of “Farmer George” who won 1st International Bordeaux OB by over an hour against 10,061 birds and fastest of 22,029 birds by 45 minutes.

Another super star is “George” who won 1st Grand National Tarbes and is responsible for many top pigeons including breeding three individual birds to win 1st International Bordeaux, 2nd International Bordeaux yearlings for Mark Gilbert and 1st National Section Fougères.



Wollongong 1st Open BICC, 1st International Pau

PERFORMANCES

In the last ten years Geoff and Catherine have won 2 x 1st International, 2nd International, 8th, 12th & 16th International, 475th International - PLUS 4 x 1st Nationals, 2 x 3rd National and over 50 FIRSTS SECTION in National and Classic races, including 5 x 1sts section with the BICC in 2012 alone.

“Farmer George”, winner of 1st International Bordeaux. was bred “in the purple” as his sire was “Farm Boy”, who won 12th International Dax, 475th International Dax plus 2 x 3rd National Dax, and his dam was a daughter of “George”, the winner of 1st Grand National Tarbes.

The sire of “Shiraz” the winner of 2nd International Bordeaux, was “PD”, who was twice placed 2nd in the section of National races.

Performances in the 2012/13 RACING SEASONS.

The last few years highlights.

- 1st International Bordeaux 22.029 birds*
- 1st International Old birds 10.661 birds (check number)*
- 2nd International Bordeaux Old Birds*
- 3rd International Bordeaux 22,029*
- 12th International Dax*
- 35th International Dax*
- 86th International Perpignan*

1st Grand National Tarbes

1st National Falaise

1st National Falaise

1st, 8th & 16th International Pau. 8,547 birds.

plus many top ten National positions and as mentioned above over 50 x 1st National and Classic wins at section level[Provincial].

The 2012 season was another amazing year for the Cooper pigeons. Flying to the West of the UK, where the strong west winds are favouring the east of the country, the Cooper pigeons won six x 1st section. In the International races where the majority of the birds are heading east to Belgium, Holland and Germany, what the Cooper's achieved was remarkable. The birds have got to be tough as well as fast to keep doing this.

Some of the present day superstars still racing at the Cooper loft are:-

“Misty” won 1st CHS, 5th Combine Lyndhurst, the first race of the season, inland and only 70km. Six weeks later he won 1st CHS, 5th Combine Saintes 630 kms and three weeks after that he won 1st West Section (prov.) BICC, 10th BICC St Vincent International, the only bird on the day in the section. “Misty” is a son of “Blue Legend” a top breeding son of “Legend” the first ever International winner in the UK.

Another star in the racing loft is “Scotty” who has previously won 1st WS provincial Falaise BICC and 12th National Fougères BBC.

In 2012 “Scotty” has won 2 x 1st Section[provincials], 1st WS (prov.) 5th BICC Bordeaux/Agén International approx. 840 kms then four weeks later he went to Bordeaux National BBC winning 1st Section 9th National. In both these races he was flying into strong west winds, racing against pigeons flying 250+ kms to the east.

A top racing hen is “Georgia Jean” who won 1st West Section (prov.) BICC, 22nd BICC Pau International. She was raced as a young bird, not raced as a yearling, then raced as a two year old. She is also bred from the very best of the Cooper pigeons. Her sire is “Blue Legend” a son of “Legend” 1st International Dax and her Dam is “777” a daughter of “George” 1st National Tarbes and G.Sire of 1st International Bordeaux.

Another top racer is “Scar” who won 1st West Section Le Mans BICC National. His sire is a nest brother to “Stroller” who was 2nd West Section St Vincent BICC International a couple of weeks before.

“Bro. Farm Boy” won 1st West Section from Tours and then four weeks later was 6th West Sect Barcelona BICC International. He is a full brother to “Farm Boy” a top racer and sire of “Farmer George” 1st International Bordeaux.

“Daybreak Junior” won 2nd West Sect BICC Barcelona International.

Readers should be aware of the fact that the West Section[provincial] within the British International Championship Club is nearly as big in area as the whole of Belgium! Living in the West of England, in order to win top National prizes in an International race the birds have to fly on their own from liberation to home, they cannot follow the main drag of the birds or they win nothing..

The Cooper family of pigeons are a true family of pigeons, all the top racers and breeders are related, there are winners or good breeders in every generation on the pedigrees. Geoff inbreeds to all his top birds and then looks for a good cross to maintain the vigour. He tries many crosses and very few have stayed. The crosses that are successful are crossed back into the family to ensure the winning genes are not lost.

Not only do these birds win for Geoff and Catherine, many fabciers throughout the UK have enjoyed success at Classic and National level with birds bred down from this family. Birds from Geoff and Catherine have produced:

1st International Dax, 2nd International Yearlings Bordeaux for Mark Gilbert.

1st Grand National Pau for Harding Bros

“Morning Glory” 2 x 2nd Grand National Pau for Paul Kendal

1st National Saintes for Stan Dangerfield

1st Classic Pau for Witney and Reed

2 x 2nd National for Richard boylin

1st Grand National Tarbes for Paul Kendal

7th Grand National Tarbes for Paul Kendal

1st Classic Messac for A. S. Thompson

1st National Carentan for J & D Staddon

Some of the Coopers' wins in 2012 are:-

4th Classic with a son of George

5th BICC Agen National/International with Scotty a grandson of George

1st BICC West Section(prov.) Agen National /International with Scotty a grandson of George.

1st BICC West Section Pau National/International with Georgia Jean, a grand daughter of George

14th National Fougères with a grand daughter of JW

2 x 5th West of England SR Combine

1st West Section BICC Tours with Bro. Farm Boy

22nd BICC National/International Barcelona, 2nd West Section Barcelona

National/International with Daybreak Junior

39th BICC National/International Barcelona, 6th BICC West Sect Barcelona National International with Bro. Farm Boy.

3rd BICC West Sect Pau National/International

1st CHS Lyndhurst, 1st CHS Saintes down from Farm Boy and Legend 1st International Dax for Brian Sheppard.

3rd Section BBC Niort

2 x 1st HLFC

1st CHS Carentan

Perhaps at this point I should highlight the immense influence that the great racer/breeder George has had on the winning lines within the Cooper loft as well as others.

‘George’ the Grand National winner raced up to 2008 and has only been in the breeding loft for three years . In that short time children from him are showing great potential as long distance champions, this year winning 4th Classic with George Junior and children of George are proving themselves as breeders of National and International winners.

“George’ is sire of ‘Pearl’ - mother to amazing ‘Farmer George’

1st. Int. Bordeaux 2011 – 10,622 birds

1st. Int. Bordeaux 2011 overall – 22,029 birds

3rd West Section Tours

135th Open NFC Saintes – 3,484 birds

150th Open Fougères – 2,161 birds

‘George’ is also sire of ‘Georgeson’ –sire of ‘Scotty’

1st West Sect British International. Championship Club Falaise,

5th BICC Pau National/International

1st BICC WestSect (prov) Pau National/International

4th Section Fougères,15th Nat. Fougères

‘George’ is sire of “Double 7” mother of :

“Georgia Jean”

8th International Pau 2013

1st BICC West Sect Pau International/National

122nd BICC International CC Pau

‘George’ is sire of Darkie’ – sire of

2nd Int. Bordeaux yearlings

3rd Int. Bordeaux hens

A sister to ‘George’ is breeder of ‘Wollongong’

1st International Pau 2013

10th section St. Malo young birds

3rd Sect BICC Pau International/National

4th Open HL Tours .

1st Exeter .

A half sister to ‘George’ won

4th section young birds St Malo .

A half brother to George bred

1st National Falaise for J & D Staddon

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2013 Performances to date.

1st West Section BICC Falaise with Scar

8th Section G 26th NFC Carentan with Carla Page

1st West of England SR Combine Truro with Farmer Fox

4th, 5th, 6th West Section BICC Alencon

6th, 7th, 8th, 15th National BICC Alencon

1st International Pau with Wollongong

8th International Pau with Georgia Jean

16th International Pau with Carla Page

8th open Agen.

6th open Barcelona.

6th,18th,20th,26th&30th Open St Vincent.

The success story has continued unabated with yet another National win during the 2014 season. Listed below are Geoff and Catherine's 2014 Results with the BICC:-

Falaise 194 miles (3,278 birds) section: 2, 8, 9, 25, 26, 31, 39, 40, 42
Open National: 2, 8, 9, 25, 26, 31, 39, 40, 42
Alencon 228 miles (6,823 birds). section: 19, 23, 118, 123, 124, 125, 135
Open national: 33, 44, 240, 263, 265, 266, 299
Tours 307 miles (3,655 birds) section: 1, 4, 9, 21, 28, 36
Open National: 1, 4, 9, 54, 88, 112
Poitiers 350 miles (1,938 birds) section: 13, 18, 32, 38, 44, 45
Open National: 19, 26, 53, 66, 81, 84
Pau International 561 miles (379 birds) section: 7, 22, 24, 25, 30
Open National: 31, 73, 82, 89, 99
Agen International 512 miles (532 birds) section: 1, 5, 10,
Open National: 3, 34, 69
St Vincent International 530 miles (302 birds) section: 2, 5, 7, 8
Open National: 4, 10, 54, 58

Pretty impressive team performances I'm sure you'll agree.

It is always a hard decision to retire a good racer but most of Geoff and Catherine's top race birds have been bred from retired top racers or daughters of these top birds.



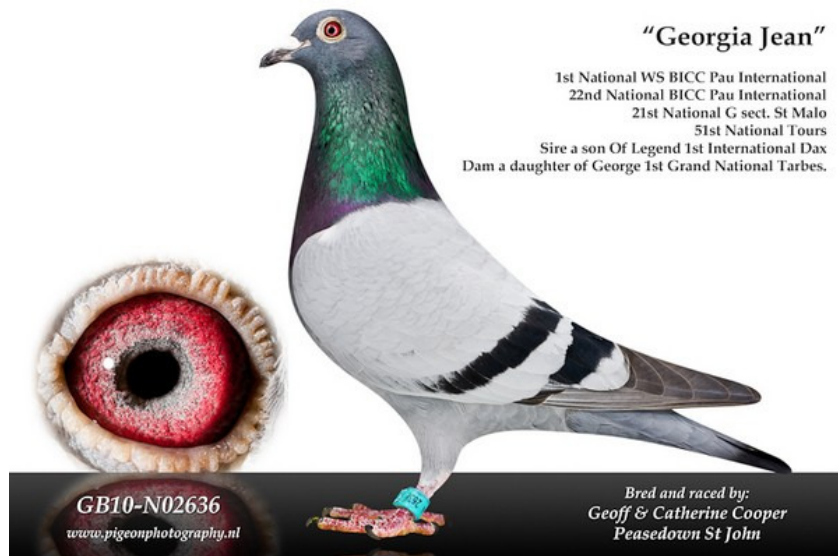


1st Open BICC Tours-Farm-Star



6th Open BICC Pau International





5th Open BICC Pau International

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF THE SPORT

Many fanciers are leaving the sport for a variety of reasons and are not being replaced by new ones. Geoff feels many of these problems could quite easily be addressed. He often hears fanciers complain about clubs voting to exclude good flyers, yet they forget they are only as good as the fanciers they fly against. Back biting is also causing fanciers to give up, as many are disillusioned by the lack of sportsmanship. Add to this family break ups and fanciers having to relocate then the numbers leaving the sport grow each year. Although Geoff does not take part in One loft Races, he feels they are a good way of getting the general public interested, especially now several schools are getting involved.

They would also like to wish every one a good season for 2014. Who knows, the next winner of an International race could be you. One thing is certain though – you have to be in it to win it so join the BICC the home of International pigeon racing in the U.K.

Can these performances achieved by Geoff and Catherine and those fanciers fortunate to obtain birds from the Coopers be bettered? Only time will tell.

It only leaves me to wish Geoff and Catherine the very best of luck for the future Geoff was winning top prizes long before I first met him in 1988 and I'm sure he will continue to excel well into the future – his mantra being “Keep it simple”.