

*John & David Staddon.
Of Evercreech.
Winning well at the top level.*

*1st Open BICC Carentan 2012.
1st Open BICC Tours 2013.
1st Open BICC Falaise YB's 2014.*

The name of Staddon has been synonymous with success for more than 30 years. However, in 2009 the racing lofts of John and son David were moved to their present location at Evercreech just south of Shepton Mallet in Somerset. In the short time that the new lofts have been established, success has followed as night follows day, and in late April 2012, just three years after setting down their roots at the new location the partners won their first National race to their new address. This success, just one in a long line of exceptional performances, was achieved when their Deweerdt hen won 1st Open in the BICC Carentan National. John and David then followed this initial BICC win with a second top spot in 2013 in the BICC Tours race and now have completed the trweble by winning 1st Open BICC Falaise YB's in 2014.

The following is a report on the partners' latest successes based on an interview with David Staddon.

David's father John, started at 9 or 10 years of age when his father bought a pair of pigeons from a pet shop. John is now 69 and David having grown up with pigeons, and is now 38.

John's first major influences were Reg Christopher and Reg Venner – two West Country fanciers who were ahead of their time and ahead of the rest of the fancy. David, comments that he learnt from two of the best fanciers in his opinion, namely John and his twin brother Mike and more recently from the terrifically successful Mark Gilbert.

John started with a galvanised metal shed with a concrete floor. The birds were mainly strays from the locality and the management in those days left a lot to be desired!

The racing lofts were moved from Merriott to Evercreech in late 2009, so the 2012 BICC Winner “ Shapway Annie” was from the first crop of pigeons bred in Evercreech.



John & David Staddon Three times winners of 1st Open BICC

The Loft.

The partners have one racing loft of timber construction with a pent roof which was made by Econo lofts. It measures 34 ft in length and 6 ft in depth. Additionally, John and David have fitted wooden aviaries to the entire front length and these are 4ft deep. The loft has two sections for widowhood cocks, one for widowhood hens and two sections for young birds and that's it. With a south east facing aspect, it catches the early morning sun [when there is any!].

The young birds are kept on deep litter (Elephant Grass & Builders Lime) This is not usually removed for several seasons, just freshened up. The floors in the cocks' section are scraped out daily but the nest boxes have grill floors. The hens are kept on grills and the aviaries are also fitted out with grilled flooring in order to reduce management and to break any disease cycle that might arise.

At the start of this season the partners had 32 cocks, 28 hens in their race team and they usually rear about 70 youngsters annually. The stock team currently amounts to around 15 pairs.

Management.

John and David have tried a variety of systems - Natural, Widowhood, Round about, all with success. However, in 2012 they tried out a brand new System of Total Widowhood, which is very different to any of the previous systems employed. They feel that with such restricted space they have to race the hens to give themselves a chance to compete in as many races as possible.

The time of mating the birds varies. The race team is usually mated around Feb 14th although nothing is set in stone, but all racers are always mated at the same time.

The partners' motto is "keep it simple." Too many people try and make pigeon racing more complicated than it really is. The old birds are exercised daily throughout the winter months when the weather is good. John firmly believes that they stay healthier and are more street wise to the persistent hawk problems as they have found that they lost more birds to the hawks after shutting the loft up all winter. Both cocks and hens are close to race fitness by mid February and are ready for pairing.

They are paired around Feb 14th and are allowed to do as they please, pair, not pair, lay legs not lay eggs, what ever makes them happy. Those that lay are allowed to sit for about 7 days and are then split. Some will have laid, some won't, some will be paired some won't. They are all separated at the same time as the racers are never bred from before racing as loft space is limited.

During March the racers are exercised hard for up to an hour morning and night for both cocks and hens. On the last week of March the birds are allowed together once more and they then undergo three short training tosses from about 20 miles. That's it, the training basket goes away. The birds are split on return from the third toss and are then ready to race.

Exercise & Training.

The partners have tried free flying exercise and forced exercise, both with success but at the present time the birds are forced to fly by use of a flag when necessary.

These exercise periods occur twice a day for at least an hour, sometimes longer, if they want to fly they are allowed to do so. The more time they exercise the heavier they are fed. The heavier they are fed the more time they exercise. One feeds off the other.

As mentioned above, the race team gets just three training tosses before the first race and then nothing thereafter. They are however raced most weeks. These training tosses do not exceed 30 miles for both old birds and youngsters and are undertaken against the prevailing wind.

The race birds are checked by a vet at least every three/four weeks throughout the season, regardless of their form as John and David like to be sure that they have all bases covered regarding the birds' health and this is especially true before a big National race.

Young Birds.

The young birds go to every race in the Combine programme if fit. This would mean about seven races or so up to a distance of 130 miles inland. The partners also like to have a crack at the YB Nationals but have found that these can be very hard on a youngster in the South West, as the prevailing westerly winds at that time of year make it very tricky competing into their area.

The young birds would get about 12 or 13 tosses prior to the first race and then maybe one or two a week thereafter depending on what they think the young birds need, some weeks they would get no training. Both John and David strongly believe that the darkness system is the only way if you want to compete to a high level with youngsters and anybody who says that it affects them later in life is wrong plain and simple.

Feeding.

John is in charge of all the feeding and he is a master at it. In the Staddon lofts all feeding is carried out via hoppers and John likes to see the birds competing for their food at the hopper. The mixtures fed are home made using four varieties of Garvo mixes with the addition in the 2013 and 2014 seasons of the German Matador feeds. The birds are always fed to appetite as the food is never measured. Youngsters are fed exactly the same

mix as the old birds. They are all high performance athletes and need plenty of fuel in the tank if they are expected to put in a full shift on race day.

The birds are fed according to the weather week by week with no specific alterations in the build up to National races.

Bloodlines.

The majority of birds in the stock loft have been bred by Mark Gilbert, and these include Deweerdt, Brockamps, Koopman, Van Elsackers, Verkerks etc. Mark advised the partners to try his middle distance birds, so they have brought in four pairs and are giving them a go. John and David also have Deweerdt from Geoff & Catherine Cooper. Other recent introductions have come from the International winners of Wicky & Kirk Bullen and Mark Gilbert, as well as a son of Brian Milkins's outstanding Cholet NFC winner plus a son of John Halstead's Barcelona winner "Untouchable" and a daughter of Crowley & Green's Barcelona winner "Minx". The partners are always looking for well bred pigeons to join their team and hopefully enhance their performances.

John and David are still trying to find a line of truly top class National distance pigeons but this takes time and the peregrines don't help in building a team of 600 mile pigeons. The families currently housed are still new, so the policy is simply to pair best to best. They do not intend to integrate the new middle distance bloodlines into the distance bloodlines until they know which pairs are the best, then and only then will they be crossed in and the partners will await the race results with interest. Their ultimate aim is to be able to build a family of pigeons for all races similar to the families that Geoff Cooper and Chris Howse have developed in their area.

When asked which fancier had influenced him the most David said that on a personal level his father John has helped more than any other fancier, but outside of the family, Mark Gilbert has been and continues to be a massive help. Stuart Wilcox also deserves a mention as he helps with the partner's sales as well as loaning the odd high class stock pigeon.

Performances.

There are many but amongst the highlights are:-

1st BICC Carentan, 2nd BICC Pau, 2nd BICC Falaise, 7th NFC Saintes, 7th BICC Saran, 8th NFC Saintes, 8th BBC Fougères 9th NFC Fougères, 10th NFC Alençon, 10th BICC Perpignan, 11th BBC Carentan, plus many others in the top 20 National racing. In recent seasons John and David have won 9 x 1st Section and 6 x 2nd Section in National racing alone.

Here is a quick resume of the last two seasons [2013 & 2014] racing results at National and Combine level:-

1st BICC Tours 2013, & 1st BICC Falaise YB 2014.

Plus 3rd National Tours 2014, 1st 2nd 4th Section 3rd National Saintes NFC 2014, 1st 3rd 9th & 16th National Falaise YB 2014, 9th National Poitiers 2014, 1st Section 4th Open Falaise YB NFC 2014, 7th National Barcelona 2013, 19th National Barcelona 2014

4 & 19th CSCFC Bergerac on day only sending 3 birds.

5 x 1st WOESRC 2013 & 2014 combined

5 x RPRA Region Awards 2013

L A Baker Trophy Winners 2013 & 2014 (Best Average All NFC Races Section C D & G)

Runners Up National Flying Club Trophy 2014 (Best Average All NFC Races)

They regard that the performances that gave them the most pleasure would be when they timed their good hen "Lady Caroline" to be 1st West Section 2nd Open BICC Pau in a strong west wind with heavy rain, only being beaten by a pigeon flying 130 miles east of their loft location, and winning the two bird average in the same race when only entering two pigeons. Yet another highlight was when they clocked "Dark Velvet" to be 2nd Section NFC Tarbes and then 1st Section 10th Open BICC Perpignan in the same season. Both these top class hens are now in the stock loft. A close third would be winning their first National race with the BICC with "Shapway Annie" from Carenton on 30th April 2012.

Some top pigeons.

"Lady Caroline" she won 60th BBC Carlisle NR, 21st CSCFC Bergerac, 1st section 2nd Open BICC Pau (retired to stock)

"Dark Velvet" a winner of 2nd Section NFC Tarbes, 1st section 10th Open BICC Perpignan (retired to stock). And so to the latest winner in the Staddon stable a young dark chequer cock now named Shapway Anniversary Boy.

He was bred from a pair of yearlings in the race team and he is a "Heinz 57" in terms of bloodlines being 75% Mark Gilbert and 25% Geoff Cooper blood. The father is a full brother to their Carentan BICC winner "Shapway Annie" (Cooper X Gilbert Deweerdt) and the mother is from a Full Brother to 2nd, 7th & 14th Open Tarbes NFC for Mark Gilbert when mated to a half sister to Southfield Melissa 1st International Bordeaux Agen. He has Deweerdt, Brockamp, Jan Aarden & Van Elsacker in his make up. Certainly bred for the job then.

Here are David's views on how the sport can be improved:-

"I think Stewart Wardrop has made a positive start and I like the way he is thinking. We should give him our full support. To attract new members we need publicity to the general public, they know nothing about our sport, we should concentrate on the 40 and over category as they are the only group who may be able to afford to start racing pigeons".

Medication.

"Keep it simple", is the partners' watchword. Droppings and swab checks are regularly sent to a good avian vet, and the birds are then treated if necessary. The partners never treat as part of a routine only if there is a problem. 1st Nationals do not come out of a bottle in their experience. Once the loft hits form the vet checks are usually negative. The birds are obviously vaccinated for PMV and they do this as the young birds are weaned and every year thereafter. All birds are vaccinated, including the stock and any new birds brought in are vaccinated/wormed/cankered before entering the lofts. They do treat for Salmonella/Paratyphoid in the autumn as a preventative but do not now vaccinate against it. Both John and David believe that Salmonella is a huge problem lying undetected in many lofts.

No vitamins are fed, as they have tried them and saw no difference. They never use electrolytes and think them a complete waste of money. The scientific facts suggest that pigeons do not need them so why waste your money. The Staddons stopped using these supplements 5 years ago and the birds don't appear to have missed them. Cider Vinegar, crushed garlic and also a good Probiotic are administered in the water twice a week, that's it, nothing on the corn as Garvo adds all the birds need in the pellets and oils contained in the mixtures used.

The ideal pigeon.

The partners like the Cocks to be of a strong athletic and medium build with a corky buoyancy and good feathering and perfect balance. Hens, on the other hand should be ideally be of small to medium size with similar attributes to the cocks. However, both Mark Gilbert and Geoff Cooper have taught them that handsome is as handsome does. Some of the Deweerdt pigeons really can be deep, over sized and down right ugly but they still win races with monotonous regularity. At the end of the day it's all about performances and it's a bonus if they handle well and have a nice eye etc.

So we come to the 2013 season and the Tours race organised by the BICC. The race was flown under the commanding influence of a strong easterly wind and the three bird entry of John and David certainly thrived under the conditions as they clocked all three to win 1st & 30th Open. At this point I'll let David take up the story:-

" Our first BICC race of the season and We've won it again !!! What a feeling. Below are a few words about our winner and how he was prepared It certainly seems to be a lucky club for us. You may remember that we won 1st West Section 1st & 4th Open Carentan, 2nd Open Falaise & 4th Open Guernsey Young Bird race in 2012 with the BICC .

We were absolutely over the moon to again win 1st West Section 1st Open BICC from Tours. We sent 3 cocks to this race all raced on our Chaos System. This system was pioneered by the Verreckt Arien partnership in Belgium and we have slightly adapted it to suit our set up. The principals though are the same as Pascal's system. We were alerted to this method by Stuart Fawcett (thanks Stu).

Our three entries had 3 short inland races with the West Of England South Road Combine from "Down The Leg". They have each then been to two channel races prior to the BICC Tours race, namely Carentan & Cholet

NFC. All three cocks returned in immaculate condition in good time. Our winning bird has now been named Shapway Matador in honour of our good friend Rob Brooks . Matador is bred for long distance racing and it's easy to see why he raced so well from Tours when you see his parentage. His sire Shapway Untouchable was bred by John Halstead from his Champion Barcelona Winner Untouchable (thanks John !!), the dam is our own Shapway Lady Caroline 1st West Section 2nd Open BICC Pau, 21st Open CSCFC Bergerac amongst others leading performances. So as you can see Matador is bred for the job. He was 9th Section 85th Open NFC Saintes 2012 as a yearling but this is the first time he has showed up this year."

Considering the fact that John and David have only been at their new loft location for just four seasons it is amazing how successful they have already become with a relatively young team of pigeons.

Gareth Watkins



1st Open BICC TOURS 2013 for J & D Staddon



J & D Staddon

GB10N42031
SHAPWAY ANNIE
Bred by J & D Staddon
1st West Section
1st Open BICC Carentan National 1348b
11th Section 36th Open
NFC Cholet National 5886b
11th Section 106th Open
NFC Tarbes Grand National 2808b
All in 2012



Shapway Annie



"Anniversary Boy"

©Chris Sutton

ShapwayAnniversaryBoy 1st Open BICC Falaise YB's 2014



John & David Staddon's Racing Loft



Widowhoodcockssection of J & D Staddon