

The British International Championship Club Agen race is incorporated within the International race program of seven races. The previous and the starting gun for the rest of the series which was from Pau was won by Mark Gilbert who is also the winner on this occasion in the second race from Agen.



Much has already been written by myself and others about Mark and indeed he is forging a route to the history books as one of the greats. For most British fanciers there is little left for him to achieve but from his prospective there are far more higher goals he has set himself. For the last three BICC National races I have travelled to his loft to compile a report and I always manage to arrive within 24 hours, only to have to wait for him to return from the marking station for the next International race. That's how quickly they come around and although he has suffered the same setbacks as all the other fanciers with the east winds this season, he still looks forward to the next race with a passion. He gets upset about top pigeons in his loft having to be put by for the season after a difficult race,

but he does not throw in the towel and is happy when a yearling puts in a good performance for him or shows promise for the future races ahead.

On this occasion I had planned to visit around 4pm but marking for Barcelona International meant that he would not be home until 6:30 so although he had been busy all day preparing his entries, was hot, tired and had just driven for a couple of hours, he still showed me around with enthusiasm for the future asking me to look out for this pigeon from here and that pigeon from there. Explaining how each was bred and proving that he knows all of his birds intimately. He would point out a yearling with equal knowledge as an old hen perched next to it. The man is restless and busy, cramming two days into every one yet still taking the time to answer his phone which never stops.

It is all too easy to dismiss his success as just large teams sent, but I know for sure, as do many others that a large team of high quality pigeons are required to compete in the seven Internationals and Mark has these in abundance. Not by chance though, but by careful study, spending many hours in the closed season preparing for the races ahead. Most would look forward to the next years races and plan accordingly but Mark is planning five years ahead and the wins that come along the way, in difficult conditions, keeps him on track and he knows he has chosen the right one in his quest for the Barcelona International. This is why he does not get disheartened when a setback comes along, in my opinion he relishes the challenge of the little micro adjustments he has to make to reach his goal, and when the conditions fall into place for a UK win, he will be very well prepared to grasp the moment.

A large team of youngsters are being prepared for training to begin at the loft, which will receive far more work than last year's young birds did. "I made the mistake of giving them 5 trainers and putting them by" he said, "They need experience" and I have just realised I am actually writing a weekly diary I have been to his loft so often this season! So, Barcelona International looms for the weekend ahead and as last week, when he predicted difficult races for both the International and NFC Tarbes, he has still sent his best regardless of the conditions, because he knows he has played his part and now it's time for the pigeons to shine. Until next time at Mark Gilbert's 23 times national winning loft...

News and views to Chris Sutton 01530 242548.