

The International race program consists of seven races, all well over 500 miles to the UK coastline and the vast majority of us will be flying 600 miles plus and when the races begin in June, they come thick and fast one after the other until the first weekend in August. To race this program can be quite daunting and you would think a large amount of pigeons were required, but I can offer a solution that once thought through, makes competing in the International races each season possible. In the top lofts of Europe, and I am including Mark Gilbert in this account,



"Southfield Dark Star"
GB14J06118
1st Centre Sect 1st Open
British International Championship
Club St Vincent 13-7-18
Owned & Raced by
Mark Gilbert, Winkfield

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they will designate teams or loft sections to three of the races and they will be sent to them all one after the other. By careful selection of the races this gives each team two to three weeks recuperation before the next i.e. Pau-St Vincent-Perpignan or for the second team Agen on to Narbonne or possibly Marseille. This way they know that the pigeons that have completed this program for a season or two, should be ready to make their mark in the Barcelona International. Any permutation could be used as an option for each of the two teams, but the secret is to send them to find them.



When long distance enthusiasts here in the UK are trying to build a team to compete in one "Grand National" race per season over five to seven hundred miles, they could equally build a team to compete in several of them each season. Thus, reducing the number of years required to build a team in order to compete at that distance by half or more, as only the tested ones could go on to breed the next generation.

A few years ago, Mark had studied this plan before making the decision to emulate the long distance Champions of Europe. He is now beginning to reap the rewards by finding pigeons that can, and indeed have, won the British International Championship Club on more than one occasion. It is not a plan for the faint hearted though, it is a plan to shorten the time needed to build long distance team. A team that a fancier may wish to build in his golden years of pigeon racing, only to pass away before fruition because the only test of his bloodlines is the Grand National held once per year. I have had fanciers say to me "I've left it too late to do Tarbes" or "I cannot keep pigeons all year for just one race" But if we are to compete with Mark or anyone else in Europe we must forget the "Longest Race of the Year" syndrome and I would reply to those fanciers, "It's never too late and there is more than one 600-mile race per year" Big teams are not needed, it's quality pigeons that are required. Granted it may take a few losses to find the right quality, as breeding pigeons is just

like throwing dice and trying to get two sixes each time. It's just not possible, no matter how well-bred the parents are. Towards his goal of International success again, Mark will be putting four of this season's team to stock, "they are multiple winners and have done it" he said. Rest assured, from those four and others he has tested, he is loading the dice for the throws of the future. Those four have taken two years to find when other such multiple long distance pigeons take many years to find based on the British system of "Longest Race of the Year". "Southfield Hugo" won the BICC from Perpignan and Mark put him down as one of his best



candidates for Barcelona when most would have put him to stock. As we all know, he went on to win the BICC Barcelona National and is in the top 100 International against 1500+ pigeons. He is the talk of Europe as it is considered to be one of the best results in that race, given the conditions and the channel. He will be prized for breeding, but he too is bred from previous prized birds who have proven themselves in the International program.

"Southfield Dark Star" winner of BICC St Vincent has scored many times before and is bred down from "Southfield Melissa" 1st International Hens from Bordeaux and "Southfield Darkie" winner himself of two first Nationals BBC Messac and BICC Pau and she beat her loft mate "Southfield Melissa's Star" into second place BICC St Vincent, but he had actually won the BICC from Pau a few weeks before. She is raced on widowhood and nearly missed going due to laying in a corner and had she not been sent, "Southfield Melissa's Star" would be yet another double national winner. The quality of their breeding has been mentioned time and again over the course of the last few seasons, one must study the results and articles and when I hear "it's alright for him, he has the money" I despair. Mark has shown us he is fantastic pigeon fancier over many years, and now he considered one of the Elites, but only through hard work, intelligent consideration of his choices and dedication to his goals. A small loft of quality pigeons such as these would be difficult to find, but it IS possible if they are sent fearlessly to the International races and given the opportunity to shine.

Then Mark could be beaten at his own game and he knows he has to stay awake, as others have expressed that intention, I just hope they view the 2018 difficult races as a positive in their quest.

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