

"Sez-Lez" goes North and calls on.....

JIM SANDERSON OF PATHHEAD

1st Open Scottish National from Nantes two years in succession!

IT WAS more by accident than anything else how I came to visit this top Scottish loft because we were at Eddie Newcombe's for a few days which coincided with the Nantes National. When Eddie heard that Jim Sanderson had clocked a good bird he said that this would be a good opportunity to see and handle the 1981/82 S.N.F.C. Nantes winners in the same loft. So, it was in the car only a few hours after the pigeons had been clocked to see Jim's 1982 Nantes winner. It certainly does not take long for the word of a winner to get around across the Border.

As I have previously stated in the 'Gazette,' one would not have thought that this game frill Red Hen, known as 'Loan Frill Lady' had not only spent the night out but had just won a race in which she had flown some 600 mls. I suppose this is the difference between the pigeons in Scotland and England; those from across the Border appear to do the job in a different way because the pigeons in general that fly to this part of the Country appear to have more taken out of them than what I have seen of the Scottish pigeons. Perhaps it is just a simple case of the winners being that much fitter that they generally return in a little better condition. When I had the pleasure of handling the Nantes winner I was surprised how well she handled. A little tired maybe but never-the-less for a pigeon that had completed the course as well as she did she still had plenty of flesh on her. A pigeon doing this must give a bit more credit to the owner who has carefully prepared the pigeon to do a good job.

Jim first started to keep pigeons at the age of 16 yrs, through an interest in his cousin Alec Allinson's pigeons over at Carnwath, a regular holiday stop for Jim in his younger days. From Alec came six late-breds that originated from the J. MacGillivray bloodlines, himself a past double winner at Nantes. These stock were originally based on the well known family of J. Kirkpatrick of Annan. The MacGillivray bloodlines have won well for Jim over a good many years and no doubt will continue to do so in the future. Mr. MacGillivray, Mr. Clydesdale and, of course, Alec Allinson were the main fanciers who first drew the attention of Jim into the pigeon world for which he has given full dedication during the 20 yrs that he has taken part.

Even though Jim has a good National team he admits to always being on the look out for a good cross. He does have birds from J. Clydesdale and the 'in-form' Bobby Carruthers of Bonnyrigg, both of which families are Kirkpatrick based. Another pigeon being brought in is the Sire of the National winner which was bred by W. Brown, Peebles, all very good 500 & 600 ml racers as are Jim's own family that he has built up over the years.

Jim first joined the Gorebridge & Dist club but says that there is now a club nearer home, Pathhead, of which he is now a member. He admits to making mistakes through trying to go places too fast, without careful thought and consideration for the pigeons and also (a common fault with many) by not sticking to the same methods. As Jim said it is the lack of commitment, also lack of thought why some fanciers make so many mistakes and in the event never visit the prize table. Jim also said "Pigeon racing is a hobby but to be successful it is very hard work all the time. If things go wrong there is a reason and one must think it out to find the answer; you should be thinking pigeons all the year round." Jim's comments on knowing the answer when things go either right or wrong is an

opinion echoed by numerous top fanciers all over the country.

To be a successful fancier, one of the most important things, in Jim's opinion, is gaining the confidence and trust of the pigeons. Once you have that they will race their little hearts out for the owner, but gaining that confidence is an art in itself. To get the best out of one's birds they must have happiness, trust, contentment plus plenty of training at the right time; one must also find the right nest condition with individual birds racing best to certain conditions with plenty of good feeding at the right time. All these things will come through trial and error with the observant fancier coming out on top.

One has to pay attention to the smaller things in pigeon keeping. A little advice for the new starter from Jim is, "Firstly decide on what kind of racing interests you, i.e. 500ml racing or the inland programme (distance depends on where one lives in the Country). The methods and birds are as different as chalk and cheese. Once you have decided, go to your local fancier in that category and purchase some late-breds, if the price is not too high it is better to buy four top birds than eight average ones. Then listen, look and learn and, most important, do not be afraid to ask questions. The best of birds bred for the job always think of the bird's welfare, dedication and patience, remember Rome was not built in a day."

What about the loft at Loanhead Farm? The original is still there and where the winners are clocked year after year, measuring 18ft x 7ft. To Jim, this loft has always appeared to be comfortable for the pigeons, dry and with simple trapping arrangements. On floor dressing Jim said, "I have used deep litter for the last two seasons, the Spanish granulars type, but this season the dust from it was affecting my health so I am experimenting with another material i.e. straw and wood shavings. The pigeons really love deep litter and lay about the floor with their wings stretched out, as I have previously said, peace and happiness."

The loft is not really overcrowded as Jim houses 20 prs of racers and 4 prs of stock which were paired for 1982 on the 20th March to rear around 35 YBs. Jim likes his stock birds to have silky feathering excellent body conformation, good supple wing with gaps between the last four flights. He also likes to see a rich coloured eye and, most important, the pigeon must come from a line of 500 and 600 ml winners, if possible, be a winner itself. Jim like so many other top fanciers likes to see his birds have a good strong back, whether it be for breeding or racing.

Jim also likes to breed a few late-breds and values them very highly if they are excellent specimens. Some of Jim's best pigeons have been late-breds, i.e. his 1981 Nantes winner, also his good Mealy Cock who scored three times in the National before being put to stock. To make a family of racing pigeons Jim says one has to in-breed and by this method he can find his stock birds the cross to produce the racers. This is, of course, very much a generalisation.

On racing, Jim said, "I race natural as I am only interested in the 5-600ml races, my methods and breeding being totally geared to that distance. Distance racing requires peace, contentment and as little false excitement as possible. Widowhood does not give you this and until the Widowhood boys consistently score from 500 mls I will stick with the Natural system. Also, many of my wins have been with hens

which, to my mind, would be wasted on Widowhood. My birds live a very natural life, coming and going from the loft all day. Every pair has to rear two YBs in the first nest then, on their second nest, they are sent club racing and on the third round they go to the Nationals. The National candidates have three races of 150, 200 & 250 mls on consecutive Saturdays. Once down on the third round they are trained every day from 40 mls in any weather."

Most of the two year olds are sent sitting ten to twelve days but if they do not score you must try something different, as was the case with the two National winners. These were sent sitting a little later at 16 days. All two year olds are sent to the 500 ml races upwards, yearlings to 350 mls while the YBs go to the races between 210 & 250 mls.

Obviously, for Jim the greatest achievement was winning the Scottish National two years in succession but he has won many National positions such as in 1981 Rennes Nat 48th & 61st Open; 1980 Rennes Nat 41st, 98th, 146th & 314th Open, all on the day; Nantes Nat 7th Open. 1979 Nantes 35th Open; Rennes two birds in the result, 1976 Avranches 4th Open; 1973 Avranches 16th Open; 1971 21st Open. Since 1971 Jim has averaged just under four National diplomas per season with his twenty pairs of racers. The 1982 Nantes winner has been 35th, 7th & 1st Open Nantes while last year's winner was also 116th Open Rennes 1979 and is a great grand-daughter of his original stock cock.

The present day Mealy Stock Cock has won 49th Open Avranches in 1976; 188th Sect Rennes Nat in 1978, 214th Sect Rennes Nat in 1979 then retired for stock. He is a G.Son of the old original MacGillivray stock cock. Other than the odd bird brought in as a cross all this family go back through three pigeons to the originals which are '1298' - 98th Sect Avranches Nat 1971, 91st Open Rennes Nat 1973 then stock. '1298' is the Dam of this year's winner. '1275' - 175th Open Rennes 1973 then stock and is the Dam of the 1981 Nat winner.

'Young Scalpy,' always stock, is the Sire of eight Diploma winners in National racing, also the Sire of the 1981 Nantes winner. One of his sons has scored three times from Rennes, being 1980 314th Open Nantes Nat, 1981 48th Open Nat in 1982 he will be well up again but, at time of writing, the exact position is not known.

I have previously stated that Jim trains his

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there is strong hints that the 'once' best flyer in the club Malcolm Forrest will also sound the 'last post.' The club will be all the poorer as all of them were good fanciers.

The big question

"WHERE DO all the young birds go?" No one seems to know the answer! Personally, I don't think YBs should be raced beyond 50 miles if at all, and I also feel if rings were 50p or a £1 each less rubbish would be bred to face these horrible weather conditions. After all, our champion OBs don't normally get sent to race after their third or fourth flights have dropped, and the poor youngsters go right through the moult and still are expected to put up good performances for our enjoyment. Our own club got somewhere in the region of one thousand rings, and at the 130 mile stage only 200 odd donned the rubber rings. 800 rings still circulating I doubt it.

Jim Sanderson holding one of his Nantes National winners, watched closely by his guard dog. (Photo by 'Sez Lez')

pigeons hard, his complete training programme is, for Yearlings, once or twice per week up to 200 mls then they are trained with the National birds. OBs get very little training until after the 200 ml stage but after they are down on their third round of eggs they are trained as often as possible, all these tosses being from 40mls. YBs receive as many tosses as possible before the first race from 5 to 30 mls, then after the first race they are given very little training because Jim is very busy with the harvesting, he and his brother have 500 acres to look after.

As one can see, Jim is a hard taskmaster for which he compensates with good feeding of Beans, Maize, Wheat & Pellets. From Jan to mating time beans only are given but from the 1st June through racing the fat content as added to the above mixture. Then, for the moulting period protein is added bringing it up to 20%, in other words protein for growing, fat for energy. Moulting is a most important time of the year as they must grow good quality feathers for which aim, Jim increases the protein and keeps them shut up until January.

On the subject of 'eye-sign' Jim said, "I have a very open mind on the subject and find it very interesting but, like all aspects of pigeons, it has to be closely looked in to. It seems to me that all the good pigeons have good 'eye-sign' but what bothers me is a lot of good eye-signed pigeons go down."

While we were in Scotland we met Bobby Carruthers of Bonnyrigg, a fancier who Jim rates very highly because of his excellent performances in the S.N.F.C races and also the fact that he only keeps a small team of pigeons. Bobby is also rated highly by Eddie Newcombe who says that in recent years it is a case of who gets the first pool pigeons, either Bobby or himself.

Jim has his sights set on great heights in the pigeon world and has achieved more success in the National races that many would achieve in a life time and is proud of his achievements for which he has worked so hard. If this fancier is not up amongst the winners at the end of the day you can be sure that he will work all that much



harder with the pigeons in order that he will stay in the reckoning when the Scottish National F.C., results are published.

I am surprised how many fanciers in Scotland just set their sights on the National races but there again they do have a good selection to have a go at. Jim is one of the select few who have won the National on more than one occasion and flying only a comparatively small team of pigeons to the original loft he flew to 20 years ago. As one can see, there is no regular swapping and changing done at these lofts where contentment is the order of the day so that when the pigeons are sent to the races they give 100% in return for their life of peace at Loanhead farm.

Thanks to Jim and Jane for the opportunity of seeing and handling so many National prize-winners from a small loft that can win against the best.

reasonable all hens should lay within eight days of mating. If not, they are suspect. I make a practice of outing any hen who doesn't lay within eight-days when the weather is warm and suitable.

I can tell all New Starters that if the weather isn't right in March and April the young they raise in this period will not be of a vintage type. The best young are always those who are hatched and reared in reasonable weather, the warmer and dryer the better. When the spring months are extremely cold and bleak don't expect youngsters reared in that period to be exceptional, or even good. I know of no sport which is more affected by the weather than pigeon breeding and racing. We are just like pawns at the disposal of the weather which dictates the future of every race.

The common error made by most New Starters is to race every bird to the bitter end. Thus, YB survivors are raced to 400-miles and sometimes to 500-miles by the New Starter with the result that whenever you visit his loft you find one or two OBs on perches but the rest are YBs who will be next year's yearlings who, in their turn, will be required to race through the OB programme, remorselessly. No good OB team with ages ranging from two to six-year-old are ever built up. This state of affairs is not good enough and all New Starters with commonsense should try and by conserving good birds give them a chance to put on a little age and the experience that goes with more than one or two years along the road.

My habit - and it is not a bad one - is to make yearlings fly the inland or shorter races while leaving them to mature before facing up to the long distance events. Some birds cannot fully mature until their fourth or fifth season. I can remember one good Blue Cock who failed to win a prize in three years of racing including YB events. In his fourth year he bloomed and won one of the best prizes I ever took in a National race, much to my surprise. I could have disposed of him as a YB or yearling, or even as a non-winning 2-y-o, but something told me that he would be worth preserving. In the two seasons that followed his big national win he never put a claw wrong and became a consistent winner.

How many of us put paid to a bird before it has been given a real chance to respond to its breeding and just because it didn't shine from the very beginning? Many thousands of us, I regret to say, lose patience far too quickly.

BIRDS THAT MAKE YOU WONDER

by "Little Sid"

MOST FANCIERS who are observant discover that one or more of their birds may behave peculiarly or influence peculiar results. For instance, take my 'Dover Hen.' A good racer, very reliable, winner of a string of good positions, a good layer, handles well, maintains form continuously, in fact, I can't fault her. However, the year before last she had three cocks and lost them all. Last year four of the cocks I mated to her went west. This year, two have gone already and there is still time for her to lose another couple. Problem - why does this hen lose so many cocks whereas my other hens, who also race to cocks, hardly ever drop one? I ask you, very confidentially, to tell me why!

I have run over what appears to be most of the situations which could affect this relationship. For example, does she nag her cocks too much? Don't imagine that this is impossible! If you study the nesting birds closely enough you will discover some amazingly queer behaviour, some of it not at all unlike human conduct. Hens do nag cocks, as I've noticed on a number of occasions. Does the hen flirt with so many cocks that she drives her spouse round the twist? Feasible, yes, and not too unlikely. There has to be an answer but I haven't found it yet.

I don't think that the average fancier (whoever he might be) studies breeding as much as he

should. Some of the letters that reach us at our offices cause hair to stand on end. Can we tell them what inbred ties to avoid so that their strain is not too inbred? Well, yes! Avoid the mating of first cousins, brother and sister who are from closely related parents. Uncle to niece and Auntie to nephew is O.K. but try not to go in too close because if you do you are bound to be disappointed.

Incidentally, don't mate a whacking great cock to a rather small hen. There is no hope of this kind of mating producing medium-sized birds and the over-size cock will play up and adversely effect the too small hen.

Another bit of advice which should not go amiss with New Starters (I naturally exclude veterans, who shouldn't be reading these notes) is not to mate a yearling hen with a very old cock, or a very old hen to a very young cock. The yearling hen may be making demands on the old cock which he is incapable of supplying and the very young cock might knock the very old hen about and do her an injury. Fanciers should always try and avoid using extremes of anything, especially in the breeding pens.

Nothing humbugs a racing team about quite so much as hens who won't lay to time. I know that in savage, cruel, freezing cold weather hens tend to delay laying eggs but when the weather is