



THE ONLY WAY IS TO ESSEX

PART 3

By Gareth Watkins

After a pleasant hour or so at Tony and Pat Mahoney's lofts, we were soon on our way to visit one of the most consistent partnerships presently racing on the International race circuit with the BICC - Dickie and Steve Pearmain of Wickford.

The Pearmain family have an uncanny knack of not just getting one, but in most cases, two, three or more birds on the results in International long distance races. What is even more remarkable is the fact that Dickie and Steve only set their stall out to compete on the International stage in 2010!! Since that time they have won two International races with the BICC, Perpignan and Marseille and have, as I say, many more top prizes when racing a modest team of just six or so birds in each race.

The Pearmain family have been at their present address for only a short while as for generations the family had lived in Dagenham in East London where they plied their trade winning out of turn in sprint and middle distance races on the north road with the then massive London North Road Combine.

With the move to Essex Dickie and Steve decided that they needed a new challenge and so set about building a team of long distance pathfinders. It certainly hasn't

taken them long to achieve a great level of consistency at the very top level of the sport as I hope to highlight in this report.

In 2014 the partners had two pigeons qualify for a Merit Award with the BICC. These awards are presented to pigeons which have attained three top 15 finishes in an International race when competing with the BICC. The two pigeons in question are the great long distance racer Mary from Donegal and her illustrious loft mate Marseille Maur. Maur was named after Maureen Pearmain who picked her out as a young bird as one to watch. Unfortunately Maureen passed away in 2014 after suffering a long and painful illness.

The following is report that I wrote on the Pearmain loft when I first visited in early 2014:-

"The Pearmain family moved out to their Essex home just nine years ago. After a successful career in sprint /middle distance racing in Dagenham they then sought to change tack completely and develop a team of long distance racers. This they certainly have done as the team performances achieved by the Pearmain pigeons in International races over the past 4 or 5 years have been exceptional. This is due in no small measure to Steve Pearmain's

meticulous scrutiny of long distance International race results over a period of years. Eventually, Steve settled on one fancier whose consistently top class performances stood out - that man was Nico Volkens of the Netherlands whose pigeons were consistently performing at distances out to 790 miles into North Holland from Barcelona. Along with Steve's good friend Calum Edminson, steps were taken to contact Nico Volkens but the initial responses were that they were unlikely to be able to purchase any birds, as not only did Nico not sell pigeons, he rarely allowed visitors to see his birds.

As mentioned above, Calum Edminson of Horley in Sussex has been Steve's travelling companion when looking at long distance birds especially in Europe and readers should note here that Calum enjoyed an outstanding team performance in the 2013 Agen International with 2nd, 4th & 7th Open when only 10 birds were clocked on the day in the whole of the UK. Calum enjoyed another successful season in 2014.

Nevertheless, Steve and Calum persisted in their attempts to contact Nico and were eventually successful in arranging a loft visit. The two Englishmen must have made a good impression on the Dutchman as he allowed them to purchase youngsters from his top pigeons and the rest as they say "is history". These initial purchases took place in 2004/5 and Steve and Dickie set about building a team of pigeons in preparation for a tilt at International success with the BICC. The results achieved in a very short time has proven the wisdom of their decision to base their family on the Volkens pigeons. An example of the sort of results achieved are given here:-

In 2013 competing with the BICC

St Vincent - 14th, 29th, 47th & 52nd Open.

Marseille - 5th Open.

Pau - 28th & 67th Open.

Perpignan - 1st.

These performances followed on from the 2012 season of International competition where the partners excelled once again with the following terrific team performances:

Tours - 22nd Open.

Pau - 34th [2].

Agen -30th & 65th.

St Vincent -2nd, 18th, 28th, 37th, 54th, 56th, 64th.

Marseille - 14th, 15th, 17th, 18th & 23rd with five birds in the first 30 Open from a six bird entry.

I'm sure you'll agree that the above are extremely impressive "team" performances.

I should point out that Steve Pearmain lives in County Donegal, Ireland and works Monday to Friday in England travelling all over the south and east of England with his employment. This usually means an early morning start i.e. 4.30 - 5 am and a late evening finish. He then travels home to Ireland for the weekends. It is in Donegal that the Pearmain stock birds are housed and these are cared for during the week when Steve is in England, by Steve's wife and mother in law.

Only the racers are kept at the home loft at Wickford under the supervision of father Dickie.

As Steve says, he and his father have never lived in a house without pigeons.

Grandfather Pearmain and all of Dickie's brothers raced pigeons.

Dickie Pearmain raced pigeons on the north road into Dagenham for 40 years prior to the move to Wickford.

The Loft

The racing loft is a 30ft x 8ft structure facing east, with a completely open front - wire top to bottom with a walkway along the front allowing access to each internal section. Each section has grilles on floor and the nest boxes and perches are cleaned daily. The loft houses a maximum of 30-35 pairs of old bird racers and just 45 young birds, so there is certainly no overcrowding here. The old bird race team are not allowed young birds before racing. All young birds are bred from the stock birds which are kept at Steve's home in Ireland.

Management

The old birds are paired in mid April with the specific aim of getting the birds to come into form later in the season at the time of the International races. Results would seem to indicate that Steve and Dickie have been consistently successful at achieving their aims in this respect! All are paired at the same time, then parted, raced and trained separated. They are then re - paired for specific races. I should point out that the birds are never treated for any ailments so there is absolutely no program of medication here. The birds have to develop their own immunity to the common ailments.

The home exercise regime is also simplicity itself. Both cocks and hens when separated are allowed their freedom twice daily for one hour on each occasion. During this period they are locked out but not forced to fly. They can flap off or simply rest as they

wish. Very little training is done but if the birds do get a livener it is on the works van with Steve and could be from any direction depending on where Steve is working that day. The birds keep themselves fit with their home exercise and racing.

The old birds, as stated earlier, are then remated to get them in their favoured nest condition for specific International races and are given plenty of rest during the run up to basketing.

Young Birds

The Pearmain young birds are extensively trained along the south coast, all single tossed. At the time of our visit we handled a number of late bred birds reared from the pick of the old bird team after the end of old bird racing. These late bred birds had completed the body moult but had not dropped a single flight and yet they had been trained out to 65 miles throughout the autumn and early winter months with a first toss in excess of 45 miles.

Needless to say the young birds are not placed on the darkness system as Steve and Dickie do not race them. They are simply trained to give them an excellent education in the year of their birth with minimum or no stress involved.

As yearlings the birds get one or two short channel races and are then set aside until the two year old stage when they are brought on and hopefully peak around the time of the Agen International in late June. The three year olds and older usually go to the long distance Internationals in July and early August and may well have been entered in one of the early season Internationals such as Pau or Agen in June.

Feeding

The old birds are hopper fed various mixtures marketed by GEM along with a certain amount of Beyers Olympic mixture, so there is always some food available to them throughout the day. Any food remaining in the evening is given to the young birds who are fed measured amounts so that they are kept under control.

The partners do not change the feed in the build up to specific races. They have exactly the same mixtures right through the programme. No vitamins or any other supplements are ever given to the birds.

The Birds

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs, these are basically bred down from the original imports sourced from Nico Volkens in 2004. These were bred from the Volkens multi performance long distance racers or their parents. Dickie and Steve then occasionally outcross, and then cross back the best into the base family. This strategy has produced a family of extreme distance, small and light framed marathon pigeons. Pigeons originating in the loft of Lancashire long distance ace, Alan Parker have also played an instrumental part in the development of the Pearmain team of long distance racers as they have crossed well with the Dutch imports.[More recently some select introductions have come from Palamos "ace" Dave Goddard of Reading and these will soon be rigorously tested alongside the present team.]

The pigeons proved to be all of one type in as much as the cocks were just on medium sized or a little bigger. The hens were medium sized with the odd one a little smaller in the hand. All birds, both cocks and hens had superb feather quality and there was not a deep keeled raw boned

pigeon in sight. I should also mention that all birds had strong rich iris colouration with very few pearl eyed birds in evidence.

The partners state that they have raced a lot of good birds over the years both sprint and long distance but "Mary of Donegal" their Perpignan winner is the best as she has been 3 times on the day of liberation, from Pau twice and St Vincent once and was also 2nd Open Perpignan in 2012 before going one better in 2013 to win 1st Open BICC Perpignan.

In Conclusion

Steve states that a lot of people have helped them over the years and he has asked me to thank them all on his and Dickie's behalf. These friends include Alan Parker of Clithroe, Calum Edminson of Horley, Patrick and Tony Mahoney of Basildon, Robert and John Cassidy of Derry, Bobby Pearmain of Dagenaham (deceased) and Brian Williams of Westmarsh (deceased). Also Aaron Murtagh of County Armagh Northern Ireland. Your help, advice and friendship have been greatly appreciated by both Steve and Dickie."

That's what I wrote on my first visit and nothing has changed in the intervening 12 months, as the birds were of the same outstanding quality and condition on our return.

I have included here some photos of the lofts and of the winning pigeons including Mary of Donegal and Marseille Maur the two 2014 Merit Award winners with the BICC.

Once again, after handling the pigeons we were treated to a superb buffet lunch kindly provided by Lynda, Steve's sister, who along with her husband, was a pillar of strength to Dickie and Maureen during Maureen's long

illness. Many thanks Lynda and also Dickie and Steve for your lovely hospitality, it was much appreciated.

It was then time to move on to our next and final port of call - the loft of multi National winner David Hales of Hockley.

To be continued...

Gareth Watkins



Dickie & Steve Pearmain



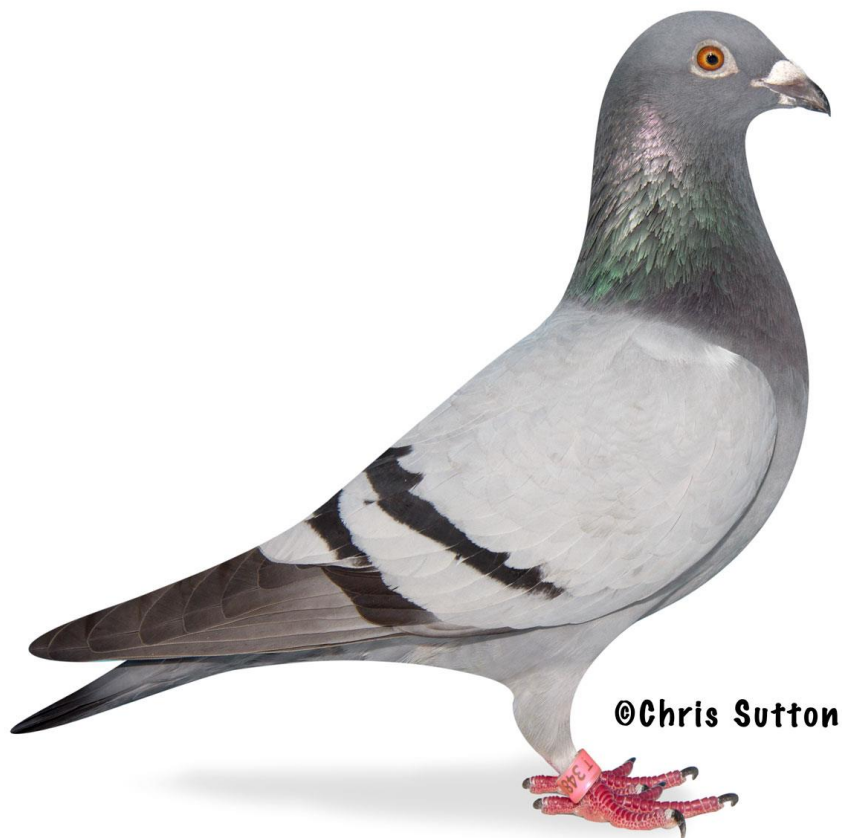
Dickie-Pearmain-with his family.1st Open BICC Perpignan



Donegal Girl 1st Open BICC Marseille for Pearmain&son



Hens section with plastic grid flooring



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Marseille Maur Dickie & Steve Pearmain's Meritorious Award winner
Marseille Maur 15th, 5th & 10th Open BI



Mary from Donegal. Pearmain & son's Merit Award winner 13th Open Pau 26th Open Agen 34th Open Pau 18th Open



One of the Old bird sections at the Pearmain loft



One of the old hens sections at the Pearmain loft



The Pearmain loft



The Pearmain loft



