

# ▶ Van Gent

## Looking back at racing season 2016

In the first issue of July of The Racing Pigeon I gave you an insight of three lofts preparing for marathon races. The three were my own loft, a Widowhood racer and a Barcelona and ZLU specialist. In this issue I would like to give you the results of the three lofts and their finishing of the racing season.

### How did my season go?

The first race was St Vincent. I basketed two racers for their first marathon race and two that already did two. It was a tough race with lots of rain. One experienced timed on time for a spot on the result list. Two came later in the week. One of the first timers did not make it home. When the racers returned, they were locked up and treated as described. Immediately the Monday I had to basket for Agen ZLU. This race was originally not on my list, but I decided to split the racers, so two to Agen ZLU and two to Bordeaux NPO. Agen was a morning release and Bordeaux was a midday release. All first timers to the marathon races. Bordeaux was released on time and one bird in the result list again. The other I have never seen again. Agen ZLU was released on the Sunday and both pigeons came late Monday afternoon three minutes apart. So I was glad that they were home and they were given the standard treatment.

The yearlings had a race from Le Mans (600 km) and the National race from Chateauroux (670 km). The last race is a release for the whole of the Netherlands, so the birds need to orientate more and choose the right direction.

I skipped the Albi race and I basketed two hens for the Agen NPO race. I thought the two were ready for their task, but they were not. One returned later in the week. Finally I was able to basket some experienced pigeons for Cahors. All of these four had already one marathon race this year. For two it was St Vincent, one it was Bordeaux NPO and one it was Agen ZLU. The one from



Agen ZLU finished in the top 10, the other two came late in the evening, one did not make it home at all. That one was already very late from St Vincent, so that one was just not up to the task.

For the last race, Bergerac, I basketed six, four yearlings, one last chance cock and an experienced one from Agen ZLU. First I got three yearlings just too late in 90 minutes and the experienced one early in the evening. One yearling did not make it and the last chance cock did not grab it. He came a day too late.

Although the results were not great, five races basketed three times in the result list, I had a good season. I am finally getting experienced pigeons in my racing team and things are getting clearer and clearer in view of breeding. It was my first year on the Natural system and I need to tweak it in some spots. Especially the way I feed the pigeons. One of my tasks in the winter is to find a good and simple way to feed the racers. I am very happy with the way the pigeons returned to their home. The yearlings are very well trained until 670 km or even did a marathon race. I can use these immediately next year.

It is always hard to lose a pigeon, but that is racing. Especially this year, I and my fellow fanciers had a lot of gunshot wounds on the pigeons. It looks like the French do not know the difference between a racing pigeon and a duck...

### The Widowhood racer

St Vincent was not the best of races for the Widowhood racer. But after the first

pigeon was timed, six other followed within the hour. That is the advantage of Widowhood racing with experienced birds. The Bordeaux race was as it should be. Close to the first pigeon in the province and again a good chain of birds. Albi was the best race of the season. With four birds in the top 10 in the province you can hardly do better. Experience and top condition did wonders. Agen with a morning release was a good race, but due to the many yearlings basketed the price percentage was modest, they timed three birds in the evening in three minutes. Also the losses of yearling racers during this race and during the preparing races were high in comparison to the years before.

The fifth race Cahors was an average one. A high percentage of the birds in the results (70%) but not the top classification.

The sixth and last race Bergerac was the same story as the Agen race. A lot of yearlings on their first or even second assignment. The ones that did their second assignment after Agen rescued them. The experienced birds were not the ones that did the trick. The championships in the Netherlands are a combination of the first in the clock plus the first two on the entry list, the assigned pigeons. In view of championships, they did not do that well. They lost the provincial title on the last race where they could not time an assigned racer on time.

But there are highlights. It looks like they have a bird for the Brussels Olympiad 2017 for the Netherlands. A huge honor of course.

They breed a lot of youngsters and they are trained and raced very intensively. The percentage of pigeons lost during these educational races are high in my opinion. But they do not care. They want to know as soon as possible if certain combinations they made in their breeding loft are working or not. And they want to see if their investments have enough profit. And they never talk publicly about their losses. They only talk

about their wins and gains. Always positive and try to help other fanciers if they are open to it.

They leave no option unused when they have the opportunity to handle top birds or to visit other top fanciers.

### The Barcelona and ZLU specialist

As mentioned in the article of July, the whole year is planned for the Barcelona race. So the entry list of the Barcelona race is made during the winter. So when a racer is not able to race, it will be replaced by another or the entry list will be shorter of course.

This specialist suffered from an attack in the race loft by a cat four weeks before the basketing Sunday of Barcelona. Seven birds were killed and two were injured. Amongst these were cocks of hens that were planned for Barcelona, two racers of the first 10 of the entry list were wounded. So five racers were taken out of the Barcelona squad. From the very successful squad of 2015 the top five were not in the squad anymore. The top three of last year are in the breeding loft, and the other two were injured or were amongst the victims of the cat incident. A tough loss for this specialist and he did some last moment changes to the team. On the first race Pau he had only a handful of racers basketed. He timed OK, not great.

The second race, Agen was much better. Six on the day of release came home. It was great to see these pigeons attack the loft. Also a National top bird of the 2015 race was amongst these six.

Then Barcelona came. The squad of 25 racers was prepared well. Some last minute adjustments were made and birds were added. In the province again a top result. Nationally the province did not perform as in 2015, but it was OK. The experienced birds were there again, but the new additions had a hard race. We need to add that a lot of Barcelona racers came home wounded by birds of prey or by gunshots. I heard at least a couple of dozen stories only from our province.

The next race is St Vincent. Again a tough race but very early in the morning two racers came home quick after each other. Again a top result. After St Vincent is Marseille. Always a difficult race in view of the easterly release. The result on Marseille was good, not top. But due to the tough races earlier this year he decided to skip the Narbonne/Carcassonne race. The birds that came home are prepared for the next race

Perpignan or are not ready yet to be basketed again. So the last race Perpignan was good again. Again in the top 10 of the province.

The ZLU season is seven weeks in a row. So seven weeks with seven races. This year it was even twice that basketing of the next race was together with getting the clocks done from the race before. So recuperation is key. And when the races are hard and birds come home every day of the week after the race, it is difficult to make new teams for each of the races. Also in view of the future, this fancier skipped a race and basketed a limited amount of pigeons for the last race. You need to have a big team to do all the seven races. Each bird can maximum race two of these races, at least on the Natural system. The yearlings were tested on one or two of the midday release races and the long distance races on 600-750 km.

### What have we learned in 2016?

First is an open door. Every season is different. Lofts that performed extremely well in 2015 were not as good in 2016. One of the causes was the weather. In 2015 the weather was stable and warm, in 2016 it was different every week and also in France and Belgium the weather was wet, cold, sometimes hot.

We as fanciers have to adjust ourselves to the changing climate, conditions and circumstances. Also our Feds need to adjust. We must be more flexible and for a lot of fanciers that is very difficult. We also learned that the route the pigeons take from the south of France with western winds through the valley of the Rhone River and even more easterly is more dangerous for our pigeons. In the Netherlands we got less birds home and more with gunshot wounds and with birds of prey attack wounds. Especially with the races from Barcelona and Marseille in 2016 we saw this. We also saw that stray birds were reported in easterly Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. On the day of liberation the pigeons took a very easterly route to avoid areas of thunder and rain above the Alps and easterly France. So our birds do a lot to get home.

Secondly you need a big squad to compete on all levels on the ZLU and NPO races. You also need a large number of experienced birds, because you can plan a lot, but the results and reality are always different.

Thirdly, education is the key. You need to give birds experience. Better to race

the yearlings four times 600 km and one time 900 km, then one time 600 km and twice 900 km. And you better toss them every week at least 100 km then every two or three weeks 300 km. They need to experience all kinds of circumstances a number of times.

For me personally racing on the Natural system for the first time was good and I enjoyed it. So in 2017 I will race on the Natural system again. During the winter time I need to find a simple but effective way to feed the racers. And I am going to mate the breeders a month later, so I can mate the racers also a month later.

### Super Dutch performer in 2016

There are always fanciers who performed outstandingly in 2016. Through commercial websites such as Pipa you can always read about the fanciers who have contracts with them to sell pigeons, but there are also others. So besides Jelle Jellema, who had a season almost never seen before, Toon van Vliet from Aarlanderveen had an outstanding season. On a loft of four, five metres in total with 10 couples of racers he managed to do the best of the best. From St Vincent he basketed six birds. In Sector 2 he registered 7th, 13th, 37th, 39th and 550th. So five out of six and four in the first 40! From Albi he basketed again six birds for 5th, 183rd, 326th, 454th and 457th in Sector 2. Five out of six. From Cahors he basketed nine for 13th, 24th, 176th, 200th, 556th, 657th and 741st. So seven out of nine. He is proof that a fancier with limited accommodation and time can still be at the top of the Nationals and Championships.

Then I need to mention Tim Hage from Woerden. I visited him last year when he won 1st Cahors in North and South Holland. He won this year the 1st National St Vincent ZLU and 10th National Agen ZLU. He also features in a DVD and there he explains his system and choices. Very interesting person!

Then from my own club I must mention two partnerships. The first is FS Kramer from Wormer. Fred and Cees had a very good year and have the eighth best marathon pigeon of the Netherlands in 2016 and an Olympiad pigeon for the Brussels Olympiad. The second that I need to mention is Ben and An van de Peppel from Wormer. They finished three times in the top 10 of the province on the marathon races. Both in their late 70s and still racing at a top level.

**Arjan van Gent**