



Many of you who read my articles may recall that last November whilst on a cruise I unexpectedly met Martha van Geel and her partner Heinz, so in my favourite coffee shop on the ship we met and had several long chats about pigeons, especially long-distance racing for which Martha is very well known. As most are aware the racing on the continent is different, in the UK I have about 20 races, old and young birds in total in my racing calendar from 70-500 miles and Martha concentrates on about 13 long-distance races from 400-1,100 kilometres. As someone who enjoys distance racing I was very interested to

In 1984 I built a new loft (Buitenhuis), 18 metres long which I still have. Later when my friend Heinz came I rebuilt my garage 6 metres for the breeding stock birds. I also changed the 6 metre young bird loft which is still functional although several times we have changed the aeration and over the last few years it has remained good. The front is partly open with wind break gauze and the ceiling totally closed. We only close the front when the weather is very bad, such as storm and rain.

*How many birds, both young and old, do you start the season with?*

We start every year with around 250

pigeons, yearlings and old birds, and after breeding young birds there are about 125 more.

*Going on to feeding for your race birds, what diet do your birds receive during racing i.e. the preparation for a race and on their return? What is your winter feeding regime?*

During racing they will have race mix with extra sunflower, hemp, rice and more oil seeds. The ones going to a race will get extra and candy seed in separate pots, with glucose in the water for the last 3 days. When they return they have honey in the water. During moulting they have small seed and sometimes tea. In winter after moulting they have only grated carrot for one week only and then special moulting food with barley and depurative food 3-2-1 and when the days are short only once a day.

*Do you add any supplements to the feed or water?*

Almost every day in winter one or two cloves of garlic in the water. Some days



Martha van Geel, 3rd ZLU Nationale Marathon.



Martha van Geel with other prizewinners.

find out her methods and her answers to my questions I have set out below.

*How long have you been involved in the sport and what prompted this interest?*

Since 1969. My ex-husband and I had canaries and we had friends who raced pigeons. I didn't want pigeons but they gave a pair of old birds to our little boys so we made a loft for them, a small one at first then later made it bigger. We had some success at first then gradually more successes. Later we met Marijn van Geel and in 1974 I divorced and Marijn & I married. Unfortunately Marijn got lung cancer at the end of 1981 and died in 1983. I decided to continue racing the pigeons from 1984 with great success.

*Could you tell me about your loft, the design etc?*



Martha van Geel receiving her prize.

in the racing season Total Vitaal and sometimes especially for the young birds apple cider vinegar.

*What medications do you give your old and young bird teams during the season? Do you do it as a routine or do you consult a vet?*

We always consult our vet, Dr Peeters in Belgium and sometimes he comes to us or we go to him. Before pairing he comes to check the pigeons and when they need medication we give it but normally it is ok. When on eggs the birds always have treatment for canker and sometimes after a race an individual is given an anti tricho tablet. Three weeks before Barcelona the birds are taken to the vet to be checked.

*Tell me about your family of pigeons, racing, stock etc. What is your method of pairing? Do you in-breed or outcross the families?*



In 1989 I sold all my breeders and racers keeping only 10 old birds and 2 rounds of late-bred pigeons and I still have offspring of some of these breeders. In 1989 at the end of the season I got a pigeon from Frans, a very good friend. This cock was a very good racer and won several times in the Barcelona and Perpignan races. I crossed this cock with several Barcelona hens which was a very good crossing as in 1999 one of the late bred cocks out of the Frans x Dolle lines I put direct into the breeding loft. This cock 'Quasimodo' turned out to be one of the best breeders when crossed with a hen of Leo Kouters having bred 'Quasimodo Boy' 16th National, 27th International Barcelona 2015, also his brother 55555 several times Barcelona and other sons of 'Quasimodo' with other hens. Now most of the pigeons in the loft, children and grandchildren of 'Quasimodo' are from this line plus some other bloodlines from Kouters & Son,

Sjaak van de Velde, Belleter and Co van Dommelen. Some years ago I got a hen from Flandrin (France), a daughter of his 1st National Pau which I crossed with a cock I got from another friend, de Ridder. This cock and hen have been paired together for 7 years and have given me many super racers from Agen, Narbonne, Marseille, one of them Marcio has scored 4 times from Agen and 4 times Marseille.

*Can you give me a brief rundown of how you start your season, i.e. when you pair up? How many, if any, young birds the widowhood cocks rear? Do you re-pair before going on to widowhood?*

We start at the end of December by injecting the birds against paramixo virus. After a week they will get only carrots grinded for 1 week and then food with 30% barley. Only the breeders 2 weeks before pairing no longer have the barley. Mid-February we pair up the breeders and then mid-March the race birds. Some of the eggs from the best racers are put

under yearling pairs and the older birds after 10-12 days breeding are put onto widowhood. The widowers do not rear any young birds and normally they will not be re-paired. We have 44 older widowhood pigeons, 40 yearling cocks and hen partly on widowhood and after some weeks we re-pair them for 800 km races for 10-12 days to get eggs. We also have 20 pairs of old hens crossed with later bred yearlings. These hens go to the long-distance races in the nest, on eggs or with youngsters.

*How much exercise do your widowhood cocks receive during racing and how much time are they given with the hens on return from a race?*

The widowers and other racers will have several training distances of 130km and 240km and 2 of 400km then they go with the club to 500 or 600km and after that to the long-distance races. When they come back sometimes they will get the hen (on the shorter training) later they will



Martha and Heinz in the Caribbean.



Martha and Heinz at the lofts.

not always have the hen after the race as they are tired but will get the hen 1 day before the next race. While some cocks go to this race others a week later so they come back from the race Friday evening or Saturday and with basketing on Monday they will all get the hen Sunday or Monday. Sometimes it is a short time, sometimes a whole day and also sometimes they fly together.

*What are your training methods, old birds and young birds?*

We normally train the widowers at home 2 times a day at 6am and 4pm with the nest pigeons and young pigeons in between. The young pigeons are not always easy but they will go out of the loft

clubs several times, first in our own village New Vossemeer we needed to stop as very few members, we then went to Steenberg for more long-distance races. Now 2 years ago in 2017 we changed to Lepelstraat where there are still 45-50 members but we don't go every week as we only train the birds and we often go to another place where they only train pigeons.

*Is your interest sprint or longer distance racing? How do you prepare your birds for your particular type of racing?*

I have never raced sprint or middle distance as I don't have that kind of pigeon. We only race long-distance but

*Do you have any secrets concerning your sport that you would like to share with me?*

Secrets? No, everybody has their own system, 25 members, 25 different systems. The most important things are a good loft, good pigeons and for sure the health of your pigeons.

*If tomorrow you had to start all over again where would you go to achieve success?*

I think to start it would be best to go to a good fancier and try eggs or late bred youngsters. Start with them breeding and the young birds in the basket, sometimes change the pairs and if after 3 years no success, kick them out.

*What do you aim to achieve in the next few seasons?*

I really would like to win 1st National once on one of the long-distance races. We have won 2-3-3-4-5-6-8 etc, but never 1st.

*What is your most memorable experience with racing pigeons?*

The most memorable experience was to win 2nd & 4th National Dax in 1984 just a year after my husband died in 1983.

*Who do you thank in pigeon racing for their help?*

Of course I need to thank my late husband Marijn van Geel and Heinz my best partner of 26 years and manager of the pigeons.

*Are there any special comments you would like to make about the sport? Are there any changes to improve the sport that you would like to see?*

I don't know what needs to change, only more young people, new starters, but how? I have been secretary of the FCI Grand Prix races and we have talked about many things to change but it is only going back. Maybe in the future there will be more OLR and while not everybody can build a loft big enough for racing at home this could be one of the things to help keep the pigeon sport.

My thanks to Martha and Heinz.

At the General meeting and AGM of the North London Fed I was asked to remind members that all Fed fees must be paid by 25th February 2019. Also the North London Fed will be holding a Futurity race on 7th April 2019 at the Fed HQ Cheshunt Football club to be competed for on the longest Fed young bird race.

A date for your diary gentlemen, the East London NR club will be holding their Trophy and Prize Presentation on Saturday 23rd February 2019 at the Leyton House club, Stratford E15 1TB. There will also be a joint Trophy and Prize Presentation of the Long Distance Club and the London Social Circle on the same evening. Everybody is welcome.

That's all for this week. **Woodo**

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Some of Martha van Geel's top pigeons.

when they are about 8 weeks old, first into the aviary and we don't lose many young birds with this method.

*Do you practice the darkness system? If so, at what time after weaning do you start darkening the loft for young birds and what is your routine of darkening during the day and when does the darkening period end?*

We never use the darkness system as it is not necessary because we do not race the young birds just train them at 130, 240 & 400km several times. We also think the darkness system is bad for the young birds, no sun, no vitamins and when it stops there are many problems with e-coli. We never have early bred young birds and don't put young birds in the races, only training birds.

*What club do you fly in? How many members are there and approximately how many birds go weekly? Do you participate in specialist club racing?*

Over the last few years we have changed

we have 13 races a year, 6 National races, release midday and 7 International races with release normal at 7 o'clock in the morning depending on the weather.

*Are there any mistakes you have made in our sport which you would like to tell me?*

I think everybody makes mistakes, as for example last year the Barcelona race was tough and also Perpignan, some did good but my designated pigeons were lost, never seen again. What was the problem? Bad weather, bad release, too hot in the lorry and maybe under the roof, nobody can tell. Another mistake, a training of 500km the birds came home good so not seen by the vet. The next race was very bad and we found out the birds had got worms (in the training baskets?) but after treatment they were good again. So now after the last training of 400-500km they are seen by the vet before sending to the long-distance races.