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THE HOME OF LONG DISTANCE PIGEON RACING

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## **The British Barcelona Club celebrating '50' years 2014**

### **BRITISH BARCELONA CLUB's 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY (Part 4).**

Dennis Ward of Epsom – Thirty seven years on!

1<sup>st</sup> open BBC Rennes (235 miles) 1977.

This week we are going back over 35 years to look at some of Dennis Ward's early success! Two Surrey fanciers took the two premier prizes in the British Barcelona Club in 1977, with 'Jubilee Lady' winning 1<sup>st</sup> open Palamos for Joe Bradford of Sutton, and 'Stormy Lady' winning 1<sup>st</sup> open young bird Rennes for Dennis Ward.

When I visited Dennis' Epsom loft two weeks after the Rennes event, the young birds were just finishing one of the hardest seasons the sport had seen for many years. Dennis had come from 'Beginner to Champion' in just three years, as he had only started up in the sport in 1975 and his Rennes win was true to his good form that season, winning several good positions, including 1<sup>st</sup> club Niort and 1<sup>st</sup> club Weymouth (young bird). He was then, as he is now, a small team man, wintering about 30 birds in his neat 16ft. loft and some things never change, as he used bob hole trapping in those early days too. The old birds were hopper fed a good mixture, with training being intense before racing started and he gave them two 20 mile tosses every week during the racing season. When I visited his loft, he had 13 old birds, of which 11 had flown the English Channel and told me every pigeon had to race.

The first bird I handled on my 1977 visit was his Blue chequer hen, Champion 'Stormy Lady', and she was small and appled bodied. She had two races prior to her Rennes win, from Weymouth and Wadebridge, when she was Dennis' last pigeon home both times. Her full performance was 1<sup>st</sup> section A, 1<sup>st</sup> open B.B.C. Rennes (velocity 1395), winning the princely sum of £46 and lifted Harkers Trophy, Sopp Trophy and the Section Winners Tankard. Her sire had won 1<sup>st</sup> club Weymouth and her dam was Dennis' best young bird in 1976, liking the hard, punchy races. Her dam was obtained from Mr. Durham of Sutton and she won several good prizes, including 2<sup>nd</sup> club Plymouth. 'Stormy Lady' was a Burger / Krauth cross and on handling her I noticed how well she was feathered for that time of year.

Dennis broke his novice status in 1966 when he flew young birds in the old Chessington Club, but gave up after that season because he couldn't afford the up keep of the birds. Dennis told me at the

time, that he raced his birds on the Natural system and was a firm non-believer in the Widowhood system, as it seemed very unnatural. How times have changed! On that visit to his Epsom home he said he thought it was very wrong that the same people do all the work at the local pigeon clubs and maintained the work should be shared out more evenly among the members.

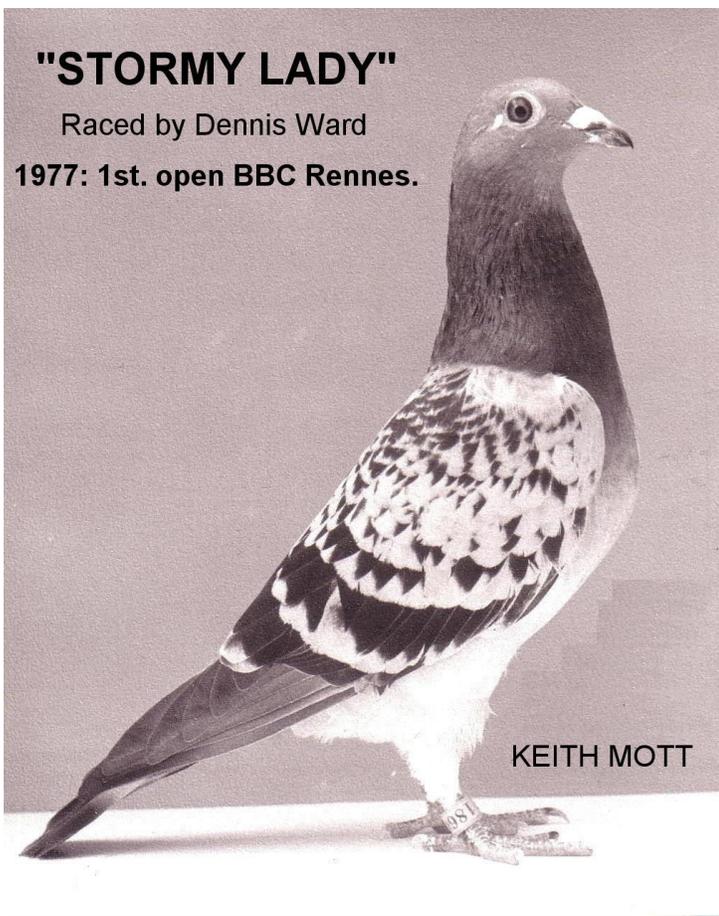
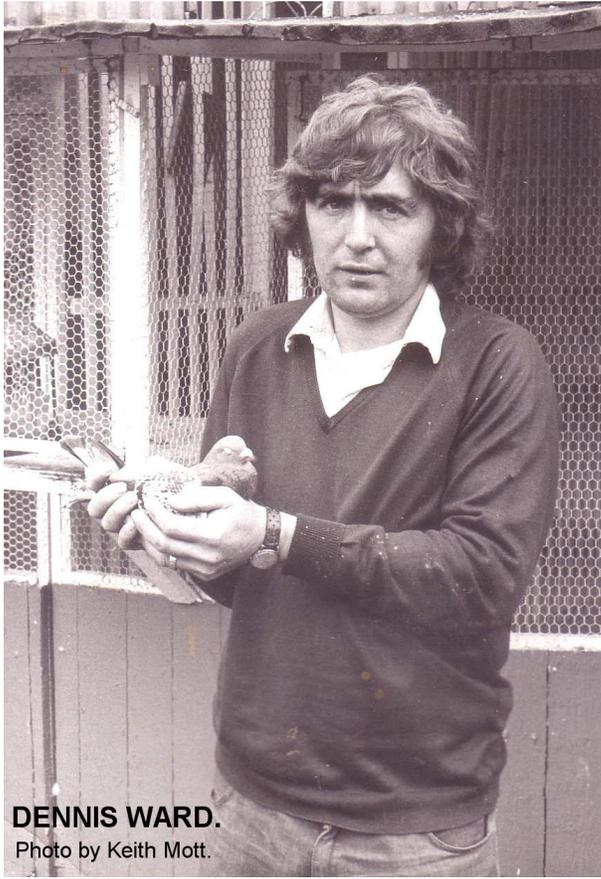
The members of London & South East Classic Club sent 1,264 birds to Cholet at the end of June 2006, for their first race from France after the 'bird flu' ban was lifted. On hearing that Dennis Ward, a fellow Esher club member had won the race, I gave him a phone call to see if he fancied a write up to record his latest success. I'm shocked to say that Dennis and I go back nearly 40 years, to when I wrote up his B.B.C. Rennes winner in 1977. When I was sorting out the photos for this article I was amazed that I've now been photographing pigeons for over 40 years, with Dennis' 'Stormy Lady' being one the first champions I ever snapped. Where has the time gone?

The London & South East Classic Club took its new transporter to France for the first time and I must say the birds returned in 'mint' condition, which is full credit to the classic convoyers. The convoy was liberated at 06.00hrs. in to a North East wind and a good hard race resulted, with a few empty perches at the member lofts that night.

Dennis Ward won the race with his two year old Staf Van Reet blue chequer pied hen, 'Marilyn's Girl', named after his wife Marilyn, and she was sent to Cholet sitting 12 day old eggs. It was a double success for the Ward loft on that Saturday, with her sire, 'Bad Boy', winning the very strong Surbiton club from Messac on the same day as she won the Classic. The handsome blue chequer cock, 'Bad Boy', was one of a batch of 18 youngsters purchased from Louella Pigeon World in 2000 and has proved to be a 'gold mine' for the Epsom loft. 'Marilyn's Girl' was only lightly raced on her build up to her Cholet win, getting four inland races, and her dam, another Staf Van Reet, was obtained from the Ewell partnership of Les and Mark Duffell. On handling this game little hen the day after her Classic win, I noted she had cast her third flight before the race and her main outstanding feature was her nice silky feathering.

Dennis raced his ten pairs of old birds on the roundabout at the start of the 2006 season and repaired them four weeks before the Cholet Classic, to fly on his normal Natural system. He has a 20ft, four section loft, with the old fashioned bob hole trapping and scrapes out twice a day. Dennis feeds a 'breeder' mixture and likes racing every Saturday, long or short, with his favourite races being from France, and maintains his birds perform best from the Channel and hard inland races. The old birds are paired up in January and Dennis tells me, he has no stock birds, with 90% of his team being Staf Van Reet. The racers get regular training from Milford (25 miles) and maintains he never goes any further down the line. He keeps about 25 youngsters every season and not being in favour of the darkness system, races natural to the perch. The young birds get a 12 training tosses before the first Federation race and must fly the programme. Dennis says he likes young bird racing and a good education when the birds are young sets them up for life. Dennis is a great worker for the sport, being secretary of several clubs in past seasons and was secretary of the Epsom Downs club (London Federation).

Well that just leaves me to congratulate Dennis on his major achievements. Well done mate, two winners, 1<sup>st</sup> open BBC and 1<sup>st</sup> open L&SECC.! It's great to see one of the sport's workers at the top of the race result sheet.

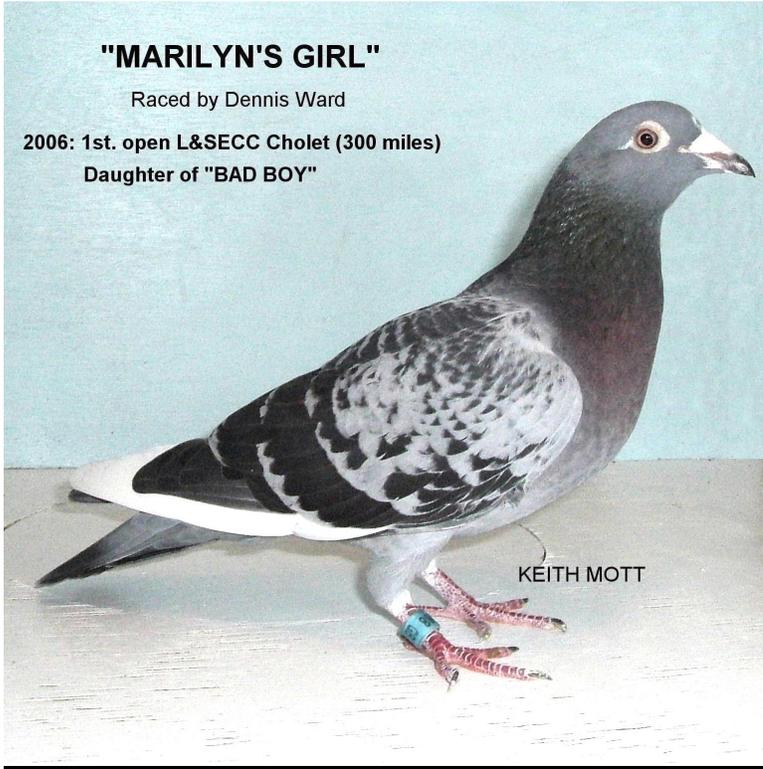


**"MARILYN'S GIRL"**

Raced by Dennis Ward

2006: 1st. open L&SECC Cholet (300 miles)

Daughter of "BAD BOY"



**"BAD BOY"**

Raced by Dennis Ward

2006: 1st. Surbiton Club Messac

Sire of "MARILYN'S GIRL"

1st. open L&SECC Cholet.

