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The British Barcelona Club celebrating '50' years 2014

BRITISH BARCELONA CLUB'S 50th ANNIVERSARY

DON'T DESPAIR

By L. S. BUNN, Folkestone,

1st British Barcelona Club, Palamos 1968

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Having been greatly honoured by the request to write an article for SQUILLS, I readily agreed, in the hope that at least one novice may learn something, as I have done from the many SQUILLS I have read in the past, and I hope in the future.

It seems to me that I have always had pigeons; the first days go back to the early '30s, when cash was very short, so the usual newspaper round helped me to purchase the maize that I fed my "illustrious" stock on.

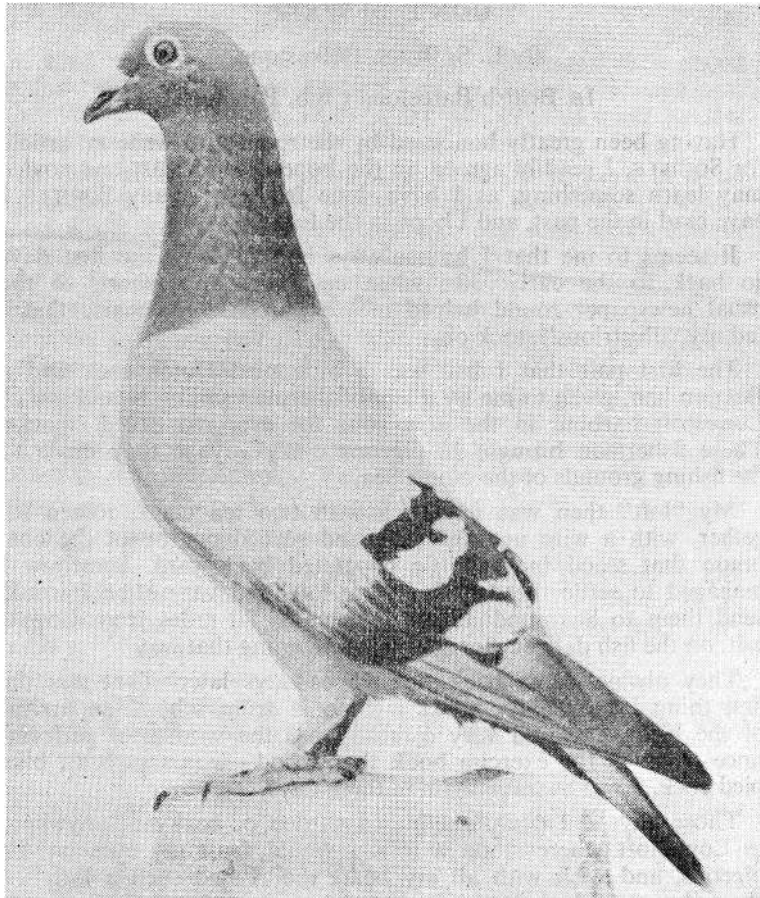
The first pair that I had was a blue pied Dutch cock and a Belgian hen, given to me by a local fisherman sailing in and out of Lowestoft harbour in the now gone forever red sailed smacks. These fishermen brought in pigeons every voyage they made to the fishing grounds of the North Sea.

My "loft" then was made up with two tea chests joined together, with a wire netting front, and placed on top of the coal house that stood in the little concreted back yard. Somehow I managed to settle these birds to the loft, and very often I would send them to Saxmundham, a distance of 20 miles from Lowestoft, on the fish delivery lorries that were going that way.

They always came back, sometimes days later. That was the first thing I looked for when I came in from school, an arrival of the birds. I would very carefully put the wonderful performance down in the exercise book that I had—words such as, blue pied cock, flown Saxmundham in three days.

Those days if I could get into a garden or backyard anywhere in Lowestoft where stood a loft, I would feast my eyes on the pigeons, and wish with all my heart that I had such a loft, for they always looked so spacious and way out of my reach, surely for ever and ever.

To be allowed to enter this paradise I would offer gladly to act as runner for the fanciers, and race up the road as fast as my legs would carry me to the clock quite a distance away, holding tightly in my hand the rubber ring that had been taken from the bird that had dropped in from Plymouth or Penzance, names that seemed to be in a different world to the one I was living in.



**MORNING GLORY. 1st British Barcelona Club Palamos (646 miles),
vel. 886. Bred and raced by L. S. Bunn, Lyminge, Kent**

I would look at these pigeons with glowing eyes, and marvel at their courage, never thinking I would ever own such feathered wonders. Came the day when my dad decided to move into a new house, still in Lowestoft, 1936 that was, the house having a very nice garden attached. I decided to act while the iron was hot, and asked my mother to request dad to let me keep pigeons in the garden.

He must have said yes, for before very long he had put up a small loft and had decided to come into partnership with me, a partnership that gave us many happy hours, and wonderful companionship together.

The Oulton Broad Club was just formed, so we joined that. Dad warned me that we would not win much for a year or two, for way back in the '20s he had been a successful fancier in the Up North Combine, racing in the little village called Hobson, near Newcastle.

He was correct in his forecast. With our mixed collection of pigeons from various fanciers, we didn't win anything the first year, but that did not dismay me at all, only made me more determined to get better birds for the next season.

Our great friends Gaze Bros. started the ball rolling. They gave us a young blue cheq. cock that showed form straight away. He was of the old East Anglian strain, and at last our clock was put into use again, the last time it had clocked a winner was way back in 1925 when dad got a good one in from Nevers.

Another good bird was one we had purchased from Brassy Ames of Lowestoft. He was always with the leaders, whatever the weather, so at last we were on the winning trail. From a 12-year-old blue pied cock, bred by Fred Harmer, we bred a lovely blue pied hen, when he was paired to a 10-year-old hen bought for a few shillings from Percy Bagshaw. This hen had been a good one in her time. She just filled one egg, but what a good youngster it turned out to be.

This youngster went to every young bird race, up amongst the leaders each time, and the last young bird race was from Exeter, 257 miles, a long way in those days. She took second, and won for us a small silver cup that I still treasure today.

The Oulton Broad Club disbanded, and we then joined the Premier Club in Lowestoft, the crack club of the town. We didn't think we would do much in the winning line, but to our surprise we scored several times. Competition was fierce for some of the flying members were such illustrious fanciers as Jack Mummery, Drummer Nobbs, Percy Bagshaw and Jimmy Ayers, just to mention a few.

The best performance we put up in this club, just before the war started, was with the blue pied hen that won 2nd from Exeter a couple of years before.

We had rested her as a yearling; as a two-year-old we gave her Romford and Caen, then jumped her to Angouleme, 450 miles. Never will I forget seeing her come. It was quite dark, and she came in low, following the railway lines that ran at the back of our house. We clocked her, and I could have cried with happiness. She won 2nd Club, 2nd East Anglian Fed, being beaten by a minute by the long distance racer Jack Quantrill, whom I regret to say was killed during the war.

That year we won the overseas trophy, my dad, bless him, letting me go up to the table at the club dinner to receive the cup from, then, Captain Lea Rayner. I felt that I had won the King's Cup. That night I'm sure I grew six inches.

Like thousands more I was in the Territorial Army. I was called up when the war started, so the pigeons for once took a back seat, though I still got "The Racing Pigeon" by post and I used to read every little word that it contained. It seemed that a slice of life had been taken from me, with no pigeons to see and hear. After three years or so, I applied to muster in the Army Pigeon Service, never dreaming that I would be accepted. I well remember still the day I was requested to go to the Battery Office, and being told I was to go to Aldershot to join the Pigeon Service. "Whatever that is", were the parting words of the sergeant major.

I had wonderful weeks at Aldershot; what a grand lot of chaps they all were. Then I was sent to Folkestone to the lofts of Johnny Banks, where I was in charge of about 400 pigeons that were on special section work. I met my wife to be, Eileen, there. She was Johnny's secretary, and after the war we settled here in Lyminge, where I took over the Post Office, thanks to Johnny's help and kindness.

We were the very best of friends till the day he died, and I still feel his loss very much indeed. As soon as I got settled, up went the loft again, with, as usual, the mixed collection of pigeons, and the next few years, we managed to time one or two in the National races, also to do a little showing, my best win being BOS in the Old Comrades' Show, and some good cards in "The People" Show one year.

I also managed to verify four two-year-old birds one year from Barcelona, but I didn't seem to be getting anywhere, so I cleared the show birds out, and sent to Mr. Channing of Wales for two pairs of stock birds. This was the turning point as regards racing. I paired them up as he told me, and in a year or two the birds that I

had bred were coming very well indeed, and instead of hoping to get one in the clock from the National races, I fully expected to get one.

I had, due to pressure of business, no time for the club racing in the Folkestone Club, also my wife was ill, so I stuck to just the Nationals and I'm pleased to say that I was well up on several occasions, one being 26th Open Nantes, 26th Section A; another was about 112th Open Pau, the time it was flown on the day, and mine arrived in very misty and rainy weather late at night.

Another bird was 214th Open Pau, also 65th Open St. Malo, 118th Open Guernsey, with other birds, so I kept pegging away, hoping for better things to come, as they did, for this is why I have been asked to write this article. When my little blue hen Morning Glory dropped in at 10.17 Saturday morning from Palamos, 644 miles, I knew she must be a good one, but never did I dream that it would be my luck to win the race, but that's how it goes I expect, for this was the only race I was to compete in for the season, for my wife was in hospital very ill, and I just hadn't bothered to think about racing much this year. Morning Glory was unraced as a young bird, went to Nantes N.F.C. as a yearling, jumped from Chichester, 90 miles. As a two-year-old she was untrained or raced, but kept back for breeding as I liked the look of her.

Before the Palamos race I gave her three spins from Chichester, 90 miles, and jumped her into the race, so you see she has just been in the race basket twice. I told my wife while I was visiting her in the hospital, on the Thursday, the blue hen was as fit as ever we can get her, and on arrival home, I must say the blue hen looked quite happy and not at all distressed. She was sent feeding her first youngster of the season, seven days old, and she was very keen on it, hardly allowing her mate to cover it during the day.

I exercise my birds, about 24 in all, twice a day, but they never fly for long, sometimes just ten minutes or so, but if it is a fine day I allow them to stay out in the garden for an hour or two. I pair up in the last week of February, or first week in March, depending on the weather. Just youngsters from what I consider my best birds are reared. I usually breed a dozen or fourteen, but any that look weakly I get rid of no matter what they are bred from.

I never separate my birds, not even during the winter, and when I close the nest boxes in September, it is very rare I get an egg after the first two weeks after I have done this. Though my 16 foot loft, which is open at the front, has two compartments, I never separate the youngsters, they are left in with the old birds all

of the time. I find this steadies the youngsters, and they remain close to the loft all of the time.

With yearlings and old birds just about two weeks before the races which are the N.F.C. ones, I give them first toss Chichester, 90 miles, then Chichester again several times, and jump them into the race, which is usually Nantes 300 miles. Youngsters, after spending many nights in the basket, are given three first tosses, which is 60 miles, and they come without any trouble at all. Years ago I used to give them short tosses, but found they always made a frightful hash of it, and were drifting in hours later.

After the 60 mile toss, they are given Chichester several times when the weather is nice. No risks are taken, if the weather is doubtful they are kept back.

That is as far as they go before they are jumped into Lamballe, 244 miles, and they come, most of them quite happily without any trouble at all.

I feed only on beans, nothing else, except for a little linseed every day. I have only bought one bag of mixture in all my life, but didn't like the result at all. After a few days the pigeons, to me, seemed to be light and also hungry, perhaps it is all right for the short races, but for me, not the long ones, still that is only my opinion, many will not agree with me.

The main points of all this being, I think, buy good proven stock, train hard, but not too much, send only fit birds, keep them back if they are not, do not crowd your loft with pigeons, and feed them beans for the long events.

Don't despair if you are down the list, for we all are there some years, but most of all enjoy your pigeons, for after all, it is not the end of the world is it, if your old blue cock is beaten by another fancier's, and don't put your shirt on them if you are short of the ready. Myself, I never pool, it gives me wonderful pleasure just to see the birds drop in after a long race.

May I end, Mr. Editor, by thanking everyone who has sent me best wishes, especially to Archie Howland of Folkestone, who sets my National clock and has it all ready for me so that I can get home early to my wife who is unable to move unless I am there to help her. It is little kindnesses like that that enable me to race at all.