

**NEHU Bourges Classic 20/06/2009**  
**Provisional Top Five – 3,509 pigeons**

Sponsored by Bamfords Top Flight, South Tyneside District Council, Messrs Boddy & Ridewood of Scarborough (Benzing ETS), & the Grimley Family of Spennymoor.

1. G.M. Longstaff	Cleveland Bridge	– 1002.06
2. M Cornforth & Ptnr	Brompton	- 951.21
3. Stewart & Clyde	Percy Main	- 923.21
4. Marshall & Son	Seaton Sluice	- 909.20
5. P Gill & Son	Darlington East End	- 900.97

The Blue Riband event of the racing calendar for NEHU members has always been the Bourges Classic event, pigeons became legends in the early days as a result of their performances from this race which is 530 miles to the shortest fliers in the NEHU at Brompton in North Yorkshire and an exhausting 630+ miles to the fanciers in the Borders.

The convoy consisted of of 3,509 birds including previous Open Winners and numerous Top 20 finishers in previous season, broken down as follows, the Up North Combine (2,512 Birds), West Durham Amalgamation (611 Birds), Durham Combine (265 Birds) and the New North Amalgamation (121 Birds).

The membership of the NEHU are supported for the Bourges race by their usual sponsors these are:

Bamfords Top Flight, who provide prizes in the form of cash and corn.

South Tyneside District Council who provide a Unikon ETS for the winner.

Messrs Boddy & Ridewood of Scarborough for the sponsorship of a new BENZING G2 ETS for the winner of 1<sup>st</sup> Open.

In addition for 2009 there is additional sponsorship for the Bourges Classic from the Grimley family of Spennymoor to the level of £100 to each Open winner to celebrate the centenary of the families involvement with pigeon racing in the North East.

The members are also competing for the Col. A J Hopas Trophy for the best Average Velocity from the Clermont Queens Cup and Bourges.

After two years of mid day liberations and two day races the members voted by a majority that mid day liberations were a thing of the past and the pigeons had to be given a chance to reach home on the day.

After a one day holdover due to inclement weather in the locality of Bourges the convoy of birds was liberated at 05:30 on Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> of June into a fresh North West Wind and a steady testing race was on the cards. However with the wind increasing in strength and heavy showers that turned to continual drizzle on the Saturday evening at the home end faces were long and opinions began to form that perhaps nothing would be timed on the day.

This almost turned out to be the case but at 21.22 amidst steady drizzle and rapidly reducing daylight, Matty Longstaff of Hurworth was stood in his conservatory speaking to a fellow clubmate who had rang to see if he knew of any pigeons home when he spotted his little Chequer Pied Hen appear over the tree's and down through the open door into the corridor and over the UNIKON antennae to be recorded as the first of only two day birds within the NEHU.

Retired Police Officer Matty competes in the Cleveland Bridge H.S., Darlington Central Federation and the Durham Combine.

Matty kept pigeons as a lad in the 1950's but his career and shift work made racing pigeons impossible so he kept Budgies and other small birds. However on his retirement Matty restarted with pigeon in 1996 and after a few season back topped the Durham Combine from the St Albans Young Bird National. His brother Tot still races in the Mid Durham South Federation and has 3 x 1<sup>st</sup> Durham Combine to his credit.

Matty & Eileen live in a lovely bungalow on the main street in Hurworth near to Middlesbrough Football Club's training facility at Rockcliffe Hall with it's new Hotel, Spa and exclusive Golf Course, is at the back of their garden, Matty's back lawn is large enough and so well groomed, it could well be used by the Boro & Toon for a Tees/Tyne derby!

In my report of the Queens Cup from Clermont I made reference to maybe visiting the winner in the shadow of St James's Park & here we are over the fence from the Boro's training facility and although I never got near St James's Park I did end up parked in St James's Terrace while visiting the provisional 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Winners!

Back to the reason for the report the lovely 5 Year Old Chequer Pied Hen flown by Matty & Eileen. This Wildemeersch was home bred from the cream of the Mitchell Bros lines, bred from a Double Grandson of their Kings Cup Winner from Lerwick No 7, when paired to a direct Daughter of No 7 & Only You (which is a full sister to the Dam of the late Jake Cotterill's NRCC Centenary winner). Classic 400 – 550 mile bloodlines.

This season she had 3<sup>rd</sup> Club & 5<sup>th</sup> Fed from the difficult Newark race in the Durham Combine which left Matty with a large gap in his team, then Billericay, Folkestone, Melton Mowbray, Lillers then exercised round home prior to Bourges with one 60 mile single up on the Friday before basketting.

Now named "Endurance" after her tenacity on such a difficult day she previously won 2<sup>nd</sup> Club, 7<sup>th</sup> Fed and 28<sup>th</sup> Combine Bourges in 2007, and has a 1<sup>st</sup> Club from Lillers. Although planned for Bourges in 2008 she scuppered Matty's plans by laying just prior to basketting.

To prevent a repetition of this in 2009 she was placed in solitary confinement 10 days prior to marking and was exercised with the rest of the team but was fed & watered in her own section. Towards the end of this period she was clapping & banging as she exited the door on being let out for exercise.

Like the rest of the team she is flown on Total Widowhood and is fed Versele Laga Gerry Plus as the basic mix with a move onto Sport Mix later in the week, and obviously depending where the next weekends race will be dictates on which day the feed is changed.

Medication is Paramyxo Jab and after a pre season Canker treatment 48 hours of Canker treatment after every 2<sup>nd</sup> race.

The pigeons are paired up in January after Blackpool and the racers rear the 1<sup>st</sup> round from the Stock pairs. These along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> round from the stock, make up the 45 strong young bird team. Which are all raced on the darkness system.

The Longstaff pigeons are raced to traditional pent roof lofts with open door trapping for old birds and let boards for youngsters. All pigeons have been timed on ETS since the Cleveland Bridge introduced the UNIKON system for all of it's members as a result of an Awards for All lottery Grant and Matty is a convert. Quite a coup for the NEHU's sponsor UNIKON is that all three 1<sup>st</sup> Open Old Bird Classic Winners in 2009 have been timed using their system and in fact the first 3 Open from Bourges are all happy users.

Matty has a 20' x 8' old bird loft that has 16 boxes in the main section, and two smaller sections, one with boxes to lock the hens in and another for solitary confinement. The Young bird loft is Matty's former Budgie Bird Room and is 12' x 8' with two sections. The stock loft is 16' x 6' with two compartments one with 2 pairs and the other with 6 pairs. All these lofts are arranged in a row and face East. There is also a Cabin with trial pairs and a friends stock team who has recently moved house.

Matty is certainly able to condition Bourges pigeons as he also brought out his Blue Hen that beat "Endurance" home is 2007 to win 1<sup>st</sup> Club, 1<sup>st</sup> Fed and 6<sup>th</sup> Combine, sadly this grand old lady had to be retired after homing injured last year with a split from throat to keel that was so infected on her return that maggots were dropping out. Thankfully recovered she has earned her box in the stock loft.

Although living in an idyllic setting, Matty is plagued by Sparrowhawk's due to the mature trees a couple of hundred yards in front of the loft – so every location no matter how good it looks has it's own drawbacks and when nesting Matty cannot leave the pigeons unattended.

The pigeons are based upon Staf Van Reet, Wildemeersch and a few odd introductions from different families. Matty is quite happy to cross for the race team as if you take the time to study most pedigrees of the Original imports they were crosses.

Matty is fully supported by Eileen in his chosen hobby and she helps out around the lofts and acts as spotter on race day.

Congratulations Matty , Eileen and "Endurance" on a fantastic achievement and enjoy your moment in the Spotlight at South Shields in November.

The Second of the only two day Birds was timed a little over 30 minutes later and Ten miles short of Matty to the loft of Matthew Cornforth and Partner (his father Tosh) of the Brompton HS, in the Darlington Central Federation and the Durham Combine.

Matthew is a 26 year old bricklayer and lives with his Partner Nichola and 1 year old daughter Brook.

Matthew has raced for sixteen years and joined Brompton H.S. a couple of seasons back after racing in the GYA to race against the bigger birdage in the Durham Combine and in the NEHU Classic Races.

Matthew races a Janssen based family based upon pigeons from Brian Nelson of Ripon who is a work colleague of Tosh.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Open winner is now named “Airforce Brook” after Matthew & Nichola’s Daughter Brook who had her first birthday party the day after the race.

The Cornforth’s sent a team of five pigeons to Bourges and three were timed in at 21:55 on the night, 08:47 Sunday and the third at 15:00 on the Sunday.

First in the Clock is a five year old Blue Hen, a previous winner of 31<sup>st</sup> GYA Clermont and Prizes in the Stockton Federation. She was also 6<sup>th</sup> Darlington Central Fed in last season’s hard Queens Cup race from Clermont. The hen was on Jealousy earlier in the season but was repaired and sent to this race on a 12 day old youngster (she did rear 2 youngsters prior to racing).

The loft for the Jealousy pigeons is 25’ long, widow cocks have a 12’ loft and the Youngsters have their own 16’ loft with aviary and finally a small stock loft for 8 pairs.

The race team at the start of the season consists of 24 Jealousy hens paired to 12 cocks and these are then paired up as the channel races come round.

50 Youngsters are bred, some go all the way down and others are stopped due to the moult as Matthew is unable to darken them due to his and Tosh’s work commitments. Tosh helps out generally when Matthew is at work, but his main role is that of Young Bird loft manager, this obviously works well as it allows Matthew to concentrate on identifying which hens respond to which motivation.

The old bird team is trained 8 times pre season and then receive a 20 mile toss each Wednesday (subject to the weather being fit).

Feeding is similar to Matty Longstaff, being Gerry Plus as the basis with Natural Max Widowhood as the sport mix along with Red Band used in the morning.

Due to time constraints the old birds are only exercised once a day but this does not seem to affect their performances as provisionally Matthew looks to have the best average from Clermont Queens Cup and Bourges.

Well done Matthew and I know your family are very proud of you as your Mother sent me the photos of you to use in the article.

Taking 3<sup>rd</sup> Open and also winning the UNC is the Percy Main loft of Billy Stewart & Brian Clyde, two cracking lads who are in fact Father & Son in Law.

The lads started the partnership in 2000, with Billy having previously flown as Stewart & Sons and Brian never handling a pigeon before (he is a fast learner).

The lads have a routine around the lofts and both Billy’s wife Marie and their daughter Lisa (Brian’s wife) who both get stuck in with cleaning & exercising etc.

With Billy working offshore Brian and the lasses look after the team when he is away and then when he is home they both do the morning chores and then Brian has the day free to spend with Lisa and the bairns.

Their winner is a 2 year Old Red hen (very similar in frame to Matty Longstaff's open winner) with again previous form, as a Youngster she was 1<sup>st</sup> Club, 6<sup>th</sup> Fed, 8<sup>th</sup> TT Section 3,038 birds and 68<sup>th</sup> UNC from 17,762 birds, since then she has a 5<sup>th</sup> Club & 38<sup>th</sup> Section Rivenhall 4,612 birds, 4<sup>th</sup> Club Lillers and now the big one 1<sup>st</sup> Club, 1<sup>st</sup> Fed, 1<sup>st</sup> Section, 1<sup>st</sup> TTCC & 1<sup>st</sup> UNC Bourges. Now named "Little Marie" after Billy's wife as Billy told me on the phone when arranging my visit they were both little and bonny (what a romantic)!

She is a Van Reet x Busschaert, the Busschaert being one of the pigeons left in the original loft the aquired from Adrian Wright when they took the garden over when he moved to fly with his brother as Wright Bros to a new loft.

The Van Reet side was obtained from the sale Rod Adams organised for Jimmy Nicholson's Granson Josh, and was bred by Stuart Culbert of Cumbria. The mother of "Little Marie" is also a usefull racer having Club, Fed & TT Section turns with up to 9,713 birds, in fact she was timed in the week after Bourges on "Black Saturday" to win 3<sup>rd</sup> Club as the lads 2<sup>nd</sup> arrival from the disastrous Folkestone race.

"Little Marie" and the two other hens were earmarked for Bourges after dropping in after the Queen's Cup race untouched with all three home in 13 minutes and the second and third arrivals clocked 2 seconds apart. After taking the ETS to be struck off the lads could not believe how fresh the hens looked and decided to send them to Bourges.

The main race loft is 40' long with 3 sections for cocks (each with 9 boxes) and one for hens. The loft faces South and has a sitting cabin on the Westerly the loft is approx 10' high at the front and has extensive Perspex sheeting across the top to let in light. Trapping is through open doors and like the previous two lofts the pigeons are timed with UNIKON ETS.

The Young bird loft faces East and has 2 compartments and a trapping corridor. There is a separate two section stock loft along with a quarantine loft for new introductions. This loft was previously used to quarantine Channel pigeons before the DEFRA restrictions were lifted.

The race team currently consists of 27 cocks and 27 hens, but the lads are cutting down to 18 pairs next season and will only race one club. Currently they are racing in both Percy Main and Howdon H.S. The Young Bird team is normally 65 – 70 but after the decision to reduce the old bird team they cut back to 50 this season. The youngsters are darkened down and were undergoing basket training on my visit and had the drinkers on learning an important lesson.

The pigeons are fed Buckton's Expert early week and Buckton's Super widowhood at the end of the week, with Gem G10's used all season.

The mainstay of the loft are the Van Reet & Marcellis pigeons along with the

Busschaert cross to get the distance.

They also timed as second Red Hen to be 2<sup>nd</sup> Club and 12<sup>th</sup> Fed and this will be on the UNC sheet.

Flying 3 gardens behind Porter & Steven's of "The Village Lad" fame and also compete weekly against Arthur Bowden and it is a privilege to use these two lofts in the club as a benchmark. If they time in front of these lofts then they know they are doing something right. There are plenty of other top lofts competing in the Tyne to Tweed Section and birdage is such that other parts of the country can only dream of.

Billy & Brian wanted to publicly thank Kevin Winter of Sunderland for his advice this season.

Since starting up the lads in both Clubs (Percy Main & Howdon) have been a big help to the partners and are a pleasure to compete against weekly.

Finally Billy told me he had the pleasure to work with and race against the legend Ayton Marshall and is over the moon for the Marshall family for keeping the name going with 2<sup>nd</sup> UNC to the lads in this race.

Putting up a great performance to be the first to time in on the second day was the loft of P. Gill & Son of the Darlington East End Club who were 1<sup>st</sup> WDA and provisionally 5<sup>th</sup> Open NEHU with their good 4 year Old Cock "Tyson" who was scoring on his 3<sup>rd</sup> and final trip to Bourges with a velocity of 900 YPM.

The New North Amalgamation winner was the loft of Moody Brothers of the Ouseburn Valley Club in the Newcastle Federation cocking doing 831 YPM.

Congratulations to all those fanciers who managed to time in from what has been a hard race.

After this our final Old Bird Classic race of 2009 the Officers & members of the NEHU would like to thank our generous Sponsors for their support and wish them well for the remainder of 2009 and look forward to working with them again in 2010. These are Bamfords World of Specialist Feeds, UNIKON (Deister Electronics), South Tyneside District Council, Garvo Corns Courtesy of Jonathan Sage and the Grimley family of Spennymoor for the Centenary prize money.

The remaining race on the programme is the Futurity race due to be flown on August Bank Holiday Monday from Biggleswade.

Since it was first flown this race has got bigger and bigger and from £37,000 in 2006 to over £50,000 in 2009.

Best of Luck to all those who have entered this season and it will be interesting to see how the race develops on the day with the new racepoint and more traditional South Easterly route.

If you missed it this year, remember rings for 2010 are £10 each and non NEHU members can buy them and send youngsters to race in the Futurity race and then to make your name by continuing to race in the NEHU Classics and the four racing organisations Classic races – imagine how proud you will be if you sent up the winner of the following years NEHU Folkestone Classic or Queens Cup (it can be done, look at the FUT rings on the result the past couple of years!). Rings are again available from the NEHU Office in January and an application form and race rules etc. will be on the Union Website <http://www.NEHU.co.uk/>

Trophies for the Classic Races will be presented at the NEHU Presentation evening at the Little Haven Hotel at South Shields on the evening of Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of November prior to the NEHU Show. (Tickets available from the NEHU Office). This evening is a celebration of the Best of the Best within the NEHU, it also sees the presentation of the NEHU Young Fancier award and the Sealink Trophy for the Best Pigeon in the NEHU, there are already some cracking contenders (I for one don't envy the Judges having to decide which one is best).

The following day the 21<sup>st</sup> of November sees the biggest and best one day show in Great Britain, held at the Temple Park Centre at South Shields, with show classes and approx 30 trade stands it is a great day out, I am sure our usual visitors from Northern Ireland, Scotland and the South of the UK will attend, for those who have never been, why not combine it with a weekend away in the North East, there is plenty of shopping for the ladies (Metro Centre etc.), night life (The Big Market in Newcastle), Food (Ocean Road, South Shields) and fantastic scenery.

One final plug for the show, Derek Buckley has a stand for St Clare's hospice, Derek has a mixture of his own Van Reets and pigeons donated by the cream of the NEHU at reasonable prices with all proceeds to the local hospice (the majority of these pigeons would cost far more if the donors would let you have them, Derek usually talks them into giving something really special for this cause so don't miss them. Such is the quality of stock offered this is always the first stand to sell out, so get there early and get a bargain while donating to a good cause.

Can I take this opportunity to congratulate all the winners I have had the pleasure of speaking to/visiting and to thank them for their assistance in providing me with the information I needed when collating these reports and also a big Thank You to the NEHU's Official Photographer Jeff Walton for taking photographs of the pigeons and then producing his fabulous montage work for these reports.

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