

The Invitation Challenge



Racing from France in the National Flying Club 2018 Young Bird National

So what's my series of articles on the Invitation Challenge about? Well, I always like to occasionally set myself a new project, be it coding an App for a mobile phone, creating a new web site where the subject matter interests me or assisting with the development of a new ETS clock. In this particular case, I shall for the very first time race youngsters from France. My Invitation Challenge project is to enter the 2018 National Flying Club, Young Bird National Race from Coutances. However, before going into detail about the Invitation Challenge, it would be helpful for you to know about my history in this wonderful hobby of ours and some of you may remember my articles called 'Against all Odds' which was about my daily battle with the Peregrine and Goshawk when I lived in Wales . It was around 20 years ago due to severe back problems I could no longer participate in my hobbies of high performance dinghy racing (*505s for those who know about sailing*), horses and German Shepherd dog showing and working trials,



Plus worst of all it meant I had to retire early and so my Funeral Home business was sold. Activity wise this left me with a void to fill and it was whilst out walking very early one morning on Portsdown Hill, which overlooks the Bedhampton Liberation site, that I saw in the distance a pigeon fancier releasing his pigeons. Instantly, I thought that looks fun and as I used to breed, train, show and do working trials with German Shepherd Dogs in my late twenties and thirties, (I'm 75 now), this potential new hobby seemed not too dissimilar to the dogs, but by the time I had quickly walked to where the pigeons were released, the chap had driven off in his car.

You need to understand none of my family or friends had ever kept pigeons, so I started out knowing absolutely nothing about my new hobby. So how does one start? Well, I looked in Yellow Pages thinking there would be a club in Hampshire, but no, there were none advertised. After hitting a stone wall with various other investigations, I contacted Hampshire County Council, as my thinking was just like the dedicated German Shepherd Dog clubs, probably racing pigeon clubs would be very few and far between, hence my call to the council as surely they would know of a club. However, disappointment once again, as the girl at the council said "No", but she would investigate for me and telephone me back. Well, 'Oh me of little faith and a surname of Thomas', I thought in no way will the Council get back to me, but no, I was wrong, as she did call back with the RPRA telephone number and so progress at last. The RPRA gave me the number of the Southern Region Official and they also kindly sent me a copy of the BHW and other literature, so



at last things were falling into place and I was now moving forward and could actually speak with someone who kept pigeons. I duly contacted the Region chap, whose name I have forgotten, and whilst visiting his loft I said that I would prefer a club that was not attached to a pub or social club and he gave me the name of the Emsworth & Havant Homing Society where I'm still a member to this day. Mind you a few years ago we had to move location and we are now attached to the Southbourne Social Club, but alcohol has not been a problem and all my fellow members are a really nice bunch of chaps.

So back to what my Invitation Challenge is all about? Well, normally I only house eight young birds each year, (yes 8), so I'm careful with them by training quite short distances and generally enter them in only one or two short distance races which don't involve two nights in the basket. Last year due to my own health problems, I entered them in no races at all, but did go twice with the Southampton & District North Road Federation who offer training to non members. It was whilst working with TOPigeon (*case and spelling is correct*) of Taiwan who have developed and introduced to Eastern Europe, the USA, Africa and Australia their new iPigeon ETS system that I started to follow with interest what racing pigeons is all about in Taiwan. It surprised me that predominantly they do no old bird racing and concentrate on young bird races which lead up to a final race of over 300 miles released at sea from container ships and in any weather. This got me thinking why not have a go and do something different with my young birds for a change in 2018 and so never having set my youngsters a difficult task, I decided for the first time ever to have a go at this year's NFC young bird race from France. Now because this will be a massive learning curve for me, as I have no track record in the way of results in local young bird races and certainly no success in breeding over the last 20 years. How do I at least by way of preparation and know-how give the young birds at the very least a chance of success because if racing young birds from France did not generally suffer risks from heavy losses, my own Solent Federation would be having a yearly well supported race from there and to my knowledge we have never raced young birds from there, at least not in my time, even though our race fixture is predominantly Channel racing. The reason being, because most of the older generation chaps who have been in pigeons for over 50 years have been there and got the tee shirt and we small team members would be foolish to ignore their advice. So, I decided the best way forward was to start with youngsters bred for the job in hand and obtained from very well known fanciers fairly local to me, who excel in NFC Channel racing, and try where possible to prepare them as these household names would do. To this end I had a chat about my ideas with my friend Brian Wall, of Gem Supplements, who said, "Why don't you ask these fanciers to come on board with your project and donate a pair each to the project"? To which I replied, "Most will not know me and I certainly have never set the world on fire with my race results so have nothing to offer them by way of performances", he went on to say that I would not find these fanciers as aloof as I may think and they will be only too happy to join me in the project and offer advice, which obviously would have to be on a consensus of opinion. I accepted his advice and settled on housing 14 youngsters being nearly double

to what I have been used to over all these years. Brian offered to have a word with those I had thought of asking and said he was sure Tony Cowan would also help, as he is never shy of a challenge and knows more top notch fanciers than I have had hot dinners.

Well contacts were made and I explained to each of these successful NFC result lofts what my project was all about. I felt most humble that these household names were genuinely interested in my project and would willingly give advice knowing the young bird's preparation had to be on a consensus of opinion. I did assure them all that the project was not about comparing one person's birds with another person's birds, it was about how would I perform having the tools and advice for the job and so any shortfalls would be purely down to me and not the birds. To this end, other than naming these genuinely, sincere pigeon fanciers in the footer of my periodic articles, from now onwards the birds will have numbered names and only their breeders will be able to identify them in my future articles.

These game fanciers entered:

Tony Cowan, Mark Gilbert (Southfield Lofts), Crammond & Langstaff, Roger Lowe (Orbital Lofts), James & Pete Parker (J.P.S. Lofts), Wearne & Neilson and Brian & Viv Wall (Gem Supplements). For those who don't know, Ian Crammond sadly died shortly after he and Nigel agreed to participate.

To be continued . . .

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