

## **Peter Virtue from Cockburnspath**

*By Billy Wortley*

During the season past, Peter Virtue timed three pigeons on the night from the S.N.R.P.C. Gold Medal race from Reims to be 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Open. He named the winning pigeon 'Double Gold' the name being derived from the fact that this was the second time that he had won the race in four years. Peter resides in the village of Cockburnspath, which is situated in Berwickshire in S.E. Scotland, eight miles south of Dunbar and five miles north of St Abbs Head. He entered the pigeon fancy in 1954 and commenced racing in 1955. No other member of the family had previously kept pigeons but as the months passed his parents gave him every encouragement and his mother particularly became really interested in our hobby. Having initially started with an assortment of local pigeons, Peter then made contact with Reg Barker from Chadwell Heath from whom he obtained stock and the bloodlines that he obtained, became the foundation pigeons of his original family. The stock was acquired prior to Reg Barker introducing more modern Continental bloodlines and contained the Logan x Barker x Gits lines of E.J.Spare, Tom Clark, F.H.Jarvis and J.W.Bruton ... indeed the very best of the old English families. Two further birds were then introduced; the first being a Blue Chequer cock that was obtained from Davie Angus from Symington and a cock that was purchased from the local partnership of Crowe and Bertram. The local pigeon was 7 y.o. when Peter purchased it and contained the Bricieux x Sion x Le Feynen lines of Dr. Anderson. He had flown Rennes on three occasions and was 61<sup>st</sup> Sect. 161<sup>st</sup> Open. Importantly, however, having bred three pigeons to score from the channel for his previous owners, he bred seven direct to score from the channel for Peter Virtue.

Peter set about developing a family and had ambitions to succeed in National competition. In 1961 he gained his first position with the S.N.F.C. when he was 124<sup>th</sup> East Sect. Rennes. The birds were liberated at 8.30am into a S.E. wind and the winner was timed by J. & P. Dora at Arbroath at 8.41pm. Peter recalls that it was a marvellous night for a race and after he had controlled his clock at 10.45pm he went to visit neighbouring fanciers to enquire how many pigeons were in. He returned home at 11.35pm and checked to confirm that he had no further arrivals. Minutes later he was conscious that a pigeon had alighted at the loft and on checking discovered a 4 y.o. hen on the landing board. With the help of his father he was able to encourage the bird into the loft and timed it at 11.49pm. This experience further whetted his appetite to succeed in National competition.

In 1968 he won his first National from S.N.F.C. Avranches. The convoy was liberated at 12 noon and Peter timed his winner at 9.43 the following morning. The pigeon recorded a velocity of 938ypm from 502 miles, 70ypm ahead of the bird that was 2<sup>nd</sup> Open and 140ypm in front of the pigeon that was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Section. The Avranches winner was named 'Bonnie Jean', she was a 1965 Dark Chequer hen and in addition to winning the National she was 38<sup>th</sup> Open Y.B. National, 106<sup>th</sup> Open S.N.F.C. Avranches and 11<sup>th</sup> Open East of Scotland Fed. from Lewes. She was bred from a hen that contained Reg Barker lines when paired to the cock introduced from Crowe and Bertram.

In 1973 Peter was 1<sup>st</sup> Scottish Section, 25<sup>th</sup> Open Vaux Usher International race from Beauvais with a 1969 Pencil Blue hen that recorded a velocity of 1605ypm. This was a considerable achievement as the Scottish pigeons formed part of a large convoy of 23,000, including pigeons from the West Durham Amal. and the mighty Up North Combine. The Dam of the Beauvais winner was a first cross, being out of a Reg Barker hen when coupled to a Davie Angus cock whilst the Sire was a Blue

cock that contained Reg Barker bloodlines and sired four different pigeons to score with the S.N.F.C. It should also be noted that the 1969 Avranches winner was the paternal grand-dam of the Beauvais winner.

As the years moved forward, Peter continued to win out of turn; he studiously retained the foundation bloodlines of the loft and made select introductions to support the line. Consider, for example, that he purchased 1<sup>st</sup> Open S.N.F.C. Exeter from local fanciers J. & W. Gray that contained original Peter Virtue bloodlines and obtained occasional birds to cross into the family from friends Jim Sanderson from Pathead and Bobby Carruthers from Bonnyrigg who were two of the most respected fanciers in Scotland. Through successive generations quality pigeons emerged with a high percentage of the most prominent performance pigeons being hens.

We then advanced to the 1990's, which proved special for two reasons, firstly because Peter recorded yet another National win and secondly through the emergence of a truly exceptional performance pigeon.

The members of the S.N.F.C. competed from Beauvais in 1994. The convoy was liberated on schedule at 8am into a N.W. wind and Peter timed at 9.14pm to win the National on 1076yppm from 486 miles. The winning pigeon was 2 y.o. Chequer cock 'Anniversary Boy', so named as 1994 was the Centenary of the S.N.F.C. He was late bred and as a result, didn't race as a youngster. He was put on the road as a yearling and went through the programme to Fareham (355miles), carrying four nest flights. He was paired along with the remainder of the team in 1994 but early in the season his mate was killed by a hawk and as a consequence, he ran spare. Flying to the perch, he went through the inland programme competing from five races with his final outing being two weeks prior to despatch to Beauvais. He was tossed twice from 30 miles before being basketed for the Classic and went to the race without having cast a flight. His Dam was bred from a super 1978 Mealy hen that was a grand-daughter of Bobby Carruthers legendary 'Moneymaker'. This 1978 hen competed from five Nationals and was 8<sup>th</sup> Open Y.B. National, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> & 277<sup>th</sup> Rennes and 114<sup>th</sup> Sartilly. Good as she was as a racer, she was an even better breeder, being responsible for in excess of thirty prize winners right out to 669 miles. It is said that prepotency and longevity go hand in hand, well, this hen lived until she was eighteen years old and continued to breed until she was thirteen years old. Sire of 'Anniversary Boy' was purchased at the Clearance Sale of John O'Donnell from Pitlessie, Fife. This cock had scored on the road and was particularly well bred, his Dam being an unrung hen from Dennis Dall from Ladybank, which was indeed the Dam of John O'Donnell's loft.

Now let us consider the great pigeon that was raced by Peter two decades ago. When he and his good lady, Jean, were on holiday in Scarborough in 1990, he sighted pigeon lofts in a green area in the town and whilst Jean was shopping he made his way to area where he saw the lofts with the hope that he might meet local fanciers and view their pigeons. As he walked up a pathway towards the lofts he sighted a fancier remove a basket from a car and politely introduced himself. The fancier was Peter Thorpe and the two fanciers quickly developed a friendship. Peter Thorpe allowed his visitor to handle his pigeons, which were primarily Busschaert and Peter Virtue was much impressed. On parting the two friends agreed to exchange youngsters and the following year two young cocks arrived at Cockburnspath, which had been bred from a pair that Peter took a fancy to in the stock shed at Scarborough. They had been bred in July and as a result were unraced as youngsters. They were, however, put on the road as yearlings carrying nest flights. I should add

that over the years Peter has had a number of good late bred birds that have developed into quality pigeons. They never see a basket in the year of their birth but are put on the road as yearlings being pushed right through the Inland programme. Being worked in this manner the two pigeons raced well as yearlings, with one of the pair winning twice as a yearling but was regrettably lost from Fareham. The other pigeon was a super Blue cock that won from Charnock Richard and Fareham as a yearling and when competing from the coast was on the wing for 11 hours 8 minutes, carrying nest flights. In 1993 as a 2 y.o. he again won in the Club and then went to Sartilly with the S.N.F.C. and was 9<sup>th</sup> Open with a velocity of 1152yph. On that occasion, however, when he alighted on the loft, a neighbour simultaneously started a petrol strimmer, which frightened him and from that day forward he was a habitual bad trapper. The following season he was worked exactly the same as the year previous and once more won in the Club. He then went to the Rennes National on 12 day eggs and competing into a S.E. wind was 47<sup>th</sup> Section 108<sup>th</sup> Open with a velocity of 1360yph. By this time the pigeon had become a real favourite in the household and whether the birds were away to a training toss or to a race, the first question that Mrs. Virtue asked was "Is Peter Thorpe home?" The name evolved, therefore and the pigeon became known as 'Peter Thorpe'. The following year in addition to him going to four local Club races he also went to an East of Scotland Open Race. He again won in the Club and scored from the Open race. He then went back to Rennes covering twelve day eggs and following a 5.45am liberation was timed at 9.14pm to be 1<sup>st</sup> East Section 3<sup>rd</sup> Open National with a velocity of 1025yph from 542 miles. On that occasion the birds were liberated into a variable wind but homed into an East wind. The two pigeons that beat him were racing into the South Section on the other side of the country but notwithstanding the influence of the wind, the Blue cock held line and was right up with the leaders. The following season he was prepared in exactly the same way as the previous year and he again won in the Club and scored from the Open race. He once more went to Rennes covering twelve day eggs and following an 8am liberation into a light West wind, he was timed at 9.45pm to be 3<sup>rd</sup> Section 3<sup>rd</sup> Open. The following season he was again being prepared for Rennes and was tossed along with another seven loftmates from 35 miles. As Peter stood at the loft awaiting the birds come, a yearling arrived then another and after the third bird hit the loft he realised there was something untoward. After four hours he had seven of the eight home with his sixth and seventh pigeons having arrived injured, displaying all the signs of being hit by a hawk. Regrettably 'Peter Thorpe' never returned and it was believed that he had been taken by a hawk. The Sire and Dam were both stock pigeons with 'Blacky' featuring in three of the four segments of his pedigree. This pigeon, that was bought by Paul Smith for £1,000 gained 56 prizes including 8 x 1<sup>st</sup>. The Maternal g.g.dam was John Soderland's 'Flaming Star' that was responsible for hundreds of prizewinners whilst the Paternal grand dam was a white stock hen that was a grand-daughter of 'Rapido' and was Dam to 16 x 1<sup>st</sup> prizewinners. 'Peter Thorpe' competed from thirty two races and was timed on twenty five occasions. He gained 11 x 1<sup>st</sup> in the Club and in addition to his Club and National positions he was twice 1<sup>st</sup> Fed. Rennes, 5<sup>th</sup> Fed. Rennes and 3<sup>rd</sup> Fed. Sartilly. He was also 9<sup>th</sup> Leicester and 21<sup>st</sup> Peterborough in the East of Scotland Open race.

Whilst Peter had achieved so much working his birds on the Natural method, he is a very discerning fancier and as we moved into the millennium he was taking careful note of what was being accomplished by those fanciers who had moved with the times and had updated their systems. He decided, therefore, to alter his management method by working the birds celibate and to introduce pigeons that were familiar with the system. After careful consideration, he chose to introduce

examples of the Jan Aarden family, which it must be emphasised, have been used to complement his original family and not to replace it. In 2002 he introduced two fabulous Stock Cocks from Peter Reeves. The first of these is known as the No.1 Stock Cock, he is a g.g.s. of 'Invincible Spirit' and a g.g.s. also of 'Smaragd 11'. The second cock is known as the No. 2 Stock Cock, it is a handsome Dark Chequer, which is in fact an uncle of the No. 1 Stock Cock, being a grandson of 'Invincible Spirit'. In 2003 Peter purchased six further Jan Aardens amongst which were two exceptional Pied Hens that have made a considerable impression in the stock loft, these being grand-daughters of 'Vlekje' and are known as the Nos. 1 and 2 Stock Hens. As the years moved forward, further examples of the Jan Aarden family have been purchased including introductions from Steve Wright of the House of Aarden, with several pigeons from this source having left useful offspring.

In 2005, Peter's close friend, John Fairbairn unfortunately died and when the birds were sold, he purchased a superb Blue Chequer cock, which became known as 'The John Fairbairn Cock'. He was an Ace competitor on the road being 18th Y.B. National, 2nd, 4th, 19th and 104th Reims and 47th Falaise. He actually won a Silver Award. Importantly this fine pigeon additionally made an impression in the stock loft.

In 2005 also, the Scottish National Racing Pigeon Club was formed, which Peter joined on its inception and all subsequent National performances have been achieved with the new Club.

Over the past ten years the achievements of this loft of pigeons can only be described as awesome gaining 7 x 1<sup>st</sup> National and 9 x 2<sup>nd</sup> National. Peter was 1<sup>st</sup> Open Arras in 2008 with the 'Blair & Brodie Cock', 1<sup>st</sup> Open Lilliers 2009 with 'Blue 007', 1<sup>st</sup> Yearling National Arras 2010 with 'Golden Girl', 1<sup>st</sup> Open Arras 2011 with 'Golden Girl', 1<sup>st</sup> Open Reims 2011 with 'Virtue's Pride', 1<sup>st</sup> Open Billericay 2012 with 'Jubilee Lady' and 1<sup>st</sup> Open Reims 2014 with 'Double Gold'. The success story continues ... he was 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Newbury 2005 with half-sister of the 'Blair & Brodie Cock', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Reims 2006 with the 'John Fairbairn Cock', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras 2010 with 'Golden Girl', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras 2011 with a half-brother of the 'Blair & Brodie Cock', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras 2012 with 'Golden Girl', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Reims 2013 with 'Lady Jane', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Reims 2014 with a cousin of 'Double Gold', 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras 2014 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Chelmsford 2014.

Consider the following team performances ...

From Newbury, seven in the list in 2005 and six in the list in 2006. From Portsmouth, eight in the list in 2007. From Wanstead Flats, nine in the list in 2007, twelve in the list 2008, ten in the list 2009, eight in the list 2010 and ten in the list 2011. From Billericay in 2012 eleven in the list from an entry of eleven with his first four arrivals being 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> National. Ten is the list from the same race point in 2013 and twelve in the list from Chelmsford from an entry of twelve with his leading six arrivals being 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Open National.

In cross channel completion ... from Arras, a distance of 445 miles, six in the list in 2008 from an entry of nine with his leading three arrivals being 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, ten is the list in 2010 with his leading arrival being 2<sup>nd</sup> Open and 1<sup>st</sup> Yearling National. It goes on and on ... seven in the list in 2011 with his leading two pigeons being 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Open, eight in the list in 2012 with his leading three pigeons being 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Open, eight in the list in 2013 with his first five pigeons being 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Open and seven in the list in 2014 with his first two arrivals being 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Open.

From Lilliers in 2009 he had six in the list with his first three arrivals being 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Open National.

The race that Peter targets is the Gold Medal Race. In 2005 it was flown from Alencon and he timed one pigeon only into the list to be 40<sup>th</sup> Open. Over subsequent years the race has been flown from Reims, a distance of 537 miles. In 2006 Peter timed five into the list on the night with his first four arrivals being 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Open, eight in the list in 2007 with his first three arrivals being 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Open, nine in the list in 2008 with his first four arrivals being 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Open, seven in the list in 2009 with his first arrival being 11<sup>th</sup> Open, eight in the list in 2010, six in the list in 2011 with his first five arrivals being 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Open. It should be noted that there were only sixteen arrivals into the Club on the day of liberation in 2011 and Peter had five of them. Seven in the list in 2012, eight in the list in 2013 with his leading five arrivals being 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Open. In 2014 he timed eight into the list from an entry of twelve. There were only four pigeons home on the night and he had three of them to be 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Open National ... truly spectacular pigeon racing!!!

From the longest race he was 3<sup>rd</sup> Messac in 2008, having timed on the night from 561 miles and the following year the same pigeon was 4<sup>th</sup> Andrezel, again up on the night from 551 miles. He was 36<sup>th</sup> Fontenay 2011, 9<sup>th</sup> Troyes in 2013 from 594 miles and 9<sup>th</sup> Ancenis 2014 from 595 miles.

Whilst the youngsters are worked on the conventional method, the team performance has continued from the Y.B. National. From Leicester seven in the list in 2005, three in the list in 2006, another three in 2007, six in 2008 and nine in 2009. From Peterborough nine in the list in 2010 with his leading arrival being 3<sup>rd</sup> Open, five in the list in 2011, five again in 2012, ten in the list in 2013 with his first two pigeons being 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Open and twelve in the list in 2014 with his first three arrivals being 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Open.

Let us consider several of the pigeons that have come through the modern family.

'Virtue's Pride' was 1<sup>st</sup> Open from the Gold Medal Race from Reims in 2011. He was 6 y.o. when he won the Classic and had actually competed from the same race point on four previous occasions, scoring each time gaining 6<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Open. Sire contains the loft's original bloodlines with his g.g.s. being 'Peter Thorpe'. Dam is the No. 1 Jan Aarden Pied Stock hen, which are grand-daughters of 'Vlekje'. 'Virtue's Pride' is a Gold Award winner.

'Virtue's Joy' is a Blue Chequer Pied cock, which has been 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Open from the Gold Medal Race from Reims and was three times the first bird to the loft from the Blue Riband race. When he homed to be 66<sup>th</sup> Open, he was very badly injured. Whilst he obviously scored, he was that wee bit late to enable him to secure a Gold Award but nevertheless, he gained a well-deserved Silver Award. His Sire was the No 1 Jan Aarden Stock Cock whilst his Dam was the No. 2 Jan Aarden Stock Hen that is a grand-daughter of 'Vlekje'.

'Dark Charmer' is a Dark Chequer hen that was bred from the No. 2 Jan Aarden cock that was obtained from Peter Reeves, which is a grandson of 'Invincible Spirit' when paired to the No. 1 Jan Aarden Pied Stock hen, which is a grand-daughters of 'Vlekje'. 'Dark Charmer' was 14<sup>th</sup> Falaise, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and twice 31<sup>st</sup> Reims and has won a Gold Award.

The 'Blair & Brodie' cock contains  $\frac{3}{4}$  original bloodlines and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Jan Aarden. This super pigeon was 1<sup>st</sup> Open Arras 2008 and is proving his worth in the stock shed, having left a number of winners including 'Wee Tuff Cookie' that has scored from five Nationals through to 595 miles.

A noted Blue Chequer cock was 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras and 21<sup>st</sup> & 46<sup>th</sup> Open Reims. He is a half-brother to the 'Blair and Brodie cock'. His Dam has bred eleven birds to score with the National and contains the loft's original bloodlines.

'Lady Jane' is a daughter of the 'John Fairbairn cock' and a Silver Award winner. She has been 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Open Reims and 50<sup>th</sup> Open Arras.

'Golden Girl' is a Janssen hen that was bred by A. & E. Luke from Dunbar. She is a fantastic pigeon having been 1<sup>st</sup> Yearling National and 1<sup>st</sup>, twice 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Open Arras and has additionally been 9 x 1sts Fed. This super pigeon is also a Silver Award winner.

A noted Blue Bar hen is a grand-daughter of 'Peter Thorpe' and contains  $\frac{3}{4}$  the original bloodlines. She is the Dam of the 'Blair and Brodie cock' that was 1<sup>st</sup> Open Arras and grand-dam of 'Virtue's Pride' that was 1<sup>st</sup> Open Reims.

'Tufty' was 12th Lilliers, 13th, 32nd, 34th and 62<sup>nd</sup> Reims and is a Silver Award winner. He was bred from 'Virtue's Joy' when paired to 'Dark Charmer'.

The 2014 Reims National winner is 2 y.o. Blue Chequer Pied cock 'Double Gold', which was bred from 'Tufty' when coupled to a daughter of 'Virtue's Pride', the 2011 Reims National winner. He had not raced from across the channel prior to competing from Reims and to demonstrate the constitution and durability of the family, he was timed at 8.14pm following 5.15am liberation. It should be noted also that his nestmate was 3<sup>rd</sup> Open from the same race.

I could go on and on ... there are so many winners in this loft. Consider, for example 'Virtue's Dependable' that has also gained a Silver Award having been 15<sup>th</sup> twice & 57<sup>th</sup> Arras and 35<sup>th</sup> Lilliers. There is also a Blue cock bred direct from the 'John Fairbairn cock' that is a Bronze Award winner having scored from Reims, Arras and Lilliers.

These pigeons win also for other fanciers who are fortunate enough to obtain the bloodlines. Pigeons emanating from Cockburnspath have won into each of the four quarters of Scotland and as previously explained, J. & W. Gray were 1st Open S.N.F.C. Exeter with a pigeon that contained original Peter Virtue bloodlines. Consider also, that Jim Crombie and John Mechan from Annan are currently racing a Blue Chequer. W.F. hen that was bred by Peter Virtue and contains the loft's established bloodlines with the 'John Fairbairn cock' being the paternal grand sire. This hen has gained a Silver Award with the S.N.F.C. having been 4th Section Ypres as a yearling, 8th Section 37th Open Ypres as a 2 y.o., 14th Section 88th Open Alencon as a 3 y.o. and 4th Section 4th Open Alencon as a 4 y.o.

Andrew Neilson Hutton wrote "prepotent pigeons are those, which because of their particular genetic constitution are capable of passing on that happy combination of inherited characters which tend to produce pigeons of merit as racers and producers". To understand the prepotency of the line that is currently being worked by Peter Virtue, consider the breeding of the pigeon 'Tufty', being bred from 'Virtue's Joy' when paired to 'Dark Charmer'. Appreciate also that 'Tufty' is the Sire of

the pigeons that were 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Reims National during the season past and is grandsire of the pigeon that was 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Arras. There are very few fanciers who can get pigeons to reproduce their like but have no doubt; Peter Virtue unquestionably has that ability.

Peter houses his birds in two lofts. The racing loft is 35' long x 10' deep, contains five compartments and is kitted out with Grids. The loft contains a corridor that extends over the length of the structure. Birds access the loft from the roof off the corridor, which forms a landing board. The roof is clad with corrugated metal sheets, which enables air to move through the roof. Louvres are included in the front of the shed to aid ventilation whilst small ventilators are built into the rear of the loft to provide further ventilation. The backs of the individual nest boxes do not extend to the top, which enables the air that comes into the loft through the rear ventilators to circulate behind and into the boxes. Our readers will observe from the photograph published with the article that glass windows are included in the front of the shed to facilitate light but block out the persistent wind that blows off the North Sea. There is a small extension attached to the end of the shed, within which Peter keeps aged performance and stock pigeons. The second shed in the garden measures 11'6" x 10" and is used to house the stock pigeons.

He normally houses between forty two and forty eight old bird racers and nine pairs of stock pigeons. He is ever so critical on selecting pigeons for the stock shed, however, choosing birds that have proved their worth on the road or contain quality bloodlines. Significantly, they must also conform to type. It should be noted also that he is highly skilled at evaluating pigeons by eyesign and on selecting stock birds; considers the eye. He told me that "not all pigeons with eyesign breed winners but you will not get a good breeder that doesn't have it". Importantly, immaterial how good a pigeon has been on the road or how well-bred it may be, he only gives them two years to prove their worth at stock and if they fail, he immediately discards them. Another item of note is that he normally changes his pairings each year with only occasional pairs being allowed to run together for more than one year.

The young cocks are introduced into the O.B. end of the shed in October and settled into their nestboxes. During the winter months, pairings are carefully considered and tried through the spars. By working this system Peter does not encounter any problems when he couples the team in the Spring.

Peter has, unfortunately, suffered from severe chest problems for a good number of years and with a concern for his own health; he chooses the moment and pairs the total team on the first good day during the last week in February. All birds rear at least one youngster with a number of the birds in the racing loft rearing first round youngsters from the stock shed. The racers are separated from their mates on the Sunday after the first O.B. race and are thereafter worked celibate with the cocks and hens going out and in their own compartments during weekdays but all racing into the compartment that contains the nestboxes on a Saturday. Pigeons intended for the channel don't enter the race basket until the third race, they go to four successive races are rested for a week and then have two further races with the Federation, after which they are prepared for the target race. At that point, if the birds are being conveyed in their own Federation transporter, they will have advanced to Leicester, a distance of 235 miles. Occasionally, however, the East of Scotland and Kingdom pigeons are conveyed together in the Kingdom transporter and the race point and distance

could differ. The birds are worked celibate right up until the channel races and at the point when they go to the Gold Medal race, Peter would expect them to be on their first flight.

During the week before the first race they are given two training tosses from 10 and 18 miles and are thereafter lifted right into the race basket. After having had the initial two tosses, they don't see a training basket again throughout the season. They do, however, exercise well at home. To get them going early in the season, Peter throws a soft ball amongst them, on the grass and within days they begin to exercise freely. Cocks are put out to exercise twice a day and hens once a day and after they have worked for 50 minutes, the traps are opened and they are allowed in.

He feeds Versele Laga corn in Hoppers on the floor at regular feeding times, with the content and quantity being adjusted throughout the season to suit the job in hand. On being asked if he provided any additives he responded "I consider there is sufficient goodness in the range of Versele Laga corns that no supplements or additives are needed".

The entire team is vaccinated against PMV; otherwise no other medication or treatments are applied. He said that he has screened the flock on three occasions since 1980 and there was nothing untoward. He does not agree with the indiscriminate use of antibiotics and if the birds are ailing he would interpret that to be a sign of weakness with the remedy being to cull. By working this system he is of the opinion that you will develop a family with an inherent immunity.

Half of the Young Bird team is sent to the Y.B. National, which is 248 miles. The other half go to the final Federation race which, if they go in the East of Scotland transporter is 210 miles and if they are in the Kingdom transporter is 165 miles. All yearlings must at least go with the Federation to 320 miles, with half a dozen going across the channel to Arras with the S.N.R.P.C.

I asked Peter if there was anyone he particularly wanted me to acknowledge in the article. He immediately said his good lady, Jean, who has supported him in his hobby for half a century. Mrs. Virtue is a special lady on a wider stage as she has just recently been awarded the B.E.M for services to the community. Peter also asked me to mention his grandson, Brodie, who is 'pigeon mad' and is beside his grandfather, at every opportunity. Having explained that the aged pigeons are kept in a small compartment at the end of the racing loft, I learned that these pigeons are cared for by Brodie. I also admired several African Owl fancy pigeons that he keeps in a small shed in the garden. Certainly a name to look out for in the future.

It has given me tremendous pleasure to pen this article and recognise the achievements and ability of Peter Virtue, a truly exceptional pigeon fancier.