

My National Memories

by Alan Darragh

With no racing looking likely for some months, Ronnie Johnston thought that a few articles of interest to the members of the Irish National Flying Club, and to pigeon fanciers in general, would pass a bit of the time so I can only give the memories that have given me so much enjoyment over the years. I have had the pleasure of winning six Nationals and with the standard of pigeon fanciers in Ireland, I consider myself very fortunate, but I will endeavour to give a short article on each of my National winners and some of my other performances.

Perhaps 1984, when the National races were all from Scotland and I managed to become National Champion, gave me the drive to try to win a National. The honour and excitement of going up to lift a trophy at the INFC prize distribution is amazing.

The first of my National winners was in the King's Cup race of 1986 from Les Landes in Jersey, a distance of 432 miles to my loft. There was a hard north wind blowing that 4th July, American Independence Day, with his velocity down to 891ypm. My blue cock, a yearling, had been in the Guernsey OB Derby race with the NIPA, a distance of 410 miles, being 4th Club, 10th

Section, 71st Open. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, in that Derby race his hen was lost and he was flying around the loft in great form, so I gave him an old hen just before marking for the King's Cup race and sent him back, and he gave me what is probably the highlight of my pigeon career in winning the King's Cup. When I heard he had won I gave him the name Independent Ranger, as it was a historic day for me as well as the USA. I was thrilled to go back to the INFC prize distribution to lift the King's Cup, and what made it even better was the fact that my father was still alive and he was able to see and hold the cup (see photo). Independent Ranger was bred down from the original pigeons I had purchased from McCartney Bros of Moira, and the descendants of these pigeons are still the base of my pigeons to this day. The dam was a Venner x Harper cross.

The Yearling National on 7th June 1989 brought the honour of winning a second National, when my blue cock, Swallow Brae Lad, competing from Sennen Cove, 332 miles to my loft, was clocked on 1027ypm, winning by 30ypm, and giving me another visit to the INFC presentation. This cock was bred from the Old McCartney lines with a cross of van Wildemeersch from Bertie Fletcher.

Another good pigeon I remember well was Golden Dreams, he won a Gold Medal with the NIPA. He also won 10th Open Dinard, 1998; 69th Open St Malo, 1999; 27th Open Sartilly, 2000; 74th Open Lamballe, 2001.

Sometimes I think that the winning pigeons in Nationals get all the credit and attention, but in 2002 I timed a blue cock with a few white marks on his head to be 2nd Open King's Cup, and he was named Swallow Brae Dawn. This cock was a great racer, starting in the 1997 INFC Young Bird National, where he was 45th Open, in 1998 he was 23rd Open in the NIPA Penzance Classic, in 1999, 30th Section Dinard and in the 2000 King's Cup he finished 176th Open. There was no King's Cup race in 2001 owing to the foot & mouth crisis, but in the Redon race of 2002, flying 531 miles, he put in another great effort with the velocity down around 900ypm, also winning 2nd Open in the



Independent Ranger.



My wife Betty with my father, Jack (both unfortunately no longer with us).

IRISH NATIONAL FLYING CLUB
2ND SINGLE BIRD CHALLENGE
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Plaudren - Vannes King Cup
 Old Bird National 2009

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Raced by **A Darragh, Cullybackey** Photo & Graphics © **Sid Collins**

Betty's Choice.

Alan

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