

LOOKING BACK...

TWO KING'S CUP WINS

by Ronnie Johnson

2020 was the fourth time that the King's Cup was not flown since 2000 – 2001, 2007, 2008 and 2020.

Looking back on the history of this great race, and in the early days of National racing E A Robinson of Shawsbridge won in 1933 from Les Sables and again in 1937 from Redon.

Only one other loft has won the King's Cup twice, and this was the Newtownards loft of A McDowell & Son in 1953 from Redon and again in 1973 from Nantes.

Open. I remember the race, as my close friend the late Jim Brown took me to see the 2nd Open winner a wonderful red cock raced by Lutton & Nununey of Milltown, and this super pigeon was to win 2nd Open for a second time.

Andy is now retired and must wear a mask at all times in the loft. He misses the senior partner brother Willie who died in January 1995. When one saw a McDowell brother the other was never far away and they just lived for pigeons.



The lofts at Newtownards, not a big set-up for such a record.

I spent a short time at the McDowell lofts recently and was delighted with the information that Andy gave me about his two winning pigeons, both hens.

In 1953 they clocked a four year old blue chequer w/f hen second morning at 6.10am making a velocity of 790ypm to win 1st

The 1953 winner was a very good hen having flown the Channel some ten times. She contained the bloodlines of W C Moore/Gits x Jack Leathern and Pollock of Bangor. Pollock was living in Bangor at the same time as the great Charlie Neill, and Jack Leathern was in Downpatrick. The



Andy McDowell holding his fine blue cock, a former winner of 1st Open East Down Combine Dinard. Remember this loft has won 3x1st Nationals and an OB Derby.

McDowell's father was in India with Jack and a great friendship developed. During this time the McDowell's were building a top class team of distance pigeons, and the next great result came in 1960 when they were 4th Open to Larry Burns of Dromore. Larry clocked on the day, the winner was the only bird on the day and was a super winner of the cup, race pouit Les Sables.

None of the two brothers actually clocked the 4th Open winner a black hen, as Billy was away on holiday and Andy was married on the day of the race, life must go on! It was left to near neighbour Bennett Ferguson to watch the loft and what a result, he still talks about it to this day. 1973 was a year to remember and the McDowell's had two great bens away to Nantes for the King's Cup.

No day birds, and as in 1953 the brothers clocked early second morning to win 1st Open, velocity 835ypm. Andy remembers the race as if it was yesterday, recalling that Smyth Bros of Ballymena were 2nd Open, Tommy Walker of Dromara 3rd Open and the car winner, and Gilmour & Beattie, Newtownbreda 4th Open. Andy missed out on the car as he and Willie could not split the two hens, one went into the Cash Nom, and yes you have guessed it they got them the other way round as the second blue chequer hen was clocked to win 27th Open.

They were as good as any fancier could wish for. The King's Cup winner flew Dinard

as a yearling, Nantes as a two year old and was 77th Open before winning the race, she was a great granddaughter of the 1953 winner.

The 27th Open winner was the best racing hen they have owned winning 5x2nds, 1x3rd, 3rd Club Dinard. Willie & John Robinson were great friends and they travelled to England to visit Jim Kenyon bringing the best of his blood back to Newtownards. These Kenyon pigeons played a great part in the success of the McDowell loft, music to the ears of Bobby Smyth and Jackie Patience.

In 1975 the McDowells were to win a third National with a cracking blue cock, this fellow won 1st Open INFC Beauvais Friendship National, the only bird on the day of liberation. The pigeon Fancy still talk about this performance as the Combine birds at Okehampton were held over, owing to bad weather. The winner had flown the YB National Penzance and was 77th Open NIPA OB Derby before going on to his National success.

His sire contained the Pollock pigeons, and his dam was purchased at a clearance sale for the late Tommy McIlwrath of Sydenham, this black w/f hen had won 43rd Open INFC Nantes.

The top races still fall to the loft as in 1994 they won 1st Open East Down Combine Dinard, 1st North Region with a two year old blue cock. This Derby winner is a grandson to the 1973 King's Cup winner on both sides. He was a very consistent pigeon across the Channel winning 6th Okehampton, 7th Okehampton, 7th Okehampton and always in the clock.

Andy reminded me that George McKinstry was 2nd to him, and it was George's son Len who won the race for Dundonald last year.

I really enjoyed the visit and was about to leave when Andy produced an old blue chequer cock from the loft. When I say old, I mean old. I will give you a clue when did you last see one of the old metal rings? The pigeon in question is 27 years old this season and yes he is not filling!

Some 30 years later the great South Section fancier Joe Doheny became the second fancier to win a second King's Cup, 1982 from Les Sables, 2002 from Redon and was 2nd. Joe has also won the Friendship National and the OB Derby.

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