

WE FLY AT DAWN



Leonard & Willie McCaw with INFC trophies won in 1993.

The McCaw's by Sid Collins

One of Ireland's most northerly located tourist attractions is the world famous Giants Causeway, often described as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Located close by is the small County Antrim village of Dervock, maybe not quite as famous as the Giants Causeway, however, it can lay claim to being the birthplace to an Olympic Gold Medal winner, Ken McArthur, who won the Marathon in the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden.

Pigeon racing into County Antrim has over the years produced many long distance racers. An example of these being the late Billy Erwin, Tommy Harper and many others. Today we still have Smyth Brothers, Alan Darragh etc. All of these fanciers being household names within the pigeon fraternity in Ireland and the UK.

As my introduction to the article refers to the village of Dervock, I would now like to focus on the partnership of William & Leonard McCaw, who live and race their pigeons in this North Antrim village. The partnership has been racing together for almost 50 years. Like many fanciers, throughout the UK and Ireland, they don't seek publicity. They just get on with racing their pigeons, especially the long distance events.

I have known the brothers for some years, and have finally

evergreens and not daffodils that appear in spring, flower, then disappear. This is quite an appropriate quote used by Bert Braspenning, which describes Billy & Leonard McCaw perfectly.

I hope my introduction has convinced the reader that this article is worth reading, especially if you are a long distance enthusiast.

The partnership of W & L McCaw was formed back in 1964. The brothers, having gained knowledge of management and racing

to win, the emphasis being on long distance and Channel racing. How things have changed. Incidentally one clock was used by six fanciers.

As the addiction for long distance racing started to kick in, so did the yearning for top long distance stock. New stock was introduced, this being the 'Solway King', 'Lancashire Rose' bloodlines crossed with the old Gurnay pigeons from Horace Devine. Success soon came, in 1974 winning 6th Open Irish National Flying Club Kings Cup race from Nantes flying 588 miles when 23 birds were recorded in race time.

The passion for long distance racing had been started and the search was on to further improve their stock. This search led the brothers to the lofts of the then famous A H Bennett of Church Stretton, whose reputation for long distance racing was infamous. Also being highly impressed with the Van Bruaene pigeons, the brothers agreed that these were the pigeons to take them forward. Negotiations took place, and direct children from the principal stock birds were purchased.

Being as keen as mustard, the brothers could not wait to get a racing team of these Van Bruaene's together, and set North Antrim alight with fantastic performances. This did not happen, to quote Leonard, they went down like snow in a ditch. Despite the major disappointment experienced, they kept faith in the Van Bruaene pigeons. Contact was made with



Trophies won by W & L McCaw in 1993.

got these quite, unassuming fanciers to agree to me doing a loft report on them, putting their long distance performances on record. A record you will see matches up with many of the modern day champions, we regularly see publicised in the pigeon media. I can assure readers that this partnership are

from their grandfather and uncle. They became members of the Ballymoney club, Ballymoney being a market town approximately six miles from Dervock. Like all young enthusiastic pigeon fanciers, club racing was the in thing. However in those days it was first race to last race that every one wanted

Albert Bennett, the management of the birds was discussed also their disappointment at the performance of the birds. Albert enlightened the brothers as to the correct management of this long distance family of pigeons reminding the brothers that these pigeons were not club

Cattrysse cock of Roy Oldfield, emphasis always being on maintaining the strong Van Bruaene influence. About 15 years ago Leonard began to race on his own signalling a significant change in the partnership. Billy at this time had moved house, and was in the process of establishing

bringing success right through from the short to long distance events. As the emphasis is on long distance events, it was felt that the Natural system enables Leonard to prepare both cocks and hens for the main events.

I must point out also, that there are no stock birds. All birds have an open loft all day, winter and summer. The old bird club events are used for training and education, mostly for the first two seasons of the pigeons career. Preparation for the long distance races is not complicated. A couple of races up Ireland then steady training with a local transporter keeping things simple.

In relation to the feeding method, again this is kept as simple as possible. Several mixtures have been tried over the years with success, but Leonard now mixes his own, adjusting it for racing, and breeding whichever applies at the time. Barley and wheat is purchased from local farmers at harvest time, and usually gets enough to last the season, making it a lot cheaper than commercial mixtures. After the racing the birds remain together, until December, they are separated over the Christmas period and then re-paired at the end of February. The only supplement used is cider vinegar and garlic, if a bird becomes sick, it is isolated and only then is any treatment administered.

The young birds remain with their parents until four weeks

Blue hen 'Mothers Pride' Hall of Fame winner Friendship National.



pigeons, and required a totally different approach to their management. This information was digested by the brothers, applied to the letter, and bingo, success. This method still applies 30 years later. Patience is a virtue – a motto used by W & L McCaw.

As the years moved on, many positions were won in the long distance events, bearing in mind also, further introductions of selective long distance stock. Notably a son of 'Clanfield Expected', the Pau National winning

his own team of birds.

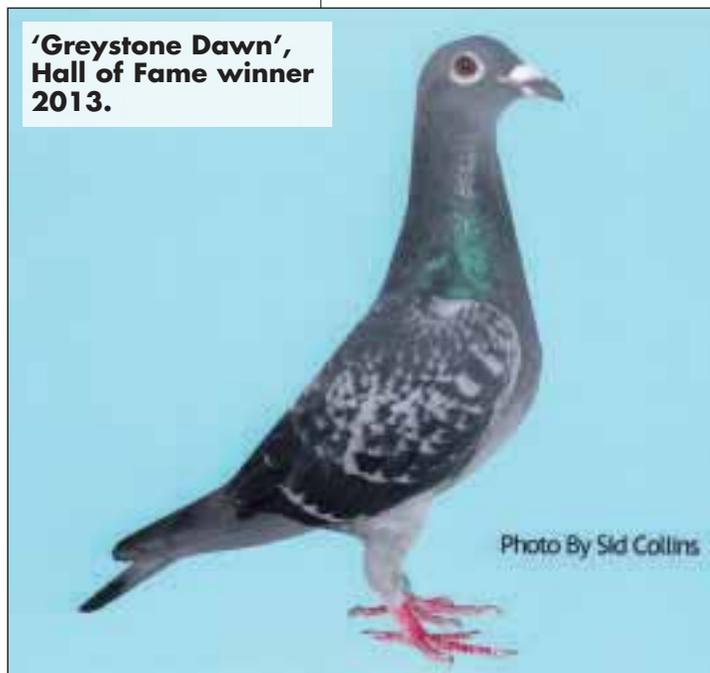
To continue with the article, I will focus on the lofts of Leonard, as this is where the story begins, still racing as W & L McCaw. There are four lofts, two for old birds and two for young birds. One of the young bird lofts is used for racing some young birds on the Darkness system, the other for the Natural young birds. The two old bird lofts are used for the old bird race team, which are raced Natural. The Widowhood system has been tried in the past,

old, they are then moved to the young loft lofts, where they remain for another four weeks before being introduced to an open hole. When all settles down, they are then just released for an evening fly. Young birds are trained up to 15 miles before getting their first race, which by this time is the third race on the young bird programme. This being about 150 miles. The Natural young birds get

As I mentioned earlier in my report, Billy McCaw set up a loft of his own a few years back. Thought had been given to the introduction of some new blood, into the existing Van Bruaene lines. A short list of fanciers was drawn up, one of these at the time, was Ken Hine (now deceased), and four young birds were introduced from Ken. Whilst Billy was dealing with Ken Hine, he asked if Ken would recommend any

two Hall of Fame awards and two Irish National Flying Club Merit awards.

Moving onto the management system used by Billy McCaw. This is very similar to the system used by brother Leonard. However, the significant difference being is that Billy has only one race in mind each year and that is the Irish National Flying Club's longest old bird race, flying 570 miles from



about three races and are then stopped. The Darkness young birds are kept racing and entered in the Young Bird National events.

I am sure by now, many of the readers will have raised eyebrows, having read how with such a simple cost effective management system, a fancier can become a successful long distance flyer. Let me assure readers, this is the system for over 25 years now and it works.

other fancier from whom he could purchase stock. Ken's replied, "You won't need any more. The young birds you got from me will do all you require." To date three out of the four birds purchased from Ken Hine have produced birds to fly from France to Ireland. They have also crossed successfully with the Van Bruaene pigeons.

Birds containing the Ken Hine bloodlines were first sent to France in 2009, up until 2013 they have won

France to Ireland, competing for the Kings Cup and other awards associated with this event, plus the Friendship National.

Feeding, training etc, is managed with the sole purpose of producing and preparing birds to fly from France to Ireland. I will run through quite briefly some of the main features of his management. Young birds are not raced receiving only a few training tosses. As yearlings they are sent to a

few club races, just for training purposes. Most birds are two or three years old before going to France, all raced Natural. The birds are fed a good Widowhood mixture all year round, with protein being introduced during the breeding season, Hormoform is also given during the breeding season.

Nantes 588 miles; 1st Open INFC Friendship National Sartilly; INFC Champion 1993; 2x4th Open INFC Friendship National; 6th Open Dinard NIPA Old Bird National; 11th Friendship National St Malo 493 miles; 20th INFC Kings Cup Rennes 525 miles. On the information I have received

prize winner in INFC Kings Cup race – 127th, 146th & 161st Open. Unfortunately 'Greystone Girl' was lost in 2012 competing for a Gold Medal award. Despite the disappointment of losing the Hall of Fame winner, Billy remained confident that he had a ready made replacement, this being 'Greystone Dawn'. A beautiful dark chequer hen who had already flown France 2010 just out of the prizes. In 2011 'Greystone Dawn' was timed at 5.09am on second day to win 151st Open Kings Cup, being the first bird timed in Ireland on second day. She returned in 2012 to win 67th Open Kings Cup, only 71 birds in race time, winning an INFC Merit Award.



Leonard & Willie McCaw with the Best Average Cup (two French races) Continental Cup.

The 2013 INFC Kings Cup provided the platform for 'Greystone Dawn' to bring yet another Hall of Fame award for the McCaw loft. Sure enough, at 9.05pm on the day 'Greystone Dawn' arrived home, to claim yet another award. Not only winning a Hall of Fame Diploma but also winning the INFC Single Bird Challenge, a much sought after award in the INFC. Knowing the McCaw's and their enthusiasm for the long distance events, I would say for sure that 'Greystone Dawn' will be back in France next year, competing for the coveted Gold Medal award.

In relation to health matters, the birds are vaccinated for paramyovirus. No medication is given unless needed, and this is very rarely. Keeping things simple is the motto used by Billy, totally focus on your main event.

the partnership have attained over 60 Open positions in National racing to date. Considering this to be one of Ireland's longest flying members in long distance National events, attaining these results is a reflection of the quality of fanciers that these boys are.

Before coming to the conclusion of my report, I would like to highlight some of the outstanding results and achievements obtained by this partnership stretching back over 45 years. Sixth Open INFC Kings Cup only 23 birds in race time,

As mentioned earlier in my report, Billy McCaw set up on his own a few years ago, success soon followed. Two of the loft stars are 'Greystone Girl', winner of INFC Hall of Fame award for three times

In conclusion, I do hope that you, the reader, have enjoyed this loft report, and have attained an insight into what, in my opinion, is one of Ireland's true long distance lofts.