

The recent report

Lothar Lessmeister (Hütschenhausen – G): 1st International Barcelona 2016

The race from Barcelona did not start on the day that it was scheduled to but what else could we expect in such a tumultuous 2016 racing season. The pigeons were eventually liberated on Saturday 2 July at 11.15am, one day later than scheduled. Due to the favourable wind direction and the likelihood of pigeons flying overnight, fanciers got up very early to keep an eye on their clocking devices on Sunday morning. The first pigeon was in fact clocked in the early morning by the French fancier Mohamed Mehadji from Hombourg Haut, a town in the Moselle department near Germany. He clocked his four-year-old hen at 6.03am, completing 931 km with a velocity of 1220.75 mpm. It resulted in a national win in France and a 3rd international prize.

He was eventually caught up by the international winner Lothar Leßmeister from Hütschenhausen in Germany, who clocked his six year-old hen at 6.26am after a distance of 981 km (1250.20 mpm). The international second prize was won by the Belgian national winners Gilbert and Julien Pronckaert from Schepdaal, whose two-year-old cock was clocked at 7.39am, covering 1,059 km with an average speed of 1233.04 mpm. The national winners in the Netherlands were Hans and John Lindenberg from Yerseke (Zeeland). They clocked their first pigeon at 9.14am for a distance of 1,130 km (1186.44 mpm), finishing 4th at international level. The rest of the pack did not arrive home quite as quickly, which was to be expected. It was a Barcelona classic like in the old days.

Supple muscles

It was through his uncle and a cousin that Lothar Leßmeister got involved in pigeon racing. He had his first pigeon loft in the attic of his parents' home at thirteen years old. Back in the days pigeons used to fly in south-

easterly direction, with Wien (700 km) and Budapest(900 km) being the longest races. Those races were very demanding when combined with a west wind and thunderstorms in the Donau valley but they were not quite as difficult if the wind was coming from the east. Lothar: "Only a limited number of pigeons would get into difficulties in those races but that goes for any other race as well. I changed jobs in 1984 to pursue a career in politics which meant I had to attend many prize events and meetings. It was no longer feasible for me

to compete in specialist racing because they require you to take care of your pigeons on a much more regular basis. I had two options: leave the sport or compete in long distance races instead. I promptly started to look for long distance pigeons. I was travelling all across Belgium to visit numerous well-known pigeon lofts but I soon realised that Belgian fanciers are not too keen on revealing their secrets. They like to keep their cards close to their chest. I personally don't mind sharing my secrets and I am always willing to help others. I participated in my first long distance races in the 1980s and I got in touch with Piet de Weerd after reading one of his articles. I was quite fascinated by the way he would assess



Gertrud and Lothar Lessmeister from Hütschenhausen in Germany showing the hen which won the international race from Barcelona in 2016.



Breeding birds on the left, young birds on the right.



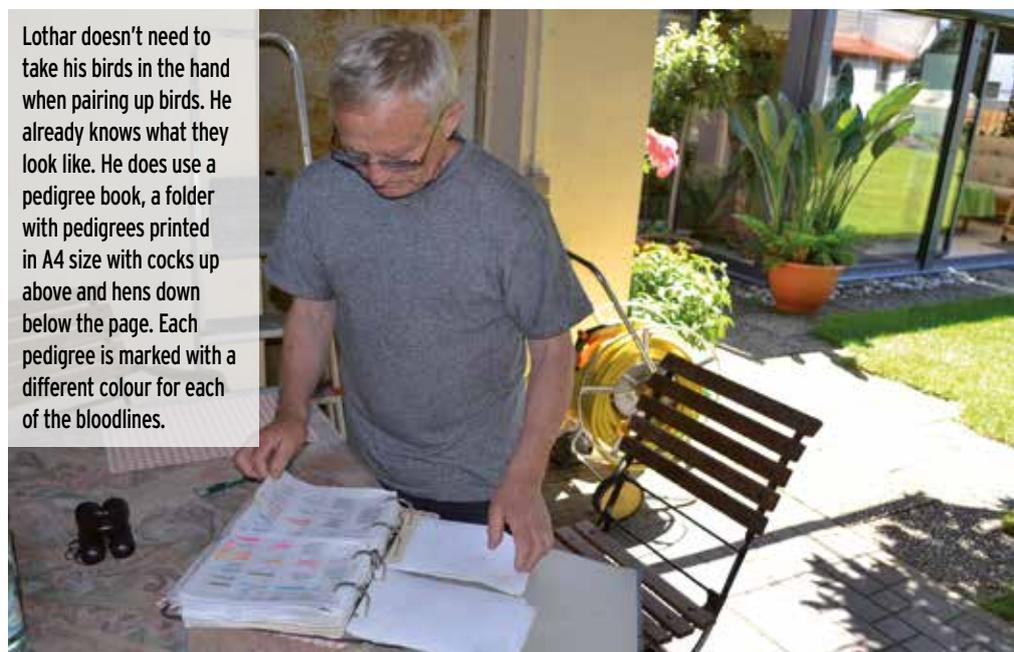
A look inside the widowhood loft, which is oriented towards the southeast and which lets in sunlight through the roof.

a pigeon's muscles. I visited him two to three times a year for the next ten years, each time returning home with a car full of youngsters. I had familiarised myself with his approach after two to three years and from then on I would assess the muscles of my own young birds at home. I would put them in three different baskets: the pigeons with the best muscles were placed in the first basket, the other pigeons would go in the second and third basket. I showed Piet the pigeons with the weaker muscles first, which he was not very impressed by. I then showed him the first basket and he wanted to know why the pigeons with the good muscles were all kept together in the same basket. I said: "Well, it seems I have learned something from you." He was proud that I found his approach so important. It is quite difficult to put into words how you can assess a pigeon's muscles just by feel. They should feel supple but the issue is that both strong and weak muscles can feel supple. For instance, my winning hen from Barcelona had hard but supple muscles, whereas my 1st International Pau 2014 "Tamino" had weak yet supple muscles. In the breeding loft I often try to combine strong with weak supple muscles. According to professor Anker a pigeon inherits its muscle type proportionally from the

two parents, which in fact makes breeding youngsters from proven long distance birds a lot easier. A lot of attention goes to the feathers as well. I look for stable and slightly bent wing feathers. What I mean by that is that the wing feathers appear slightly bent when seen in profile (from the side). As such, the feathers will not be standing upright after having spent many hours racing, which would cause the bird to put out less force. Most other theories are nonsense. The silliest thing I have heard was the theory of the closed

vent bones. In fact, the tailbones of "Vento", 1st Nat. and 5th Internat. Dax 2006, and those of his dam were open. Besides muscles and feathers I am mostly interested in how my pigeons perform. I am very patient with pigeons which have strong muscles. I was also very patient with "La Primera", which had won eight long distance prizes but none of those were top prizes before the 2016 race from Barcelona. She did deliver on that classic though. That is a sense of joy you only get from a racing bird achieving an outstanding result."

Lothar doesn't need to take his birds in the hand when pairing up birds. He already knows what they look like. He does use a pedigree book, a folder with pedigrees printed in A4 size with cocks up above and hens down below the page. Each pedigree is marked with a different colour for each of the bloodlines.



Two international victories in two years' time

Lothar was up at five that morning, even though he did not expect any pigeons before 9 o'clock. He did not want to take the risk though, as he had been caught by surprise by an early pigeon from Barcelona back in 2001. He sat on the terrace looking at some national results from Barcelona, studying the distance to the lofts of his closest opponents, should it come down to it. He suddenly heard a bleep from his electronic clocking device. It was a pigeon from Barcelona and the time was 6.26am. It was a six-year-old hen with the ring number DV 05286-2010-545 and she was given the name "La Primera", Spanish for "The first".

Her pedigree is shown opposite.

This is her list of honours:

- 2011:** 87th Nat. Bordeaux
169th Nat. Tarbes (with a liberation in Agen)
- 2013:** 424th Nat. Barcelona
58th Nat. Narbonne
- 2014:** 85th Nat. Narbonne
- 2015:** 271st Nat. Barcelona
247th Nat. Narbonne
- 2016:** 1st Internat. Barcelona



"La Primera", DV 05286-2010-545, 1st International Barcelona 2016.

Lothar had already made history two years ago, winning an international first prize from Pau with "Tamino".

He had travelled 906 km in 14 hours and 20 minutes, beating 8,295 pigeons with a velocity of 1053.20 mpm.

The sire of "Tamino" DV 05286-2012-1766 is "Pablo", who stems from a son of "Präsent" (Cees de Jong) when paired to the dam of "Vento" (Cees de Jong).

The dam of "Tamino" is a daughter of the "Königspaar" (royal couple) "Vento" x "Dona Espana". "Vento" won a 1st Nat. and 5th Internat. Dax (11,536 b.), while "Dona Espana" won a 6th Internat. Barcelona (20,209 b.) and a 30th Internat. San Sebastian (2,932 b.).



"Tamino", DV 05286-2012-1766, 1st International Pau 2014.

We would like to conclude with an overview of Lothar's most impressive victories:

- 1st International Barcelona 2016 - "La Primera"
- 1st International Pau 2014 - "Tamino"
- 1st International Carcassonne hens 2006 - "Nadira"
- 1st International Perpignan hens 2006 - "Nadira"
- 1st International yearlings 2005 - "Fadhilla"
- 1st National Barcelona 2006 - "Evita"
- 1st National Dax 2006 - "Vento"
- 1st International "Copa Espagnola" - "Dona Espana"
- 1st German Champion in the international races 2011

The main foundation breed of the loft

Lothar Leßmeister created his pigeon breed as follows: "I was looking for a one-year-old hen in Theo Ernest's auction and the one I picked had ring number 99-9902356. I named her "Thea". She is the dam of "Evita", 1st Nat. and 7th Internat. Barcelona 2006 and granddam of "La Primera", 1st Internat. Barcelona 2016. I also looked for a good-quality hen of his brother Jan Ernest and I came home with a pigeon having the ring number 002151679. She is the dam of "Dona Espana", winner of a 6th Internat. Barcelona and a 30th Internat. San Sebastian, both prizes with which she also won the Copa Espagnola 2003. I had heard about Paul Claessen obtaining youngsters of the best pigeons of Kipp & Sons and so I decided to get twenty youngsters from Paul Claessens in turn. I then crossed those pigeons with my other newly acquired birds, including for instance a racing cock which was given to me by Cees de Jong from Lepelstraat (Holland). It carried the ring number 01-2061841 and I named it "Präsent". He is in fact the grandsire of "La Primera" from her dam's side, while his brother is the sire of "Vento". The dam of "Vento" comes from Cees de Jong's loft as well. Her ring number is 999907905. I still have about seven or eight youngsters of my breeding pair "Vento" x "Dona Espana" in my breeding loft. I have sold only one single youngster of that pair because the pigeon in question was called the worst bird in my lofts by an eye specialist. The buyer really wanted to have the youngster nonetheless and as it turned out, her son "Tamino" won a 1st International from Pau that same season. It was reason enough for me to never look at a pigeon's eyes again."

Using the breeding record

"I have 28 breeding pairs. I like working with late youngsters which I select myself. The sire of the hen which won the international Barcelona race was such a pigeon. I usually pair breeders in the beginning of March if weather permitted because I do not want to spend too much time in the breeding loft when it is cold outside. I do not need to take my pigeons in the hand as I already know what my breeders look like. I do

make good use of my pedigree book though, a folder which contains the pedigrees of all stock breeders in A5 size. Cocks are up above the page, hens down below. Each pedigree is marked with a colour for the different bloodlines: blue for the line of "Vento" (Cees de Jong), orange for "El Cid", my stock breeder of the Kipp breed, green for the "Nadira" (1st Internat. Carcassonne and 1st Internat. Perpignan in the hen race) and "Rainmaker" bloodline (Kipp), and yellow for "Rapid", winner of a 20th Nat. Pau, an 18th Nat. Dax and a 16th Nat. Perpignan 2002. He was a crossing of Stoffel and the "Buffel" bloodline of Piet de Weerd. The Theo Ernest family of pigeons is marked with a pencil. I prefer to form pairs in which the sire is related from his sire's side to the dam from her dam's side, or the sire is related from his dam's side to the dam from her sire's side. I tend to crossbreed only seldom. When you pair closely related pigeons, their best characteristics really tend to be passed on but I have to make sure not to pair too closely. I know the Kipp family very well and they gave me a few pigeons particularly suited for crossing: a son of a 1st Nat. St Vincent paired to his own dam. The Kipps are very nice people and they know what a good-quality pigeon



The wing of "La Primera",
1st International Barcelona 2016.



looks like. I think they are the best long distance fanciers in Europe. They have an impressive list of performances, including a recent international victory from St Vincent."

Logical thinking

Lothar: "My pigeons are raced on total widowhood. I have 48 widowhood boxes at my disposal. I start

off with 48 cocks and 50 to 52 hens, more than half of which are yearlings. I pair my racing birds between mid- and late March. That is quite easy: all I have to do is open the doors. That is anything but a good system because some cocks will occupy two or three different boxes, leaving other pigeons with no box at all. Those cocks are not motivated. They will usually return home but they are never in a hurry. So there is

some room for improvement still. I should probably reduce the number of pigeons in my loft so that I can take better care of them. When the pigeons are separated some pairs will have a youngster, while others have not had a chance to mate. The Kipp family uses a different approach: father Wulfram looks after the racing birds while his son Hugo runs the breeding loft. Unfortunately my son Ralf has no time to help me out, even though he does have an interest in keeping pigeons as well. I remember him hurrying himself to the loft when he heard about my early arrival from Barcelona. I do not take the pigeons away before their first race and the same applies to young birds. If they train well around the loft they should be able to cover 80 to 100 km. All they have to do is follow the direction of the other young birds to reach the loft. That is the least we expect from them. My old birds and yearlings are basketed in the IG Weitstrecke (a pigeon association) every week. We do that until fourteen days before they are basketed for an international race, after which they have to stay at home. Once the international racing season is underway they will no longer be basketed for the IG Weitstrecke races. I basket the hens simply by picking them up and putting them in the basket. The same goes for my cocks although I will usually put one or two hens in a widowhood box, making it easier



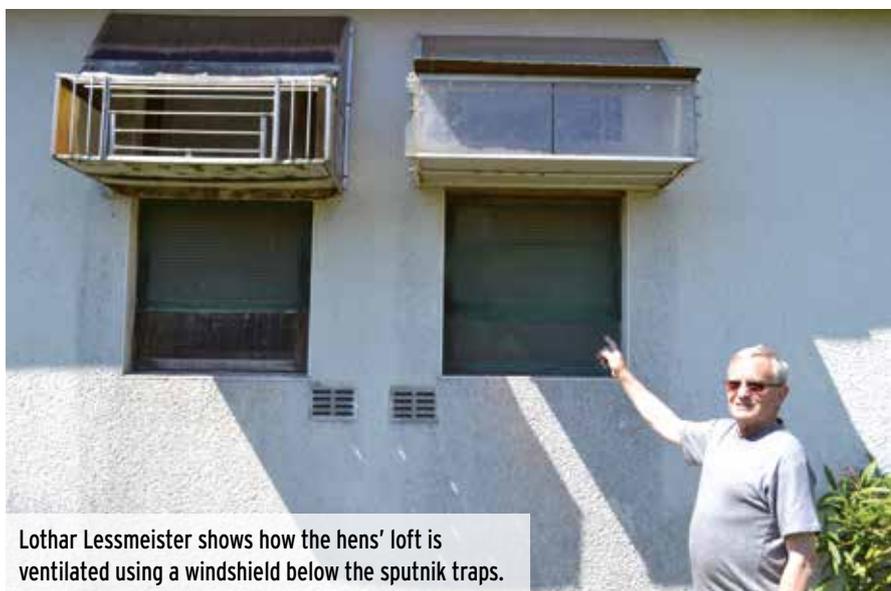
A look inside the hens' loft, consisting of two sections.

for me to catch them. The pigeons which stay at home can then spend a night together. In fact I improvise quite a lot in my loft. Racing pigeons is usually a matter of logical thinking. I try to get everything done with the least effort possible. Given the size of family of pigeons I would actually need a partner. That means I should either reduce my number of birds or try to improvise. Either of these strategies might lead to better results, although I think I have been doing alright, winning two international victories in two years' time."

One of my best results ever from Barcelona

"I adopted Cees de Jong's feeding system in the year 2000. He was thinking of leaving the sport at the time so I was hoping he would share some of his secrets with me. He told

me he gave his pigeons cider vinegar every day. I did not believe it at first so I asked his wife about it. I started giving my pigeons a daily portion of cider vinegar in 2001 and continued to do so till 2009. I am no longer doing that so frequently because cider vinegar is believed to have a negative effect on a pigeon's skeleton. Still, it did not keep me from getting my best result from Barcelona ever in 2007, winning the following international prizes against 25,716 birds: 21st, 31st, 33rd, 69th, 76th, 84th, 111th, 147th, etc. I won 19 prizes out of 32 pigeons. I was not using any medicines at the time but I had my pigeons checked at the beginning of 2007. They were diagnosed with a severe inflammation of the crop mucous membrane and a moderately severe trichomoniasis infection. I decided not to give any treatment and apparently the pigeons managed to get better by themselves. They were training very well at the time so I was confident. I use two types of feed: a diet mixture containing many sorghum and cardoon seeds and a marathon mixture containing many legumes. After an international race my pigeons get nothing but diet mixture. They have to eat everything they get until five days before the next basketing. I then switch to marathon mixture for three days, not allowing any leftovers. I want them to eat the peas as well. Two days before basketing I add a high-energy feed to the marathon mixture, which is a mixture of 55 per cent sunflower seeds and 45 per cent hemp. They get a full feeder and they can eat as



Lothar Lessmeister shows how the hens' loft is ventilated using a windshield below the sputnik traps.

much as they want for an hour or a bit longer. On the day before basketing I switch to 2/3 of a portion of marathon mixture and 1/3 of a portion of high energy feed. I do not take away the feeder and they get another portion on the day of basketing. If the high-energy feed is already gone, I add some more. All birds have empty crops by the time they get basketed in the evening. I never made a secret of the fact that my pigeons get nothing but diet mixture upon return and yet no one seems to follow my example. It keeps your pigeons lean but they continue to train well because the mixture is highly nutritious yet easily digestible. You just have to make sure that your pigeons eat well in the final two days before basketing. I adopted that feeding system for the first time in 2001, when I won a 4th and 6th National Barcelona. I have not changed anything since. When they are busy training for the international races they get any mixture which is available at the time. That can be very different mixtures as I tend to improvise a lot on diet. Until this year I used to race cocks and hen alternately for fourteen-day periods but it was Hugo Kipp who advised me to basket cocks and hens for the same races this season. The pigeons which had to stay at home were also given that feed rich in fat, followed by a few days of light diet. I add glucose to the drinking water when my racers arrive home and also provide them with iodine, iron, amino acids, cider vinegar and



Lothar Lessmeister learned from Piet de Weerd how to assess a pigeon's muscles.



"Tamino", 1st International Pau 2014, has been so valuable for Lothar that he can spend his entire life in Hütschenhausen.

Naturaline. To cover any possible deficits they also get a multivitamin preparation on the final two days before basketing."

Medical guidance

"I spent many years without using any medicines or having any medical guidance but I learned a hard lesson in that regard. I lost quite a few talented pigeons in 2009 and 2010 due to hair worms. Things got better once my entire pigeon family had been decontaminated and I went on to become German champion in the international races in 2011. Many years went by before I thought about protecting my breeding loft against a possible trichomoniasis infection. That was until "Vento" had a medical issue in the autumn of 2015. I immediately treated all my birds for seven days by adding a medicine to their feed. My pigeons were also given a trichomoniasis pill and two trichomonas drops in their beak before each international race that season, except for Agen. The evening before basketing they were also given a nose drop in each nostril to clear the respiratory tract. I now have my birds' dropping examined every year but I only vaccinate against PMV."

A priceless bird

Lothar's young birds compete in four to five races from Auxerre (340

km) in August and are then selected on the basis of their muscular build. Lothar will also check the descent of all birds which pass the selection test. As yearlings, those birds used to compete in the race from Bordeaux in the IG Weitstrecke club but since 2016 Lothar has been racing his yearlings on the international race from Agen instead, followed by Marseille or Narbonne. He now favours the race from Agen, where his pigeons have to break away from the flock and sometimes have to learn things the hard way. The remaining yearlings will stay on board the team. Lothar: "I am very patient with pigeons if they have a proper set of muscles. "Dona Espana" completed Marseille and Perpignan as a yearling, finishing home just after all prizes had been won. However, that didn't prevent her from winning two early prizes in the race from Barcelona as a two-year-old. First International Pau "Tamino" always won an early prize: as a yearling he was one of the first pigeons of the team in every preparatory race, while also winning a 41st National from Marseille. At the age of two, he immediately succeeded in winning a 1st International Pau. That makes him a priceless bird, and one which I will never sell."

That was our report on the international winner of Barcelona 2016. Many congratulations!

Patrick Philippens