

Report

Gaston Van De Wouwer, Berlaar (B): "Kaasboer"!

The "Kaasboer" made him famous. Pigeon fanciers from all over the world are interested in having offspring from the "Kaasboer". Even today, after he sold many of his birds in October 2014. We are talking about Gaston Van De Wouwer, the fancier behind the "Kaasboer". Up until today, the Van De Wouwer breed is very high in demand and that is all thanks to the "Kaasboer".



Gaston Van De Wouwer, the fancier behind the "Kaasboer".

Yes, we paid a visit to Gaston Van De Wouwer. And it was worth it. Gaston and his wife live in Berlaar, a village not far from Lier populating about 10,000 people. The small city of Lier is famous for its pigeon market. Gaston and his wife have a large and very beautiful piece of land which offers ample room for keeping pigeons. Gaston will soon celebrate his 72nd birthday, meaning he retired several years ago. Just like many other fanciers living in the Antwerp region, he made a living of cutting diamonds. However, he is still racing pigeons. Even after his big Internet auction on PIPA in October 2014, in which he sold most of his birds, Gaston continued racing pigeons. He only kept a few birds, two rounds of

youngsters of 2014 to be precise. That allowed him to continue racing pigeons without quitting the sport. He of course had to make a fresh start in some ways but the basis for new successes was already formed.

The Internet sale

When looking at PIPA's pigeon auctions with the highest revenue, Gaston Van De Wouwer's sale is placed 3rd after Leo Heremans (Belgium) and Pieter Veenstra (Holland). His 301 birds were sold for a total amount of 1,542,800 euros in October 2014. That is a phenomenal average price of 5,126 euros per bird. Strongly contributing to that substantial amount was of course the superior breeding bird "Kaasboer" and his countless offspring. Out of the 301 birds put up for offer 197 were sold to China. Forty-four birds remained in Belgium, twenty went to Taiwan and 12 were shipped to the United States. The remaining birds were sold to different, mostly European, countries. Many fanciers had already enjoyed the superior breeding qualities of the "Kaasboer", if not such a sales success would not have been possible. No less than seventeen direct child-



ren of the "Kaasboer" were put up for auction. Pigeon fanciers from across the world wanted to acquire birds from the world-famous "Kaasboer" bloodline and, consequently, some very serious bidding was done.

The "Kaasboer", B 98-6335690

We can without doubt say that the "Kaasboer" is the stock cock of the Van De Wouwer lofts. The blue cock came from Jozef Govaerts' lofts in Beerzel. Jozef Govaerts sold cheese, eggs and butter on the market and was called a "kaasboer" (cheese farmer). It was obvious that Gaston would name the ace bird he got from Jozef Govaerts "Kaasboer".

Never in his life has Gaston Van De Wouwer bought a pigeon. Most of his birds, mostly summer youngsters, he traded with well-performing fanciers who were also friends of his. Once and a while he bought a voucher but always from small, well-performing fanciers. He then always asked for a last-round squeaker at the end of the breeding season because he thought the fancier could more easily spare a bird. The "Kaasboer" also moved to Gaston's loft through such a trade.



The lofts



A look inside the loft. Not all boxes have been occupied.

It is also important to mention that the Van De Wouwer birds also lie at the heart of provincial and national victories achieved by other fanciers. In addition, numerous successes at local level were achieved with Van De Wouwer birds. Let's for example have a look at 2012. In the first classics of that racing season, it again became clear how big the influence of the Van De Wouwer birds really was on triumphs scored in pigeon racing. If we only list top performances at national and provincial level, the following top-table prizes were for example won:

1st National Montluçon 22,875 yearlings, won by Marcel & Gunter Vercammen from Vremde, is a granddaughter of "Gastona" (a granddaughter of the "Kaasboer"), an original Gaston Van De Wouwer hen.

1st National Montluçon 17,865 old birds, won by Wim Storms (Berlaar) with a bird coming from the same bloodline of the Jozef Goovaerts birds, so the same as Gaston's breeding legend "Kaasboer".

1st Provincial Châteauroux 2,478 birds, won by Daniel De Pauw, is a 50 % Gaston Van De Wouwer bird.

2nd Provincial Châteauroux 1,862 birds, won by Bart Verbeek, is a 100 % Gaston Van De Wouwer bird.

2nd Provincial Châteauroux 2,478 birds, won by Bart & Nance Van Oeckel, is a 50 % Van De Wouwer bird.

We can conclude that Gaston's stock cock "Kaasboer" lays golden eggs. Eggs from which the offspring succeeded in achieving remarkable results in provincial and national longer middle distance classics at numerous different lofts. The "Kaasboer" bloodline has developed into one of the best bloodlines in Belgium for races from about 450 till 600 km. Whoever possesses "Kaasboer" offspring can count him- or herself lucky because it doesn't matter whether they are children, grandchildren or greatgrandchildren of the "Kaasboer", their breeding qualities are without doubt outstanding. They always give proof of the great breeding value and huge racing potential of Gaston Van de Wouwer birds with the "Kaasboer" legend as the number-one breeder.

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A few national highlights from 2004 till 2014

- 1st National Champion Long Distance Young Birds KBDB 2007
- 1st National Ace Bird Cureghem Centre 2009
- 1st National Champion Young Birds Cureghem Centre 2013
- 1st National Guéret 14,700 young birds 2009
- 1st National Bourges 17,061 yearlings 2010 (and fastest bird of all 39,614 participants)
- 1st National Zone Argenton 2011
- 1st National Zone Poitiers 2,538 birds 2013
- 1st Interprovincial Vierzon 15,359 birds 2014
- 3rd National Bourges 37,900 young birds 2009
- 4th National Champion Long Distance Young Birds KBDB 2011
- 5th National Limoges 14,211 birds 2010
- 6th National Champion Long Distance Young Birds KBDB 2004
- 6th National Argenton 9,900 old birds 2009
- 8th National Champion Long Distance Young Birds KBDB 2013



The "Kaasboer" is still present in Gaston's living room.

Gaston Van De Wouwer's biggest achievement is perhaps his 1st National Bourges against 17,061 yearlings in 2010 with the fastest pigeon of all 39,614 entrants. That performance was achieved by a small chequered hen raced on the widowhood system. In its first year of age as a young bird it had already shown what it was capable of.

Who he has become, what he is

Let's have Gaston tell his own story: "When I was a child, all we talked about at home was pigeons. My father was a dyed-in-the-wool pigeon fancier. I already lend my father a hand in the lofts when I was seven years old and since we lived in a region where diamonds play an important role in business and trade, I became a diamond cutter. My father didn't race well to be honest and that's why I started racing under my own name after I got married. I first raced on the sprint like any other fancier in this region. I wanted to race well so even then I visited a vet from time to time. I started racing on the middle distance in 1999 and began participating in the national young bird races in 2003."

In the year after, Gaston finished sixth in the national long distance championship in the young bird category and in 2007 he won the championship. After winning that national title, he was celebrated as an up-and-coming star who had been working his way up in the past five years, much to his annoyance since he had been racing birds well for 35 years. To prove his point, he presented a large folder containing prize lists from the seventies and eighties. He had been finishing in the top of the table with a limited number of basketed birds in the regional prize-winning races from Quiévrain and Noyon, always basketing his birds in those clubs



Gaston and his wife.

which were located best in terms of wind direction. Gaston: "It is hard to make a name for yourself in sprint racing, however. It is normal that if you go two villages further from yours, people will have never heard of the best sprint racer in your village. I started with Stan Govaerts birds and later on introduced birds from Theo Vermerckt (Houtvenne) and Frans Verbeeck (Schriek). At the time I had about 30 early youngsters which were raced on the nest. My second-round youngsters were sold on the market in Lier to finance my hobby."

In 1999, Gaston's fellow-villager Bart Hendriks gave Gaston six of his birds as he was quitting the pigeon sport. Bart had pigeons from Gaston, Marcel Dillen (Ranst) and Marcel Cortens (Booischoot). Those six birds bred excellent offspring. In addition, Gaston's opposite neighbour Jerome Van De Putte possessed an ace bird in the Noyon races. Since Jerome didn't race old birds, he gave Gaston his ace bird the next year so Gaston could breed from it. Before the start of the racing season, that ace bird bred two youngsters and one of them was given to Jerome while the other remained in Gaston's loft. Both young birds performed well and the bird which stayed with Gaston, a cock with the band number B016345101, also proved

his worth in the breeding loft. He bred the three birds which won Gaston the 2007 national long distance championship in the young bird category. Gaston was also lucky in 2003 when he put eight summer youngsters in his breeding loft and nearly all of them produced good offspring. Gaston resumes: "I have had birds from perhaps 25 different fanciers and with each of those breeds I have achieved success. I would take me too long to mention all of them but I still have pigeons from the following fanciers: Johan De Belser (Berlaar), Theo Ijskout (Hulshout), Van den Eynde-Goyvaerts (Putte), Leo Verhaegen (Hallaar), Walter Roziers (Berlaar), Eddy Janssens (Zandhoven), Kristiaan Hennes (Rotselaar), Frans Wouters (Tremelo) and Luc and Bart Geerinckx (Wommelgem). The two most important bloodlines in my family of birds nowadays are offspring from the "Kaasboer" and descendants of Jerome Van De Putte's ace bird, crossed with my old grizzle breed."

Food for discussion

Gaston soon found out that birds from the "Kaasboer" bloodline also performed well in the middle and shorter long distance races. Many sprint birds can also master

middle distance racers but it is up to the fancier to try it. Gaston also has his thoughts on the future of pigeon sport: "I think pigeon racing will continue to exist but races will gradually shift to provincial and national level. The number of races will without doubt drop and old birds and yearlings will be raced in one and the same category. On the one hand, every fancier should of course have the possibility of participating in those races which are most to his or her liking. On the other hand, a certain amount of birds should participate in a race if the race is to be taken seriously. I am also convinced that a good middle distance fancier has to race both his young and old birds. If you specialise in young bird racing, your young birds will soon be burned up. I often compare it to cycling. Young birds are amateurs whereas old birds are professionals." You can also discuss the use of private training with Gaston. He also knows that there are fanciers who take away their birds almost on a daily basis: "That is perhaps a good thing when you race the sprint but I don't see the use if you participate in races from 500 to 600 km. I never liberate my birds farther than Vilvoorde (30 km) and I only do that to train them just before the start of the racing season. I don't take them away during the

racing season. My young birds are trained in four stages and liberated from four distances: 5, 10, 20 and 30 km. Afterwards, they are basketed in my club and liberated in Brussels (50) and, afterwards, two times in Quiévrain (98 km). I put half a basket with drinking cups attached to it in my young bird loft for ten days so they learn where to find water in a basket."

24 breeding pairs

Before his big auction in 2014 Gaston had 24 breeding pairs from which he bred about 80 early youngsters each year. The loft in which Gaston put the youngsters was populated by twenty feeding pairs which raised the breeders' first round. Those eggs were always floated out as soon as possible so the breeders could start their second laying. That way each breeding pair produced four squeakers. Gaston usually paired large birds to small ones because he doesn't like large pigeons. He also doesn't like heavy inbreeding. He only made an exception with his "Kaasboer" breed, when sometimes pairing cousin to cousin. He normally doesn't recouple birds as well but when a pair which produced good youngsters in the past doesn't breed anything useful for

two years in a row Gaston recouples them. If a new pairing didn't bring any good offspring after two years, that of course meant that the pair had to be removed.

When the youngsters are sixteen to eighteen days old, Gaston checks their sex. Depending on the sex, they are each given a coloured clip ring. Gaston thinks he can better examine them to find out their sex by looking at them nest by nest. Afterwards, they are all put on the floor because in Gaston's opinion they will be taken better care of by their parents and will soon start picking up feed by themselves.

As soon as all young birds are starting to flit about the loft, they are separated according to their sex and moved to the young bird loft. There they are fed at 9am. They are first given a full feeder for half an hour, containing a mixture of 2/3 of a portion of breeding mixture and 1/3 of a portion of Liège mixture. Both sexes train together till they are ready to pair. During the first months, Gaston prefers not to let them outside until the afternoon when the weather is good because otherwise too many birds get lost. Later on they train in the morning and a racing mixture is given to them. However, they can still eat as much as they like, both in the morning and in the evening. Young cocks are darkened from around 10 to 15 March till the end of May and young hens from that same date till 10 June, both every day from 6pm in the evening till 9am in the morning. When the days begin to shorten again, that is around 1 July, Gaston lightens from 5am in the morning till 10.30 or 11pm in the evening. Half an hour longer or not, it doesn't matter so much. Gaston takes away his young birds four to five times in May to liberate them at a distance of 3 to 30 km. Afterwards, they are basketed in the club to be liberated at increasing distances, first at 50 km, then twice at around 100



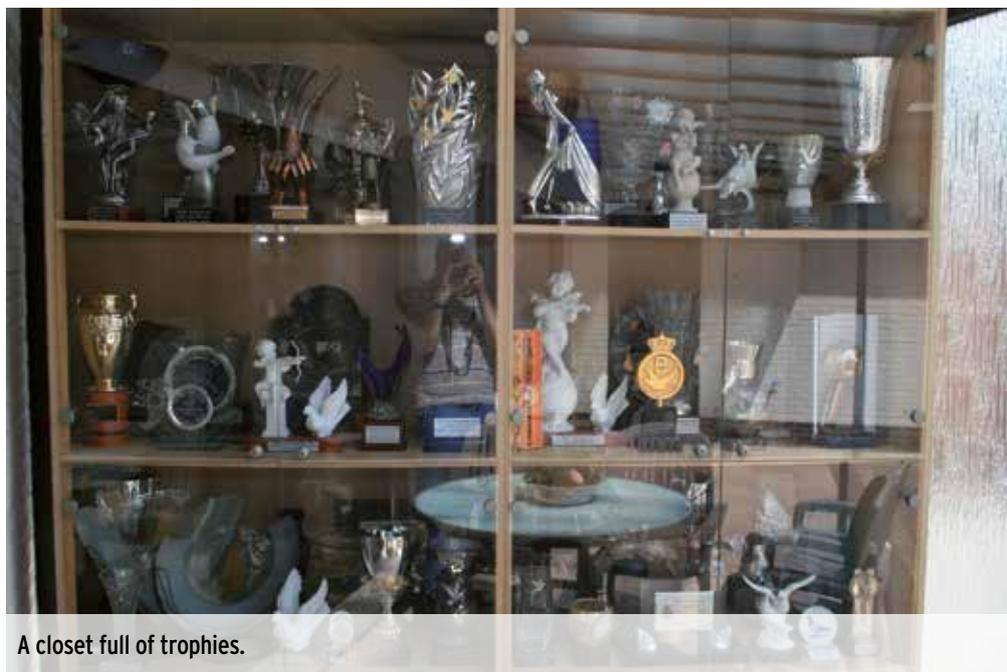
Gaston standing in front of the wall on which the photos of his aces are hanging.

km in Quiévrain and lastly twice in Noyon (209 km). After Noyon, middle distance racing starts. Gaston doesn't take away his birds between the races because, as said before, he doesn't see why.

Racing hens

Prior to 2010, the year in which one of Gaston's hens won the national race from Bourges, Gaston only raced a few hens which were sitting among the young birds. He only started taking racing hens on the widowhood system seriously in 2010 after he met Leo and Gerry Dockx from Koningshooikt. They asked him for a piece of advice on how to better perform in middle distance races. They successfully copied Gaston's racing system and in return advised him to race hens. As a result, a hen's loft was built in the late summer of 2009 for young hens where they were allowed to build their nest and brood for 5 to 6 days. That would make them feel right at home. The next winter, they stayed in the aviary until 1 March where they had plenty of oxygen at their disposal and couldn't bother Gaston with much work. They were paired on 1 March, their youngsters were weaned at the age of sixteen to seventeen days and the cocks had to raise the youngsters on their own. The hens were also trained on that laying.

The hen's loft consists of a resting section and a section with widowhood boxes. In the latter section hens are fed. On the day of basketing hens eat at 4pm. Afterwards, they are pushed towards the resting section while the cocks are put in the partially closed widowhood boxes. The hens can then re-enter the other section to sit in front of the cocks, sometimes resulting into fighting. Gaston never intervenes, however. After about ten minutes, all pairs are locked up inside their boxes: five minutes be-



A closet full of trophies.

fore a race from Quiévrain, ten before one from Noyon, half an hour before a middle distance race and 45 minutes before a national one. Upon the hens' return, the cocks are sitting in their partially closed box and when the race is as good as over the hens can join their cocks in their boxes. After arriving and before being put together with their cocks, all hens have had the time to eat and drink. Electrolytes are put in the drinking water by the time they arrive. After a sprint race, pairs can stay together for two hours, after middle distance races they can spend more time with each other and after a shorter middle distance race – or a longer middle distance race if you prefer that term – they aren't separated until 9pm. Two hours after being locked up, hens are allowed to leave their boxes one last time to eat and drink. However, Gaston has made some changes here because cups are now attached to the boxes in which feed and drinking water is present.

When starting to race hens, Gaston asked himself: "When exactly do I have to train hens which are raced on the widowhood system?" He then experimented for some

time and came to the conclusion that 6.30pm was the best time. Before letting them out, they can eat for about ten minutes. If possible, they then have to train around the loft for one hour with closed windows. Gaston: "When I see that they don't feel like training, I let them inside earlier. To give you an example: the week after the Bourges race, they trained for five minutes on Monday, half an hour on Tuesday and an hour on Wednesday. Some fanciers don't even let their birds fly outside the day after a race but I think that is wrong. In my opinion, birds have to go out to relax their muscles and make them supple again." Gaston likes it when his hens go and fly way up in the air. According to him, that is a sign of their good shape. His widowers, however, show that they are in excellent shape when they circle above the forest which is located nearby.

Feeding and medical guidance

Gastons says he isn't a specialist when it comes to feeding. He always supplies his birds with a

full feeder which stays in the loft for ten minutes. From the arrival from a race till Monday evening, his birds are first given a diet mixture and afterwards racing mixtures of five different brands, all mixed with each other. Furthermore, they are also provided with grit in a big feeding cup so they don't look for it on the land. Since all pigeons are fed before training they are always given a handful of small seeds and peanuts when they re-enter the loft. On Monday and Tuesday evenings, the feed is mixed with Vitamineral and a vitamin juice for children, whereas on Wednesday evenings a conditioning powder is added. At the start of the season sedochol is put in the drinker for an entire week. That prep is later on only given on Mondays. Otherwise, there are always three cloves of garlic in each drinker until the day of basketing. Before and after the racing season, Gaston pays a visit to Henk de Weerd's pigeon clinic to have his birds checked. During the racing

season he goes to Dr Mariën four to five times. On the advice of Henk de Weerd, Gaston treats his birds with parastop for ten days in October and he adds BS to the bird feed for five days before the start of the racing season. That was the sole treatment till the end of May (speaking of the year 2010). Young birds were also treated against trichomoniasis only once until July. Gaston: "I don't just randomly give antibiotics. If I have a problem in my loft, I will not treat my birds with antibiotics unless prescribed by a vet. Dr Mariën doesn't easily prescribe medication but if he does it's always the right medicine. I'm just interested in good birds and racing them, that's it. Every race my birds participate in is actually an elimination race because I no longer wish to race so many birds."

That sums up everything there is to say about Gaston Van De Wouwer's performances before his big auction in 2014 and how

he has achieved them. 2015 was a transition year during which he established a new breeding team of 24 pairs, all birds born in 2014 which stayed in his lofts after his auction. He breeds 30 youngsters a year from those birds to race. Because Gaston didn't want to have too much on his plate at his age, he decided to only race hens in the old bird category from now on and no longer cocks. 2016 has shown that Gaston made the right decision and that he is again a force to be reckoned with in the future.

Dirk Zoland

Some splendid results from 2016:

Vierzon (472 km) prov. 1,533 old birds: 77-137-166-277 (4/4)

Brive (699 km) prov. 548 old birds: 12-136 (2/2)

Souppes (353 km) 530 old birds: 3-6-23 (3 prizes / 5 birds)

Gien (405 km) prov. 5,470 young birds: 27-56-58-61-75-149-465-485-etc. (15/28)

Argenton (552 km) prov. 1,326 old birds: 13-39-101-223-345 (5/5)

Argenton (552 km) prov. 2,326 yearlings: 23-86-245-etc. (7/7)

Blois (460 km) prov. 776 young birds: 4-9-37-41-54-69-74-etc. (16/22)

Souppes(353 km) 724 young birds: 7-35-43-44-46-72-etc. (9/14)

Bourges (475 km) prov. 4,166 young birds: 17-22-37-131-142-190-244-388-etc. (15/23)

Argenton (552 km) prov. 2,872 young birds: 22-24-99-181-205-etc. (13/19)



This small loft populates the twenty hens Gaston races on the widowhood system. On the left hand side is the resting section and on the right the section in which the cocks await their hens' return from a race.

Elite of Natural: Gaston Van De Wouwer

Multiple Gaston Van De Wouwer birds populate our lofts. We present to you two cocks which are both paired to two different hens. You can buy or order youngsters from those pairs.

OPTION 1

B 11-6119060 – Cock "Olympia Bourges"

Sire is "Son Bourges", B 07-6033120. He descends from "Den Bourges", 1st Prov. Bourges (3,988 b.), 15th Nat. Bourges (26,679 b.). "Den Bourges" is a son of „Kaasboer 690/98".

Dam is "Daughter Olympia", DV 9861-09-0586, and she descends from "Olympia Gaston", 1st National Ace Bird Germany and 2nd German Olympiad Bird All-round 2009. That bird was raced by Uwe Berg.



B 11-6119051 – Hen "Daughter Ferrari"

Sire is "Ferrari", B 07-6033147, winner of 1st/304 b. Châteauroux, 4th/1,554 b. Châteauroux and he descends from "Den Tom", grandson "Kaasboer 690/98" and 9th Nat. Ace Bird KBDB Middle Distance.



B 11-6331091 – Hen "Kaasboerin"

Sire is "Blauwe Van Avondt", B 09-2063268, grandsire to 306/2014 at Niels Broeckx'. She wins 3rd/16,892 b. Nat. Montluçon, 14th/25,710 b. Châteauroux and 14th/16,262 b. Guéret. Dam is "Lili", B 10-6031750, a daughter of the world-famous "Kaasboer". She is a descendant of "Kaasboer" when paired to "Greetje 1", the dam to "Olympia Gaston" at Uwe Berg's.



Further information

The pair B 11-6119060 X B 11-6119051 has already bred:

- 2nd/459 b. Noyon (230 km)
- 13th/423 b. Melun (340 km)
- 16th/499 b. Souppes (385 km)
- 22nd/499 b. Gien (430 km)
- 70th/1,777 b. Prov. Gien
- 32nd/1,004 b. Argenton (560 km)

OPTION 2

B 15-6048795 – Cock “Laura’s Topper”

Sire is “Brother Laura”, B 14-6072343. He descends from “Rony”, B 07-6033129 (son “Kaasboer 690/98”) when paired to “Geerinckx Hen”, B 08-6259169. “Laura” won the 1st National Bourges (17,061 b.).

Dam is “Toppertje”, B 14-6072416, a descendant of “Topper”, grandson “Kaasboer” and half-brother to “Palme d’Or” from Casaert-Sénéchal. “Palme d’Or” is dam to “Amalia” and “Nikolaas”, both 1st National Ace Bird Longer Middle Distance KBDB. The hen “Topper” was paired to was “Vera”, daughter “Kaasboer 690/98”.

‘LAURA’S TOPPER’

Original Gaston Van De Wouwer, Berlaar
 Father: “Brother Laura” 6072343-14
 Full Brother to “Laura”, winner of:
 1/17061 Nat Bourges
 Mother: “Toppertje” 6072416-14
 Granddaughter to worldfamous “Kaasboer”

♂ BE15-6048795
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B 15-6048790 – Hen “Tiarony”

Sire is “Rony’s Son”, B 14-6072460, a descendant of “Rony”, B 07-6033129 (son “Kaasboer 690/98”) and sire to “Laura”, 1st National Bourges (17,061 b.), when paired to “Denis” (granddaughter “Kaasboer”, sister to “Kim”, 1st National Guéret (14,245 b.) and 38th Nat. Argenton (23,900 b.).

Dam is “Tia’s Cheese”, B 14-6072391, and she descends from “Grandson Kaasboer” with “Sister Tia”, granddaughter of “Kaasboer”. “Tia” won the 2nd Nat. La Souterraine, 11th Nat. Guéret and 42nd Nat. Bourges.

‘TIARONY’

Original Gaston Van De Wouwer, Berlaar
 Father: “Rony’s Son” 6072460-14
 Grandson to “Kaasboer” 690/98 and halfbrother to
 “Laura”, winner of 1/17061 Nat Bourges
 Mother: “Tia’s Cheese” 6072391-14
 Mother is full sister to “Tia”,
 winner of 2. Nat La Souterraine, 11. Nat Gueret, 42. Nat Bourges

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B 11-6119053 – Hen “Kimmy Kaasboer”

Sire is “Benny”, B 10-6031772, brother “Kim”, 1st Nat. Guéret (14,245 b.) and 38th Nat. Argenton (23,900 b.). He descends from “Torre”, 240/03 (son “Kaasboer 690/98”) with “Célien”, dam to “Kim”.

Dam is “Granddaughter 231/03”, a descendant of “Brother Mirthe”, paired to “Brother Rambo” from Theo Yskout. “Mirthe” won 5th Prov. Salbris (1,337 b.), 18th Nat. Guéret (12,586 b.) and 25th Prov. Châteauroux (2,179 b.). “231/03” is a son of “Kaasboer 690/98”.

‘KIMMY KAASBOER’

Orig. Gaston Van De Wouwer, Berlaar
 Father: 6031772/2010 “Brother Kim”, Grandson “Kaasboer”
 “Kim” won: 1. National Gueret 14245 p
 38. National Argentes 23900 p
 87. National Bourges 57357 p
 4. Provincial Salbris 1080 p
 Mother: 6111536/2009 “Granddaughter 231/03”, Son “Kaasboer”
 wins herself 62. provincial Orleans 7510 p

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