

## Etienne Meirlaen, Sint-Martens-Latem (B), practically unbeatable in extreme long distance racing

You are a pigeon enthusiast but have you already been to Belgium, the cradle of pigeon racing, and more specifically Sint Martens Latem? Do you know where that small town is situated? I'll briefly tell you: It's only a few kilometres southwest of Ghent by the river Leie and definitely worth a visit. When strolling along the picturesque river Leie, you can see unspoilt nature on the one side and beautiful villas and their gardens on the other. Furthermore, you can also enjoy a very good meal there!



### A visit to Etienne Meirlaen

There are of course pigeon fanciers in Sint-Martens-Latem as well. I paid a visit to one of the very best long distance fanciers of today, Etienne Meirlaen. What I saw there, is very hard to put into words. I had already read many reports on him in numerous pigeon magazines. I remembered him as an ace fancier in extreme long distance racing. We had a meeting scheduled with Etienne at 9am but he wasn't home yet because he and his wife had taken the birds away for training. That

is why we were received by Aline De Rycke and as our conversation went on, we found out that she was the loft manager. I was quite surprised: a female loft manager! (I'm being a sexist now, sorry.) After I had seen how wonderful she was handling pigeons, I was and am still full of admiration. And above all, the birds were all in perfect condition.

After some time, Etienne arrived. What followed was a nice conversation in which he openly spoke about his career and life. Etienne is now 64 years old. He used to have his own highly successful

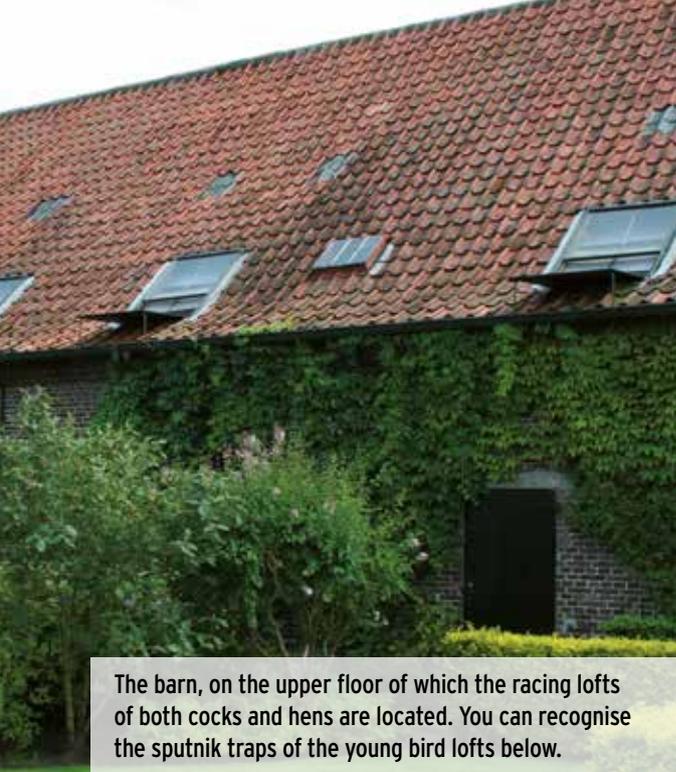
business in Sint-Martens-Latem as an installer. In the 1980s till the mid-1990s he competed in middle and longer middle distance racing, achieving many successes. Since running his own company was increasingly time-consuming, his pigeons of course gradually faded into the background. Fortunately, his wife Yvette lend him a hand in taking care of the pigeons. When Yvette was diagnosed with silicosis, Etienne decided to sell his entire family of birds and quit the sport. That was in the mid-1990s.

At the end of 1990s, Etienne bought an old farmstead on the edge of the town of Deurle, part of the municipality of Sint Martens-Latem. He renovated it so he could live there and could accommodate his horses. After some time, it came to his mind that the old barn was most fit for accommodating pigeons so he decided to turn it into a pigeon loft, which would be perfect to start his hobby again after his retirement. However, once a pigeon fancier always a pigeon fancier. Needless to say that it didn't take very long before the first pigeons arrived in Deurle.

Now Etienne has retired and his son Steven has taken over the family business.



Etienne Meirlaen and his wife Yvette



The barn, on the upper floor of which the racing lofts of both cocks and hens are located. You can recognise the sputnik traps of the young bird lofts below.



Some other racing lofts.

## The lofts

In 2000, Etienne and his wife Yvette moved from Sint-Martens-Latem to Deurle, where the former farmstead was now renovated and turned into a comfortable place to live. In that same year, the first pigeons moved to Deurle. The upper floor of the old barn, which is about 40 m long, had in the meantime been converted into a modern pigeon loft. That loft, however, has one big disadvantage: it is oriented towards the west. It had and still has to cope with west wind, which is often accompanied by rain. Furthermore, the sun could only heat up the lofts in the afternoon. It took Etienne several years to come up with a proper solution. Nowadays, there is nearly no draft when pigeons land on the landing board and a clever exhaust and ventilator system regulates air circulation. In addition, each loft section is only populated by a very limited number of birds. Etienne's young birds have found their accommodation on the barn's ground floor. In the big garden, the breeders have their own loft with many nest boxes at their disposal.

Pigeons were bought and raced with successfully, especially at the

extreme long distance. Huge successes were achieved instantly at national and international level. Etienne didn't think or dare dream he would be part of the very best extreme long distance fanciers at national and international level so quickly. He did, however, set one goal: To build up a family of birds which could compete with the cream of the crop at long and extreme long distance racing. He therefore contacted fanciers such as the Van Damme-Boddaert partnership (Oostkamp), Antoine Van Hove, Florizoone and Gyselbrecht, all of whom were famous for knowing a great deal about long distance racing. Later on, birds from Cor de Heyde (Made, Holland), Wijnant and Son (Maastricht, Holland) and Gommans, who had Theelen birds, came to reinforce the lofts in Deurle. After a short period of time, Etienne started to reap the benefits of his major investments. Not surprisingly because miracles do happen when you put first-class birds into the hands of an expert.

This is a list of Etienne's biggest achievements until his auction at the end of 2012:

1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2009

- 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008
- 1st General Champion Entente Belge - Belgische Verstandhouding 2011
- 1st "Golden Wing" 2006 in the Brugse Barcelonaclub
- 1st International Narbonne 13,779 birds 2011
- 1st International Perpignan 3,841 hens 2009
- 1st National Cahors 8,348 birds 2012
- 1st Euro-International San Sebastian 1,995 birds 2007
- 2nd International Tarbes 12,537 birds 2008
- 2nd International Perpignan 3,131 hens 2007
- 2nd National Champion Long Distance KBDB 2010
- 3rd Nation Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008

Which fancier can present such a list of honours in long or extreme long distance racing?

What to start with? His birds, his achievements or his Internet auction? Let's begin with the spectacular 2012 Internet sale. A few years have passed and Etienne Meirlaen is now, in 2016, again as successful as he was back then and as he ever was.



Etienne with his two female helpers Yvette and Aline

## The big auction in 2012

At the end of 2012 Etienne Meirlaen sold all his breeders and racers older than three (years) through PIPA on the Internet. It was a massive success with a total revenue of 1,159,700 euros, making Etienne Meirlaen's family of birds the most expensive extreme long distance loft ever. Two pairs were up for

offer "in bis", meaning the buyer who eventually won the bidding of a single pair could only choose one of the two birds and the other would return to the fancier. The first pair consisted of a cock named "Monar" and a hen named "Yelena". It didn't take long before the bidding exceeded 100,000 euros, leaving eight people still interested in buying one of the birds. In the

end, Great Wall (China) bid the most with 126,200 euros. He chose "Monar" and Etienne got to keep his ace hen BE06-4288297 "Yelena", the stock dam of his loft. The second pair which was up for auction "in bis" consisted of two cocks, "Montali" and "Montauban", the (at the time) best Montauban birds in Belgium in the last two and three years respectively. The highest bid was 45,200 euros and it was BE08 4298110 "Montali" which was to stay with Etienne in Deurle. In total, 252 pigeons were sold at an average price of 4,602 euros. Selling all of birds which were three years or older of course meant a severe loss for Etienne in terms of racing pigeons at a high level. His entire breeding stock was now scattered all across the world. They were all pigeons with whom Etienne had gained worldwide recognition, including national and international aces. However, Etienne knew what he was doing and had taken precautions.



A view into one of the widewood lofts.



Beautiful trophies.

## How did the story continue?

Both the breeding and racing loft were more or less empty. However, Etienne still had “Yelena” and “Montali”, two proven breeders of which he knew that they could produce well-performing offspring. Furthermore, Etienne had also bred one last round of youngsters from all his first-class birds, meaning he had direct descendants of both national ace birds and (early) prize winners such as Cor, Perpignan-Lady, Fenomeen, Monar, Montauban, Marseille, Brother Marseille 612, Starlight, Monty and many others.

Be that as it may, Etienne still had to start from scratch in some way. The most important thing was to build a new breeding family and put together a new long distance racing team. The young birds which stayed in Deurle were of course at the heart of the new team.

Etienne started the 2013 season with that quite young team which only had limited experience in extreme long distance racing. An experienced long distance champion like Etienne knows his breed and racing birds inside out, however, and in 2013 he already succeeded in becoming the 13th National Champion Long Distance Old Birds in Belgium. He finished thirteenth thanks to the following prizes:

That was clear proof of the superior quality of the Meirlaen birds.

There is more, however. Etienne won seventeen top 100 prizes in national and international races. The ten best prizes:

- 5th International Agen/Bordeaux  
3,113 hens
- 8th National Agen/Bordeaux  
5,283 yearlings
- 19th International Agen/Bordeaux  
10,579 yearlings
- 25th International Agen/Bordeaux  
3,113 hens
- 27th International Perpignan  
3,049 hens
- 31st International Marseille  
1,913 hens
- 44th National Agen/Bordeaux  
5,283 yearlings
- 44th National Orange  
3,874 old birds
- 46th International Agen/Bordeaux  
3,113 hens
- 63rd National Brive  
8,331 old birds

Date	Race	No. of birds	1st nominated	2nd nominated
01/06	Limoges	Nat. 14,271	871st	2,268th
08/06	Montélimar	Nat. 5,952	373rd	372nd
29/06	Orange	Prov. 395	69th	4th
13/07	Brive	Nat. 8,331	330th	63rd



'Yelena', B 06-4288297, unique breeding hen! Dam to 1st/12,605 p. Internat. Narbonne, 4th/9,091 p. Nat. Montauban, 5th/6,654 p. Nat. Montauban, 7th/5,935 p. Nat. Montauban, 10th/6,822 p. Nat. Montauban. She has the very rare LDHA A/A genotype.

Etienne was well on his way of performing at the same high level as before his auction. In the next year, he did even better.

### A great triumph: 1st and 2nd National Pau 2014

Etienne didn't have to wait long for new successes. One year later, in 2014, his long distance aces won the 1st and 2nd National Pau of 1,910 birds. It was a very tough race held in the most honest weather conditions for a pigeon race: a blue sky and a strong headwind blowing from the north to northeast. The first pigeon, B10-4284665 "Marco", was clocked at 9.41.19pm after a race of 904.759 km, achieving an average velocity of 1,009.42 mpm. Three minutes later, Etienne's second bird arrived. It was B10 4284644 "Cor-As" with an average speed of 1,005.51 mpm. Later in the evening, those two birds were declared the first two birds in all of Belgium. At international level, "Marco" and "Cor-As" finished

sixth and eighth, with Etienne winning three prizes out of four birds. 2014 was a fantastic year for Etienne. He excelled, dominated and won, all three of which are the qualities the Meirlaen breed is known for. That was once more

proven in 2014. Despite the "severe loss" he suffered in 2012, Etienne not only managed to triumph in the Pau race and win the 1st Provincial from Agen in 2014, he also succeeded in ranking three birds in the national ace bird championships and winning the title of 3rd National Champion Long Distance. Let it be clear that 2014 was once again a productive year for Etienne.

### Ace birds come from ace birds

It has been and is still being said over and over again: Ace birds come from ace birds. It sounds too easy but it isn't because true ace birds are not thickly sown at all. Who has several such pigeons? Etienne. Even before his big auction he already possessed several first-class birds. He had had the possibility of pairing aces to aces for years on end. Top-quality pigeons which had proven their worth at both national and international level.

If you have such first-class birds at your disposal like Etienne has, it isn't that hard to achieve results such as Etienne's in the 2014 season. We will list them one last time



'Montali', B 08-4298110, son 'Yelena', B 06-4288297, and winner of 4th Nat. Montauban (9,091 p.) and 12th Nat. Montauban (6,654 p.).



'Monar', B 08-4298283, (= son 'Yelena') and winner of 1st Internat. Narbonne (12,605 p.) and 13th Internat. Narbonne (13,355 p.).

for you:

- 1st and 2nd National Pau 2014
- 1st Provincial and 3rd National Agen yearlings 2014
- 3rd National Champion Long Distance Old Birds KBDB 2014
- 4th National Ace Bird Long Distance Yearlings KBDB 2014
- 6th National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance Yearlings KBDB 2014
- 9th National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance Yearlings KBDB 2014

### The incredible hen B 06-4288297 "Yelena"

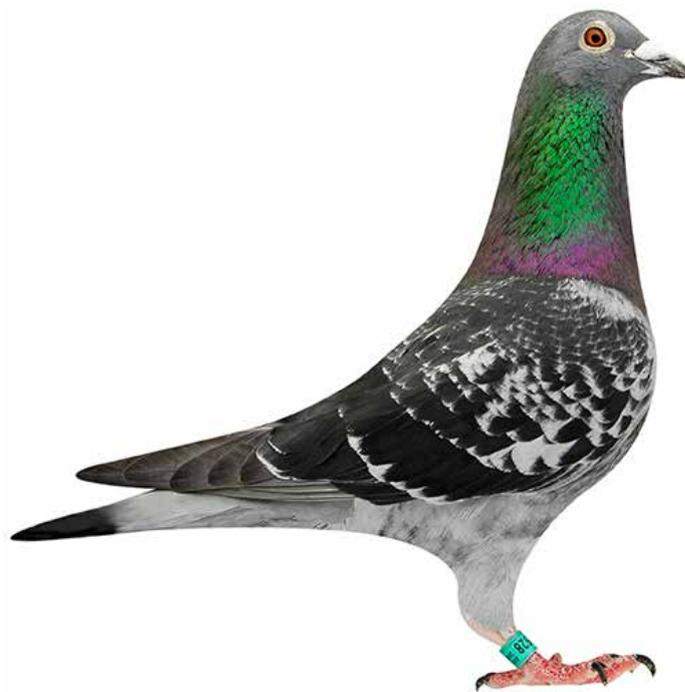
The impact of "Yelena" on the current breed and the racing performances of her offspring is just extraordinary. She is now probably the best breeding hen in the world for long and extreme long distance racing. Her bloodline is woven into Etienne Meirlaen's strain like no other. She is a true gold nugget, a guarantee of success. In 2016 she produced six squeakers. I was allowed to take "Yelena" in the hand and was stunned into speechlessness because never in my lifelong

career as a pigeon fancier had I held such a high-quality hen. She was in excellent physical condition, her plumage was very sleek. I have to say that I have never seen a hen with such excellent plumage quality

and I have already held numerous ace birds as well as national and international winners. That hen is unique. However, it wasn't just its plumage which impressed me. Its overall build, eye, wing, muscular system and upper arm bone, every single aspect of the pigeon was perfect. And above all, the hen was ten years old! She is of course more than well looked after. The famous Piet de Weerd would have had a blast if he had tested his theory on the hen.

"Yelena" is the dam of several birds including:

- 1st International Narbonne 2011  
12,605 birds
- 1st National Narbonne 2011  
6,428 birds
- 4th National Montauban 2011  
9,091 birds
- 5th National Montauban 2010  
6,654 birds
- 7th National Montauban 2014  
5,935 birds
- 10th National Montauban 2012  
6,822 birds
- 11th National Narbonne 2010  
6,330 birds
- 12th National Montauban 2010  
6,654 birds



'Cor', B 05-4344528, 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008 (3rd/7,752 p. Nat. Perpignan, 4th/17,463 p. Internat. Perpignan, 25th/11,484 p. Nat. Barcelona and 71st/23,695 p. Internat. Barcelona).



'Perpignan Lady', B 05-4344670, 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2009 (7th/5,547 p. Nat. Perpignan, 15th/15,087 p. Internat. Perpignan, 6th/3,586 p. Nat. Marseille, 1st/3,841 hens Internat. Perpignan, 6th/7,478 p. Nat. Perpignan, 7th/18,354 p. Internat. Perpignan).

- 13th International Narbonne 2010  
13,335 birds
- 14th National Agen/Bordeaux 2014  
3,180 yearlings
- 46th International Agen/Bordeaux  
8,845 yearlings
- 52nd National Montauban 2011  
9,091 birds
- 70th National Limoges 2009  
7,586 yearlings
- 73rd National Montauban 2011  
9,091 birds
- 83rd National Cahors 2012  
8,348 birds
- 96th National Poitiers  
14,094 birds

- "Yelena" is also granddam to:
- 3rd National Agen 2014  
3,180 yearlings
  - 11th International Agen 2014  
8,845 yearlings
  - 13th National Narbonne 2014  
2,835 yearlings
  - 34th International Narbonne 2014  
8,360 yearlings
  - 81st National Narbonne 2014  
2,835 yearlings
  - 92nd National Narbonne 2014  
2,835 yearlings

The sire of "Yelena" is the super breeder B 03-4343129 "Topstar" and her dam is B 04-4391386 "Marathon Lady".

### They can endure many things

It is clear that the Meirlaen birds have great stamina and aren't that easy thrown off their balance. Needless to say Etienne's motto is breeding and selecting birds which can successfully adapt to our changing Western European climate. You won't win anything nowadays if you have birds which only perform well in sunny weather but are nowhere to be found when it's cloudy or raining. Especially at the long and extreme long distance, no successes will be achieved. It isn't the case that Etienne Meirlaen rashly handles his birds. On the contrary, because he expects his pigeons to perform at their best in all weather conditions. They are selected on that basis and it didn't do Etienne any harm. Thanks to that selection process, Etienne is ready

for the future. His phenomenal long distance results repeatedly point out that Etienne Meirlaen is one of the very best.

### 2015 was a productive year as well

2015 brought Etienne new highlights. He won nine first prizes in long distance racing and 28 top 100 prizes in the national and international races. His best results are:

- 3rd National St Vincent  
3,037 birds
- 5th National Jarnac  
3,879 old birds
- 6th National Agen  
3,524 birds
- 7th International Agen  
6,042 birds
- 8th National Jarnac  
4,559 yearlings

Etienne was ranked at the top of several championships in 2015:

- 1st Champion Long Distance Old B.  
Long Distance Club Eeklo 2015
- 1st Ace Bird Long Distance Old B.  
Long Distance Club Eeklo 2015
- 2nd General Champion Belgische  
Verstandhouding 2015
- 2nd Champion Long Distance  
Cureghem Centre 2015  
etc.

The son of "Yelena", B 08-4298110 "Montali", proved another natural talent in the breeding loft. As mentioned before, "Montali" was also offered "in bis" in Etienne's big sale. Fortunately, Etienne could keep him. He performed tremendously in 2009, 2010 and 2011. His best prizes are 4th National Montauban 2011 of 9,091 birds and 12th National Montauban 2010. He is also sire to the 3rd National Agen 2014 in the yearling category.

### The 2016 season

The Meirlaen birds caused a stir in 2016 as well. The yearling hen B 15-4240121 won the 1st Provincial from

Agen of 771 yearlings. At national level, she finished sixth of 3,085 birds. Her sire is none other than "Montali" while her dam is the super breeding hen B 11-4312938 "Daughter Ace Pair", which comes from two national ace birds KBDB, B-05-4344528 Cor (1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008) and B 05-4344670 "Perpignan Lady" (1st Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2009). After having won the 1st and 2nd National from Pau in 2014, Etienne again excelled in the Pau race with the 1st Provincial. At national level against 1,661 old birds, he scored the following prizes with eight pigeons sent in: 11, 19, 142, 353 and 407. 3,427 old birds were basketed in Etienne's province for the Limoges race. Etienne won the following prizes at provincial level: 32, 60, 63, 75, 91, 101, 107, 146, 164, 170, 178, 178, etc. In total, 24 birds won a prize in the first ten per cent of the provincial result with Etienne scoring 34 prizes out of 58 birds. At

national level, the Meirlaen team even performed better with 25 prizes in the first ten per cent of the result and 39 prizes in total (in the first 25 per cent, which is always the case for national races).

Etienne can once again look back on a memorable season. However, not all results are known at this time of writing.

### This and that

The foundation of Etienne's loft, which dates back to 2010, was in the course of the years reinforced with new pigeons which were crossed in. Etienne is always looking for top-quality breeders, which he always finds and manages to successfully introduce so new aces are produced afterwards. You have read about the incredible hen "Yelena" and her son "Montali" but numerous other pigeons such as "Marathon Lady", "Perpignan Lady" and "Cor" have contributed to Etienne's success story. I can only

repeat myself: The lofts in Deurle are populated with pigeons which make a pigeon fancier's heart skip a beat or, depending on the person, make him turn pale with envy.

Etienne starts the season with winter breeding. His old and experienced cocks participate in three extreme long distance races, his hens in two.

To conclude we also wish to praise Etienne's helpers because without them, it would not be possible for a man like Etienne to achieve such excellent results. Etienne is lent a hand by his wife Yvette, who does the loft's bookkeeping, Aline De Rycke, whom we already mentioned in the beginning of this article, and Aline's husband Michel Heggerick, who looks after the lofts and farmstead.

Etienne, we have seen and heard a great deal. Thank you very much for that and all the best for the future.

*Dirk Zoland*



'Marco', B 10-4284665, 1st Nat. Pau (1,910 p.) and 7th Internat. Pau (8,295 p.).

# Elite of Natural: Etienne Meirlaen

We bought an entire round of 70 birds from Etienne Meirlaen, the master of long distance and extreme long distance racing. We present to you two cocks which were each paired to two hens. You can buy or order youngsters from those pairings.

## PAIR 1

### B 15-4254788 – Cock “All The best in One”

Etienne Meirlaen’s best birds are mixed in this one bird.

Sire is “Montali”, B 08-4298110, son of “Yelena”, B 06-4288297 and winner of a 4th Nat. Montauban (9,091 b.) and 12th Nat. Montauban (6,654 b.). He is also sire to the 3rd Nat. Agen (3,180 b.) and 11th Internat. Agen (8,845 b.).

Dam is “Cor-Perpignan Lady”, B 10-4284734, daughter of “Cor”, B 05-4344528, 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008 (3rd/7,752 b. Nat. Perpignan, 4th/17,463 b. Internat. Perpignan, 25th/11,484 b. Nat. Barcelona and 71st/23,695 b. Internat. Barcelona), x “Perpignan Lady”, B 05-4344670, 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2009 (7th/5,547 b. Nat. Perpignan, 15th/15,087 b. Internat. Perpignan, 6th/3,586 b. Nat. Marseille, 1st/3,841 hens Internat. Perpignan, 6th/7,478 b. Nat. Perpignan, 7th/18,354 b. Internat. Perpignan).

### B 15-4254786 – Hen “Yelena’s Beauty”

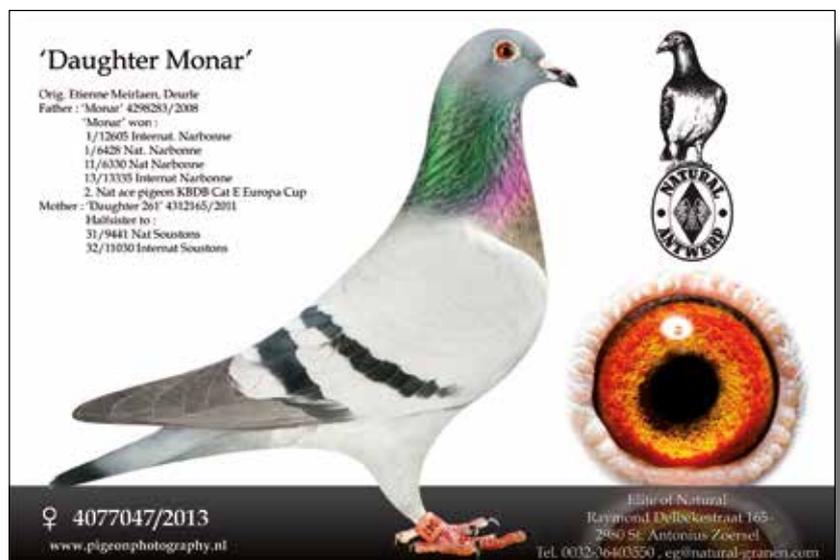
Sire is “Superbreeder”, B 11-4312214, sire to the 11th Nat. Pau 2016 and son of “Monar”, B 08-4298283 (= son “Yelena”), 1st Internat. Narbonne (12,605 b.) and 13th Internat. Narbonne (13,355 b.), x “Half-sister Yelena”, B 10-4284777.

Dam is “Yelena”, B 06-4288297, an incomparable breeding hen! Dam to the 1st/12,605 b. Internat. Narbonne, 4th/9,091 b. Nat. Montauban, 5th/6,654 b. Nat. Montauban, 7th/5,935 b. Nat. Montauban, 10th/6,822 b. Nat. Montauban. She has the extremely rare genotype LDHA A/A.

### B 13-4077047 – Hen “Monar’s Pride”

Sire is “Monar”, B 08-4298283, (= son “Yelena”) and winner of the 1st Internat. Narbonne (12,605 b.) and 13th Internat. Narbonne (13,355 b.).

Dam is “Daughter 261”, B 11-4312165, half-sister of the 32nd Internat. Soustons (11,030 b.). She descends from “Brother Marseille 261”, B 08-4298261 when paired to “Charm”, sister of “Cor”, 1st National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB 2008.



## PAIR 2

### B 15-4254763 – Cock “Super Marco”

Sire is “Marco”, B 10-4284665, 1st Nat. Pau (1,910 b.) and 7th Internat. Pau (8,295 b.). He is a nephew of ace hen “Yelena” and a descendant of “Brother Luka”, winner of the 30th Nat. Biarritz, and “Sister Marathon Lady”. “Marathon Lady” is the dam to “Yelena” and won the 12th Nat. St Vincent (10,020 b.), 25th Nat. Perpignan (3,796 b.) and 34th Nat. Perpignan (4,666 b.).

Dam is “Daughter Monar”, B 11-4312194, daughter of “Monar”, son of “Yelena” and winner of the 1st Internat. Narbonne (12,605 b.), when paired to “Sister Yelena”.

### B 15-4254721 – Hen “Sweety Monar”

Sire is “Son Monar”, B 11-4312916. “Monar” won the 1st Internat. Narbonne (12,605 b.) and 13th Internat. Narbonne (13,335 b.), when paired to “Sweet Caroline”, sister of “Perpignan Lady”. She won the 7th/18,354 b. Internat. Perpignan, 15th/15,087 b. Internat. Perpignan, 27th/11,833 b. Internat. Marseille. Dam is “Half-sister Fenomeen”, B 11-4278390. Her sire is “612 Brother Marseille”, half-brother of “Monar” and himself sire to the 9th/7,347 b. Nat. Cahors, 10th/17,456 b. Nat. Brive, 15th/8,651 b. Nat. Cahors, 19th/6,822 b. Nat. Montauban, when paired to “Ace Hen”, 3rd National Ace Bird Extreme Long Distance KBDB with the 44th/11,484 b. Nat. Barcelona and 54th/7,603 b. Nat. Perpignan.

### B 15-4254652 – Hen “Super Yelena”

Sire is “Son Yelena”, B 12-4278197. He descends from “Super National Marseille”, 1st Olympiad Bird Continental Cup Extreme Long Distance Budapest, x “Yelena”, an incomparable breeding hen.

Dam is “Granddaughter Yelena”, B 12-4288015, from “Montauban”, 5th/6,654 b. Nat. Montauban, 10th/6,822 b. Nat. Montauban, 73rd/9,091 b. Nat. Montauban. He is a son of “Yelena”.

