

David Hales of Hockley

The Evolution of a System and the Continuing Success Story

David Hales, ably assisted in recent years by his good friend Duncan Goodchild enjoyed a long run of success at the highest level over many years. This remarkable level of consistency, in possibly the most difficult competition open to pigeon fanciers and their birds, International racing, has continued up to the present day as can be seen by the list of top finishes in 2019 International races with the BICC listed later in this report. Unfortunately David passed away in March 2019 and yet the loft, under the management of Duncan Goodchild, has continued to produce top class results with the BICC in International races.



The late David Hales (L) with Duncan Goodchild.



Duncan, 1st Open BICC Marseille.

The following article is based largely on a report I completed on the Hales set up following a visit a couple of years back. I hope it will be of interest to those fanciers who aspire to compete in International races.

In the Beginning

Having more than held his own, firstly at north road racing, winning the Fed old bird average with six cocks and the Fed young bird average more than ten times, including five years in a row, and winning 27 young bird races on the trot in one club plus a Combine win and numerous Open race wins, David decided to concentrate more on south road racing. This literal change of direction culminated in David winning 1st Open NFC Sartilly, 2 x 1st BICC Falaise etc in recent seasons. However, the lure of long distance success has proved too much, and in the past few seasons David has focused all his efforts on success at the extreme distance competing with the BICC on the International stage.

The 2013 old bird season saw the Hales team notch up an impressive series of performances in International races which lead to David winning the Europa Cup with the BICC with the best average in all International races. These performances were: Pau International, 9th (63rd Open International), 23rd and 27th Open; Agen, 71st Open; Barcelona, 3rd and 14th Open; St Vincent, 32nd Open; Marseille, 1st, 8th and 13th Open; Perpignan, 46th and 53rd Open. These performances were achieved by a team of pigeons racing to one of the most impressive lofts I have visited in over 40 years of writing.

The Loft

This is a really imposing structure set alongside a huge lawned area. The loft is at least 100 foot long and is divided into numerous sections with an internal walkway fronting the whole set up. Self built by David, it was light and airy with excellent ventilation and has been set up so that David and Duncan are able to race cocks and hens on widowhood, roundabout etc and young birds on the darkness system. Although the loft is extensive I would guess that there were less than 100 pigeons housed in a loft that could comfortably house many times that number. An example of this was the fact that in some sections that were capable of housing 16 cocks there were only two cocks present and other sections with the same capacity that housed perhaps five cocks. There is certainly no overcrowding here.



Comfort Zone, 1st Open BICC Marseille International.

The sections that housed the hens were quite innovative as the hens perched on 4 x 3 blocks in tiers of five or six and their droppings were deposited through a sloping doweled aperture onto the floor of a corridor that backed onto the hens section (see photograph). This corridor had a perspex front allowing the sun to shine onto the corridor floor, thus drying the droppings which could then be simply swept up, an innovative labour saving aid to loft hygiene.

The Bloodlines

When David decided on his transition from sprint/middle distance Fed and National racing to International extreme distance racing he soon realised that he needed a different kind of pigeon to handle this type of racing. Two fanciers that sprung to mind who raced pigeons of this calibre were Jim Biss and David's good friend Alan Parker. These two outstanding fanciers had a habit of getting repeat performances from 700 miles. This was just what David was looking for, as he firmly believed that the pigeons' origins, bred from generations of performers from the distance is of the utmost importance.

As David openly admitted to me, the transition from club, Fed and National racing to International racing was not easy, as he sometimes felt that he was stumbling around in the wilderness. In the early days it was a struggle to get birds home, let alone be competitive. The step up from club, Fed and National racing to International racing is quite considerable but the rewards of success at the top level are obviously sweeter. David got his first taste of success from Dax in 2005 winning the BICC from 550 miles with a little blue chequer hen of Biss bloodlines, but as he says, if he thought he had cracked it he was to be proved wrong once again!

So to the present day, and some of the stars of the loft during the 2018 season.

A blue cock now named Perpignan King has proved to be an outstanding long distance racer and is a direct son of the loft's great racer/breeder Tubby. The King has won 13th, 7th and 3rd Open BICC Perpignan in the last three seasons.

Next we have chequer hen Dave's Diamond, this 2y widowhood hen won 63rd Open NFC Tarbes as a yearling and in the 2018 old bird season, finished at 2nd Section, 4th Open BICC Narbonne, plus 33rd Open BICC Pau International. Once again her breeding is impeccable as her sire was purchased from the House of Aarden and is a direct son of De Cas whilst her dam is a granddaughter of 1st Open BICC Barcelona and contains the bloodlines of the Louella Hen, one of the

loft's top stock hens responsible for a number of good long distance racers.

Then we have another star of the loft named Dave's Diva, this red hen is a daughter of Comfort Zone, a winner of 1st and 9th Open Marseille, 21st and 70th Open Pau. She is also a granddaughter of the great racer/breeder Tubby, winner of 3rd and 9th Open Marseille, 7th and 9th Open Pau, 37th Open Tarbes, so bred in the purple from performance pigeons at the distance and in International competition. Dave's Diva was 25th Open BBC Bordeaux as yearling at 467 miles and this year she has been placed at 1st ES, 4th Open Agen, then 5th ES, 8th Open Narbonne.

Management

At this point I think I'll let Duncan Goodchild explain their methods in preparing pigeons for the extreme distance.

I hope that the following will give you a brief insight into how we prepared our birds to achieve our success in long distance International races over the past few seasons. Since 2003, excluding 2005, the young birds have received very little racing, plenty of training down to the coast 70 miles, but no importance is put on racing with maybe the odd race for experience.

The 2007 youngsters were just trained, the cocks as yearlings were raced to the coast, 130 miles, with four going to Tours, 292 miles but the hens were sent to three or four races then had two BICC Channel races, Alençon and Saran and were prepared for the London & South East Classic Club Bergerac race, 470 miles. To be honest I could have given these hens a bit more work but from 12 sent, 10 returned with three on the day on a reasonably hard day. This seemed to prove that the blood was there. In fact my first bird in this race had no training as a young bird and was still carrying nest flights. Perhaps there is a tip there to all new starters trying to build a team, train young birds hard but they don't all have to be raced?

Over the past few years the cocks have been treated a lot more lightly not being asked to work hard until they are 3ys then they are expected to fly at least one International and two 550 mile plus races in the same season. The cocks were treated for Cocco and Canker along with Ivermectin for the lice and worms before pairing. The birds were not treated again until racing was over.

For the 2008 season the birds were mated in March and then David went on holiday, and a family friend looked after the birds whilst he was away. The birds were allowed to rear a single youngster with the hens

The Legacy of D Hales of Hockley ~ Raced by D. Goodchild

'Dave's Diva'

Bordeaux 2017-21st Open BICC 467 miles
Agen 2018-1st Sec 4th Open BICC 576 miles
1st 7th International 1200 miles
2nd 9th International 1200 miles
Narbonne 2018-2nd Sec 5th Open BICC 585 miles
Agen 2018-4th Sec 5th Open BICC 590 miles
2008 year 1200 miles
1st 7th International 1200 miles
Perpignan 2018-4th Sec 4th Open BICC 108 miles
2008 International 1270 miles
10th International 1200 miles
2008 best hen over 2 International 2019
Menthorque Performance Award
Best UK bird over 2 years
19th Open BICC Alençon 2018
This hen has only flown in 6 International

GB16N59409

'Tubby's Boy'

1st Open BICC Marseille 2018
9th Open BICC Pau 2018

GB15N77349

'Dave's Mirfar'

2nd Open BICC Perpignan 2019
15th Open BICC Alençon 2018

GB17E23294

'Eadkyn's Surprise'

11th Open BICC Barcelona 2019
10th Open Barcelona 2018

GB16N59428

'Young Rhys'

8th Open BICC Narbonne 2018

GB17E23307

Montage by Chris Sutton

taken away when the youngsters were 10 days old and the training for the cocks commenced out to 40 miles before the racing season started. The early club races were used to bring on the team's fitness until the Channel racing began. After that very little club racing was done. The older cocks were raced out to Tours with both the L&SECC and the BICC in preparation for the Tarbes races with both the NFC and London & SECC. These races I feel, give the birds the desired 'time on the wing' in preparation for the International racing later in the season. To be totally honest the early season form was at best very average, due to the late pairing, and the type of birds housed. From the previous year's experience it was thought that the birds would come good for the main races, the Internationals. Once the Tarbes races were flown the cocks were given open hole to come and go as they pleased and finally they started to move with some freedom and aggression. The open hole was supplemented with a trip to Brighton every weekend right up until basking.

That was then, this is now. At this point we come to what I would describe as the 'evolution of an already successful system and I'll let Duncan describe the subtle changes that have been brought into place since the 2018 season's challenge on the International stage.

In Autumn 2017 I was still particularly disappointed with our Pau results for the last two seasons, decent enough returns but not near enough to the front of the results. I studied the International fliers thinking 'when in Rome etc, etc, eventually selecting three top fanciers to contact. The first said yes, later the second said yes as well so I didn't bother with the third. The fanciers who gave me the reply I was after were the van Ouwkerk Dekkers family, Jac, Irene and Vincent with whom the wife and I have become very good friends. They live in Brasschaat near Antwerp. Jackie my wife and I spent a weekend with them earlier in the year.

These guys opened my eyes as to what is required and although they fly a big team the returns are outstanding. Jac has developed a very tough team of birds and pushes the birds hard with only the strongest making the grade. Check their Pau returns for the last two years, not many matched them! We own a few pairs from their best birds to try against our own, watch this space or not as the case maybe?

Consequently getting the health right has become a priority because without this you are going nowhere! With this and of course very honest pigeons plus a little luck you have half a chance.

The basic feed now is super diet, almost everything gets this, as the distance increases, in comes Gerry Plus and then the heavier Versele-Laga mixtures but always with a little barley to keep them honest. Fats are added to the last five or six feeds for the 500 mile plus races. We are also asking our yearlings more questions now even if they are not raced as youngsters which some are not. We like them to have a few days in the basket and an all day fly using the BBC Bordeaux race or NFC Tarbes, even some of the Internationals as this year. We need to find the good ones as quickly as possible (due to our health issues) as it saves less heartache further down the line. The two hens that went to Tarbes as yearlings last year have this year been 4th Narbonne and 33rd Pau, the other was 13th Barcelona.

A little story about marking for the BBC Bordeaux race this year. The guy marking our birds asked if I knew what I was doing as we had sent 16 with 14 being yearlings. We had seven home on the day six being yearlings and 10 yearlings have made it home so far.

Always learning always willing to learn is the watchword here. The proof of the pudding is in the eating they say and you certainly can't argue with this year's results in long distance races.



Duncan Hales' Barcelona cock, Jake (see text) four times Barcelona.

The System

The cocks are flown on a type of widowhood/celibate love of home method, allowed into one half of their boxes with the bowl left in the other side, sometimes I let them into the bowl and occasionally during the season they got to see their hens, but always when they return from the big races. Some hens are also flown on the widowhood system plus a few on natural. The two hens clocked from Perpignan in 2019 winning 2nd and 4th Open BICC at 631 miles were in fact sent feeding five day old young birds.

Feeding

Feeding for racing was mainly Gerry Plus with some maple peas, peanuts and Hormoform added. However, some changes were introduced in 2018 as outlined earlier. All food is hopper fed with food in front of the birds most of the day. A little fresh grit is given daily along with minerals as David feels they need them. Once racing finishes the feed changes to the best farm food available including, wheat, barley, maize, beans, peas, groats and plenty of it.

At this time, late September, the birds are happily paired and on open hole. Rearing a single youngster from the season's top performers, they will remain paired until around Christmas before being split. Once split they will go onto a lighter diet before the pairing preparation begins once again for the following season.

As you can see there are no hard and fast rules at the Hales' establishment. The partners prefer to pair and rear from the cocks after racing has finished and not pair the next year. This way the cocks seem to take longer to come into top condition without being forced although they seem to last the whole season possibly better. The thought is that you seem to get earlier form when you pair and rear in say March and although the Internationals start early, it's a long time to keep decent form between Pau in June and Perpignan in early August. However, using this method, the fancier gets the chance to try youngsters from the better proven long distance racers at the end of each season.

The Birds

During my visit I handled a number of top class long distance racers including possibly the 'star' of the loft, a long cast blue called Tubby. This long distance slogger has 3rd Open BICC Marseille (670th Open International), 8th Open BICC Marseille, 637 miles plus 7th and 9th Open BICC Pau International including 110th Open International overall, being clocked twice on the day at Pau. Tubby was bred from an Alan Parker hen when paired to a cock obtained from Fauch Brothers. Tubby's brother, another long cast blue cock, has won 1st and 74th Open BICC Perpignan and in the year that he won the Perpignan race he had already flown Tarbes twice beforehand.

Amongst the photos that accompany this report is one of a pigeon called Jake, that flew Barcelona, 709 miles in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. He proved to be a lovely shallow keeled and long cast dark chequer with silky feathering. Jake's pedigree shows a strong influence of Bruggemann Brothers' Orhan, Myra, Sutra and Tycha lines crossed with Jan Theelen's Rode Rene lines. Bred in 2009, Jake flew Guernsey and Falaise as a youngster then Tarbes BICC as a yearling, he was eighth bird to the loft and could have been in the top 50 of the result if clocked but David used a junior clock which already had six birds with two rubbers in so it was full. He went to NFC Tarbes in 2011 and came home steady but not in the clock. In 2012 he was not paired before racing and had a couple of inland races, plus a couple of Channel races the final one being 292 miles Tours with the BICC. He was then flown at home and trained to Brighton a couple of times. Sent to Barcelona for his first

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David Hales' Tubby, a Merit Award winner with the BICC.

attempt at 700 miles he ended up 4th Open BICC. He recovered so well he was sent back to Perpignan, 617 miles a month or so later where he was again first bird to the loft being 45th Open BICC.

In 2013 he was paired early March and reared a single youngster. He had two inland races then two short Channel races with the BICC and EECC. He was not raced for three weeks prior to the Barcelona race but flown and trained a few times. The cock had taken a slight knock to his keel in the build up and David had seriously thought about leaving him at home but his condition and health saw him off to Barcelona for the second year running. It was a very tough race but Jake showed his quality again being second bird to the loft finishing 14th Open BICC. Because of the toughness of the race and his previous knock David decided that was enough for the season.

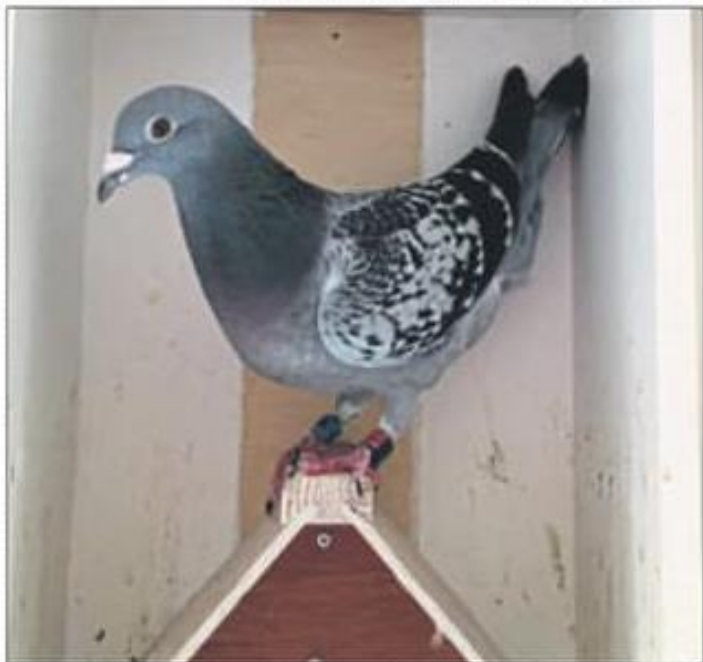
The 2013 1st Open BICC Marseille winner proved to be a terrific, medium-sized pencil blue cock of Biss x Alan Parker bloodlines. Dave ended up not only winning Marseille but also the two bird average along with the best average Pau and Barcelona and as mentioned above, also winning the Europa trophy for the best average Pau, Barcelona, Marseille and Perpignan.

All birds handled during our visit as you would expect with fanciers of David and Duncan's calibre, were in excellent condition.

And so to recent times and listed below are the loft's results during the 2016/17/18 seasons. **2016:** 13th and 16th Open BICC Perpignan; 9th and 14th Open BICC Marseille; 21st and 25th Open BICC Pau. **2017:** 42nd, 44th and 47th Open BICC Alençon (5,649 birds); 4th and 5th EECC Fontenay; 6th EECC Fontenay; 8th EECC Fontenay; 84th, 99th, 109th, 120th, 138th, 141st and 166th Open BICC Mont de Marsan; 63rd, 124th and 153rd Open NFC Tarbes; 15th Open BICC Barcelona; 5th, 25th and 60th Open BBC Bordeaux; 7th Open BICC Perpignan.

Now we come to the **2018** old bird season, one that Duncan rates as one of their best ever: 8th, 33rd, 36th, 74th and 87th Open BICC Pau International 575 miles, all on winning day; 4th, 8th, 40th and 60th Open BICC Agen 534 miles; 13th and 14th Open BICC Barcelona, 707 miles; 18th Open BICC St Vincent, 558 miles with the longest flying yearling in the result; 4th and 8th Open BICC Narbonne, 595 miles; 3rd and 10th Open BICC Perpignan, 631 miles. I'm sure all who read this will agree that this is an extremely impressive set of results in distance racing.

Here are the main results for the **2019** old bird season and under Duncan's management the success story has continued unabated. Minor positions were attained over the channel in the clubs used for education, also winning the 2B Average at Perpignan with the BICC; 3rd in S G Biss Points Cup behind Mark Gilbert and Geoff & Clayton Preece, having missed the St Vincent International. The loft had the 322nd best International hen over two races in the whole of Europe and 1,616th best overall ranking all International races with a nominated bird. With the BICC in 2019 the birds took the following positions: 8th and 18th Open BICC Alençon (4,658 birds); 42nd, 45th and 50th Open BICC Pau International, 575 miles; 6th Open BICC Agen International 534 miles; 11th and 30th Open BICC Barcelona International, 707 miles; 2nd and



Dave's Diamond, 2nd Sect, 4th Open BICC, 3rd Open BICC Pau 2018 and 63rd Open NFC Tarbes as a yearling.

13th Open BICC Marseille International, 615 miles; 16th Open BICC Le Mans, 249 miles (2,693 birds); 8th, 13th, 15th and 30th Open BICC Narbonne International, 595 miles; 2nd, 4th, 17th, 24th and 33rd Open BICC Perpignan International, 631 miles. The most birds sent to any race was ten birds to each International race. As Duncan modestly admits, 'I'm still pushing to get to the next level which won't be so easy without having the support of 'the boss' to drive me on'.

These results are the outcome of skill, hard work and perseverance over adversity. Good luck for the future Duncan. You certainly deserve it. Finally, my thanks to Chris Sutton for supplying the pigeon portraits that accompany this article.

GARETH WATKINS



Perpignan King, 13th, 7th and 3rd Open BICC Perpignan in last three years winning Certificate of Merit.



The late David Hales and Duncan Goodchild.