

THE HISTORY OF THE VEREECKE STRAIN

Part two • The transformation from middle distance to long distance



After Roger Vereecke returned home to Deerlijk from his two years' National Service in the Belgium Army, he took a more active part in the pigeon racing, so much so, that the Vereecke pigeons have been raced under the name of Roger Vereecke since 1949. Prior to this they were under the name of his father Jerome, who was one of the best middle distance fliers in the Province of West Flanders. As a point of interest during the years of 1925 to 1930 Georges Busschaert was the loft cleaner for Jerome Vereecke until Georges had to do his National Service in the Belgian Army.

In 1949 and 1950 the top middle distance fliers in West Flanders were Nachtergaele and Desmet Matthys. In 1952 Roger Vereecke was the best middle distance racer, as he was in the years 1955 and 1959. In the 1955 Orleans Provincial race Roger clocked 11 birds in two minutes and in the first four races of the season he won the sum of 202,000 Belgian francs.

As mentioned in the previous article the main base of the Vereecke middle distance pigeons were the



Top: These aviaries were built in 1978 for the hens when separated from their cocks in winter and also for the Widowhood hens. Above: Roger Vereecke with loft man Filip Putman who in 1992 won 1st National Champion of Belgium KBDB with young birds (long distance). Filip is the nephew of Andre Vervaecke who was loft man for the Vereeckes from 1955 to 1960.

bloodlines of Julien Commine of Leers Nord. The two most important birds that Jerome purchased were from Dupont who had a family of Commine's, these were the 'Schuwen' and 'Atomique'. Both of these birds were outstanding racers and were perhaps two of the best middle distance birds in Belgium at that time.

During the period of 1955 to 1960, Roger's loft manager, along with his father Jerome who was the main loft manager, was a man by the name of Andre Vervaecker who lived in the next village of Zwevegem. This man was the uncle of Filip Putman who is now the loft man of Roger.

In 1960 all the middle distance pigeons were sold and in 1961 there were no pigeons at all in the Vereecke lofts until the purchase of the foundation birds of their long distance strain, which were the four National winners, 'Figaro', '90', 'Yzeren' and 'Roste Tanghe' plus a number of other long distance pigeons that were less successful breeders than the four mentioned.

Andre Vervaecker raced in partnership with his brother with the



old Vereecke middle distance strain, becoming one of the best middle distance fliers in the Province. At the beginning of 1962, Roger crossed one or two of the Vervaecker hens with the new long distance cocks that he had just purchased. Daughters from these pairings were the following year paired to the other cocks such as 'Roste Tanghe', 'Izeren' and so on. This is how his long distance strain was developed, three quarters were new long distance bloodlines and a quarter was from the old family based on the 'Atomique' and 'Schuwen' of Dupont via his old loft man Andre Vervaecker. At this stage it is of some interest to say that Roger's present day loft man Filip Putman races a team of pigeons that came from his uncle Andre Vervaecker and these birds are the old middle distance Vereecke strain. In 1992, Filip Putman was Young Bird Champion of Belgium. Filip Putman has an outstanding racer named 'Derby' and in 1995 a brother of 'Derby' that Filip had given to Roger won 2nd National Limoges against an entry of 16,854 birds. A son of 'Little Felix' when he was paired to a daughter of 'Derby' also won a top prize from Limoges. So the lines of the old Vereecke middle distance strain are still being used with success up to the present day.

At the transformation from middle distance to long distance racing, all the pigeons that were born in 1962 and 1963 were sent to training races in 1964. It was not until 1965 that Roger started to compete in the long distance races and these were races up to 600 km (375 mls). In 1966 Roger Vereecke became the 1st Champion of Flanders on 17 races with old and young birds. It was not until 1968 that he competed in races of over 800 km (500 mls).

The transformation from middle distance racing to long distance racing was not without risks, it was a very big gamble that was to take over five years to find out the result. However, by 1969 it was becoming very clear to all that the gamble had

Top: Just after the arrival of 'Kleine Felix', winner of 1st National Tulle in 1990. Roger Vereecke is holding 'Kleine Felix', Richard Schatterman who was loft man at the time, holding nestmate 'White Felix' and Leon Vandevelde president of Kortrijk pigeon club is holding 'Young Felix'. In the background is the loft of 'Kleine Felix'. Middle: 'Young Felix', winner of 1st National Pau in 1985 from a painting by Audrey Lawrence-Johnson. Left: Tony Oates, Victor Vansalen, Roger Vereecke and Gilbert Van Hassel at the Auberge Napoleon.

paid off, for that year they were considered to be the Kings of the long distance races from Brive, Cahors, Montauban, Bordeaux and Barcelona. By 1970 Roger Vereecke was considered as a world champion of pigeon racing, for as well as their marvellous results from Barcelona and San Sebastian they also obtained that year, for the first time in the history of Belgian pigeon racing the three greatest championship titles of Belgium in the same year. These were 1st Marathon (Montauban, Barcelona,

championship was organised between the French Grand Circle Du Nord and The Royal Belgian Flying Club, based on the International races from Pau, Barcelona, Narbonne and Perpignan. The top five of this championship were: 1st Roger Vereecke, 2nd Raoul Van Spitael, 3rd Guy Vinois, 4th Paul Gilmont, 5th Norbert Norman.

Also in 1978, Roger Vereecke was 1st Champion of the most prestigious club, The Royal Belgian Flying Club. For this championship

was given in 1983 – 'Keizer Van de Royal Belgian Flying Club'.

It is my intention to include in this series more information about the Royal Belgian Flying Club, this club is perhaps the oldest club in the world. It had as one of its founder members, Northrop Barker who emigrated to Belgium from his native Yorkshire, hence the English name of the club – 'Royal Belgian Flying Club', more of this later.

Success was to continue into the 1980s. The main policy of the development of the Vereecke long distance strain was now proved to be an outstanding success, based on the policy of only introducing top performance pigeons such as the four cornerstones – 'De 90', 'Figaro', 'Izeren' and 'Roste Tanghe'. It was with this policy in mind, a policy of the Vereecke's since the days when Jerome Vereecke purchased the 'Atomique' and the 'Schuwen' that caused Roger to purchase another 1st National winner to his collection, this pigeon was to play a most vital role, that has contributed to the most outstanding successes of the later part of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

This pigeon was named 'Felix' after its owner Felix Smits for whom it won 1st National from Tulle in 1978. In the pedigree of 'Felix' one can see such names as Desmet Matthys, Hector Desmet, Huyskens-Van Riel and Cattrysse.

'Felix's' role in the Vereecke strain, was being the father of two outstanding pigeons, 'Young Felix' and 'Para'. One important fact that we must not overlook is that 'Felix' when he bred 'Young Felix' and 'Para' was paired to a very good hen, a mealy that was a direct descendant of the 'Roste Tanghe' from whom she had inherited her colouring. She also contained the proven winning genes of the '90' and 'Izeren'.

The two mealy cocks from the pairing of 'Felix' and the 'Mealy Hen', 'Para' and 'Young Felix', were both to become outstanding racers at the distance. 'Para' won 10 top National and International prizes, amongst which were 28th National Pau and 5th International Perpignan. 'Young Felix' was the winner of 11 top National and International prizes amongst which was 1st National Pau, but it was not to end at this, these two brothers were to become outstanding breeders.

Several sons of 'Para' were to become important members of Roger's race team, some of these



Roger Vereecke with Luc Sioen who with his partner from Taiwan, Den Fu Chuang, purchased the pigeon that Roger is holding. The pigeon named 'Brecht' was the best long distance pigeon in Belgium in 1993. 'Brecht' was bred and raced by Remi Hoebrechts, the 1993 long distance champion of Belgium, and contains some of the bloodlines of the Roger Vereecke National-winner strain.

San Sebastian); 1st General Champion of West Flanders and Interprovincial Union, this was for 20 races, 14 for old birds from 550 to 950 km (343 to 593 mls) and six with young birds in races from 400 to 500 km (250 to 312 mls); 1st General Champion of Belgium in the Royal National Federation Championships for six National long distance races.

By the late 1970s Roger Vereecke was considered to be one of the very best long distance racers thanks to the top prizes he had won in the National and International races in that decade. Journalist Jules Gallez wrote – "In 1977 and 1978 Roger Vereecke kept his good reputation. No Belgian fancier has flown better the last two years than Roger Vereecke has done in the long distance races". He also said "that the Vereecke loft had become a standard bearer of our sport". Roger was also described as the "eternal jewel" of the Belgian racing pigeon world.

In 1978 Roger was the champion of the Grand Circle of the North and the Royal Belgian Flying Club, this

only the first two birds on the member's entry form for the six National races that took place from Pau, Montauban, Barcelona, Limoges Derby, St Vincent and Perpignan were used. The 1978 result was: 1st Roger Vereecke, 2nd Guy Vinois, 3rd Raoul Van Spitael, 4th Norbert Norman, 5th Joseph Van den Broucke, 6th Fernand Goffin, 7th Paul Gilmont, 8th Georges Depaduwa, 9th Romain Dubocage, 10th Louis Duchene.

The success was to continue, Roger was to take 1st place in the Championships of the Royal Belgian Flying Club in 1981, 1982 and 1983 and was then being described as the King of the Royal Belgian Flying Club. That holds true today after his 19 years of membership of the Royal Belgian Flying Club. In the yearling championship that now includes all the National races Roger has been 17 times in the top three of the championship, once 4th, once 5th and six times he was 1st. This is racing against many of the most famous names in Belgium. I don't think that anyone has done better and he still deserves the title that he



Top: Barcelona 1985 with father Jerome holding 'Tsar', 16th International Brive 1985 just after the arrival.

Centre: Barcelona 1978 with Jan Hermans of Holland, Tony Meulucci of USA and Rudy Glaser of Canada.

Right: Roger Vereecke with his friend Joseph Vandembroucke, both members of the Royal Belgian Flying Club. They often pair the best birds together and share the offspring.



were 'Phoenix', 'Panther' and 'Sire'. 'Phoenix' won a top prize in the 1987 Perpignan International race against 6,900 birds, 'Panther' as a two year old in 1987, was 73rd in the Perpignan International race against 6,812 birds. In 1988 he was 45th International Perpignan against 11,614 birds. 'Panther' went on to win many more top prizes. 'Sire' in 1988, was 11th Interprovincial from Chateauroux (5,635 birds). In 1989 he won 42nd National Limoges (8,882 birds) and 34th National Limoges two year olds (8,807 birds). A grandson of 'Para' named 'Major' was in 1989, 28th National Narbonne (4,665 birds). Another son of 'Para' as a two year old, won 51st National Marseille and 2nd Provincial in 1989.

'Young Felix' which won 11 top National and International prizes between 1980 and 1985, never spent a night out during his racing career. In the 1985, Pau International race when 'Young Felix' was 1st National and 6th International, the weather was so bad that no birds were expected on the day. However, out of the total Belgian entry 11 birds arrived home on the first day of the race, two of these 11 were for Roger Vereecke. 'Young Felix' was 1st National by half an hour in front of the next bird on the National result.

In 1988 'Young Felix' was paired to a hen named 'Star', she was a daughter of the 'Schone Blauwe' which was sire of 'Moses' 12th National Pau. When he bred 'Star' he was paired to a daughter of Marc Roosens' 'Prince', winner of 2nd National St Vincent, from a previous exchange of pigeons between Marc Roosens and Roger Vereecke.

It was when 'Young Felix' was paired to 'Star' in 1988, that they bred a small blue cock ring number 3340032/88 hence its name 'Kleine Felix', by the way he grew into a very strong pigeon. This son of 'Young Felix' was to make history for the long distance strain of Roger Vereecke. 'Kleine Felix' was winner of the 1st prize in the 1990 National race from Tulle. This was a world record. Never before or since has anyone ever had three generations of 1st National winners such as this – grandfather 'Felix' 1st National Tulle in 1978; father 'Young Felix' 1st National Pau in 1985; son 'Kleine Felix' 1st National Tulle in 1990.

to be continued