

# MARTYN H MITCHELL

## Master Breeder of Winning Pigeons

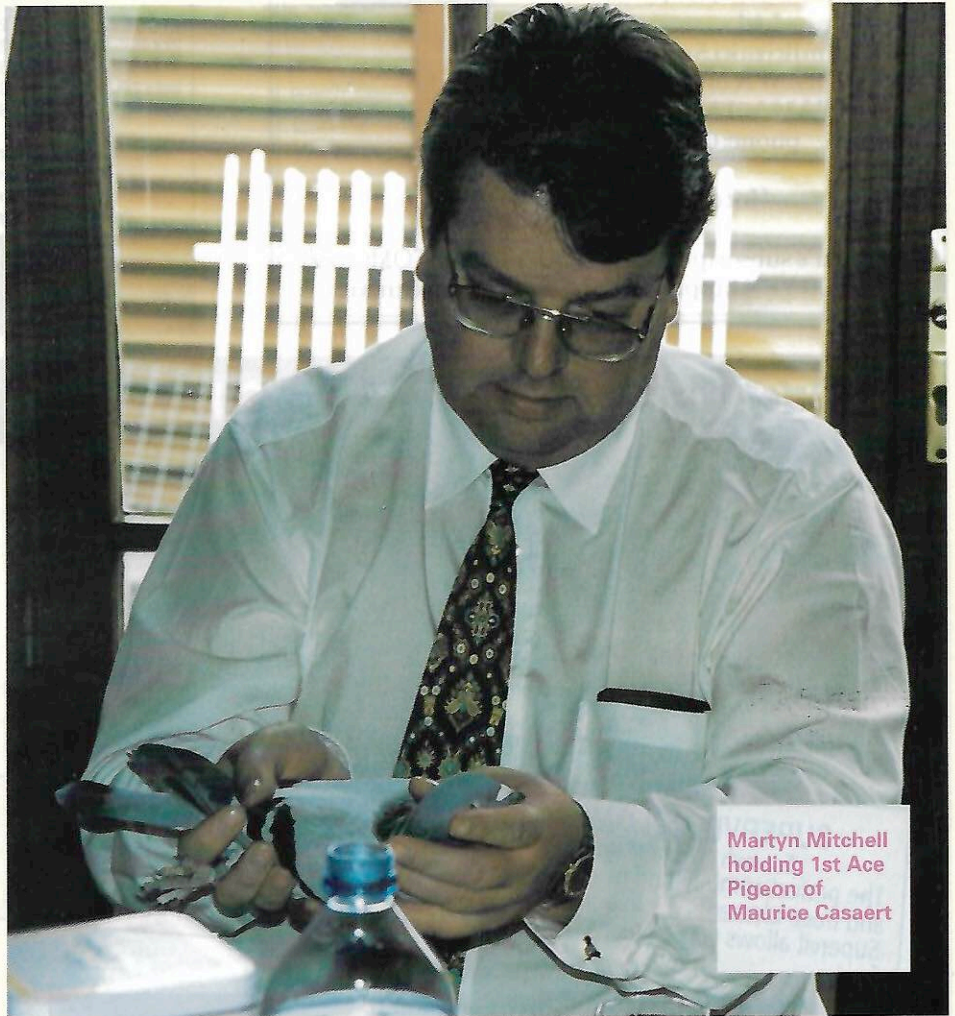
by Mark Palmer

Martyn Mitchell is well known to the pigeon world in the United Kingdom, and has gained respect throughout the world as one of the top breeders and selectors of racing pigeons. He is particularly respected in the hotbed of racing in Belgium by some of the top racing men of the world.

For those who are unaware of his background in pigeon racing, he started in pigeon racing over 30 years ago and his success is well recorded from the winner of the Queen's Cup from Lerwick in the 1970s to his phenomenal results in short and middle distance flying in the 1980s – in most seasons during that period winning over fifty 1st prizes per year. His Janssen-based family during that period was quite remarkable, not only for himself, but also for others, winning up to National level. His young bird results were quite extraordinary. You may now be aware that he started flying on the Darkness System some 15 years ago.

He has always been noted as not only a fancier who has great experience in breeding and racing, but also one who is seen as being well in front of his time. In the 1990s he moved his attentions to solely long distance racing and continued his amazing success by the formation of the now world-renowned 'Targa' family which he created and developed from the 'Tarzan' lines of his good friend, Silvere Toye, and the old 'Motta' lines of G & M Vanhee. The success which this family has had in such a short space of time in 500 miles plus racing is well recorded, and it is well deserved that his pigeon 'Targa Classique' was honoured with the category of Best Long Distance Pigeon in the United Kingdom at the age of three in 1996 by the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, also winning Ace Pigeon Northern Classic and Queen's Coronation Cup.

Martyn and his wife, Jayne, who is also involved in managing of the pigeons, decided that they wished to build new housing for the breeding birds, as they had many exciting new ideas which they had



Martyn Mitchell holding 1st Ace Pigeon of Maurice Casaert



The new breeding, young bird and Widowhood lofts





**Automated breeding boxes**

**Inside the special breeding boxes incorporating shelf for nest bowls. The pigeons shown are sire and dam of 'M & M' winner of 1st Welsh Grand National Yearling Crieff 1997**

developed for the racing and breeding of the pigeons. I must say that this seemed quite surprising to others as they had already bred over seventy 1st National, Classic, Amalgamations, and Open winners in the last two years alone. Their ideas though were not compatible with the house in which they lived, both for weather conditions and

climate, and would have required extensive demolition of existing buildings to restart their vision. They therefore decided to move to a property where they could build the housing for the pigeons completely from scratch.

In this article I shall take you through Martyn's new lofts for the breeding birds, the young birds, and finally the racers. You will see that it is a loft which fanciers may only dream of, but hope that some of the ideas and innovations may be taken up by even the smallest fancier.

The lofts are situated adjacent to the residential property with the Widowhood loft separate, and the young bird and stock lofts in the same building.

### **The Breeding Lofts**

The lofts are a timber-framed structure, built on a concrete raft. The raft is approximately two feet below ground level sat on visquine which forms a basin underneath the raft which is 10" thick. The reason for the thickness of the concrete raft is that the timber-framed building and central wall are supported by this raft. The raft was built below ground level for aesthetic reasons and also the limitation of planning was four metres.

The stock loft comprises nine sections of 12 nestboxes each, all





with automated cleaning, and the floor is of the grid structure, also with automated cleaning underneath. The aviaries to each section are to the rear and also have their own perches with automated cleaning. The total stock loft comprising of over 100 pairs of pigeons takes approximately three minutes to clean each day! This enables much more time to be spent with the pigeons themselves, and especially with young bird training. The design of the loft is such that after the birds have finished breeding, the hens may be placed in the rear of the loft and the cocks in the front, and you do not require extra aviaries for the hens during the autumn months.

The ventilation for the stock lofts is through the rear of the loft in open aviaries, and through the roof of the loft at the front. In the warm summer months the double doors may be opened for extra air if required.

All the sections are fitted with automated watering systems which allow fresh, cool water to be continually available to the birds, especially during the breeding season. Treatments may also be administered through this system.

The boxes are specially designed and are extremely large compared



to normal breeding boxes. They are double the height and allow nestbowls to be placed on a shelf positioned halfway above the box to leave the pair to sit quietly without interference from their own youngsters.

In the rear aviaries of the stock loft they each have their own shower

#### Shower and aviaries

bath which has warm and cold water. These are built on the outside of the aviaries so as to keep the conveyor belts as dry as possible which are running underneath the aviary grids.

The lighting system in the stock lofts



The colour-coded young bird boxes





is also very special in that Martyn uses artificial daylight tubes, and at certain times of each month there is controlled longer daylight. With the youngsters reared for the Darkness System, after the eggs have been laid for those rounds, the daylight is automatically changed to less than 12 hours for rearing so as not to start the moult off in the youngsters.

The whole atmosphere of the stock loft, even though housing such modern and hygienic appliances,

The young bird boxes convert for the earlier part of the training programme into three perches per box

seems very natural and warm. Suffice to say the birds are in the most magnificent condition. Martyn believes very strongly that not only should the birds have the correct lineage, but they must also be in the right mental state to rear champions. There is even background music in the corridors of

these lofts, but I am still not sure whether that is for the pigeons' sake or for the owner!

#### Young Bird Lofts

These comprise of four sections of 12 nestboxes each, all colour coded to aid the young birds' entry to their section after training or racing. The boxes also convert for the earlier part of the training programme into three perches per box. The loft is divided into two sections from front to back, similar to the breeding loft. Each section of 12 boxes has an aviary with 60 perches, with all boxes and perches being automated cleaning.

In front of the sections of the young bird lofts is an open trapping area which can be seen quite easily from the sky with the young birds trapping through the conventional two-hole stall, trapping with extra landing board. The speed of the trapping has to be seen to be believed, but it is not uncommon for young birds to trap through the single stall without even touching the board. Martyn's young bird system for racing is second to none and is utilised by many of the top National fanciers around the country. He races young birds on full Widowhood, jealousy and semi-Widowhood Systems. The contents of these systems would fill this article in themselves – perhaps we could look at that another time.

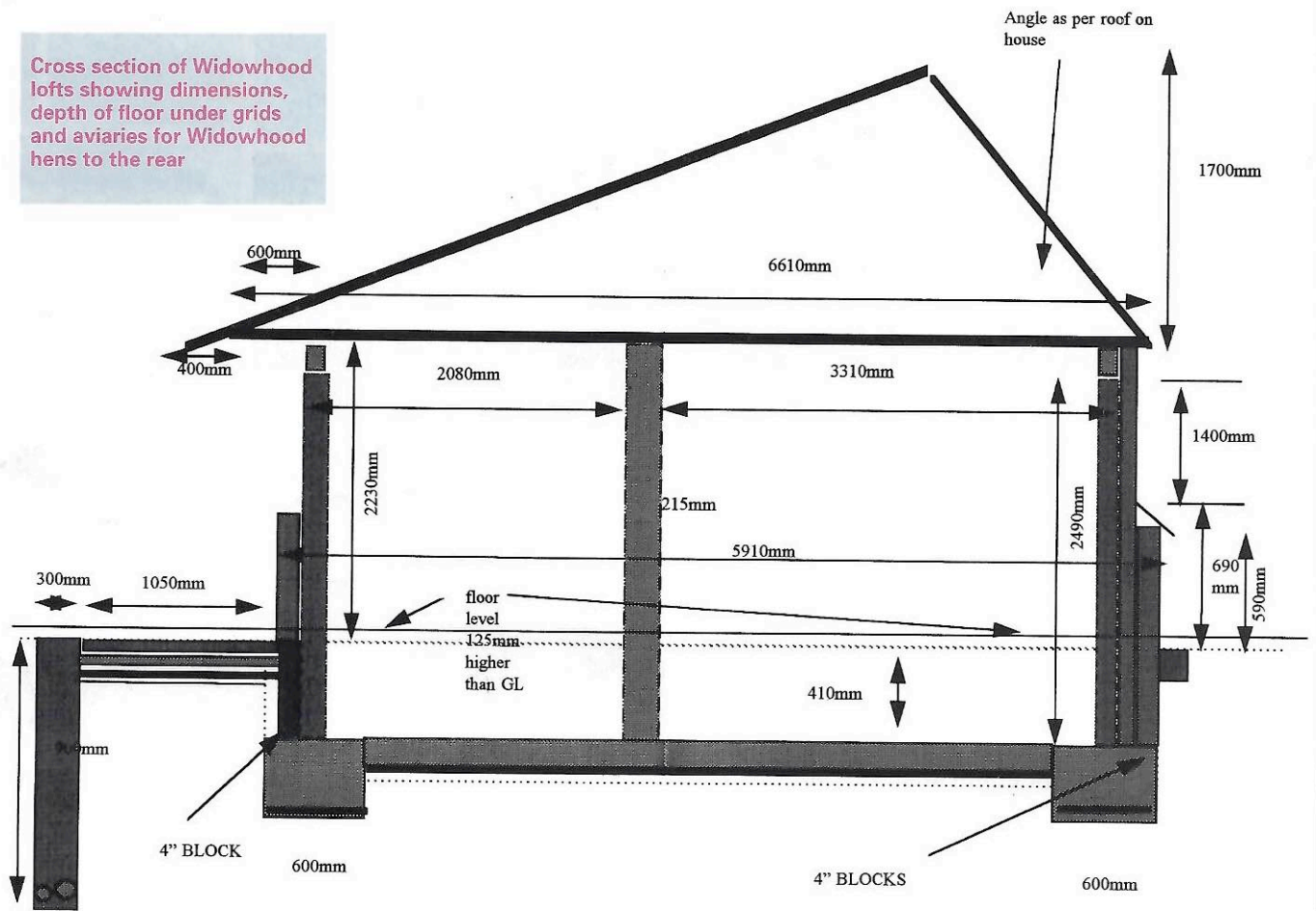
The young bird lofts have their own entrance at the rear for basketing purposes and are separated from the Widowhood lofts so they do not



Automated perches for young birds and Widowhood hens



Cross section of Widowhood lofts showing dimensions, depth of floor under grids and aviaries for Widowhood hens to the rear



disturb the widowers.

### Widowhood Lofts

These comprise of five sections with 24 boxes per section. The boxes are specially designed to allow maximum use of the Widowhood System, especially in short and middle distance racing. Each of the sections has an aviary to the rear for the hens, and they are allowed access through a hole underneath the boxes. There is no necessity therefore for catching any of the hens, they can be easily led directly into their own section.

The loft is so arranged to allow systems of full Widowhood, semi-Widowhood and full Widowhood with hens. These systems may also be run in conjunction during any season. There is soundproofing between the sections, and also between front and rear aviaries. The wall between the aviaries and the Widowhood section is one foot thick, and there is no possibility of the cocks hearing the hens calling through this system. It also allows the Widowhood loft to be warm even though the aviaries at the back are open to the elements. All the double doors and windows at the front of the loft which enable trapping have 20mm double-glazed



The start, showing timber-framed construction clad with old local brick



Automated watering system which allows fresh, cool water to be continually available to the birds



Martyn and Gaby Vandenebeele in his breeding loft holding 'Blauwe Fideel' 1st National Brive (4,719 birds) 1995 and 1st National Limoges (8,883 birds) 1995, discussing which hens will be with these cocks for the new introductions into Martyn's stock loft



Martyn with Silvere Toye and Maurice Casaert discussing strategy for the new season

units, mainly to prevent heating through the summer months. There is no ventilation through the front, only from the rear and through the tiled roof. Also there is an extractor system in place for the hotter periods. The cleaning of these lofts is again automated to allow maximum time with the race birds. There is also a system of blinds which enables the sun to enter, but the birds cannot see through the large glazed units.

The Widowhood loft is a separate building from the young bird and stock lofts, so there will be no possibility of disturbance while working in those lofts. In fact it was impossible to hear any noise whilst in the Widowhood loft, with the double-glazed units and double-walling system allowing the birds to be quiet and unaffected by other things going on outside the lofts. Martyn puts a lot of emphasis on this. At his previous lofts he always had to let his widowers out early in the morning so they were not disturbed by other activities on the farm. Now the new lofts will enable him to work in the stock lofts at 5.00 or 6.00 am without having to disturb the widowers until 7.30 am.

The whole aspect and layout of the lofts is truly spectacular and features some of the most innovative ideas for the breeding and racing of pigeons. Clearly Martyn's commitment to the loft and the birds continues to ensure that this stud is the most successful racing and breeding establishment in the United Kingdom.

I hope I will be fortunate to write another article on the pigeons which are housed in these marvellous buildings. The results of the breeding are truly remarkable, for example when I walked along the corridor of the breeding loft, the first three breeding sections contained 12 pairs each, all of which had bred 1st Amalgamation and Combine winners, and the oldest pigeons in those lofts was only three-years-old.

Martyn has asked that I give special mention to his good friend and colleague, Silvere Toye, with whom he has spent many years in Belgium selecting lofts and pigeons for future inclusion in their breeding stock. Also Jos Thone for his help with new ideas of loft constructions. Finally appreciation must be noted for the kind hospitality shown on Martyn's many visits to Belgium by Silvere and Jos, and also more recently Gaby Vandenebeele, Maurice Casaert and the whole Houben family.