

The Aftermath of the Storm

by

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Well, all good things come to an end, and now it is time for me to get back to writing in English. As you probably already know, I have been spending most of my time over on the Dutch side of the Winning site where Steven has been gracious enough to translate my responses from English to Dutch. In the process, I have become more familiar with the Blog, and frankly, I have grown to really like that kind of writing as it is more interactive.

For me, the hardest part about writing is coming up with a topic. That has never been easy, and it is probably the main reason that I am constantly starting my articles over. Often times, I write a page only to say to myself, "Now who would want to read that?" This of course leads to endless rewrites.

The Blog is more interesting because I am answering people's questions, and in a sense, they are providing me with a topic. This is more fun for me in that all I have to do is give my opinion. As I am not short of opinions, this makes writing easier. If the topic is stupid, well, that is just fine because I didn't come up with it; instead, I am just answering the questions that were asked.

I would suppose that by now most of you know that the reason that I was writing over on the Dutch side of the magazine was because, in a way, we were promoting my visit to Europe. During that period of time, I had the opportunity to give a total of six seminars in Denmark, Holland and Belgium. Also during that period, I graded over 3,000 pigeons. I am very pleased to say that from what I have heard from Steven and Eddy Noel, and along with the several hundred emails that I received, both the grading and seminars went extremely well!

I must give special thanks to Steven and Steen Haagh for their hard work! Although it sounds easy to blow into some country and speak for three or four hours, grade a few hundred pigeons and then blow back out again, let me be the first to say that it isn't.

Unfortunately, there was always a significant language barrier to contend with, and this required a translator. As I only speak English, or at least my version of English, I have never translated anything in my life other than maybe those ominous stares that my wife often gives me for no reason at all. Although he

didn't know it when we first started out, Steen is a born translator. The problem with Steen is that he gets to enjoying himself so much, that he starts adding little things to the speech. You soon start to realize that at least some of the things he is adding are poking fun at the speaker (me). Fortunately, I don't take myself too seriously or else I wouldn't be in this sport.

I can tell you that at the end of my first speech in Holland, Steven had broken out into a full sweat from attempting to translate my ramblings. At the break, he came up to me and said, "I never realized how hard this was going to be. You have to pay attention every minute, and that just isn't that easy when you start to get tired." He recovered quickly because by the third speech, he was up to three glasses of wine, and the words were flowing right along.

There are also two others that I would like to thank, Flemming and Eddy who helped to make this trip both enjoyable and successful. Flemming actually took off a week of work to drive Steen and me around the Denmark. As Steen is old, he would just go to sleep in the back seat. Flemming is a very easy going fellow, and we had many great conversations while he worked on his English.

It was Eddy that primarily arranged the trip to Belgium and, without him, I doubt that portion of the trip would have ever happened. Eddy spent a lot of time working out the details, including our overnight stay with his partner. I have been many places and done many things, but I have never been treated like I was that night. If I even thought about food, a banquet was placed before me. If I got thirsty, there were seven types of wine and three types of beer (and tea because that is all I really drink). I thought about sacking the wife and bringing these people home with me. It was a very good visit!

Then there is always grading. Grading always sounds like so much fun to most people. Wouldn't it be great to sit in a chair and have people bring you pigeons hour after hour? Well, the answer is, "No."

There was a stretch where Steven and I gave a seminar on one side of Holland on a Wednesday night that lasted until midnight. We then got back to the hotel at two in the morning. The next day, we got up at about 7:00 a.m. and drove to see Kees Bosua, and Steven's friend Jan O. that after noon. When we arrived back at the hotel at 4:00 p.m., I took a one hour nap and then we drove to the other side of Holland to give a second speech that again lasted until midnight (we got home at 1:15 p.m.).

The next day, I was up at 7:00 and off to Belgium, where I graded 500 pigeons and finished just in time to give another four hour speech. We finally got to bed at 3:00 a.m. in the morning. At 8:00 a.m. we got up and drove back to Holland so that I could grade another 500 pigeons.

You always have to be focused when you are grading pigeons because things must move along very quickly. Twice during the trip, I was handed the same pigeon a second time. One time was at Flemming's and once during the last Holland grading. Flemming was catching his out of his loft, and he accidentally handed me the pigeon again about 50 pigeons after I had graded it the first time. I asked him, "Flemming, how many times do you think I should grade this one?" He went back and looked and sure enough I had seen it before.

The second one happened when a guy showed up with about 100 pigeons for me to grade. He had about ten baskets of pigeons, and got confused and brought one of the baskets back a second time. Again, this was about 50 pigeons later, but still I caught it on the first pigeon.

At the last grading session, I took what I believed was the best pigeon from each fancier and placed them into a set of show cages. When I was finished grading, I placed them in order. One gentleman only brought me three pigeons to grade. I looked at the first pigeon and told him outright that the pigeon was a big winner. I think it might have even won a National. While it would have been easy for me to put that pigeon in the show cages, I instead gave the pigeon back to him. The second was nice, but the third was excellent. Without even asking him about the pigeon, I told him to take it to the show cages. I was passing up a known winner for a pigeon that I knew nothing about. I like risk.

When I had finished grading all the pigeons, I went to the show cages and shuffled everyone's pigeons around to the order that I thought was correct. When I was done, it turned out that his pigeon was the number one pigeon. When we asked what the pigeon had done, he informed us that it was the top pigeon in the combine and that it had won three combines over the last several years. By the pigeon was down from Steven van Breemen's family!

We looked at each of the rest of the pigeons from the show cages, and I explained many of their strengths and weaknesses. On many of these pigeons, the owners said, "You also graded all his children very high as well." One fancier actually went and got a sister that I had graded way earlier in the session (a black check hen as I remember it), and handed it to me. While he was looking at the grading sheet, I was looking at the pigeon. I said if I remember right this one was about a 1.85, which of course I knew it was because I remembered the pigeon. He showed everyone the grading sheet, and there it was 1.85.

While grading pigeons in Esbjerg, Denmark, I was introduced to a fancier that had owned the famous "255" which is the undisputed best short distance pigeon ever in Denmark. In truth, fanciers don't stick in my mind like pigeons, so I soon couldn't have picked him out of the crowd. However, he had said that there

would be two children from this cock that I would see during the grading session.

It was late in the grading session when I remembered that I was supposed to see those two pigeons. Not long after thinking this, I came across what I remember to be a younger BBC. I immediately said that the pigeon is from a big winner, but it is not the best pigeon out of that winner; in fact, I think at least one of the parents is quite old. It got kind of quite for a minute, and then Steen told me that this was one of the children of the "255" and that he was now 12 years old.

To me this offspring felt like a pigeon that was out of an older pigeon because it lacked the vitality. I told him that while I could see the pigeon had good bloodlines, there were things that I didn't like about the pigeon. Having not handled any others from the pair, I told the fancier that some of the things that I didn't like might be because the cock was old, but that it could also point to future flaws within that line. He handed me the second one and while it was better in some ways, it was about the same in others.

Later, I was apparently handling a pigeon from either a partner or friend, and I said, "This pigeon is like that first pigeon off the "255" that I handled several minutes ago. In fact, he has almost the same flaws. Again there was more quite, and then the fancier said, "that is a grandson to the 255." I don't believe that this grandchild was directly off the first son because I remember thinking, "Now I know that it is a future flaw."

When you are grading, you have to monitor everything that is going on in the room. Some fanciers get very keyed up by the whole event, and some are disbelieving right from the start. Some like to play games, and some are just there for the show. Most have nothing of any real value, but some have some good pigeons. Very few have a loft that is heading in any real direction.

For me, it is those that have direction that are the most fun to grade. It is fun to get into their heads to see what they are thinking. No I don't talk to them, I read their pigeons and to them the experience can be somewhat unnerving. These guys are always the best in their area or country, and they spend countless hours with their pigeons. It isn't often that someone is going to come along and actually know their pigeons as well or better than they do.

I think the two lofts that I enjoyed visiting the most were Ulrik Lenjre Larsen and Carsten Petersen; both are from Denmark. While these two are already superstars, they both have the potential to get much better. Make no mistake about it, these two guys are all about pigeon racing, and both have a natural feel for the sport. Better yet, they are competitors.

My visit probably couldn't have been timelier for these two because, for the first time, they heard something different, and I think it registered. When you are competing, it is often easy to get too caught up in your own results. Results are important, but they are just a small part of a much bigger picture and that bigger picture drives your ability to improve.

The following are excerpts from an article that was written about my trip by Peter Knudsen. This article was translated from Danish to English, by Steen Haagh, and I am going to clean it up the English just a little more. Since this is out of context, let me just explain that Peter asked these two about my visit.

I have asked Ulrik Lejre Larsen - 033 Koege some questions about the Book after he had visited Ulrik's loft:

"What did you think about Book's visit to your loft?"

I am one of this guy's who is sceptical that you can't select pigeons by handling them, but Book is without any doubt an excellent grader. He accurately graded the ability of my pigeons. He is very thorough in his evaluations. Book is a great spokesman for line breeding where the genes are close. He stressed that when you cross breed your pigeons, it is important that you use pigeons which match your own line.

If you hear his speeches about eyesign you get some fact on the table - regardless whether you believe in it or not.

Book's greatest strength is that he believes in himself, and he is very good to understand where the fancier's loft is right now, and where it will be in the future. He is also very good to find strength and weakness of the loft and the individual pigeons, and I am now confirmed about things I have wondered about for a while. I will concentrate on selecting harder in the future, which he says is the only way to success. Something we all know about, but we don't always carry out.

The top loft in section 12 at all distances through several years Carsten Petersen in Hilleroed also got the visit from the Book. Carsten says:

It was a really good visit, primarily because it has started me thinking!

After his visit I have been thinking a lot about his words, that I needed to make a chose - Do I want to race hens or cocks. Book believes that it is not possible to make the right racer when you bread with top racers of both sex. I never thoughts that was a problem, but that is very interesting. Also he very concerned about breeding the right size right size pigeons for the course - this size was smaller than we normally see in Denmark.

He handled a lot of my racers and breeders and out of 70 he found the best.

It wasn't easy for these fanciers to let someone else evaluate their loft or their thinking, and at first it was a struggle to get them to really let me in. However, when you correctly call pigeon after pigeon, people tend to soften and listen. These guys had very good pigeons, but the program wasn't as well defined as it might have been, and this meant that there were a number of pigeons that didn't fit into a program. If they can define the program a little better, they can streamline the pigeons that go into that program. With a little of my help, they now better know what my program would be and they also know which pigeons fit that program.

Until next time!

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