

IRISH NATIONAL FLYING CLUB SKIBBEREEN OLD BIRD NATIONAL

The first of the 6 races organized by the Irish National Flying Club was held on Tuesday 26th May from Skibbereen in Co Cork. 496 members sent 4,712 birds to compete for £15,040 in pools and prizemoney. This was well up on last year's entry of 4,293 birds, and it's always good to see an upward trend. The race was sponsored by Bamfords Top Flight and we are very grateful to them for their continued sponsorship. The race took the same format as last year with the Ronnie Johnston Challenge Cup and diploma awarded to the Overall winner and the Gerald Delaney Trophy awarded to the best velocity of the other two sections. The winner of the section with the lowest winning velocity will receive a coveted INFC diploma. There are no Open positions for the Skibbereen Nationals but prizes are allocated to the three sections. As the result is divided into 3 sections I will cover the top 5 in the three sections in this article. The birds were liberated at 11am in a light northerly wind, which is reflected in the velocities with the early pigeons in the South section doing velocities of over 1400 with the winners of the Middle section and the North section doing 1370 and 1346 respectively.

1st South Section, 1st Open, Adam Hillis, Vel 432, Flying 127 miles, winning £80 and the Ronnie Johnstone Challenge Cup

The winner of this year's Skibbereen Old Bird National is 16-year-old Adam Hillis from the Wexford North and South club, surely one of the youngest National winners anywhere. It's great for the future of the sport to see young people like Adam not only taking part but winning such a prestigious race. Adam has been racing for six years now and got his interest in pigeons from his grandparents Robert and Mary who are 4th South section in this race and who have a great record from this race. This is a particularly big year for Adam as he is currently sitting his Junior Cert exams and I wish him every success with those. The winning pigeon is a blue yearling hen racing on widowhood. The breeding is Staf Van Reet from his grandfather's old bloodlines. While just racing steady this year this bird was Adam's first bird most week's as a young bird so he had high hopes for her. Adam tends to train up until racing starts and then the birds are flown before and after school every day. Feeding is a light mixture with geryplus.

2nd South section, Dempsey Bros Wexford North & South, Vel 1405, Flying 132miles, winning £176

2nd in the South section are Dempsey Bros also from the strong Wexford North & South club. The partnership was originally Francis and Geoffrey but Francis retained the partnership's name when Geoffrey passed away. This loft had a great result in this race in 2012 when they were 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th. The pigeon timed here is a two-year-old Blue cock racing on semi widowhood. Breeding is Karel Boeckx and the parents were bought from Dave & Ann Beswick's Lynwood Lofts. As a young bird this cock won from Skibbereen but was held back as a yearling as he had a knock early on in the season, but he has really taken off this year having been in the top 20 in six out of the eight races he has had. Francis trains hard before racing starts and thereafter only if he feels they need it. Feeding is Versele Laga.

3rd South section, G Furlong Wexford North & South, Vel 1396, Flying 131 miles, winning £168

3rd South section is Ger Furlong again from Wexford North & South and a previous winner of this race. Ger was 1st Open in 2013 and he was also 4th South section that year. The pigeon timed here is a three-year-old Blue cock racing widowhood. The breeding is from the family that Ger had built up with his Uncle Jimmy over a period of 40 years with just an occasional bird introduced over the years. This pigeon won the South Leinster Fed Derby from Skibbereen in 2013 and also had a few high positions in the Fed last year. The sire was Old Bird of the Year in the club in 2009 and was put to stock after that. Birds are just flown around the loft with an occasional toss as and when Ger feels they need it. Feeding is a widowhood mix but it doesn't matter what brand it is as long as it's good quality.

4th South section, R & M Hillis Wexford North & South, Vel 1378, Flying 130 miles, winning £40

4th South section are Robert & Mary Hillis also of the Wexford North & South club. As mentioned above they are the grandparents of young Adam who won this race. Robert & Mary have won three Irish National

Flying Club nationals. 2001 was an exceptional year for them when they won both the Yearling National and the Young Bird National. The Yearling National was flown from Skibbereen that year. They also won the Young Bird National from Skibbereen in 1990 winning a new car in the process.

The pigeon timed here is a yearling hen flying roundabout. The breeding is Staf Van Reet x Heremans Ceusters with the Ceusters coming from Wall. Lunt & Green, Manchester and the Staf Van Reets they have had for years. Robert told me that the birds aren't given much training but are flown around home.

5th South section Adam Hillis Wexford North & South, Vel 1369, Flying 127 miles, winning £34

We go back to the winning loft of Adam Hillis for the 5th South section pigeon. It's always good to see the winner back up the result with a few other birds. This one is another yearling hen racing widowhood. Breeding is Pieter Veenstra bred by Louella PigeonWorld. This bird is a super racer and has already been 1st Open South Leinster Federation from Kinsale (93 miles). The South Leinster Fed can boast of a host of National winners so the future certainly looks bright for this young fancier.

1st Middle Section L Newman & Family Ballymun, Vel 1370, Flying 179 miles, winning £170 and the Gerard Delaney Trophy for the best Velocity in the Sections not winning the Open

Winners of the Middle section and the Gerald Delaney Trophy is Lee Newman & Family from the Ballymun club in Dublin. The partnership is made up of Lee, his sons Scott and Nathan, and his brother Darragh. They were 4th Middle section in the Young Bird Skibbereen National last year and with Lee having previously won the Miller Gold Cup when he raced in partnership with James Kelly they are no strangers to success. In fact last year was the first year they raced as a family loft.

The pigeon timed here is a black two-year-old cock sent to this race driving his hen. He had been on roundabout but he was paired 6 days prior to this race as this is the way he races best. Breeding is Andree Roodhooft on one side from Sheldon Leonard while the other side is Van Herck from a bird gifted to Nathan by Billy Harris. Lee informs me that this is Nathan's bird and is known as 'Helicopter'. He raced consistently to the loft last year and had a selection of 2nd, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths but this was his first win. Training is to Edenderry (35 miles) twice a week with Herbie Thorpe and feeding is a small see in the morning with Vanrobaeys PLX in the evening.

2nd Middle Section M & U Gorman Balbriggan, Vel 11369, Flying 192miles, winning £100

2nd Middle section are Michael & Una Gorman from Balbriggan. They are great supporters of the Irish National Flying Club and I was fortunate to be sitting with them at the 2013 Annual Prize Night in the Stormont Hotel.

The pigeon timed is a blue yearling cock racing Natural. He was in Owenahincha the Saturday before this race and was their Nom bird that day. He was five and a half hours on the wing but was fresh on arrival. He actually lost his hen in Owenahincha but when he came home he went straight on to the eggs and was still sitting when Michael sent him to the race. Breeding is Marc Capelle with the sire being bought at the Dublin Show in 2013. They bought two that day but both turned out to be cocks so they later got a hen to put to one of them. They bred four youngsters from them last year and still have three of them left. Training is 2/3 times a week with Barney Fitzsimmons and feeding is from Cyril & Henry Beattie with Geryplus added.

3rd Middle Section N & N Smith Greenhills, Vel 1368, Flying 175 miles, winning £351

3rd Middle section are the Greenhills lofts of Noel Smith Senior and his son Noel who were also 3rd Middle section in this race in 2013. The pigeon timed here is a latebred hen that was hatched on 18th November 2014. He was sent to the race unpaired but was in a loft with 10 other latebreds. But this was no freak result as before this the hen was 2nd club 19th Open Irish South Road Fed from Barleycove two days before basketing for the National. The previous week she was 4th club, 23rd Irish South Road Fed from Skibbereen with approximately 10,000 birds competing and the week before that she was 4th club, 70th Open from Mallow.

The breeding is Van Winkle with the sire from Noel's good friend Val Flood, Dublin North East and the dam from clubmate Brian Brady. This pair has bred 4 winners with others taking plenty of good positions.

The Smiths train hard with a 20 mile toss every day, weather permitting, including Friday. Feed is Versele Laga and Merrimans Varimix with homoform, small seed and depurative also given. The lads asked me to thank Eugene Fitzgerald for taking their pigeons up to the Marking Station.

4th Middle Section McCabe & Byrne Dublin North County Vel 1365, Flying 180 miles, winning £60

We stay in Dublin for 4th Middle section but move to the Dublin North County club to the lofts of Ken McCabe and Henry Byrne who is Chairman and Race Controller for the Irish South Road Fed. The pigeon timed is a blue yearling hen racing widowhood. She was bred by Ian Gibb and Son Glenavy, the dam being Marijke Vink while the sire, a Van Dyke was one of Ian and Peter's best racing cocks, with the following positions, 21st Open NIPA (21,000 birds), 13th Open NIPA (28,000 birds), 10th North section INFC (3,100 birds), 59th Open NIPA 5-Bird Fermoy, 71st Open NIPA Roscarbery, 6th section D NIPA Clonmel (6,100 birds) and 147th Open NIPA Fermoy (18,500 birds). He was 4 times 1st club in Glenavy and is a half brother to two birds that were 2nd Open NIPA.

The hen had been racing well this year and was in both club and Open result every week this year and was in Skibbereen, Barleycove, Skibbereen in the space of 9 days and was back in Pilmore Beach on the Saturday after this race when she was 30th Fed. Feeding is Vanrobaeys. They get a half an ounce in the morning and as much as they want in the evening.

5th Middle Section P Rock & Son Skerries Vel 1362, Flying 183 miles, winning £40

5th Middle section is the 1997 King's Cup winners P Rock & Son of Skerries who were 6th Middle section in this race in 2013. Paddy and Martin are great supporters of the Irish National Flying Club and regularly travel to Lisburn for the Annual General Meeting and also attend the prize nights. The pigeon timed here is a blue widowhood cock that had four races before the national and was 7th club Pilmore Beach also in a northerly wind. His last race before this one was also from Skibbereen with the East Coast Federation on 16th May. He was given a short toss the Sunday before marking to fly home to his hen just to freshen him up. The cocks were all shown their hens for a short while basketing on the Monday. This cock was bred by Frank Bristow, Hobling and Paddy and Martin asked me to thank Frank for breeding this pigeon for them. The widowhood cocks are fed on 2 parts Vanrobaey's widowhood and one part Beyer's widowhood blended together with both supplied by Henry Byrne of Sandyhill. Peanuts are fed to trap the birds.

1st North Section McComb Bros Killyleagh Central, Vel 1346; Flying 247 miles, winning £450

1st North section and winner of a Framed Diploma is the Killyleagh lofts of McComb who were 2nd North section in this race in 2010. The sire is a De Klak latebred bred by D Croskery & Son, Annsborough and was purchased at their club's development sale in 2012. This bird was raced and has won 1st club on seven separate occasions including 1st East section, 28th Open East Down Combine Skibbereen Old Bird Classic. He was put in the stock loft after receiving an injury and has bred numerous winners. The dam is from their good friends Caskey & Adair, Crossgar. This hen is from their top class Soontjens stock and has produced winners every year including daughter and granddaughter winning East Down Combine Opens.

The North section winner here has himself bred winners for other fanciers. He has numerous club positions and his nestmate was twice 1st Club and was also 2nd Section F from Roscarbery in 2014 with the NIPA in similar conditions to this race. The North section winner has now been named 'Tommy's Boy' after their father.

2nd North Section O & M Monaghan Andersonstown, Vel 1345, Flying 248 miles, winning £471

2nd North section this year is Owen and Michael Monaghan from Andersonstown. They also race in Colin HPS. Owen and Michael were 4th North section in the Skibbereen Young Bird National in 2013. The pigeon timed here is a three-year-old Van der Rhee x Vandenabeele hen racing on widowhood. As a yearling she 1st club, 10th section, 30th Open Roscrea with the NIPA and she was also 7th section 19th Open Yearling Hens race with the NIPA in the same year. The hen had been coming well in training all year and had all inland races except for Roscarbery. Training is mostly private training with an occasional transporter toss. Feeding is Versele Laga Super Star. The pigeon has been named 'Proud Mary' after

Owen's sister whose birthday was the day of the race. Owen and Michael had a great race here with a further six pigeons in the result at 82nd, 92nd, 172nd, 209th, 288th and 296th North section.

3rd North Section Whiteside Bros Eastway, Vel 1344, flying 255 miles, winning £762

3rd North section are Whiteside Bros Eastway. The partnership was originally Billy and Frankie but when Frankie passed away on 26th May 2012 Billy decided to retain the partnerships' name. The pigeon timed is a blue yearling cock racing roundabout. The breeding is Janssen x Huybrecht from good friend John White of Muckamore. The pigeon timed here at 3rd North section was 34th Open Roscarbery with the NIPA the Saturday before. This was the fifth race in a row that he was first bird to the loft. His nest mate won £560 in the club's breeder buyer last year. Billy trains with both Jackie Scates and Mark Johnston. Feeding is from Robert and June Kirkwood as well as Frazers and is usually Gem Widowhood mix and Vanrobaeys. Billy asked me to pass on his congratulations to McComb Bros on winning the North section here.

4th North Section A Bradley Dromara, Vel 1342, Flying 241 miles, Winning £250

Alister Bradley of the Dromara club is 4th North section here improving on his 6th North section in the Skibbereen Young Bird National last year. The pigeon timed is a blue yearling hen racing on roundabout. The sire was a Red Belgium cock and the dam a blue tipped hen obtained from Jason Smyth Ligoneil, through Tom Marshall Newtownbreda. The hen was a steady racer last year and was just out of the money in the Skibbereen Young Bird National. She was steady again this year without winning any prizes before the National. Alister was training before racing but following a few peregrine attacks decided to reduce the number of training tosses to just an odd toss now and again. He prefers now to fly the birds at home. Feeding is a Natural widowhood mix from his mentor and friend Tom Marshall.

5th North section B & M McCorriston, Vel 1341, Flying 236 miles, winning £247

5th North section goes to B & M McCorriston of Dromore with a yearling pied hen racing on widowhood which Mo's granddaughter has now called 'Minnie'. The sire is a Van Wildemeersch from the late Bertie Fletcher while the dam is from Billy Hayes from Ballynahinch and contains the breeding of Jim Moreland of Dromore. A pigeon the same way bred as the pigeon at 5th North section was 1st club, 1st section, 17th Open Talbenny on the Saturday after the Skibbereen National. Another brother was 4th Open Sennen Cove Yearling National in 2010.

'Minnie' had only two training tosses and two races from Roscrea and Pilmore Beach before the National. However the birds are flown around the house and sometimes the widowhood hens will fly for two hours. Mo feeds Frazers corn, mainly breed and wean and a widowhood mix.

The committee of the Irish National Flying Club would like to thank all those who helped at the marking station and all who helped at the clock centres. Thanks to Clifford Browne for his help in completing this report and to all who helped with photographs.

Brendan McLoughlin
INFC Press Officer