

"Creag Dhu"
Carman Road.
Renton.
18/11/67.

Dear Fellow Fancier.

Very pleased to hear from you & have taken some time to consider what you wrote about & am delighted to help you. Perhaps in 1969 I will have some photos of my winning team taken to show others what they look like. I do not think there are enough fanciers interested for me to write a book on Gurnays. Now as to your questions? Here goes.

The history of the Gurnay strain, well Mons. Gurnay being Mons Hansenne's Runner i.e. he ran with the rubber race ring to a central place as clocks were scarce & only one would be used in each village. Gurnay was the fasted runner in the village so this was his job. This way Gurnay won many races for Hansenne that he otherwise would not have won specially when birds came in batches from the shortest races. You can only win in pools in Belgium at the rate of 10/1, but for every 100 birds in the race there are 10 shares of pools. If ones team were in in form one could enter 10 & pool them all up & win 10 shares of the pools. In many races there were specials for the 1st or 1st 2. Nom. birds. & 1st three nom. birds such as a new motor car or a suite of furniture etc. Most big businesses gave specials such as these most weeks. Now when Gurnay ran his fasted & won one of these specials Hansenne would give him the winner as a present & these winners kept accumulating & eventually Gurnay started on his own, & these great winning Hansenne were the base of his loft. When Hansenne retired Gurnay knew what to bid for & so he got the best. The only cross that I know of Gurnay using was 2 reds from a Mons Dedroyd if I remember rightly. These had won 1st & 2nd in the National by an hour but I don't remember the distance of this race, so it is quite possible that this race was only 300 miles as as many as 6 Nationals were run in one season from various distances. To my mind by putting these reds into his already inbred family they would breed winners right away & even champions at that but from then on Gurnay only concentrated on races up to 450 miles. Now these were the races where the big money was won in so maybe that is why he kept to these distances. Now 95% of Belgian fanciers only flew in races up to 400 miles & left the distance Nationals to the real Distance men. As much as £80 can be bet on a single bird in one race so you see the kind of pool money that can be won. Yes weekly at that too.

One must remember that there are no horse racing in Belgium & that the main sport is Pigeon-racing & that the whole village bets on the birds & that it is quite legal to do so. I do not know who was racing against Gurnay in those days from 1880/1936 but these were the years of many famous fanciers such as Putman, Jurion, Delmotte, Sion, tremerry, Bricoux, Lamotte, Havenith, Blampain etc. & if Gurnay could win £100,000 in that time well the

fanciers were definitely putting their money down against him. Other fanciers must have had their share of the pools

too or they would have stopped pooling against him.

Now competition is different the world over. You see the pity is that I do not fly in Belgium against that crowd. I fly 15 races a year against 30 club members & 500 Federation members & the most that I can win is say even though I won every race & all pools at that would be about £25 /£30 weekly or £500 per year & if I did so no one would pool against me in my clubs as has happened before.

Our club races are up to 370 miles & Fed races also. In 1967 we had one race from 522 miles an open race competing against 2 other Feds. about 1,500 members. I sent 10 & clocked 6 by early 2nd morning winning 3rd club. This is the 1st open race like that for 18 years. Some day birds were clocked by 6 p.m. but heavy shut the rest out or I may have done better as my birds were trained hard for a hard race. I do not think that there were a final Gurnay sale as far as I know. I am sure that Fred Shaw was over visiting Gurnay at the time when Gurnay gave Shaw the chance to purchase the whole of his team. Later the lot were sent over to Shaws & he flitted to a bigger house so that he could accomodate them. With these he flew so well with against the strongest club in England that within a few years no one would pool against him & eventually he had to sell out. He sold many of these winners & birds that were breeding winners for I think £80 per pair. This was a lot of money in those days but still he sold them. A Mr Palmer of Lurgan N. Ireland bought 8 pairs in 2 lots but I do not ever remember him racing them. I think he was more of a dealer & I know that he stills sells them. Others no doubt bought them & raced them but one only gets to know of these when they advertise them. O.I. Woods of yorkshire was another who won well with them & one or two other races I ~~forget~~ about now. My friend Mr. Craven of

Leeds in Yorkshire races some grand Gurnays .You will see some of his adverts in Squills with their pictures. There are only are about 4 English fanciers race the Gurnays to my knowledge. Many other big fanciers racing great strains of their own have bought Gurnays off me to put into their own strain but these usually only carry a number in their ~~pos~~ pedigree instead of the strain. They say Gurnays as a cross are really great being so inbred that is only natural. I say that Gurnays have as their limit specially in Gt. Britain. A winning limit of 460 miles, after that distance they need a cross. One gets the exception of course in fact I can usually time in at 557 miles yearly 5 out of 8 every year but that little bit late. The greatest strain in Wales is the Channings they have won 7 or 8 Welsh Nationals well they have as a base Gurnays as well as Barkers & Logans etc. They were actually built on sons and daug. of Welsh National winners & the survival of the fittest. (2) Can't say how they race in other countries though they win out of their turn in S Africa One fancier won 10 races out of 11 in one season, to 700 miles but I expect that the country would be flatter & with tail winds too. (3) I am now 51 & have kept pigeons for 47 years As a boy I kept strays which I caught in the streets & fed them on maize that I bought at 4½ per qr. stone. My father & mother were always kind to me & although my father was unemployed for 10 years they kept me supplied with pocket money for feeding. My father gave me a poultry house to keep them in. The young off these I trained to 100 miles & it was great how they managed to home from that distance first toss. On leaving school at 16 I parted with my birds & went into business for a few years. Business ~~was~~ quiet so I started Budgerigars & in a couple ^{yes} of years I won the Cup at Londons big Crystal Palace Open Show for best Scottish Novice. So breeding was in my blood, as I won at all the leading big shbws Father got a job & business prospered & eventually we opened a Fish & chip shop in Renton. The war started & my 4 sisters kept the shop going while I got a job with the Threshing machine going around the farms daily. This way I got plenty of wheat oats & groats to keep my pigeons alive which I had started up again, as Renton was a hot bed of pigeon men. Now this feeding mixed with boiled Potatoes was all I used to race my birds on & they won & won out of their turn at that. There were various strains & all kept pure such as Grooters Verhagen Soffles, Logans, Stassert (Direct) Eventually about 1942 or 43 I saw some Direct bred Gurnays advertised by a Mr. Hart of Birmingham at £40 the pair an unheard of price to my parents way of thinking & nearly a years pocket money

to me., at that. I liked the cut of these Gurnays short bodies with all the weight at the front & lovely red eyes I eventually bought more of these direct bred birds about 6 or 8. Mr Hart told me that this was the last direct consignment ever to be sold by Mons Gurnay. These were bred off his old favourites which he had kept back from his sale to Fred Shaw. Unfortunately no pedigree arrived for these as Mons Gurnay died just as this lot arrived in England. Now strange to say the progeny of these Gurnays were hopeless in training & racing for the first couple of years. Maybe they were getting acclimatised I don't know. I persevered & then they started to show other just what they could do, & have not stopped winning since, no matter what the wind or weather. I remember one year I had 32 young ones at longest young bird race & it was usually a tough one even if only from 170 miles. The winning velocity was usually about 900 yds. in the Federation with about 2,000 birds competing. This day one bird circled & before it landed another appeared then another until there were 10 sitting on the roof of the loft & damned if I could coax any of them in. The 11th arrived & trapped like a bullet & then the others started dropping in one at a time. The time from the first to arrive to the last was 10 minutes & yet I won 1st, 10 places, 1st 3rd 5th & 7th Federation. They had been so far in front that they were a bunch of nerves & it was a pity that they did not trap right away as this would have been a new Fed. record. This happened many times but never were they ever so far in front, not at least with a batch of them.

Most years I buy in a couple of pair of pure bred to try their progeny against my own, nothing could beat them at least not consistently until 3 years ago when I got 3 pairs of Channings. Now these Channings are starting to ~~take~~ take the pants off the Gurnays. Not only that but these have bred 2 champs. in 2 years already. One has won £140 in 10 races & the other a 2 year old late bred has won £60 in 6 races his first year on the road.

One of these Champs has bred me 6 winners also. I also

have a small team of Kirkpatrick's the base of these is Bricoux & are very inbred nearly all are reds.

These are winning also & I think that this is the best

strain in Britain. All are bred off National winners.

(5)
This fancier won out of his turn in Nationals before he died. I am sure that he won 20 Nat. positions in the first 20 in 6 years. Since his birds were sold some at £200 each this family have won over £50,000 in Britain. Their progeny are making twice the price of any others. I forgot to mention that Bricoux himself was the only fancier in Belgium who was ever barred from club racing, he was so good. He was only allowed to race in the Nationals. This chap Kirkpatrick even won the Scottish Nat. against 5,000 ^{BIRDS} by an hour & also won by an hour flying 540 miles with his 2nd. bird. The year before that he was 3rd. Granted he was the shortest flier & has the best position in Scotland. There are 100 members down there in that part & 25% of them win good positions every year. These 3 strains of mine have each an entirely different way of being trained to race. Each strain is trained together almost every day at 20/30 miles seldom further ^{IN} but any weather hail, rain or shine. The Gurnays are jumped into their various races as they become fit. The Kirkpatricks need more ~~aces~~ being a bigger type of bird & mostly all reds. The Channings all checks & blues are all shapes & sizes yet they are all bred down from 8 Welsh National Winners. These need as many races as one can give them. the only catch is that this is not ~~not~~ possible as our club has a limit of 10 birds per race as the Fed. transporter ~~only has~~

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the Fed transporter only holds 3,500 birds & the 500
members must all get their share of birds each week. other
clubs will not let me in as I win so many races they just
shut their radius or did not accept duplications. Some even
disbanded their clubs & called it a day. Having 2 or 3 str^{INGS}
I naturally keep & breed more birds than can be raced in a
10 bird club so I just have to train them hard & jump ~~them~~
into various races. This does not give ^{THEM} the same chance as
they would get if they were raced every week so getting
them used to the transporter & the mass liberations. Anyway
I get more than my share so what is the use of complaining
Some have to be jumped into 240 or 300 miles for their
1st race birds which may have won 2 or 3 shorter races
had they been entered.] (4) Fred Shaw raced his birds on the
widowhood system. I tried this system but I could not get
~~it~~ it to work. Twice I tried 6 winners on it with no success
I have always raced my birds on the natural system. Sitting
on eggs rearing young ones etc. Have won in every condition.
Fast or slow races it is all the same to them bad weather
or good it did not matter. My birds are fed only once per
day as much as they can eat on beans maize & wheat. This I
give them at about 1 p.m. daily. These rearing young ones get
have a 1lb. jam jar filled with ~~beans~~ kept filled in

their nest boxes. Like Gurnay & Shaw I am always experimenting with herbs & such things to put in their water to maybe help to put a little bit of extra speed into them.

I also like to try & mix different kinds of grain during each racing season being of different protein content. The only bad season I really had was when I used an all bean feed. That season I won only the 3 hard races. Strange to say the only season I used linseed was the winter previous to the season that I used the all bean mixture. Have never used

linseed before nor since. The gurnays can keep on winning up till 8 or 9 & still keep on winning up till 17 at least as that is the oldest I have kept. The old champ mealy is still going strong yet born 1950 winner of 24 firsts & £400 in races up to 360 miles though he has also flown 557 & 620 miles 6 times twice day of toss but always just out of the prizes as he flew every race every year of his life this did not give him much of a chance in these big races. I never show now, at least not in Open shows, just in the local club shows at the back end of the year. You see Gurnays as racers couldn't compete against the present day show racers. These are bred specially for showing & are a bigger type than the racing type even though Gurnays were the base of them.

These show birds are a lovely type & one cannot pass them. I personally know that these show ^{birds} cannot race as I knew the late George Greenshields & the late John Thornton 2 of the worlds best show racing men. These men had 2 lofts of birds one for show birds & one for racers. The show birds were never allowed out of their lofts in their life as they had no homing sense. I tried a team of them once & trained 10 of them along with my one young ones & they were a wee bit slow but once they were racing that was a different story they had to use their brains of which they had little.

All 10 went down in their 1st 2 races yet none of my racers went down. Strange to say all of these were reported as I had all of them wing stamped with my name & address. So legally I was quite in order to show them in flown classes. My greatest win was in 1951 or 52 the only time that our Fed ever had an open race against another Fed. Their was about £1.000 in pools in this race. I won 5530 5130 with 3 birds entered in all pools winning 3rd, 5th & 15th if I remember right in the Open. Our Fed, won so much of the pool that there was never any more open races again. The distance of this race was 300 miles. Those that beat me were flying 20 miles less than me. My biggest disappointment was in 1958 I think in a national from Charleroi (Belgium) at 540 miles

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I entered 14 & pooled 10 of them. for £100. as all 10 of them had won 2, 3 & 4 Fed wins. each Result only 4 home & all outside of race time & none of them was a pooled bird. No more ever returned & strange to say these 4 bred over 60 winners between them in the years afterwards.

To me this was aa pleasure writting this & at least it will give you something to read. Please excuse the bad typing as this is only my 5th or 6th letter this way. We only bought it this past week.

yours very sincerely

Wm R Black

William R Black

THE ADDRESS OF THE RACING PIGEON
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