

February 11, 1954

Mr. R. L. Spiker
Cumberland
Maryland

Dear Mr. Spiker:

Answering your recent letter, my first importation of Gurnays was from Fred Shaw, Denton, England, in the year 1919, four birds which as individuals were not up to my expectations.

In 1920 my first importations from Mons. Gurnay arrived and for six years I imported annually a few birds from him, all splendid individuals descended from the best in his loft; included were First Prize Noyon, Thirty-eighth Prize Angouleme, First Prize Vierzon (1920), and Twelfth Prize Bordeaux, a poor trapper which he gave to me as a present in return for a painting of Bon Bleu, which M. H. Paget, then of Rockford, Illinois, did from a photo of Bon Bleu, taken by Hedges in England.

Gurnay was a runner for Hansenne and had access to Hansenne's loft. Choosing several birds from the great pied cock, Coeur sur le dos (heart on the back).

The Old Blue Hen 26204-07, called the Mother of Gurnay's Loft, was either a daughter or granddaughter, so I believe, of the great pied cock. This Blue Hen won the Prix d' Excellence (championship) wherever shown and was never defeated until 13 years of age. She was sold to Shaw and in his loft at 19 years of age but I do not know how long she lived. Every bird that I purchased from Gurnay was related to this hen. In 1918 Gurnay had her mated with LaTache 991-16. I bought this cock later, paying \$350.00 for him, and mate and not £ 192.00 as advertised by Shaw.

I do not have Gurnay's complete show record but will give you what I have after a hurried search through his many letters to me.

The Old Blue Hen 26204-07

Gurnay's letter of February 28, 1921 "At the Liege Exhibition with 1500 birds competing I exhibited 18 birds and won 17 prizes, the Prix d' Excellence and all the first prizes in all classes. The eighteenth bird which got nothing

is as good as the others and must have remained unnoticed. It is the fourteen year old blue hen and each year she has gotten the Prix d' Excellence and she is not to be beaten in spite of her age".

January 16, 1923 Gurnay writes: "As a wager I had to exhibit at the Independante, a very important Liege Club, five birds and I won the Excellency prize, along with first, second, fourth and twelfth prizes, while my opponent secures but twenty-first prize with his best bird, some eight hundred birds competing".

The juries had to admit they could not explain, that there must have been a mistake. Hence my decision never to show again". (He may have changed his mind).

Bronze Excellence 1102-16

Gurnay writes: "A real breeder and not to be beaten at an exhibition of racing pigeons. Has been three times exhibited and has gotten the highest awards". Described by Mons. Stassart as "unbeatable". The quote is from Gurnay's letter to me of May 20, 1920 and he no doubt exhibited 1102-16 after that.

Bronze Cock "Derby" 9590-19

Gurnay writes: "Great prize winner at all shows, beaten for the Prix d'Excellence only by his own father, Bronze Excellence 1102-16. When in good form he does not coo, he sings. Tache - his mother's sire was Le Bidet Consistent winner for three pre-war seasons.

Show record of birds I imported from Gurnay

Dark Hen 26191-18 (mated to LaTache).
 Checquered Excellence, also called Excellency No. 1027893-20 son of Derby. Derby, son of Bronze Excellence.

Here you have three generations of winners; Checquered Excellence and Derby were racers as well. Bronze Excellence not trained, being hatched during World War I.

"Checquered Excellence late bred 1920 in December 1920 won the Prix d'Excellence at the Grand Liege show, with great distinction, with all the nest feathers on. 1921 not raced or shown; 1922 first prize Orleans 420 kilos. Having by that time tried some of his youngsters with success (he sired twelfth prize Bordeaux 507 miles) have kept it for breeding".

1922 Liege show 1400 birds - first Prix d' Excellence
 1922 Verviers show - first prize
 1923 Liege show - first prize
 1924 Brussels International show - first prize
 1925 Jubilee show Verviers - first prize
 1925 Jubilee show Verviers - second championship

Sire LaTache, dam 54805-19 Bronze with hen daughter of Bronze Excellence 1102-16. As yearling Noyon won first prize. Noyon, seventh Dourdan and other prizes. (Gurnay seldom flew yearlings over 145 miles)

At the National Exhibition Liege, Noyon won first prize (as yearling) in his class. At this 1925 Jubilee Show Gurnay exhibited four hens, winning first, fifth, sixth and tenth prizes, and four old cocks, winning first, second, third and twelfth first being 1027893-20 above). "For the championship I again sent the four birds (cocks) which were shown with all the other people's champions. There I got second, third, fifth and sixth prizes, thus for the first time being beaten. The championship was won by Mr. Coopman. His bird had been shown on the first day I had shown mine and he won tenth prize. However it was that with the tenth prize he managed to beat my four birds which had previously beaten his, I do not know, neither does he. The juries had to admit they could not explain, that there must have been a mistake. Hence my decision never to show again". (He may have changed his mind).

Well this is how I happened to get Chequered Excellence. Gurnay writes that "this bird is a first class breeder and unequalled in the pen and if I show him here and he is ever defeated he will send me ten pairs of birds as compensation". (I am not sure I have this sentence composed as Gurnay had it but you get the meaning).

Vierzon sired blue on LaTache Chequered cock 991-16 won eight prizes in 1921 and in 1922 - nine prizes, among them first Dourdan 225 miles, first Orleans 270. Gurnay writes: "You may exhibit LaTache for it is one of the best specimen of racing pigeons that could be found in every respect. Masterpiece (brother of "Petite Ecuille Vierzon") sire of La Tache - his mother's sire was Le Bidet Consistent winner for three pre-war seasons.

This son of Vierzon gave Gurnay good blue cock 418322-21 which in turn gave him good dark pied cock Dark Hen 26191-18 (mated to LaTache). Sired by Bon Bleu, son of the Old Blue Hen 26204-07. She 26191-18 is full sister to Bronze Favourite, winner Grand National from Angouleme 1920 by over one half hour advance, Young Excellence, Cigarette and Plum Casse, all great racing pigeons. She was exhibited twice as a young bird winning first prize at one show and the Prix d' Excellence at the second show.

"Bon Fonce 418322-21 son of this pair flew in 1922 nine races, won nine prizes and over 40,000 francs. This year (1923) again wins in the strongest competition among which three times first prize and a small fortune.

In the fall 1921 bred a youngster from same parents. In 1923 (as a 2-yr. old) first race, second prize; second race, third prize; third race provincial with high competition, first prize. The fourth race I lost him. Take care of this pair, they are second to none as breeders". (Gurnay asked me to send him a pair of youngsters from LaTache and mate).

Dark Cock Noyon 1158438-20 Or 11 flights. Sire LaTache, dam 54805-19 Bronze wft hen daughter of Bronze Excellence 1102-16. As yearling Noyon won first prize. Noyon, seventh Dourdan and other prizes. (Gurnay seldom flew yearlings over 145 miles)

At the National Exhibition Liege, Noyon won first prize (as yearling) in his class, 400 birds competing. Noyon was a very good likeness of his grandfather Bronze Excellence - 1102-16 sire of Noyon's mother and proves what Gurnay observes herewith. "It is ever so much more difficult to have good breeders than good racers; often good racers are not good breeders but the product of their offspring is generally good. Thus it is that if you want to reproduce the bird which you most like, it is out of that very bird's daughter that you are most likely to get it again". Thus Noyon, through his mother, 1102-16's daughter, greatly resembles Bronze Excellence.

Gurnay was a master breeder, his birds combined beauty and utility, he knew what his strain could do and handled it with perfection. He sold his best birds but always had something to take their place both as breeders and racers. At his sale in 1936 his strain was said to be the last pure strain in Belgium. To illustrate what his birds could do:

Dark Cock Fred 26168-18 First Limoges 1921

Fred sired Petite Vierzon Dark cock 40779-19 (sold to me) first prize Vierzon 1920

Vierzon sired blue cock 1158500-20 (I had his dam also) won eight prizes in 1921 and in 1922 - nine prizes, among them first Dourdon 225 miles, first Orleans 270 miles; second Limoges 385 miles and at the Grand National subscription race he, with another bird of Gurnay's, won the famous cup offered by the Gazette de Liege for the best results with two birds, winning first and second.

This son of Vierzon gave Gurnay good blue cock 418354-21 which in turn gave him good dark pied cock 302707-22 which in 1923 won above 60,000 francs in prizes and pools, an extra bird Gurnay writes "Vierzon has all the virtues required in a super bird, birds good for racing and good for breeding are most rare".

He also offered me his famous Old Mealy 146-13 and his champion son but that was before the son won so many races.
Le Gros £ 1000 in four great open successive races. First prize Montargis, 211 miles, First Limoges 385 miles, First Perigieux 440 miles, First Chateroux 323 miles.

How Verviers Birds Were Saved From the German Occupation
In writing to Gurnay I mentioned that I had a very large youngster which I intended to kill and he replied asking me to try it out first adding "I did not like Le Gros as a youngster because he was too big and I had been ready to kill him. In training tosses from 20, 40 and 80 miles he used to come back an hour or two after the other birds. From Noyon 145 miles he homed one day after the others".

because of that that we have been able to save the Verviers birds, when the German staff took them.
Bon Bleu 1228-13 up to 1914 competed in nine races, 9 times Gurnay's first bird. Marvelous stock bird and racer. He sired Bronze Favourite, (later to become one of Gurnay's greatest stock birds) First Grand National Angouleme 1920 by over one half hour, 1643 birds competing. Shaw paid 5,000 francs for Bon Bleu at 8 years of age and his mate the Record Hen and was to send Gurnay one pair of their youngsters.

of
 LeBon Petite Ecaille 218-72 (sire/my Telephone) nest brother to Gurnay's Augouleme prize winner 1914. 218-12 was Gurnay's biggest winner as a yearling. In 1914 won first Vierzon and First Fontainbleu. Gurnay said in the early twenties Ecaille was the finest pigeon I ever owned. £1600.00 in 16 races, wonderful reproducer. *Have the character; I mean the mind, the brains that will help them on the road, and that cannot be seen exactly. To my mind, these birds:* O. I. Wood, Ilkey, England was a Gurnay specialist. His famous Young Hawk bred in 1923 a pure Gurnay closely inbred to 1914 Vierzon (above) on both sides competed in races only over 230 miles and from 1924 to 1928 won 19 first, second and third prizes and 95 first pool prizes. Young Hawk was pooled to £1 in 19 races and won first £1 pool in 17 of these races. At the age of 19 he had never had an unfertile egg. O. I. Wood's wins of 600 and 700 mile races were remarkable. He was a great friend of Gurnay and flew the widowhood system, presumably Gurnay's, and fed many small seeds the same as Gurnay. *Should be good muscles linking wings to body; it shows that the bird has a good motor. That the bird has* H. W. Bell of Leeds also raced Gurnays and with success only after Mr. Hust, O. I. Wood's loft manager, paid him a visit. It is to be presumed that Bell was given Wood's system of flying widowhood.

In May, 1920 Gurnay offered to me at \$200.00 per pair:

well proportioned in the whole structure. Race horses also race well when they have the least possible Bronze Excellence 1102-16 and mate

Angouleme Bleu Chec 224-12 and mate

The Masterpiece Bleu Chec wft 87-1915 sire LaTache *or the eye*

always seen La Tache chec cock 991-16 *the color of same has no importance, although I rather prefer dark or very red eyes without making a rule of it.*

He writes "they are worth more than 20,000 francs and I have made up my mind to sell them because they would be going abroad". *Birds which are known to have faults. As ideal types of breeders, I think it would be hard to find better ones than LaTache* He also offered me his famous Old Mealy 146-13 and his champion son but that was before the son won so many races.

Gurnay dictated in French. Mr. Dauvister translated and typed the letters and what has been written in many, many letters to me, in some instances may not have conveyed what Gurnay intended to convey.

How Verviers Birds Were Saved From the German Occupation

After Gurnay's letter on choosing birds, Dauvister adds in long hand "The "For your guidance, in 1918 our country was under German rule and as my loft had a great name in Germany, (in 1913 I had supplied the Austrian-Hungarian government with birds for a big sum of money) over and above all the staff, Prince Henri of Prussia, brother of their famous Kaiser, called on me and was in ecstasy at the sight of the four birds I am offering you. It was really because of that that we have been able to save the Verviers birds, when the General staff took their headquarters at Spa, ten miles from our town". In this same letter Gurnay offered me 9 pairs of yearlings at \$100.00 per pair, first prize
 *Vierzon 1920, 40779-19 was one of them. Shaw bought some of these birds later.

Gurnay judged the Greater Yorkshire Show at Leeds, England, exhibited three of his champions, not in competition of course. Twelfth prize Bordeaux was a splendid individual but his eye was light in color and Gurnay sent a mate for him with a rich red eye. Except for eye Bordeaux was a wonderful specimen.

Selection of Birds

"With all outward signs that go to make a good bird it is most necessary that the pigeons have the character; I mean the mind, the brains that will help them on the road, and that cannot be seen exactly. To my mind, these virtues are inborn and belong to the strain as a whole, with unavoidable exceptions.

lustrous bronze color. I lost him as a yearling in frightful weather. Most of our young birds were lost. When I put this bird in the basket I thought you should seek birds whose forehead is broad with alert and brilliant eyes, also a broad chest and the least possible in the hind part of the body, so that, when you hold the pigeon in your hand it would slide out quite easily. That there be the least possible distance between the sternum and the fork-bone. When you feel under the wings, near the chest, there should be good muscles linking wings to body; it shows that the bird has a good motor. That the bird have plenty of feathers and that the wing feathers be quite broad, as well as the feather constituting the back part of the wing and well one against the other.

"Do never try to get heavy birds unless they be quite well proportioned in the whole structure. Race horses also race well when they have the least possible weight on.

At another time he writes on choosing breeders: "For the eye always search for alert brilliant eyes, the color of same has no importance, although I rather prefer dark or very red eyes without making a rule of it. With regards to tail, I prefer a short one and as narrow as possible. One rule that always applies is not to take as breeders birds which are known to have faults. As ideal types of breeders, I think it would be hard to find better ones than LaTache and the dark hen off Bon Bleu (261 191-18)"

Gurnay dictated in French. Mr. Dauvister translated and typed the letters and what has been written in many, many letters to me, in some instances may not have conveyed what Gurnay intended to convey.

After Gurnay's letter on choosing birds, Dauvister adds in long hand "The writer trusts you easily understand his translations as this is rather technical stuff, he himself being not a fancier. He attempts to stick to Mr. Gurnay's sentences as much as possible, anyhow and should anything be not understandable please do point it out".

Gurnay writes "You probably know that during the war my strain was awarded the British Victoria Cross, the French Croix de Guerre and the Russian Order of St. George".

Gurnay judged the Greater Yorkshire Show at Leeds, England, November 19, 1921 - 900 birds - and exhibited three of his champions, not in competition of course. Twelfth prize Bordeaux was a splendid individual but his eye was light in color and Gurnay sent a mate for him with a rich red eye. Except for eye Bordeaux was a wonderful specimen.

Mr. R. L. Spiker

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February 16, 1954

Checquered Excellence, a marvelous bird but my favorite was LaTache and a Bronze cock which I raised from one of the first pairs Gurnay sent me. I should have sent this bird to Gurnay - beautiful in every way and a most beautiful, lustrous bronze color. I lost him as a yearling in frightful weather. Most of our young birds were lost. When I put this bird in the basket I thought to withdraw him but let him go. I raised some fine specimens from LaTache and Noyon as well. I wish I had the descendants of these birds today.

Dear Mr. Spiker:

Yours sincerely,

Answering your recent letter, my first importation of Gurnays was from Fred Shaw, Denton, England, in the year 1919, four birds which as individuals were not up to my expectations.

In 1920 my first importations from Mons. Gurnay arrived and for six years I imported annually a few birds from him, all splendid individuals descended from the best in his loft; included were First Prize Noyon, Thirty-eighth Prize Angouleme, First Prize Vierzon (1920), and Twelfth Prize Bordeaux, a male turkey which he gave to me as a present in return for a painting of Bon

Lee M. Ford