

North West Grand National & Bamford Gold Ring

Annual Prize Presentation. Blackpool Weekend.

It was that time of the year again when members of the North West Grand National FC and the Bamford Gold Ring winners get together for their annual prize presentation. Once more an excellent turn out. Around ninety members and guests enjoyed another delicious meal at the Ruskin Hotel. Good service, top class food and great company. The venue is already booked for next year.

After the meal Rob Owen opened proceedings by thanking some of the regular attendees for their efforts in promoting racing in this area. It is these people the calibre of John Winder, Alan Bamford, Joe Tunstall and Terry Phifer who do a lot of unpaid work behind the scenes to keep things moving forward. This club's great strength is the number of marking stations they have from near Workington in North Cumbria down to Merseyside in the south. A lot is owed to Mike Evans, George Hilson, Dave Harrington, Alan Bamford and Jim Frost plus the many other unpaid volunteers. We thank you so much for your efforts. Coupled with our excellent relationship with B & I Transport and you have a winning formula. On a sad note we missed our club champ and record holder this year George Hilson and his regular partners in crime like Alan and Hilda Hindhaugh and Tommy Chorlton and company. Let's hope for a better year health wise George and hope to see you soon.

It was time to introduce our chief guest. Sandy Brown of Mysoft. I first contacted Sandy when I realised that in order to progress the NWGNFC we needed a web site and race result software which could reflect the complex nature of a result with multiple sections and various pool and prize money scenarios. After doing the specification for what we needed Sandy visited me and then wrote the software to address our concerns. The Mysoft Toolkit result software is used by many National clubs in the UK. Sandy also sets up web sites. The big thing is he is always available and willing to visit if you get a problem. Enter the Bamford Gold Ring race. Racing for £21000 plus. Sectional, many contestants, a lot of birds, a lot of various pools yet the result is out on the night and in the BHW for publication the same week. A wonderful advertisement for Mysoft. Sandy thanked the club for the invitation and referred to his association with the sport in the North West going back over 20 years. He certainly made an impression to me of a man of integrity and the highest standards.

One of our regular presentation attenders is Paul Dolan keen as mustard. Last year he said he had invested heavily in new stock and set himself a target of winning the Grand National in two years. Well he was a year ahead of his schedule. The Portland race had a really good turn out and proved to be a popular race point. Competitors race from around 200 to 270 miles so an easily achievable taster for the programme to come. I rang up our man on the spot Alan of B & I Transport and he had the pigeon away for what turned out to be a cracking race and probably best I had had all year for consistent returns. Paul timed his very good cock pooled up to the hilt to take first spot. This cock also won bird of the year in the local club winning 1st Ormskirk West Amal Frome, 10th Ormskirk West Amal Yeovile and 1st club Fougères. In 2015 Paul visited Belgium and bought two full rounds off Stijn Van Laere which has proved to be a wise investment and this cock is off one of these breeding pair. Close on Paul's heels was Cliff Harding who timed in a very consistent bird with multiple NW Combine positions to its name. Well done Cliff as the loft has been decimated by hawk strikes in the last few years and he ended up with just a handful of birds to race. In the few races he sent he had brilliant results in the NWGNFC and Merseyside Fed. Other lofts in the top ten in this race were Maurice Jackson, Alec Smith, MRAD lofts and Marshland Lofts.

Higher up the country Mr Consistent Tom Jackson won 1st & 2nd, section B. Always there about whatever the distance. Ever present Ian Pedder and Swarbrick & Greenalgh took the next places. In section E around the Manchester area G. Holker & Son showed a glimpse of things to come by winning the section. Last year's Messac winner, C & L Corefield, took second spot whilst Salford loft Winder & Thompson where 3rd. Cumbrian fanciers for once enjoyed a trouble free race with Millom lofts Newton & Oliver and D, DL, & T Fallows having a really tight finish for the top two spots, these two birds sticking together for the 255 mile journey. Great credit for the solo artist third bird to Mr & Mrs I D Woods at 275 miles a great effort.

Three weeks later the club was at Carentan and it turned out to be a race to remember for all the wrong reasons with very poor returns.

As always happens in these tough races there are some good pigeons which defy the odds. New members Mr & Mrs Phil Brand proved to have the outstanding winner doing 1281 which proved to be one of the best velocities on the day. The pigeon, a blue tick eye cock is three quarters Vandersmissen and a quarter Houben. The sire and dam were gifted to Phil from Mr and Mrs Holloway from Birnam lofts in Fleetwood. The pigeon had previously won the Old Lodge Open race on its first ever race as a yearling. It was smashed up as a youngster and had a badly damaged keel, hence the name Train Wreck. Train Wreck has only ever scored on hard days and although he has had club cards, he only seems to excel in races where the birds have to think for themselves. He was sent to the race on widowhood but wasn't shown his hen just his nest bowl. Phil is due to leave for sunnier climes (Fuerteventura) after this season and Train Wreck is now back at Birnam lofts in Fleetwood.

After the first few bird's velocities quickly dropped away. One of the most consistent lofts in the club of recent years Martin Gorka was next best doing 1240 whilst former winner of this race Alan Greenall took 3rd open. Another former winner Mr & Mrs Peter Billington was 4th open and 1st section B which proved to be the last bird doing over 1200 ypm. C Barlow was 2nd section B. Once more G. Holker and sons continued their excellent season winning section E again. Up in Barrow Mike Evans timed an exceptional well fancied bird to win section A and 19th Open. This bird names 'Jules' after one of his family who sadly past away from cancer. She has been an excellent servant to the loft and was a swap bird from Ron Kendall and an old friend of mine the late Frank Blick. As a youngster she won the 'Swap' race and her racing record is 1st section Carentan, 1st section Messac, 7th section Coutances, 7th section Fougeres, 2nd section Ancenis. Sadly Jules went down at the last tough Messac race, what a great little champ. Ever presents Mr & Mrs Butterworth timed in to take 2nd section A and these two lofts went nip and tuck all year. I must mention Tom Smith St Helens, who timed six on the day when many people failed to time in.

The next race on the calendar was Messac. Always a fair test into the North West particularly into a north east wind. Paul Hart continued his wonderful run of wins with the club from cross channel racing doing 1375 ypm a fair velocity in the prevailing conditions and for good measure he timed another quick one for 6th open. These two good widowhood hens of Koopman / Syndicate loft breeding had both raced the week before from Ancenis in the NFC. They finished 11th and 13th section L, 22nd and 28th open in that race and went back to the NWGN Messac race the following week. Previous winners, they always arrive close together never looking tired or having a feather out of place. This persuaded Paul to send them on as his only two entries pool pooled to the hilt.

Dave Brookfield who has a long history of cross channel success also timed two good birds for 2nd and 4th. North West phenomenon' R & B Smith continued their long run of success finished 3rd open with Maurice Jackson 5th. Rounding up the top ten where Newsholme & McArdle, Tom Smith, Phil Brand and Martin Gorka. The section A winner was once more Mike Evans who once more held off D & W Butterworth.

The final race of the old bird series was once more Messac and typical of the 2018 channel season there was no hiding place with again a light north east wind and even hotter weather conditions. Coming out on top was Newsholme & McArdle. This exceptional pigeon was their first bird in all four NWGNFC old bird races and considering the type of races they where you can see why I would class it as a champion. Sire of the winner is a direct Cyril & Carl Lambrechts, a half-brother to King Pin. This prolific stock cock has bred three NWGNFC winners out of Messac so must be one of the best breeders of the strain in the country. Dam of the winner was loaned from their friend John Mathews of Prescott and is a Jos Soontjens. The winner for its efforts is now named Parkside 'The Power', and won the Peter Bennett 'bird of the Year' plate, well deserved. This partnership never looked back since obtaining a team of these direct Lambrecht birds many years ago, and this year won the NWGNFC channel average to go with the Widnes Federation land average. The first five birds in the open result where all well pooled pigeons. Second in the race was Hesketh Bank loft Stephen Stringfellow who has an excellent record in the club and invariably takes away a nice pot in winnings each year. Third open and winning the east section once more was that top partnership of G Holker & Sons. What a season they have had. Second East section and 4th Open was Sean Horrock's another loft on top form this year. Alan Bamford took 5th spot and was rewarded for his sheer consistency winning NWGNFC Combined averages for his efforts. Channel man Dave Brookfield, Maurice McCartney, Jimmy Hinchliffe and Paul Rimmer completed the top ten. Maurice winning section B and the section channel averages for his

troubles. He just relishes these tough races which seem to suit his pigeons. In section A Mr & Mrs Butterworth finally gained first place after two seconds in the preceding races. Wendy, the brains in the organisation tells me it was bred their friend Mike McAlinden and really comes to the fore in races over 400 miles being only bird in race time in the club from both Messac races. They are looking forward to racing this good cock in 2019.

Our young bird programme was to be two races from Bedhampton the first two weekends in September.

The first race was quite a fast affair with the prevailing wind on the day helping our longer flying westerly lofts come to the fore. A new member John Hassall of Esprick in the West Coast Fed recorded first and second. New to the club but not new to success as I have noted his name on many occasions. Only this year in the North West Combine he took 1st and 6th in the lowest winning velocity race of the season from Messac. His young bird team have been on fire also. He gave the two youngsters a break prior to the race and sent them with confidence. One of the timers went on to win the Fylde 2-Bird, the same day he took the first four in the Fed. John tells me he was fortunate to obtain 36 eggs from the famous Curtis/Wall & Lunt partnership and the signs are he will have an outstanding team of yearlings in 2019. Third in the race was Mr & Mrs Iddon of Hesketh Bank which was very pleasing as Jess does a lot of work in the area for sport. Fourth open and 1st East Section was the main man when it comes to young bird racing, Steve Maylett. How on earth that youngster got over there in the conditions on the day was amazing. Perhaps a very good bird raced by a very good fancier being 45 ypm in front of the next bird in the section. K.P. Marshland Lofts had the next two birds and they are proving a force to be reckoned with in the club with the top ten being completed by R & B Smith, Ste Stringfellow and MRAD Lofts. It was nice to see three of the four section winners in the first four. In section A, Dickie Parrington of Askam, Cumbria took first place and he has an excellent record in these events. The ever-present Tony Johnson of Barrow took the next two section prizes followed by A Stretch who flies near Ulverston. Returns in the race where excellent

The second Bedhampton race was again a decent affair. Steve Maylett of Ancoats made no mistake timing in the same bird which was 4th open the week before. Steve said he had never felt so confident that a bird would win. Pooled to the hilt he subsequently named the bird 'The Any Wind Hen'. The bird is a Leo Hermans x De Mayer and was bred for Steve by Frost, Hannon and Roberts of Liverpool. These lads have invested heavily in some top-class stock. Typical of the generosity of Steve, the bird was gifted back to them after the win. Steve also won the young bird averages in the club. I asked Steve when was he going to write a book on young bird racing, surely a best seller in the making.. Second Open in this race was Widnes ace Cliff Harding and this was an outstanding bird on the day being well clear in the West Section. Third was Steve Maylett and fourth R & B Smith. Alan Bamford, Ste Maylett again, R & B Smith, Bill Dickinson and Nairn & Brown these completed the top ten. I was particular impressed with Nairn & Brown timing seven birds in a few seconds flying into Liverpool. What a season they had in 2018. The East & West sections dominated the result but once more John Hassall topped section B to take section B young bird averages and section gold Ring prize. T Eves of Blackpool was second section B and timed in some good birds in the series. Meanwhile at 274 miles flying solo into Cleator Moor North Cumbria Rodgers & Benn timed an outstanding section winner. It was nice to see the lads at the presentation and indeed the large Cumbrian contingent what lovely people. This winning bird was double banked into the Breeder Buyer and secured £3,000 each for the breeder and buyer. 2nd section and the A section young bird average winner was Dickie Parrington. 3rd section was Cloudsdale, Pears and Henderson with another breeder buyer bird and a tasty £2,200 for breeder and buyer. There was 20 prizes in the Gold Ring scheme paid out. This is paid out at section level. K Ball of Hesketh Bank won west section, John Hassall Section B, T McManus East section and B Lloyd section A. A further 19 prizes where paid out to the total of around £1200.

Bamford Gold Ring

Re the Bamfords Gold Ring race Alan Bamford thanked all the helpers who assisted in marking, doing the clocks and enabling the result to get out once more on the night. Particular thanks go the Sandy Brown of Mysoft and Diane Bonney. In the end 111 competitors with 585 birds flying for £21600 made it for the August Bank Holiday date. A credit to all concerned and confirming its place as amongst the top gold ring races in the country. Liberated at 10:00 into a westerly wind it was fair to say the Easterly based lofts had the best of the early times however it was far from being a straight forward race, and whilst the top five birds where quite close together, velocities quickly dropped away and there was plenty of missing birds. First place and taking over £1500 was taken by that well known Swinton loft of G. Holker & Sons. Hank and Geoff had another wonderful season in 2018. Second and third taking over £1300

was Alan Nixon of Stretford. It was nice to see Paul Hart at the presentation and with four and fifth and £1050 it was worth the trip. Warrington loft Mr & Mrs Silvester won section C and 6th Open and over £1200, this loft had been in good form prior to the race winning several of the Kingsway clubs young bird races. In seventh place and £1250 was a loft with a long history of success W & P Brown of St Helens. I must mention Pimlott Bros from Hesketh Bank in 10th position and great bird on the coast. H. Andrews & Son of Wigan, Andy Gregson of Preston, Tom Jackson of Preston and John Schofield of St Helens, all very successful lofts, where well to the fore. Another section winner re the North section was that man John Hassall. What a young bird season he had. All considered there was around 180 birds on the result in as I said a difficult race. It must be said however when you are flying for such large amounts of money you don't really want it won on the trap. Ring sales are going well for the 2019 event. Remember if you ain't in it, you can't win it.

Thanks go on the night to all who assisted with the evening. As Maurice McCartney said 'it gets better every year'. Dave Moss with the raffle, and John Waterhouse with the auction of birds and of course the Ruskin Hotel staff.

Rob Owen