

Will there be a successor to the JANSSEN BROS – ARENDONK Strain

From John Hofman

Driekske (Henri) Janssen was born in 1872 and commenced building his strain of pigeon's in 1886. He obtained & blended the best pigeons in his area that took his eye and created the base or stage one of his strain. Within a few years he started a club in Arendonk and it was known that he was a brilliant flyer right from the start. Prior to World War 1 he visited lofts in his immediate neighbourhood purchasing pigeons and crossing them into his own with great success. It was in about 1907 he obtained his first real leading pigeons. He then owned a blue hen which won 20 first prizes between 1908 and 1914. He was a silent man and nobody outside of Arendonk knew much about him and his successes. He took up racing again immediately after WW1 with great success. It was in 1919 that his eldest son Fons became acquainted with Mons. Ceulemans who had a team of fabulous racers, mostly reds. Fons procured a red chequer cock which was introduced into their Arendonk lofts with immediate success. The bloodlines of this pigeon gave the base family an immediate lift and in 1926 a further red pigeon from Ceulemans was introduced. In the mid 1920's Fons met Mons. Schoeters who had a super team of racing & breeding pigeons. He was one of the best Belgian fanciers at that time. Fons crossed the Schoeters pigeons with his own Janssen pigeons at his own racing loft in Kerkestraatje & turned pigeon racing in Baarle Hertog upside down. There were slatie pigeons in this strain of Schoeters. The first Schoeters pigeon to come to The Janssen Brothers lofts was the Schalieblauwe of 32 which came from the loft of Cas Goossens, a close friend of Schoeters who sent them there as at the time he had no pigeons of his own that he wanted to sell. In 1936 Schoeters & Goossens had a sale in which both fanciers presented 14 birds each. Charel Janssen purchased lots 9 & 13 and these pigeons went on to further boost the winning line of the Janssen-Arendonk. Apart from an odd further introduction of Schoeters from time to time the only other introduction was the Halve Fabry from Victor Fabry which was also half Janssen.

The Janssen Brothers of Arendonk fame were the five unmarried brothers. They were Jeff, Vic, Adriaan, Charel & Louis. The two oldest brothers were Fons & Franz who married & moved away from Arendonk and raced the Janssen strain with great results from their own lofts. Henri, the father, died in 1949 & his wife Pauline died in 1967. There were also two sisters, Irma & Marie. Irma became a "mother" to the five brothers in their number 6 Schoolstraat home while Marie married Tist Eyssen who also raced his Janssen pigeons with quite some success over a period of time. Irma died in 1980, Adrian died in 1981 and Franz in 1982. I don't know when Marie, Fons, Jeff & Vic died but I would say somewhere between the mid 1980's & early 90's. I think Charel died in 1996 & finally Louis at the age of 100 in 2013. I guess the Janssen Brothers stopped racing in the late 1980's when there were just two of them left, Louis & Charel. With the base strain well established and winning out of turn well before WW1, although much lesser known & the success continuing until around 1990 one could say it burned brightly at the top for about 80 years. Considering the vast number of fanciers, worldwide, who have had success and actually established their own family of pigeons with the Janssen strain I doubt if anyone or family of fanciers will ever come close to emulating them.

Louis Van Loon of Poppel

Louis Van Loon of Poppel was born in 1922 and the base of his pigeons was formed shortly after the end of WWII. His strain of pigeons were a close second to the Janssen-Arendonk pigeons for many years. According to the Janssen Brothers he visited their second oldest brother Franz and obtained a

number of birds from him. Franz had married and established his own loft at his house and flew the Janssen birds with great success for a period of time. He also had birds from a Van Craenendonk. Franz eventually faded from the results as he had a habit of giving away his best birds. It was these pigeons that Van Loon raced in the 60 mile sprint races from Quievrain and after a few years he was expelled from short distance racing due to his outstanding success. He was almost unbeatable. Due to his expulsion from the sprint races it became obvious that he would have to join a middle distance club if he wanted to continue racing. To give his Janssen based sprinters the extra distance qualities needed he went to the Catthrysse Brothers of Moere who were right at the top of Belgian middle & long distance racing at that time. He brought the bloodline of the magnificent '45 and crossed this line into his own birds. Being a master breeder it didn't take long for him to combine the speed & quick orientation of the Janssens with the endurance of the Catthrysse. Within a couple of years he was winning most events in his middle distance club and it wasn't long before he was once again expelled due to his incredible success. There was only one step left for Van Loon if he wished to compete in the sport and that was long distance. He decided not to specialize but to compete in all events from 60 to 700 miles and he continued to improve his family of birds by purchasing from Desmet-Matthys, Van Rijn-Kloek and in 1970 he bought two daughters of the famous "Pandoer", the best racer of that year in Belgium. The "Pandoer" was owned and raced by Kil & Son of Zandvliet-Antwerp. The Antwerp Union was the strongest competition in the world and in 1973 he twice won 1st prize from Melun, 1st Bourges Provincial, 1st Etampes by 5 minutes and Orleans by 12 minutes. With these new introductions the Van Loon pigeons proved themselves in the 600 mile races including 8th & 9th National St. Vincent while flying the longest distance and 17th place in the once only flown 900 mile race from Alicante. Similar to the Janssen pigeons the Van Loon pigeons were sought after by fanciers all over Europe and the rest of the world and they resulted in successful crosses which established countless families. They were noted for also crossing extremely well with the Janssens. Louis Van Loon died on the 14th March 2014 at the age of 89 and as far as I know his successes continued nearly up until the time of his death. So we could say that his star shone brightly in the racing pigeon world for 60 years, a length of time only exceeded by the Janssen Brothers.

Jos (De Klak) Van Limpt of Reusel

Jos DeKlak was born into a pigeon family in 1922. His father Cees was a very successful fancier and often wore a cap, which is klak in Dutch hence he was known as De Klak, the cap, and later on Jos inherited that title. It was Cees who founded the strain in 1928, 11 years prior to WWII. Cees became friendly with a workmate in a cigar factory but he had no idea that this workmate was Adriaan Janssen of Arenkonk fame. Adrian bred Cees & his son Jos four babies and the offspring of these birds performed so well Cees made many more trips to Arendonk on his bicycle with young Jos. Those trips were made in the mid to late 1930's and De Klak & Son became champions in 1935, 37 & 38 with a racing team of no more than 15 birds. Who could do that now? In 1939 dark clouds were gathering over Europe again ahead of the Nazi invasion of Poland, Russia, Belgium, Holland etc., The Germans ordered all pigeon fanciers to kill all of their birds but many selected a handful of their very best and hid them in various hiding places on their properties. Cees hid his best 8 birds in a haystack with a view to breed from them when the war was over. However, in 1942 at the young age of 43, Cees passed away and a month or so later the Germans discovered the 8 hidden pigeons and confiscated them. Fortunately Jos' mother was able to convince the Germans that she & Jos knew nothing about these birds and that they belonged to her husband Cees who had recently passed away. The Germans accepted their story. Immediately after the war young Jos got a job at the same cigar factory as where his father worked and he too got on well with Adriaan Janssen. From then on each year Jos De Klak purchased small consignments of birds between 2 to 4 in number from the

Janssen Brothers and also a few from Tist Eyssen who was a brother in law of the Janssens as he married one of their sisters, Marie. The birds of Eyssen were solely Janssen and he was for a period of time their greatest competitor. Jos got two old 1942 birds from Eyssen, one of which became a foundation hen. She was the dam of "Goed Duifke" from '45 that would be the mother of "Witpenneke of 54". When "Witpenneke" was mated to "De Vechter" they became the second best breeding pair that De Klak ever had, second only to the "Jong Koppel". After a poor racing season in 1945 with these Janssens he persevered with them and bred from them for the following season. In 1946 he became 2nd champion with them and 1st champion in 1948. By 1972 he had been champion for 25 consecutive years. Many fanciers who obtained De Klak birds including, Dr Linssen, Wout Smeulders, De Witt Brothers and Verbarth went on to become champion flyers. Dr Linssen, who was De Klak's physician, became a legend in the Dutch pigeon sport. Verbarth's "46" came from an egg he purchased from De Klak and it has been said that it was possibly the best bird that came from De Klak's loft. The world famous "Generaal" of Wout Smeulders and later purchased by Hans Eijerkamp was bred down from De Klak lines. To add an Australian flavour to this article, a son & daughter of the "Generaal" ("The Commissioner" BBC NL 91 1559403 & "The Duchess" NL 91 1559513) were stationed at Ponderosa Australia (St. Agnes South Aust.) They were half brother & half sister. For many years they bred excellent producing stock pigeons for fanciers all over Australia. One such pigeon was BBWFH AUST 01 7930 "Ultra Violet" Her sire was BBC AUST 99 10317 "The Colonel" who was a double grandson of "The Generaal" ("The Commissioner" x "The Duchess") and her dam was "Blue Velvet" BBH GB 98X 67906 from "The Young Generaal" x dtr "Flits" (Janssen/Van Loon). Thus ¾ dose of "The Generaal" bloodlines running through her. "Ultra Violet", as well as being extremely well balanced in the hand, had one of the deepest & most beautiful violet eyes that one could ever expect to see in a pigeon. She was eventually purchased from John Hofman by Greg Hamilton and she was the dam of Greg's most favourite pigeon the "Pet Hen" dam of numerous Fed winners & placegetters all over the country. The "Pet Hen" herself won 1st SAHPA Glendambo 5 Bird Special 490km, 15th SAHPA Lyndhurst Young Bird Championship 484km, 31st SAHPA Sires Produce 605km and she was dam & g/dam of over 100 prize winners including 1st SAHPA Bird of the Year, 1st SAHPA Marree 5 Bird Special 556km, 1st SAHPA Mt Gambier 392km, 1st APC Lyndhurst \$10,000 484km, fastest velocity SAHPA Underbool 296km & fastest velocity SAHPA Hawker 306km. In the SAHPA Farina Young Bird Championship of 1993 John Hofman landed 3 birds together to take 1st, 2nd, 3rd, club; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Vitesse Group; 10th, 11th, 12th, SAHPA from 7,198 pigeons over a distance of 530km with a velocity of 2141mpm (128km/h). After studying the race result sheet the winning pigeons came direct on line from the north and the lofts of the first 9 pigeons were within 1 km or so along the main north road. John's loft was about 10km east of the main north road and he saw his three birds arriving back into a fierce northerly wind from the south west. They were really racing and came in like bullets and they hit the landing board and all 3 were in the traps before he could take a step from under the verandah of his house. Two had the bloodlines of "The Generaal" in them to a greater or lesser degree. Two were clocked in the first hole, one was a blue hen, all Janssen & the other was a blue chequer cock, a g/g/son of the "Generaal" x Meulemans Kadet lines. The 3rd bird into the clock was an inbred blue hen from the half brother x half sister pair, "The Commissioner" & "The Duchess" son & daughter of "The Generaal".

As DeKlak only purchased pigeons from certain lines of the Janssen Brothers; there is a well known saying in England & Europe that the De Klak pigeons were purer Janssen than the Janssens. De Klak died in 2003 & his final auction was on 12th April 2004. He had finally succumbed to pigeon fanciers lung.

Leo Heremans of Voreselaar

Hans Eijerkamp predicted that the pigeons of Heremans-Ceusters would be the Janssen Arendonk of the 21st century. There is no doubt that Leo Heremans was a master breeder & racer and his birds have put up super performances not only for him but many others worldwide but unfortunately health problems and circumstances have led him to two auctions, one in 2007 and the final total auction in 2013. He had been battling pigeon lung since 1994 but carried on with the assistance of several partners starting with Marcel Mols until Marcel fell ill in 1997 and had to give it away, then Charel Ceusters became Leo's assistant in late 1997 until 2006. A series of three break-ins at Leo's loft persuaded him to sell out completely with the exception of two pair and a round of youngsters he bred for a young fancier in Gert Lauwerijde who had purchased two brothers of De Kannibal. Previously he co-bred with top pigeons from Gert Lauwerijde and one of these pigeons was one of the brothers of the Kannibal paired granddaughter of Houben's Sony. He also bred his new partner Hugo Vermeerbergen three rounds of youngsters to race but Hugo did not have a loft and when the youngsters were ready to go he told Leo should not break his bond with the pigeons and keep them in his loft. Hugo agreed that he would look after the birds in Leos' Loft so that Leo would have minimal contact due to his condition. Leos' wife Chris died two weeks after the auction so the pigeons acted as some consolation to him.

The first pigeons to come to Heremans in 1978 were 2 birds from Paul Huysmans. He also purchased a breeding pair from Louis Claes. In 1979 he became Noyon champion with yearlings beating around 250 fanciers. In 1988 in partnership with his friend Marcel Mols, Leo purchased at auction all of the best pigeons of Van Den Brempt who was the overall champion of Voreselaar for 25 years and was one of the best short and middle distance racers in Belgium. Among these pigeons was his Goede Witpen, 18 x 1st prizes and foundation cock of the Heremans. When he became ill in 1994 he reduced substantially the number of pigeons and demolished all the lofts except one loft eight meters long. With the help of Marcel Mols & Leos' wife Chris, the Heremans-Mols combination were 1st Overall Champion. This was no surprise as only the best pigeons remained. He crossed the old Van De Brempt lines to pigeons of Frans De Cnodder, where Leo bought his best two performers and their parents. Around 1997 and in the Heremans-Ceusters era some pigeons from Hansendonckx Brothers were introduced such as "Goudklompje" & "Goudvinkje." After their moderate 1998 season they bought a number of youngsters from Maurice Hasendonckx, the uncle of the Hasendonckx Brothers & an exceptionally good widowhood racer. Another pigeon that found its way into Leos' loft was the Olympiad via Gust Janssens. The "Olympiade" BE01 6455003 came from the loft of Gust Janssen who in 2002 had a fantastic year that he would never forget. Leo met local fanciers Jos De Visser & Gust Janssen at the local pub in Beerse and became good friends and on several occasions they exchanged pigeons and co bred. One day Leo found Gust in a state of confusion. He had been offered a large sum of money for his top performing cock & favourite pigeon and he didn't really want to part with it. When Leo found out the amount of money offered he advised him not to sell it. He went to Gust's loft to see this pigeon and upon coming away he couldn't get it out of his mind. The next morning he went back to Gust's and made an offer to buy half of the pigeon. Leo would pay Gust half the price that Gust had been offered and the pigeon would spend one month at Leo's & one month at Gust's. Deal done. Two months later the pigeon was declared as Belgian representative for the Lievin 2003 Olympiade. The first youngster Leo bred from the "Olympiade" won a 1st prize and from then on he was always mated to Leo's best hens and his progeny formed a dynasty of top performers and breeders that was probably unequalled in the world. That is basically the makeup of the Heremans-Mols and then the Heremans-Ceusters pigeons that were sold at auction in 2007. It would be remiss of me not to mention "" Euro" B3 6192564 which was 1st European Ace Pigeon Western Nations Cup Cat. A 2004, 1st Nat. Young Birds 2003 De

Reisduif, 1st Nat. Young Birds 2003 Ave Regina and sire & grandsire of many winners & placegetters. His sire is B 00 6549276 a son of "Super 799" & full brother to "Donkere 404" winner of 7 x 1st prizes. The "Super 799" is a son of "Kleine Blauwe" who is a full brother to the famous "Kannibaal". The Dam of "Euro" is B 00 6141430 is from "Favoriet" B 98 110722 x "Goudklompje" B 96 6165098. "Euro" was later purchased by Hans Eijerkamp & Sons, Brummen, Holland.

As mentioned previously with the death of his wife & the encouragement of others Leo recommenced racing and after a short time he did make a new start and he recommenced racing again in 2008 immediately winning first & second with Hugo Vermeerbergen as his loft manager. He went to his son in law Gert Lauwerijs and selected the best of the round of late bred birds he had given him in 2006. He visited numerous auctions and purchased a young hen offered by G & S Verkerk. A year later he purchased a cock at an auction of Gerard Koopman. Both of these pigeons were blended into the existing birds that Leo had bred for Hugo & Gert. The last two years of pigeon racing were extremely successful but his health was getting the better of him and by the end of the 2012 racing season he was completely exhausted. Because he could no longer do anything at 100% he decided to auction all of his pigeons in 2013 on the PIPA website setting a new world record sum which was later surpassed by the Gaby Vandenebeele auction in 2018. So while the Heremans strain should be around for a long time in the hands of others, no longer will there be a direct source of these pigeons so it will be difficult for them to outshine the Janssen-Arendonk pigeons as far as fame over time is concerned.

Ludo Claessens of Putte

In his time Ludo Claessens was the best pigeon flyer in Holland. His Golden years were from about the late 1970's to 2008 with 2006 being possibly his best. There is no doubt that Ludo was a fantastic pigeon fancier and breeder. He knew exactly what was required in a pigeon and many top birds in other lofts would be rejected by Ludo as he was always after the super pigeon and wouldn't have one unless it was. There is no doubt that he was a man with the golden touch as everything he touched literally turned to gold. Amazingly he raced a team of only 60 pigeons, 20 widowers & 40 others. I guess he was able to do that as he only raced sprint and middle distance races from 100km to 560km. It would be fairly rare for him to lose pigeons of his class in races of this distance and is instrumental in him building a strain as the Janssen Brothers found out many years beforehand. Ludo's father was Belgian & his mother was Dutch and he has lived in the Dutch town of Putte all his life but has retained his Belgian nationality. His grandfather on his mothers' side was Louis Sebrechts who raced very successfully. From a young age Ludo was in his grandfathers' lofts and when he got older he raced in partnership with his grandfather until he was 23 years old. His grandfather carried on racing on his own until the age of 85. Grandfather Louis taught Ludo a lot about pigeons and from him he learned how to look for that superb super pigeon. "Schowveger" of the strain Van Gils & Son of Merksem via Gaston Cruysweegs was in grandfather Louis' pigeons along with "Hugo" with Huyskens Van Riel blood via Hugo Kuilen. They also bought in a young pigeon which had flown extremely well by Thijssen, "Het Donker Thijssen".

Ludo married Marja in 1974 and they bought their own home with a pigeon loft. He started with 5 pigeons from his grandfathers' loft, one of which was "Het DonkerThijssen". In his first year of racing he won four races from Orleans, Moulins, Ruffec & St. Vincent. "De Rappe" & "De Schowveger" came from Cruysweegs. Gaston Cruysweegs had pigeons from Louis Vermeyer, Van Gils Brothers & Stan Raemaekers. Ludo admits that all the pigeons he bought from Cruysweegs were top birds. Among other strains Raemaekers had Janssens & Van Loons. In 1974 Ludo went back to Gaston for more birds and bought an egg from his best breeding pair which turned out to be a cock. He was given the name "De Fokstier" and produced super birds with numerous hens, being

the sire of 17 or 18 first prize winners. He was mated to his best breeding hen at that time, "The Donkeren Thijssen" with super results including the "Groten Bonta" which won 28th National Orleans. The "Fokstiers" best breeding results were with a hen bought from Smijers. That hen became known as "Oud Blauwe Smijers" and with the "Fokstier" she produced the "Witpen Orleans" which won 5th National Orleans and he in turn became grandfather of 1st, 2nd & 3rd Orleans. The nest mate of "Witpen Orleans" won 1st prize Chateauroux by more than 15 minutes against 2557 pigeons and 2nd National in that race. Every year since then Ludo became the man to beat in the Orleans National race. In 1978 Cruysweegs bought a late bred cock from a Belgian fancier that was bred by a cock of Michielson of Braschaat and a hen from Van Alfen of Merksem, very good bloodlines. Cruysweeg unsuccessfully tried to break this cock to his loft but he strayed and ended up in the loft of Ludo Claessens. Ludo returned the cock to Cruysweegs and he was very impressed with his qualities so Ludo asked if he could buy him. Obviously Cruysweegs did not want to part with him but in 1982 Cruysweegs phoned Ludo offering to sell him along with his sister which was a half sister to the "Fokstier". What didn't work for Cruysweegs worked for Ludo first up. This cock named "Valen Michielson" bred a host of national placings. In 1982 Ludo took a friend who wanted to buy some youngsters to the Lier Market and without going into all the details he ended up with a little blue hen that put up some outstanding results for Ludo including 1st St. Quentin 801 birds, 1st St. Quentin 2221 birds & 1st Orleans 7100 birds. She was given the name "Knap Blauwke". The breeder of "Knap Blauwke" was Eddy Meyen of Geel (Belgium). Ludo later visited Meyen and he had the opportunity to buy the parents of "Knap Blauwke" but he declined as they didn't have the qualities of "Knap Blauwke". She went on to become one of the top breeding hens in Ludos' loft. Another addition to Ludos' loft was in 1981 came via his very good friend Chris Adams. Chris in turn was a good friend of Jan Hermans (the owner of Sportblad De Duif-Belgium). From Jan Hermans Chris Adams got two original pigeons from De Klak which were Janssens of the "Oude Merckx" lines. It was the hen of these two that Chris mated to a son of his best breeding pair and Chris gave Ludo a youngster from that pair. The youngster was rung with a special series ring F194/81. As a two year old this cock won 1st Corbiel, 1st Melun & 1st Corbiel Provincial 2200 birds in a three week period. The "F194" produced three super breeding hens, "Dik Licht 56", "Klein 54" & "Klein 53". "Dik Lichte 56" was the grandmother of 3 national winners from Orleans. Her son "Late Donkere" was father of "Red Arrow" while her daughter "Donkere Whitpen 72" produced two national winners with different cocks, namely "Het Nationaaltje" and "Dream". It seems that everything that Ludo touches turns to gold. In 1990 Ludos' best breeding pair "Dirk Lichte" (inbred "F194" paired to his granddaughter) x "Donkere 65" (inbred "Fokstier") bred the "Donkere Witpen". Ludo practiced a lot of inbreeding. She became the mother of two national winners. Her nest brother won 2nd provincial Bourges 2952 birds & 4th provincial Etampes 1029 birds. Children & grandchildren of "Donkere Witpen" won 1st Chateauroux 2898 birds, 1st Nivel 2355 birds, 2nd Chateauroux 2069 birds, 3rd Orleans 3919 birds, 1st St. Ghislain 2626 birds, 1st National Orleans 7406 birds and 1st National Orleans 8210 birds. In 1991 & 1992 the success continued with results simply too many to mention. The next line we come across is the "De Voskes", the reds and Ludo considered these were his best pigeons. They originate from an old red Horemans pigeon (B 69 6582499) that Gaston Cruysweegs bought in 1975. He was a very nice bird and Gaston picked him out from 400 other pigeons. He paid 1,000bfr for him. It took quite some time for Ludo to buy that bird from Gaston and when Ludo put this cock into his stock loft the famous red family was born. Champion "Red Arrow" is the 9th generation of red pigeons from the old Horemans cock. "Red Arrow" won 1st National Orleans 5445 birds, 3rd Reims 2774 birds, 6th NiJvel 3363 birds & 9th Chateauroux 1776 birds. Over 9 generations countless top level winners & placegetters were produced. One was "Vos 28" which won 3rd Limoges 1640 birds & 4th Compeigne 1209 birds. Ludo mated him to a nest sister of the 1st National Orleans 1987 which was inbred to the "Fokstier". A new super pair emerged and in 1990 they bred "Voske 54". The "Voske 54" bred many

good pigeons with numerous hens. This medium to small red cock is the sire of 4 provincial winners. He is also the sire of "Red Arrow", 1st National Orleans 1995. Eventually Ludo paired "Voske 54" with "Donkere Witpen" and from this mating came "The Dream": 1st National Orleans 7406 birds and the 2nd fastest out of 193,500 birds. In 1995 Ludo had an auction and a lot of top birds were sold. Many thought that this would be the end of Ludo as a top fancier. Up until 1995 Ludo focused on the young bird races but after the auction he concentrated also on the old bird races. The results continued as before and through to the end of the 2000 season seven top results out of eight entered. In these later years Ludo formed a team with his best friend Rik Kertens who lived just 100 metres away from Ludo. The partnership of Kertens & Claessens only competed in the speed races while Ludo concentrated on the middle distance races up to 400km and he also entered one long distance race at the end of each season. As previously mentioned Ludo could do all that he wanted with a team of just 60 pigeons. Rik Kerstens also liked keeping small numbers and he competed in the sprint races with just nine pigeons. Leo never had a bad season in his entire career which spanned the years of 1974 to 2008. For him to have a bad race is very rare and what he would call a poor or bad result would be considered as a good result by others. Sometime in the early to mid 2000's one of Ludo's last acquisitions was "Mr Tours", winner of 1st National tours. He read a report that two different fanciers had each obtained an egg from "Mr Tours". Both youngsters from these eggs became top racers so he came to the conclusion that "Mr Tours" had to be a real top breeder. Once again he wasn't wrong and grandchildren of "Mr Tours" won numerous races and high placings. Unfortunately in 2008 Ludo suffered a break-in at his loft and eight top pigeons were stolen. They were his best cock bird "Simply the Best", an old hen "Mother Simply", two super hens "Sister Kirsty" & "Blue 007". Also a late 2007 hen, an old hen "Schoon Late Donkere", and two crack hens that Ludo bought at the auction of Colijn-Ganus. Ludo never got over this and had many sleepless nights, possibly expecting the thieves to return. He decided upon a total auction which was conducted in March 2009 after over 30 years in the sport and always at the top. One morning about a year later Ludo got up and spotted a pigeon outside his loft that had been locked up for six months. It was the cock "Simply the Best". He was a little flown down and looked as if he had travelled a fair way but was fine. The next day three hens returned to the loft, the old hen "Mother Simply" and "Sister Kirsty" & "Blue 007". The other four never returned, the 9 year old hen "Schoon Late Donkere", the late 2007 hen which was never broken in and the two Colijn-Ganus hens which never returned to their loft. But with the return of these 4 pigeons to Ludo he felt no joy as he had made up his mind to abandon pigeon racing, never to return to the sport again. The Claessens pigeons probably equalled or exceed the Janssens over a much shorter period of time and it was a shame the break-in occurred as Ludo could have easily raced until he was at least 80 years old which potentially could have given him nearly 60 years at the top.

Gabby Vandenabeele of Dentergem

Gaby's father Gentiel was a very good fancier with top quality birds. In his day Gentiel was a middle distance champion in West Flanders. His breed of pigeons were based on pigeons from Valere Desmet Matthijs (Nokere), Pol Bostijn (Moorslede) and Lucien Verstraete (Dienze). Gaby was involved with his fathers' pigeons from a young age and his knowledge had a huge impact on him. Gaby started off on his own in 1976 with pigeons from his fathers' loft. The first three bloodlines to play a prominent role in Gaby's loft were the "Kleinen", "Bijter" and "Groten". Gaby and his wife moved to their current address in Dentergem in 1979. Because he was so dominant at the middle distance his opponents decided to move to different competitions. He left the middle distance competition in 1985 to move into long distance racing from 500-800km, competing at the Provincial & National level. Gaby started to introduce a few long distance pigeons to his loft but soon found that his own pigeons were performing better so he decided to compete at this level with his own

line of pigeons centred around the “Kleinen”. Gaby’s first success at the long distance came in 1985 when he took 2nd & 10th National Limoges with “Fideel”, a son of “Klienen”. How did this “Klienen” dynasty begin? The sire of “Kleinin” was “Zitterke”, a pigeon that was borrowed from Jozef Delodder. Gaby had been very impressed with this pigeons achievements including a win from Orleans on a hot day and a strong head wind. Gaby could not think of a hen in his loft with which to pair him. Gilbert Van Parys offered to lend him his superclass hen “Ameyke” of the outstanding stock pair “Angouleme” and “Ameyke”, the parents & grandparents of several ace pigeons and national first prize winners. The mating of the “Zitterke” & “Ameyke” was an immediate success with the “Kleinen” being their most important descendant and the beginning of the “Kleinen” dynasty of racing and breeding that lasts right to the present day. This bird the “Kleinen” B81 3238253 set Gaby on his way to become one of greatest Provincial & National champions in Belgium. Bred in 1981, he was never raced, his bloodlines appear in all of Gaby’s champion racers and breeders today, more than 37 years later. Gaby’s first National victory came in 1988 with “Rambo”, from Bourges against 13,154 old birds, and fastest of 63,176 birds. It was the first of seven National first prizes and 100 x 1st Provincial races. The pigeon that really put Gaby on the map as a provincial and national champion was the legendary “Wittenbuik” which was bred in 1988 from “Kleinen” x “Flicka”. “Wittenbuik” was the most talked about pigeon from 1988 through to 1990 when he won 1st Interprovincial Poitiers 2,736 birds, 1st Interprovincial Angouleme 2,450 birds, 1st Interprovincial Limoges 2,309 birds & 2nd Interprovincial Poitiers 1435 birds. He was put to stock after the 1990 season where he developed into the lofts new top stock breeder, taking over from his father “Kleinen” who was by now 9 years old. Another direct son of “Klienen” x “Georgette” was “Turbo” BE 90 3119128 and he was challenging “Wittenbuik” as the top breeder. He claimed the title of 1st Provincial Ace pigeon Long Distance KBDB West Flanders in 1993 after winning 2nd National Brive 5,132 birds, 4th Provincial 2,976 birds & 50th National Limoges 10,291 birds, and 32nd Provincial Limoges 2,767 birds. He did almost the same in 1994 claiming 2nd Provincial Ace Pigeon Long Distance KDBD West Flanders. Gabys seven national winners are as follows:-

1988	Rambo	1 st National Bourges	13,154 birds	old birds
1995	Ronker	1 st National Limoges	8,883 birds	old birds
1995	Blauwe Fideel	1 st National Brive	4,719 birds	old birds
1995	Blauwe Fideel	1 st National Brive	3,970 birds	Two Year Olds
2002	James Bond	1 st National Bourges	13,166 birds	Yearlings
2010	Paola	1 st National Argenton	7,358 birds	Old Birds
2014	Bliksem	1 st National Tulle	5,731 birds	Yearlings

“Wittenbuik” no doubt was the best breeder for Gaby Vandenabeele. His incredible breeding value continues to live on in his descendants, through his most famous grandson, “Bliksem”. “Wittenbuik”, bred in 1988 from “Kleinen” x “Flicka” BE80 3250688, winner of 3 x 1st Orleans in consecutive weeks. “Wittenbuik” was mated to different hens and he bred some outstanding racers & breeders with all of them, both for Gaby and for many fanciers worldwide. Two direct children of “Wittenbuik” when he was mated to “Prisesje” (a daughter of “Picanol”) were the “Kolonel” BE92 3233008 and “Dolores” BE95 3332945. During his racing career the “Kolonel” was 1st Prov. Ace Pigeon Long Distance 1995, 1st Prov. Limoges 2,762 birds, 1st Prov. Chateauroux 7,793 birds & 2nd Prov. Orleans 1,413 birds. The “Kolonel” x “Rita” were the parents of “Bliksem”. “Rita” BE93 3354340 was a daughter of “Vital” of Noel Lippens. “Vital” won 1st Nat. Ace Pigeon Long Distance

KDBD 1993. "Dolores", full sister to "Kolonel" was mated to "Bliksem" & produced "Jonge Bliksem" BE01 3266572, the sire of Jan Hooymans 1st Nat. Ace pigeon One Day Long Distance WHZB 2009. So now we come to "Bliksem" BE98 3158062 who was to become the new top breeder of the loft. Some of his racing performances include 1st Prov. Poitiers 1,448 birds, 2nd Prov. Chateauraux 4,662 birds, 4th Prov. Ruffec 1,778 birds, 5th Prov. Perigueux 1,119 birds, 8th Prov Poitiers 2,975 birds. Up until the auction "Bliksem" bloodlines were playing a prominent role in numerous national & international competitions. A son of "Bliksem" is "Rudy" BE06 3008003 and could be regarded as a successor to his father in Gabys loft. Two of his sons are "Super Romeo" BE12 3088052 (who was 1st National Ace Pigeon Long Distance Yearlings KDBD 20130) and "New Bliksem" BE13 3056024, 1st Nat. Tulle 5,731 yearlings 2014. In the later years "Super Romeo" & New Bliksem", along with their sire "Rudy" became the mainstays of the lofts, continuing to carry the super racing & breeding genes of "Kleinen" and all of his sons & daughters over the years.

"Bliksem" is the sire & Grandsire of numerous racing & breeding champions as below:- Sons & daughters mentioned in bold print, grandchildren in fine print. **"Rudy", "Schone Bliksem", "Jason", "Rambo II", "Lisa", "Helena", "Captain Blue", "Mona", "The Returned Bliksem" Jonge Bliksem", "Tsunamiduivin"**. "Super Romeo", "New Bliksem", "Mr Magic", "King Gaby", "Paola", "Bliksem Girl". There are many more champions and prize winners that could be mentioned but to prevent this article getting any longer I shall cut it short here.

Unfortunately pigeon lung was affecting Gaby and his doctor's advice was to give up the pigeons to prevent further damage to his lungs. The auction raised EUR 6,582,500 for more than 800 birds averaging over EUR 8,000 per bird. This broke the previous record of EUR 4,346,500 of Leo Heremans in 2013. "New Bliksem" set a new world record for a single bird raising EUR 376,000, surpassing the EUR 310,000 of Hereman's "Bolt". In the meantime however a new world record price for a single pigeon was set in March 2019 when EUR 1.25 million was paid for "Armando", a pigeon bred by Joel Verschoot of Inglemunster in the West of Belgium.

Had it not been for Gaby's illness from the pigeons I feel sure that this strain would go on to rival that of the Janssen Bros – Arendonk. So we see that three of the abovementioned fanciers in DeKlak, Heremans & Vandenabeele all having to give the sport away due to pigeon/bird fanciers lung. I remember reading an article written by an English lung specialist back in the late 1980's or early 1990's that he believed that 95% of pigeon fanciers suffered from pigeon lung to a greater or lesser degree.