

The Most Famous Pigeon Fanciers in the World: The Janssen Brothers of Arendonk, Belgium

by Henk van Limpt-De Prut of Reusel, Holland

translated by Joop Ekstijn and edited by Silvio Mattacchione

Arendonk, a little village in the Belgium province of De Kempen, became famous for thousands of pigeon fanciers around the world. And perhaps the name Arendonk is still known by a few cyclist fans that remember the name of Rik van Steenbergen, a three-time world champion cyclist much admired by the Janssen Brothers. But we all know the difference between being world famous because of cycling and being world famous because of pigeons! Very few pigeon fanciers will remember Rik van Steenbergen the cyclist, but the Janssens will be remembered for generations.

The Janssens didn't only make history because of the performances of their pigeons in the races, but even more for what their birds achieved as breeders for the thousands of fanciers that could eventually acquire a few specimens of this family of birds. All over the world you will find their birds, and there is no other loft that has been as important for the development of the modern racing pigeon as the Janssen loft. Thanks are due to my kind and good friends, the Janssen Brothers, for allowing me to visit them so many times so that I would be able to prepare this exclusive report. The Janssen Brothers wish for all the fanciers reading this report a lot of joy and a sincere hope that they may garner some useful thoughts from it.

How It Began

It began in the year 1872, the year that Henri Janssen was born. He founded the Janssen family of pigeons. Henri had his first pigeons in 1886. He was at that time better known under the name Driekske De Paauw.

Henri married Pauline, who was born in 1877. They both worked very hard all their lives. Their marriage produced nine children, seven were boys and two were girls. Their names were Fons, Frans, Jef, Vic, Irma, Adriaan, Charel, Marie, and Louis.

Henri was one of the original fanciers that founded the pigeon club in Arendonk. He was a top fancier right from the very beginning. In the period from 1908 until 1914, he had very famous Ace Pigeons such as "Het Blauwtje" with twenty firsts. Already at that time he won some bicycles in the races.

Henri was a quiet man who loved nature, and everything that had to do with pigeons had to do with nature. Because of that, he was an enemy of winter breeding and also of the widowhood system. All these tricky things made him angry. With an endless amount of love and care, Henri used his eyes and his knowledge, and with the help of the majority of his family he built his own family of birds.

All the children had to take part and share in their father's hobby. For instance, the cleaning of the lofts was done by the girls as well as the boys. Henri died in 1947. His wife Pauline was the head of the family until she passed away in 1967. She was known for her kindness and all the children loved her very much.

Henri, as I mentioned earlier, was only interested in racing the natural system, and in spite of the fact that the sons built a widowhood section, it was never used as long as he was alive. Henri was very much afraid that the use of the widowhood system would, after a few

years, hurt the quality of his pigeon family due to the fact that he would not be able to test the race quality of the hens. You see many of his best birds were hens.

After Henri's death, the sons decided to continue the life's work of their father. In the meantime, some of the children were married. Those that remained divided the work amongst themselves. Adriaan took care of the nestbirds and the youngbirds, Louis took care of the breeders, Jef did the shipping, the cleaning of the nestbowls, the opening of the clocks, and the care of the dog. Mother Pauline and Irma did the household chores and took care of all the visitors.

It was finally decided that Charel would take care of the widowers. Yes, you read well. After the death of their father the sons started very carefully trying the widowhood system. At first with only four cocks! These were the "Oude Donkere", the "Oude Lichte", the "Rode", and the "Lichte Vos". They had not forgotten the wise words of their father; they made sure that the natural system, as well as the breeding, was still first in line.

The House at Schoolstraat 6 in Arendonk

People that visit the Janssen house for the first time may be a little surprised at what they find. They may expect, as with most superstars in every kind of sport, a large imposing home. In this case, what you find is a very humble home that was built before the Second World War. As is the custom in Arendonk, the entrance to the Janssen home



is a small door around the back.



The Janssen Brothers are down-to-earth, honest men that remained faithful to the fashion in which they had been brought up. These were people who worked hard in the cigar-factory until they could retire on a pension. Inside their home, everything is honest and down-to-earth; the pictures of their parents and of their brothers and sisters are all in their own places. They have a little dog that barks very loudly at every stranger who enters their home. This is not the average residence of famous men, but rather the residence of very good and unpretentious

people.

In the backyard you immediately notice a well and a pear tree. From this well is drawn the natural water to fill the drinkers of the famous pigeons. Their hospitality to visitors is well-known, as is also their appreciation of punctuality. Anyone that visits must be punctual, as well as respectful of their schedule; this would not change even for the King of Belgium.



The Lofts

Their lofts are as unassuming as their own home-small but efficient! Everything has a use. No expensive or unwarranted materials. They are still the same as they were years ago-that is except for a very expensive alarm and security system. Charel mentioned that it was a shame that they had to use it nowadays.



There are four sections built on the attic. The youngbird section and the nestbird section are below, and above are the two sections for the widowers. As soon as you enter the lofts, you notice how quiet it is. All the landing boards are on the southwest. There are also two lofts in the backyard. One of them is called "De Ren"; this is where the older birds are breeding. The other one is built with an aviary for the widowhood hens. Notice that all the race sections are situated directly under the tiles that cover the roof of the house.

Several tiles made of glass take care of providing the light inside the sections. Because of the fact that between the shelves from which the sections are built and separated there is still a lot of room; you can say that the pigeons can take advantage of all the air that is inside the whole attic. So fresh air is always there. Many times the brothers have to remove the snow out of the sections. There's no need to close or open the ceiling in order to get more or less air for the pigeons.

"Those sections stay the same as they are, day or night, winter or summer," the brothers tell us. The most important thing is to keep the sections as clean as possible. If that's done seriously it's no problem to keep the birds healthy. Every time you enter the lofts they are as clean as can be. No matter how many people visit in a day, they always clean once again before someone else is allowed into the lofts. The floors always look as if you could eat from them. Once per week they use the vacuum cleaner so that there's no dust in the lofts, and besides that, they regularly take broom and brush to disinfect the lofts. Once every year they have the big cleaning and they brush everything with water and chloride. After that, all the walls are painted white again.



The Stockbirds of the Janssen Brothers

When we are sitting comfortably together having a drink, the Janssen Brothers start talking a bit more. Sitting in their well-known easy chairs they tell us about their family of birds:

The "Oude Vos"

In the year 1919, Fons got himself a blue cock from a man called Ceulemans from Berlaar. This man was already an old man at that time. The youngbirds out of that cock were doing very well. Louis, at that time a very young little fancier, got the "Oude Vos" for himself when the pigeon was three times as old as he was-the bird was already 19 years old. Louis made himself a nestbox that he placed on top of the toilet situated in the backyard. The

"Oude Vos" was very happy in that box and Louis saw that a suitable young hen called "Jong Voske" was made available to him. This young hen was very much in love with his cock. The young hen had won the second prize the day before in the race and Louis tried to make her get into the nestbox on top of the toilet. After some time he succeeded and was already dreaming of the pair making love to each other in his own "loft". But when he looked a few hours later, he saw that the old cock didn't like the hen at all and he had pecked her head so that it was all covered with blood. You can understand how this gave him big problems with the rest of the family.

Around that time, Fons Janssen became friends with Mister Schoeters from Herenthout, and later got himself the so-called "Oude Duifke van '25".

The "Tamme"

In 1920, both Adriaan and Charel were also very enthusiastic fanciers. They both had a small section for themselves; one that had been a former chickenloft, Charles told me. Our Jaan had his "Tamme" that was sitting always on the hedge. Jaan only had to put his hand on the hedge and "De Tamme" immediately sat on it.

The "Lichte"

After sitting together, they all agreed to put the "Tamme" together with the "Schoon Voske" from Charel. He bred from this pair two beautiful light chequers with pearl eyes. The oldest brother, Frans, liked these youngbirds very much and was willing to pay five Belgium francs for them (approx 25 cents). Brother Fons saw the disappointment in Charel's eyes and offered him 30 francs. Fons took them both to his home in Baarle-Hertog and was very successful with these birds. One of the two was lost in a race, but the other one became a real superbird. This cock won nine times first prize. At first, all the members of the Janssen family thought that Fons was saying this just to please Charel, but when Fons brought the race-results as a proof, they all were convinced and could not believe what they were seeing. Charel was as proud as anyone could be! Fons had his heart in the right place and gave the bird back to his brothers. Later, when broken to the loft, the brothers raced him.

One day the "Lichte" was shipped again, as Adriaan believed him to be in super shape. That Sunday, the race was delayed because of bad weather. On Monday, they let the birds go and Fons decided to come and watch the birds together with his brothers because there was a strong headwind, and according to him this was the best weather for the "Lichte". The pigeons flew, according to Fons, longer than you might expect. After he saw his brothers clock a few other birds, he shouted, "None of mine home yet!" His brothers started laughing and said: "My dear Fons, you know nothing about pigeons, because you were late yourself and the bird was already clocked before you arrived." The "Lichte" that day won first prize, ten minutes ahead.

The next winter, the neighbours built a new wall. All of a sudden, a big shelf fell down and mother Pauline saw a bird that was scared and raced away. In the evening, the whole family was in a state of panic! The "Lichte" was gone. He was still sitting on the nest at 16.00 hours, Charel said. Mother Pauline told them what she had seen. Two years later, the "Lichte" came back without his band. He probably strayed in another loft and was kept as a breeder.

Also the "Blinde" of brother Frans, a full sister of the "Lichte", achieved top results.

Charel at that time raced together for two years with his older brother. However, since Frans gave all the good ones away, Charel quit as he wanted to seriously build a strong family of birds. The brothers told me that Frans kept on racing by himself and had extremely good results.

The "Schalieblauw" x "Blauw Duif"

As has already been mentioned, Fons became very good friends with the brewer, Schoeters, from Berlaar, and he went together with his brother, Adriaan, to Herenthout. When they arrived, they also met Mr. Goossens, a friend of Mr. Schoeters. "What have you sitting there?" Adriaan asked, and pointed to a rabbit hutch. In it was sitting a very neglected pigeon with a lot of old feathers and a dirty tail. The brothers examined the bird carefully and discovered that it was the previous year's late-bred, still having three old primaries. They asked if they could buy the bird, but Schoeters said that this bird wasn't even worth keeping. Nevertheless, they bought the bird and Fons and Adriaan returned home satisfied. After moulting, he looked very different and was nicely built too; the "Schalieblauw" looked as if reborn. At an auction of Schoeters, Fons bought a few pigeons-amongst others, a blue hen with red around the eyes. She had raced very well and had won, amongst others, a first Noyon and a first Orleans. "As a youngbird, she was raced too many times," Louis remembers. This blue hen was mated with the "Schalieblauw". It was an extremely good pair. Birds bred from this pair were mostly light chequers with pearl eyes, as the "Oude Grote" and the "Jonge Witoger". The brothers said that these birds had beautiful bodies, silky feather, and a very tough character.

"Jonge Witoger" x "Dochter van De Aap"

Later, Fons got himself a daughter from the famous "Aap" of Schoeters. She was mated to the "Jonge Witoger". The first two youngsters from this pair didn't show much potential for the future. One got lost from the roof and the other one was lost in training. But the youngbirds from the later rounds were all very good. They were all beautiful bodied chequers with beautiful pearl eyes. Their racing and breeding qualities, more importantly, were the deciding factors.

The Janssen pigeons nowadays are still descendants of these pigeons. They were crossed with the "Vossen", those from "Oude Vos" from Louis and off "Vos van '26", which was still direct from Ceulemans.

"Wonder Voske van '45"

One of the most famous stockbirds, this hen was well-known because of her winning numerous first prizes. She was almost unbeatable. She was a daughter of "Vos van '39" and a daughter off the pair "Schalieblauw" x "Blauw Duif"

"Bange van '51"

This crack is the offspring of the well-known "Vossenline". His father was "Vos van '49". The name "Bange" is not because he was shy, but because of the fact that when he got home from a race, he stayed for a couple of minutes on the landing board in order to have a nice view of the neighbourhood.

The "Bange van '51" is the keybird from which the pigeons descend that became famous in the later years. These pigeons were "De Scherpen", the "Oude Merckx", the "019", "Jonge Merckx", and the "Geeloger".

The "Halve Fabry"

One day, Louis relates how Mr. Viktor Fabry came to their home to purchase a cock. The bird was called "De Trage", a son of "De Witoger". Fabry wanted to mate "De Trage" to a daughter off his famous "Portois". He promised us a youngbird from this pair. A little more than a year later we found a box in the kitchen with a little youngster in it. After some time, the brothers remembered the promise Mr. Fabry had made to send a youngbird from the crossed pair. It was a normal rather than an outstanding kind of youngbird, and after a few training tosses the brothers decided to send it to Quievrain (100 km). The weather was not

good and when all the birds were home the "Halve Fabry" was still missing. After a few hours, the brothers found him in the backyard with a full crop of grains that had been gathered by him in the field. "De Halve Fabry" won as youngbird, but nothing really special; still, in this his year of birth he changed enough so that the brothers decided to keep him. He had all the qualities to become a good bird. In his second year, he won three prizes in a row, the best one was a fifth. After that he missed and the brothers decided to keep him at home for one week. On Wednesday, he had a training toss and was shipped (driving his hen) to the race. He won first prize. Before he was used as a breeder, he was to win four firsts. As a breeder he was even better. His offspring were crossed into the Janssens.



Louis and Charel were very modest, indicating that they had a lot of luck. Yes, we agree that the good ones are rare. However, I think the Janssen Brothers also created their own luck. They were never satisfied with anything less than the best and they sought to achieve this in all that they did.

The Mating

Before we go to this very important part of pigeon game, we asked the brothers what qualities they consider as important for a good pigeon to have. They say that the important things are:

- . The balance of a bird
- . A strong back
- . Silky feathers
- . Strong vents
- . A strong eye
- . A short backwing
- . The primaries not too wide
- . The last three primaries, if possible, the same length
- . A small tail
- . Extra important are the vitality and courage of the bird

Our next question was how have you increased the odds of breeding these types of birds? Louis and Charles tell us:

"At first comes good performances and pedigree. We like to do some inbreeding-nephew to niece seems the best mating. That's how we got the best results. The following things we tried never to do: Never mate two big birds together, otherwise you get chickens. Never mate small pigeons together, or pigeons both of whom have deep keels. Also, never mate pigeons together with so called white eyes. As far as we are concerned, the vitality and the colour must stay in the eyes, especially with pearl-eyed pigeons, one must provide to breed the colour out of the eyes."

The matings in Arendonk are agreed to by the brothers after long conversations. The long winter nights are super for this



kind of pigeon talk. The cocks usually keep their own nestboxes. If a hen is racing very well, she also keeps her own nestbox. As soon as a cock, after feeding youngsters, starts showing new interest in his hen, they put an extra nestbowl in the box. The material provided to build a nest is tobacco.

After mating for the first time they let the pairs out one by one, and in the evening they are all locked up in their nest boxes to insure that there are no fights. After two days the pairs can go in and out as long as they want (open loft).

During the first days, the brothers spend a lot of time being in the lofts in order to be present when something goes wrong. As soon as the eggs are laid, the brothers are already curious to know what the colour of the youngbirds later on will be. The colour of the feathers at the Janssen lofts shows a lot of variety. You see dark and light chequers, blues, reds, schally's, and pigeons with one or more white primaries.

To my question if white feathers were a sign of strength the brothers start laughing, "You must know better, good ones and bad ones come in all colours. It's just a matter of taste for us."

As far as the "Vossen" are concerned, they have to be red. Though they don't like silvers, they readily admit that there are very good ones amongst them as well!

The time they mate their birds is:

- . January 8th - 8 breeding pairs
- . January 22nd - 13 nest pairs
- . February 12th - 14 widowhood pairs

Altogether the brothers have 35 pairs of oldbirds. The pairs stay almost nine months together; during the season they never change the pairs. End of October, they separate the birds.

The Feeding

The feeding of the birds is by far the most important part. Most of the fanciers give their birds too much food. It is extremely important to feed the birds in a way that they always have their ideal weight. Their feeding-schedule for the short- and middle-distance races is as follows: On Monday and Tuesday, very light grains; after that, bit by bit, some more energy in the food; and on Saturday morning only small seeds. Charel gives an extra tip by telling that you must be sure birds, when shipped, do not have too much food, otherwise they get thirsty in the basket. The Janssen Brothers mix their own food; all kinds of grains stay separated in bags in the attic, and daily they turn it by mixing it with a stick. The feeding time is adapted to the season. According to the Janssens, it's not important if you feed them at daylight or with electric light, but for them, they stay with nature as long as they can. Important, however, is that the birds get fed always at the same time of the day.



The birds get in the winter: 31% corn, 38% barley, 15% wheat, and 15% beans. In the summer: 30% corn, 25% English peas, 27% wheat, 13% barley, and 5% beans.

Special Things

The well is, as you have read, the secret weapon for the pigeons. The pigeons always get this water, and one time a week also as bathing water. In the bathwater is always a big spoon of salt. At first they gave Aviol in the drinking water, but later on they stopped that. The whole year long, the pigeons get on Sunday honey in the drinking water. Once a week they give carrots cut in very little pieces; other vegetables they never give. In all the sections the pigeons can eat Vitamineral as much as they want, also grit with a spoon of salt mixed in. Pickstone they also give, but never on the day of shipping because otherwise the birds would get thirsty in the basket.

The Nestbirds

They are let out for loft flying three times a day: At 7.30 in the morning, 12.00, and 17.00 hours. This is done in order to give both the hens and cocks an opportunity to loft fly. In the past, they let the birds out all day, but now it's too dangerous because of the poison on the fields. In the morning when they are called in, they get a little bit of small seed. At lunchtime they get a little bit of flying mixture, and in the evening they get as much as they want until a few birds go to the drinker. The nestbirds get fed in their own nestboxes. This is because some of the pigeons get fat very quickly and this way you can control this tendency. When the birds just have youngbirds in the nest they get more barley in their mixture. After a few days this is changed into wheat. In the spring they wean the youngbirds at four weeks of age, in the summer already after three weeks. The breeding pigeons are sitting in the darker half of the nestbox. This makes them more quiet and protects them against cold and draft. They take particular care to watch the health of the nestbirds and also the vitality.

The hens are shipped the most. As long as the cock isn't chasing too much, they are shipped. The best nest position of a cock is, according to them, when he's chasing the hen. For the hens the best position is a youngster of eight to ten days. All the nestbirds raise only one youngster while racing. Very important is that the pigeons that raise youngsters keep looking very healthy. The feathers must look silky and feel like that. Special signs that nestbirds are in excellent conditions are:

- . When they rarely leave the nest
- . When they defend the nestbox when the fancier gets near to it
- . When at feeding time they only take a few grains very quickly and then hurry back to the nest
- . When pigeons show behaviours that they never do normally

At our question as to whether a nestcock later on can be a good widower, they answer in the affirmative. They often see that yearlings that are raced on the nest the first year are the next year often their best widowers. A nestbird can even be used as a widower after three or four years. They still don't like to talk about making birds excited or do tricks with them. One of the nicest stories we've ever heard is that on the day of shipping a hen was lying dead on the floor. The brothers saw it and decided to lay her in her own nestbox in front of the cock. After that he was shipped and won first prize that race. "You had to see him arrive," Louis said.

The next question was if it's possible to race the nestbirds very often. Louis says that at first the birds have to be very healthy and recuperate very quickly. Their nestbirds are mostly shipped about fifteen times a year. As an example, he mentions "Oude Blauwke", that was shipped five times within fourteen days and won five top prizes. This isn't an exception but rather a rule, because when a nestbird is in excellent condition it stays for at least fourteen

days. But the fancier has to make sure that the birds do not get overweight and are not forced to do things they can't do. The eyes of the fancier are very important in such cases.

Tips: During very warm periods it's not wise to race hens that have youngbirds younger than six days. The longer the hens are in the baskets the less chance you have to win a good prize. The results of hens are better when they are liberated early in the morning. Hens feel that they don't have to sit on the nest later in the day. Hens that go to the fields when they feed youngsters are locked up in their nestboxes. This is also to prevent them from taking other birds to the fields. Nestbirds can also make excellent widowhood cocks. The yearlings are very sharp on their nest. On the second and third nest you have to try to make them more motivated by giving them special care.

The Widowhood Cocks

These are let out twice a day (at 7.00 and at 18.00 hours). In the morning they always get a little bit of small seeds. In the evening they get the race-mixture. In the beginning of the week they get 25% more barley than at the end of the week. The cocks get their food in the boxes. The widowers are let out first in the morning and are locked out for half an hour. No flag or any other thing is used to force them to fly. You shouldn't frighten a bird, they say. A bird has to fly by itself. If that isn't the case, it isn't healthy. If they can't land on their own loft because of the flag, they start landing elsewhere, and that's a bad habit. The widowers all raise one youngster in the spring, and after ten days of breeding on the second round, they go on widowhood. All the hens are taken away the same time, also when they're only breeding for a few days. The loft sections are situated directly above the nestbird and youngbird sections. On my question if this isn't a disadvantage, they don't answer. This is like it always was, so it doesn't matter.

During the cleaning of the sections and when there are visitors, they don't worry about disturbing the widowers. They're used to that, so it's not a problem. Charel says it's a fairy tale that you're not allowed to disturb the widowers. He goes to the widowhood sections three times a day and spends just as much time there as with the other birds. "Also when I walk to the nestbirds they hear me, and to the youngbirds the same. And I'm not very quiet when I go to the birds, so they are disturbed many times," Charles says.

At our question how widowers show their form, Charles thinks every bird has his own way of showing. You just have to know them very well. "Our 'Schallyblauw' was always sitting on the landing board, while the 'Lichte' always practiced landing manoeuvres on the roof. When you expected him to land, he just flew away again."

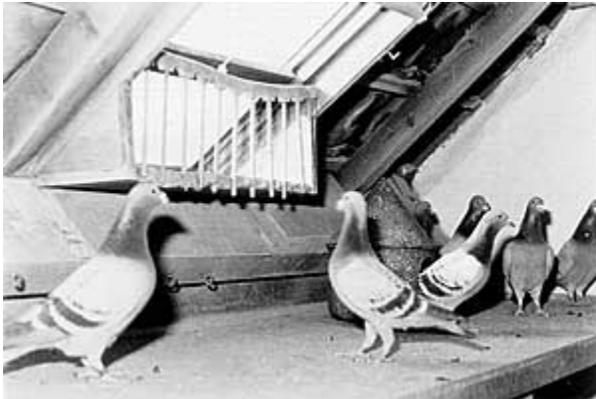
Widowhood cocks always fly in a flock. The yearlings are put in the free nestboxes in the fall as early as possible. Before shipping they put the nestbowls in. The old widowers are not shown their hens and put in the basket first. After that they show the hens to the yearlings. When the hens are laying down in the nestbowls the cocks are taken and put into the basket. At the Janssen loft there are no big windows the birds can fly in, so they have to get in through the landing board. After the race, they're locked up with their hens and can stay together for half an hour. If it was a bad race they stay longer. The birds that get home later or the next day also get to see their hens. In that case, the other cocks are locked up in their nestboxes. As soon as the hens are away, they put a curtain in front of the windows that is put away in the evening. The widowers are sitting free in the section the whole week. Widowers that are not shipped are not allowed to see their hens. The boxes of the other cocks are closed, of course.

Widowers can easily do two races in one week. You don't bring them out of their rhythm. Every cock has his own strange behaviour. One is very quiet, and the other is very busy.

Important is indeed that the cocks must keep their nestboxes under all circumstances. If one is thrown out of his nestbox, you'd better take him from the loft. The cocks stay on widowhood for three months; after that period of time they raise one youngster. Very often they race the former widowers a few times in the autumn. This can do no harm to them. According to the Janssen Brothers, a former widower can easily be a nestbird after; it doesn't do harm to it. They also never had problems with nestbirds arriving at the same time as widowers. They both go as quickly as possible into their own sections. When a widower is racing very well, you should give him the same hen next season.

The Widowhood Hens

The hens play a major part in the success of their partners, according to Charles. The hen must be very much in love with her cock. When some hens are not, they try to get the cocks very angry. They never show him another hen. After showing the hens they go immediately back to their section. Right before the return of the cocks, the hens are locked up with a nestbowl in half the box.

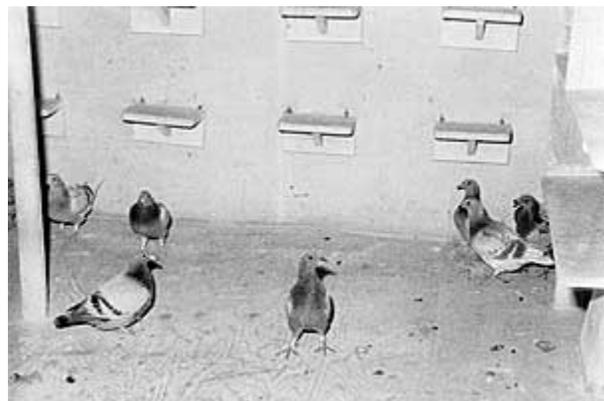


Louis is taking care of the widowhood hens. The way of feeding is the same as for the cocks. The hens are locked up for three months in a box at night on the days they are in the aviary. Only when it's good weather are they allowed to go in there. A hen only is good for widowhood during three or four seasons; after that, the love for the cocks is gone and the interest for the cock isn't there anymore. In order to get used as a breeding hen later on, they advise to keep a hen no longer than two years as a widowhood hen. Double widowhood they never tried so far.

Tip: Take very good care of your widowhood hens and try to keep them healthy, don't treat them like they are of no use. Also watch them very carefully because they often make the prizes for the cocks, Charel says. All of a sudden Charel raises his finger and says, "Don't think you can only race widowhood, because you cannot breed many good youngbirds if you don't know what your good hens are. This way you end up as just a fancier." It's for you to decide!

The Youngbirds

When the youngbirds are weaned they stay for one day at the youngbird section to get used to it. The next day they are put outside on the landing board, in order to have a good look around as soon as possible. This is done daily, as they think this way they will lose less pigeons from the loft. When the youngbirds are too old before they get weaned, they often are lost from the loft because they go into the air and are not familiar enough with the area to come back down. On the first days the brothers watch very carefully because sometimes they fly down or fall down and can't fly all the way to the high roof to get back to the landing board. In the beginning they can fly around from 13.00 to 16.00 hours.



The brothers breed for themselves sixteen winter-bred and fourteen summer-bred youngsters. All the birds are weaned in the same section that is 2.5 x 2 meters. The brothers don't think that it's the most ideal, putting different rounds together, but they have no alternative because of a lack of room. When the summer-breds are weaned they get extra food when the winter-breds are outside for exercise. They also have a problem when the winter-breds take the summer-breds with them to fly away when the summer-breds have just flown a few rounds around the loft. And when it is warm weather, Charel says that there is more chance that the summer-breds get sick.

The youngbirds get the same mixture as the nestbirds, only the corn is replaced by popcorn and very small French corn. This is only for the first weeks so that the youngbirds learn quickly to eat the corn. It is very important that the youngbirds eat all the grains.

They give special care to the youngbirds because they are the future of the loft. Besides that, they try, through contact with the birds, to develop a friendship with the birds that will endure rest of their lives. The youngbirds are trained to come in with a referee whistle so that they rush in as soon as they hear the sound of it. Always when they feed the birds this whistle is used. This way they also call the birds in when they return from a race. It's Jef that can whistle the best. "You have to be good to do it the way Jef does," Charel says. "Our

Jef can whistle the same way as our brother Jan did a long time ago."



During the feeding, they touch all the birds, one by one, so that they get used to the hands of the fancier. They also try to get the birds to eat out of their hands for the same reason. Another thing that they do is talk to the birds constantly. The Janssen birds are so tame that they fly on the shoulders of their bosses and pick their ears. The brothers dislike shy birds. It is a joy to go to the birds because you can see that they like their bosses. When you see the brothers take care of the birds you notice immediately that they love their birds.

The birds are allowed to loft fly until twice per day until the races begin. After that, they get trained together with the oldbirds. The training is no more than three times from 15 km away. After that they get five training tosses with the club at a distance of 38 km. When the youngbirds are healthy and not heavily moulting, they have to fly the whole youngbird program.

They like to race youngbirds on the nest. As soon as they notice that there is a pair, they put a nestbowl right on the spot where the birds like to build a nest. If youngbirds are raced on the nest, they simply have to perform well. If not, they won't be there the next season. They say that youngbirds can also perform very well on the perch. After the races, the birds have to moult very quickly. Late-breds don't have to go entirely through the moult. As regards keeping a youngbird that isn't raced, the brothers say that they hardly ever do so - the exception being only when a very good pair is getting old and they are afraid they will stop breeding. Then they keep one or two youngsters from that pair in order to save the family line.

Tip: Keep your eyes open in the youngbird section. For instance, when a youngbird chooses a very high perch, also give it a high nestbox as a yearling. They will pay you back in performing very well.

The Training of the Birds

Loft flying should be given every day at the same time. The birds stay in when there's fog, heavy rain, and snow. Long ago, they trained the birds very often. Charel brought them away by bike 20 km and Adriaan watched them coming home. Nowadays, the young- and the oldbirds are only trained three times before they are shipped for the training tosses of the club. Pigeons that are trained later in the season they ship at all kinds of clubs in the neighbourhood where they have training tosses all the time.

Tip: Charles thinks it is very important that the birds are watched when they come home from a training toss in order to get them used to going in very quick after landing. If you can't watch them coming, put some food for them as soon as they arrive.

We Asked the Brothers a Lot of Questions

Do you ever give your birds pellets?

The birds have to stay healthy with normal food. They are not pigs.

What do you think about fanciers that never clean their lofts or put peastraw on the floor?

That is no way of keeping pigeons. Again pigeons are not pigs.

Why don't you race long distance?

We hate long-distance races because there are too many risks for the birds and you lose them often. That our birds can do the job we have proved, but only to stop all that nonsense that our birds couldn't handle the distance. One time we shipped three birds to Chateauroux (575 km). We won first, second, and fourth in the club. "De Scherpen" we shipped to Montargis and Bordeaux (800 km) and he won two times first. Then the gossip was over. After that, we decided only to ship for the short and middle distances. That's what we like.

Are there any real breeding pairs?

Pairs that give good birds are not rare, but pairs that give real superbirds are very seldom found. Whenever you breed a superbird, this pair is already a very good breeding pair.

Do you have any prisoners?

No, and we never will, because we think a bird must be able to loft fly.

Did you do any polygamous breeding with your "Stier"?

No, we never did that. The bird "Stier" (means bull) was given to him because he was such a strong bird.

Do you give any injection in order to make the bird fertile longer?

No, over is over. Besides that, we think older pigeons should give their places to younger ones. The "019" will probably die here.

What is it that you like the most in pigeon-sport?

To watch the birds coming home from a race and see the youngbirds grow in the nests.

How long will you continue racing pigeons?

As long as we can walk and climb the stairs to the loft.

How do you manage to get along with all these people that visit here?

Well, we are used to that. Taking care of the birds is always first in line.

Race Results Over 75 Years!

For 75 years the Janssen Bothers have won top prizes in the races. They have never advertised. It's the race results that took care of the advertising. We want the readers to realize that Jef, Charel, and Louis together have a combined age of over 200 years. Their age-and more importantly, their ability-deserve great respect.



- . From 1935 to 1939 they won over 60 firsts, including: April 10, 1938 - 380 pigeons, shipped 17, they were 1-2-3-8-9-15-26-36-56-57-82-100; April 24, 1938 - 294 birds, shipped 12, they were 1-2-4-10-12-26-28

- . From 1945 to 1951 they won 80 times first, including: May 5, 1945 - 682 birds, shipped 15, they were 1-2-4-5-6-7-18-25-30-42-92; August 29, 1949 - 526 pigeons, shipped 14, they were 1-2-3-4--5-6-7-13-17-28-31-65-96-174; May 28, 1951 - 700 pigeons, shipped 18, they were 1-2-3-4-9-12-23-35-38-39-62-85-142-170-185

- . April 27, 1952 - 203 birds, shipped 12, they were 1-2-3-4-5-6-9-12-13-18-32-57

- . 1953 - 28 times first
- . 1954 - 30 times first
- . 1955 - 32 times first
- . 1956 - 30 times first
- . 1957 - 17 times first
- . 1958 - 15 times first

The pigeons were raced in the club as well in the region. Many fanciers, being envious, were happy to not have them as competitors. The result of it was that the Janssen Brothers were suspended in 1954. That was a hard judgment against them. They were punished just because their birds were too fast.



During the years 1960 to 1970, the cracks were born that are still in the pedigrees of the Janssen birds nowadays, the "Merckx", "Raket", "Scherpe", "Geeloger", "019", etc., pigeons that won an enormous amount of first prizes. In the year 1972, they became Champion of "Zuiderkempen" with seventeen prizes out of twenty they could win as a maximum with pickbirds (two birds on top of the shipping list). From 1976 to 1985, they won 31 times first. All these prizes were won from races between 240 and 350 km. "Only the birds that are in top condition are good enough to be shipped," Louis said. "That's why we win such a high percentage of prizes."

The best racers now are the "Kleine Blauwe", "Wittikske", "Grote en Kleine van de Vos", the two "Blauwkes", "Zoon van de Grote", "Stier", "Vuil Blauw", "Licht van de 019", "De Afgekeurde", and "Blauw van den Afgekeurde". "De Afgekeurde" became his name because he strayed in somewhere. The brothers don't like this. They wanted to

eliminate him, but decided to give him another opportunity right after this the bird won a first in warm weather with a headwind, and they decided in his favour.

Tips for Starters

The Janssen Brothers advise the following things.

- . A very dry loft with a lot of fresh air.
- . A good family of pigeons
- . Everything at a time schedule
- . Patience
- . Learn how to race pigeons
- . Never force anything
- . Watch your birds carefully
- . Watch the balance, the wing, the head, and the feathers

There is no doubt that this is a great lifelong hobby for all the family.

I would like to thank the Janssen Brothers on behalf of all the fanciers that will read this article for the way they cooperated in order that I could make this report. Since we know them already for years, they have given their best as friends to us. In spite of all the fame they have, they managed to stay the same people they always were.

A special word of gratitude to Mr. Bol de Bruyn and his brother, Wim, who always accompanied me to Reusel.