

# ▶ Van Gent

## RACING SEASON BEGINS WITH THE SPRING EXCHANGE IN HOUTEN, THE NETHERLANDS

On the 2nd and 3rd of March this year the racing season starts with the Spring Exchange in Houten. It is already for the 18th time that this is organized. It is a great show with everything a good Exchange must have.

Approximately 250 stands among which: 130 pigeon sport trade stands, 20 to 30 stands with fancy pigeons and over 100 pigeon trade stands. All major pigeon sport products are available.

For a few years I hosted a stand for a friend of mine in which he sold pigeons. I was amazed, and I still am, how many languages you have to speak and from how many countries people are visiting this Exchange. It looks like more and more are visiting to make this visit a weekend visit. Fanciers also go to the Natural Breeding Station in Belgium or to the famous Lier Pigeon Market on the Sunday and visit the Exchange on the Saturday.

Better is to visit this exchange on the Sunday instead of the Saturday, why? The Sunday is not that busy and you have more time to visit all the stands and talk with people. When it is that busy, the stand holders do not have much time to explain and to talk to you.

When you want to buy some youngsters, you can buy these better on the Sunday, they are cheaper and they arrive in a better condition at home! Of course there are sellers who only attend on Saturday, but that is not in the main.

What you can also do is arrive in the early afternoon on the Saturday. The Exchange is open until 5pm, so when you arrive at 1pm you still have four hours to look around. On Sunday the Exchange is open until 3pm.

### In North-Holland

In our part of the Netherlands, North-Holland, we start our racing season in the 2nd week of April. In view of the end of winter time or with the beginning of daylight saving time and the growing problem with the birds of prey it is hard to get your birds ready for the season. Although my focus is on the extreme long distance races, I want that my racers every week in the race for making the distances. Like a long distance runner the pigeons need to make their mileage before going to an extreme long distance race.

The beginning of daylight saving time gives me an hour extra in the afternoon to train my birds, because I also have a boss where I have to work for 40 hours a week. So I like to start to train them in the weekends and try to train them in the afternoon as well. The Sunset is now somewhere around 5.45pm, so

with a bit of luck it is possible to train one group of birds. In the first two weeks we get a bit of an escape. The distances are not that far, so we also have the opportunity to basket for 115 kilometre on the Sunday morning. After basketing, they drive to the release point and release the birds after a short rest. So when the weather forecast for Saturday is not good and better for the Sunday I can always go with that escape route.

My pigeons first race that count is the first long distance race over 500km. Then the birds are in the race. When they arrive like planes arrive at the airport, so like clockwork, I know that the condition is fine and that the birds are ready for the races that count, the extreme long distance.

### Other new developments

In Friesland they have their own notification program. This program is internet driven and immediately after someone reports an arrival of a pigeon from a race, the site calculates and shows an online result list. This site is very popular and also very informative. Now they developed an extra feature. Now you can report your pigeons automatically through a device connected to your electronic clocking system.

Another new development is the number of pigeons in a basket during transport. There are rumors that they are going to investigate with young birds the influence of this on the loss of young birds. Scientists believe that when you put a less number of pigeons in a basket, the stress is less and so the loss of youngsters is also less. Less stress means more exploration of the basket and they also can find water for instance. Let's hope this will happen and that it will bring some light to this issue.

Then there is a new company called PigeonPixels. The famous pigeon photographer Falco Ebben and a professional film company are now also on the market with pigeon films. In the Netherlands Jos Voortman with Koerier duivenfilms. He is in this business since 1988. He makes three DVDs per year and they are extremely popular. You can find his movies in Germany, Spain and also in the UK.

But there are always things you can learn from a DVD. Even the smallest things can be very useful.

Also about the last development I wrote last time. The feeder where mixture is available, but only when pigeons stand on a board. In my breeding loft it works fantastic. I can

recommend it. When you want to make this yourself, check for this <http://www.thegar-denroofcoop.com/2010/12/automatic-chicken-feeder.html> or <http://forum.backyardpoultry.com/language/pdf/autofeeder.pdf>. Do bare in mind the weight of chicken and pigeons. When we are busy with building plans and internet addresses, I have another nice one for starters. This is the way they build lofts in the US, [www.redrosetlofts.com/starter\\_loft.htm](http://www.redrosetlofts.com/starter_loft.htm). There are some good ideas in it. Like the aviary in front of the loft.



### At my own loft

The racers are now mated and on their eggs. Each couple will get one youngster to raise. When the youngsters are 14-16 days old the hens will move to their widowhood part of the loft. I hope I can train the hens and cocks each day or else every other day, so that one day the hens feed the youngster and the other day the cock. These youngsters are not for my own use, but they are available for others. After the youngsters are gone, the racers will be on the Widowhood system. I will mate them before the beginning of the racing season. Again a pair of eggs and then definitive on Widowhood.