

Interview with Deon du Toit – Kalahari Pigeon Federation Champion 2014.

How did it all start?

I grew up in the Koue Bokkeveld in the Western Cape. One of our labourers brought me a stray pigeon which resulted in a small loft being built and a few other pigeons were added. I never raced but loved the pigeons and vowed that one day I would race and breed pigeons. Well 35 years later (2011), when I moved to Colesberg in the Northern Cape, that dream became a reality. I met Bertus Nel and he invited me to join him in waiting for his pigeons to arrive from a race and after that I was hooked and built a loft.

My loft was completed in March 2012 and I took part in five South Route races in the NOK Union with birds bred by Bertus, Dr. Gavin Rous and Paul Viljoen. It was a daunting task as a complete novice to race against pigeon fanciers such as Gavin, his brother Trevor and Paul Viljoen – all of them multiple NOK Union champions!

My birds performed well from the start and in race four from Laingsburg II (494km) I scored 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10 in the Yearlings and 1,3,4,5,6,7,8,13 in the Open section in our Club. In the NOK Union with 83 members and 2366 birds I scored 3,4,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,20,21,22.

Race five from Touwsrivier (567km) was also a good one for me and my birds took 1,2,3,11,15,35,36,39 in the NOK Union with 83 members and 2399 birds competing. Due to holiday plans already made the previous year I could not race the last 5 races.

I did not take part in any other races in Colesberg because we relocated to Kathu in December 2012.

Can you tell us more about your first racing season in the Kalahari Pigeon Federation?

My first season went far better than expected. In the first race my pigeons took the first 15 positions with a 2 minute lead. The second race the first 8 positions. I took part in 11 of the 18 races and won every race in the All Bird category.

All pigeons, yearlings and old birds, are released together. The race results are then calculated in three categories:

- All bird result (yearlings and open birds)
- Yearling result
- Open result

2014 CLUB RACE RESULTS

Prieska I	223km 14 members 321 pigeons 1180mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,etc
Yearling club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,11,12,25,26,28,30,31,32,etc
Open club	1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,12,13,,20,21,22,23,24,25,etc
Prieska II	223km 14 members 325 pigeons 1149mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,13,14,15,16,28,31,32,etc
Yearling club	1,2,3,4,5,9,10,19,23,27,28,30,31,32,etc
Open club	1,2,3,5,6,11,13,14,19,20,23,24,25,26,etc

De Aar I	345km 14 members 320 pigeons 1267mpm
All birds club	1,2,4,5,6,7,8,12,15,16,19,20,21,22,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,etc
Yearlings club	2,3,7,10,12,16,17,18,19,29,30,36,37,etc
Open club	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,20,21,22,29,30,31,etc
De Aar II	345km 14 members 243 pigeons 1244mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,8,9,10,11,12,13,22,23,24,25,26,30,34,39,40,41,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,5,6,7,13,14,15,18,22,23,28,30,31,32,33,40,etc
Open club	1,2,4,5,6,10,11,13,17,19,22,23,24,26,etc
Hanover I	397km 14 members 269 pigeons 1446mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,14,15,16,18,30,31,32,33,36,37,38,39,40,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,3,4,7,8,14,15,16,17,18,19,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,etc
Open club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,19,20,21,25,28,29,31,32,33,36,etc
Hanover II	397km 14 members 320 birds 1179mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,21,22,23,24,29,30,32,33,34,40,41,etc
Yearlings club	2,3,4,6,7,8,9,14,16,17,18,29,20,23,25,26,34,35,38,39,40,etc
Open club	1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,12,14,15,16,17,18,24,27,31,34,38,39,40,etc
Noupoort I	426km 14 members 272 birds 1492mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,16,17,18,19,21,32,33,34,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,16,17,25,26,29,38,39,etc
Open club	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,17,25,28,29,31,32,35,etc
Noupoort II	426km 14 members 320 birds 1286mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,26,27,29,31,34,35,36,37,39,40,41,42,43,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,17,20,21,23,24,25,26,29,35,36,37,38,39,40,etc
Open club	1,2,8,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,20,24,25,26,27,29,30,34,36,etc
Middelburg I	460km 11 members 237 birds 1007mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,5,8,9,11,18,21,25,30,34,37,38,41,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,5,11,13,17,20,21,22,25,28,29,31,35,etc
Open club	1,2,4,5,10,16,18,29,30,37,etc
Graaff Reinet I	524km 10 members 242 birds 1058mpm
All birds club	1,2,3,4,6,7,10,11,12,14,16,19,23,25,39,44,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,11,15,16,25,27,33,35,36,41,etc
Open club	3,4,7,24,30,31,35,43,etc
Graaff Reinet II	524km 10 members 324 birds 1347mpm
All birds club	1,2,4,7,8,9,10,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,20,23,24,25,26,27,28,40,41,etc
Yearlings club	1,2,5,7,8,9,11,13,14,15,16,22,24,25,etc
Open club	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12,19,22,25,26,36,38,etc
Best Birds in club after race 12 when I stopped racing.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,16,17, etc.
Best Bird in club at the end of the season	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,15,16,17,18,19,20, etc.

2014 FEDERATION RACE RESULTS

Prieska I	689 pigeons 43 members 1185mpm
All birds	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,18,19,20,21,22,24,25,etc
Yearling	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,29,30,31,32,33,34,etc
Open	1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,14,15,30,31,33,34,35,36,etc
Prieska II	653 pigeons 41 members 1163mpm
All birds	4,5,6,7,8,11,12,13,17,18,19,20,33,39,40,etc
Yearling	4,5,6,8,9,13,14,,26,30,36,37,42,43,44,etc
Open	1,2,3,5,6,14,17,18,30,31,41,42,43,44,etc
De Aar I	601 pigeons 41 members 1321mpm
All birds	5,6,9,10,11,12,13,19,23,30,38,40,41,43,etc
Yearlings	4,5,9,13,21,35,36,37,38,etc
Open	4,5,6,7,8,15,20,21,22,41,42,43,etc
De Aar II	561 pigeons 38 members 1238mpm
All birds	16,17,18,19,41,43,44,45,46,47,etc
Yearlings	9,10,22,24,25,35,37,etc
Open	8,9,20,21,22,31,32,etc
Hanover I	581 pigeons 40 members 1462mpm
All birds	2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,13,14,17,18,19,21,42,43,44,45,etc
Yearlings	2,3,4,5,8,9,20,21,22,23,24,25,40,41,43,44,46,47,etc
Open	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,10,11,25,26,27,45,etc
Hanover II	531 pigeons 38 members 1179mpm
All birds	1,2,3,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,19,20,21,24,25,26,27,28,36,37,38,41,42,43,etc
Yearlings	2,3,4,6,7,8,9,15,17,18,19,25,27,35,38,39,etc
Open	1,2,3,8,9,10,11,12,16,19,20,21,25,26,43,etc
Noupoort I	584 pigeons 41 members 1492mpm
All birds	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,16,17,18,19,21,32,33,34,etc
Yearlings	1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,18,19,40,41,etc
Open	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,25,43,etc
Noupoort II	588 pigeons 41 members 1286mpm
All birds	1,2,3,4,6,7,8,10,11,12,20,37,38,40,42,etc
Yearlings	1,2,3,4,6,7,8,10,25,29,33,34,35,36,42,etc
Open	1,2,8,15,16,17,20,21,22,27,28,38,39,40,42etc
Middelburg I	577 pigeons 38 members 1017mpm
All birds	3,4,7,9,20,21,27,43,etc.
Yearlings	3,5,11,30,32,45,etc
Open	1,2,9,12,20,42,etc
Graaff Reinet I	560 pigeons 38 members 1093mpm
All birds	8,9,11,12,18,19,24,25,29,31,34,39,etc
Yearlings	2,3,4,5,8,9,12,13,15,22,26,46,etc
Open	13,18,23,etc
Graaff Reinet II	541 pigeons 38 members 1347mpm
All birds	1,2,4,10,11,12,13,16,17,29,30,31,32,34,35,39,40,etc
Yearlings	1,2,9,10,11,18,19,21,26,33,34,etc
Open	1,5,6,7,13,14,15,17,24,25,43,44,etc

Best birds in Kalahari Pigeon Federation 2014	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,21,22,26,27,28,etc.

Is your family involved with the pigeons?

My wife and kids are not that keen on my hobby, but my wife does support me and if I am away on the farm she feeds the birds.

Do you have a preference for a certain strain / line?

I was lucky to start with very good pigeons and the success that I have enjoyed so far is better than I could ever wish for. The Gaby Vandenabeeles of Bertus and Gavin's family of pigeons works well for me. Both fanciers have built their lofts around breeders whose children can be entered in races week after week.

About 90% of my pigeons are Vandenabeele pigeons. They all are descendants of two of the greatest racers and breeders ever in the pigeon sport, namely Wittenbuik and Bliksem of Gaby Vandenabeele.

The birds I got from Gavin are also from his best. Pacman, Wolfhound, Queen Bee, Egg Cock, Iceman and many other top birds are in their pedigrees.

Can you tell us more about your loft?



My loft is build out of bricks and has a tile roof. The loft is 8m long and 3.5 m wide. It is divided into 4 sections with a passage of 1,4m running the full length of the loft. The walls and floors are lined with wood. Each section has 30 perches (300mm x 300mm x 300mm).

Due to limited space, I had to build a South facing loft which means it doesn't get any sun in the winter. To solve the problem I installed transparent roof tiles at the back of the loft roof (northern side). I cover these transparent tiles in summer because of the extreme heat we have in Kathu. I have a large aviary in front of the loft and the pigeons really enjoy basking in the winter sun. I use wheat straw as 'n floor covering. It helps to create a calm and warm atmosphere in the loft. For this system to work you need good quality straw (absolutely no mouldy pieces) and your loft has to be dry. In winter I use panel heaters to prevent the loft temperature going below 6-8 degrees Celsius.

Due to limited space I only have 3 single pens for breeding and a small section next to them where I can keep a few other pigeons. Only pigeons that have bred first prize winners are kept as breeders.

I did buy a few birds the past few months from Bertus to have more breeding pairs. One is a grandson of Bliksem (who has bred first prize winners) and another five youngsters of his Wittenbuik and Bliksem lines.

I also took my best racing cock of 2014 to the breeding loft. His number is ZA 13/16240 and was bred by Dr. Gavin Rous. He is a 5 x equal winner.





Can you tell us more about your racing system and preparation for the races?

In our federation we can basket 24 pigeons per team (12 Yearlings and 12 Opens). I prefer to test my pigeons thoroughly and I enter 2 teams – 48 pigeons per race. I start the racing season with 80 birds.

Once my birds can circle for an hour or longer, I start taking them out on tosses. I start off with a 20km toss and gradually increase the distance so that I end up with a toss from the first race point the weekend before the first race. Once the racing season starts, I toss twice per week to a maximum of 60 – 80km. The other days I would circle the birds once per day for an hour. I do not chase my birds or put up a flag; they must fly out of their own will.

How often do you race your pigeons?

I believe the best way to test your pigeons is to race them every race. Therefore I try to race as many birds every weekend for 12 consecutive races. That is why I specifically bought pigeons that were tested and bred to fly every weekend from Bertus and Gavin. They selected their birds on a unique racing system in Colesberg where they raced all their birds every weekend against a headwind. This system resulted in excellent selection.

How do you decide which ones to enter?

For a novice like me it is not easy to select the best birds for every race, but because I race almost all my birds every weekend it makes it a bit easier. But I mainly look at the performances of the birds in the race of the previous weekend and the tosses during the week also help me to select the best ones. In 2014 we were allowed to move birds between our teams and after a while I was not too bad in choosing the best birds for my first team.

Can you tell us more about your feeding methods?

The feeding of your birds is very important. I used a mixture with a high fat percentage in 2014 which was made up by Jannie Nel of Bloemfontein. It is important to use only the best quality seeds available. This year I am going to use a new mixture from Vanrobeys in Belgium. I believe the quality of their food is excellent.

What products do you use to help the pigeons recuperate?

Because I race my birds every weekend, it is important for me to help them recuperate as quickly as possible. I use the products from Rohnfried. Usually my pigeons would land on clean water and when the weather turns warmer they would land on Rohnfried Elektrolyt Plus.

On Saturday evening and Sunday morning they get Rohnfried BT Amin and Rohnfried Biergist over the food.

On Sundays and Mondays they have Rohnfried Avidress Plus in the drinkers and Rohnfried Sedochol over the food.

On Tuesday and Wednesday I give Rohnfried Atemfrei and Rohnfried Jungtierpulver over the food and Rohnfried Blitzform in the drinkers. Thursdays clean water and food.

I also believe in good quality grit and my birds get fresh grit every other day – I use Versele Laga Super Grit and Rohnfried Premium Mineral Reise (only in the racing season).

Do you have a routine medical program and what do you treat for?

Before the racing seasons starts I treat the birds for Malaria and also give them a 10 day treatment with Altabacine. When I use antibiotics, I give a probiotic over the food. In my racing season of 12 weeks I would treat the birds for Canker every third week and twice with Spiradox (respiratory). I only use tablets to treat the birds – this is the only way to ensure that they receive the correct dosage. I also give the mandatory Paramyxo injection and Pox vaccine.

Do you make use of natural products?

In the off season I use Braggs' Raw Unfiltered Apple Cider Vinegar and Garlic and Rohnfried Avidress Plus in the water. I alternate between these products. It is important that the birds must not be infected when you start with these natural treatments, therefore I treat my birds at the end of the racing season for Canker and then I start with these products.

How do you decide which pigeons to keep at the end of the racing season?

I look at the best bird results and keep about 15 birds which I will race again next season. The one or two special ones I take to the breeding loft.

What strategy do you follow when you breed and are there any special things that you take into account when coupling the pigeons?

I think to build a family of birds is important and both Gavin and Bertus have families that were performance tested. I put the best to the best making use of line and cross breeding. I believe by doing this my chances of producing better birds are higher.

Can you tell us more about your best racers in 2014?

I had a number of very good racers, but the best two were:



ZA 16953/13

ZA 16953/13. This hen was bred by Bertus Nel and she was the Best Bird in the club as well as the KPF Federation in 2014. She raced 9 consecutive races and she had 4 equal first positions (she came with the winning birds but trapped seconds after). She was always within the first 12 birds in my loft and never missed a prize in the club. Her father is Kromme ZA 43220/11 and her mother ZA 43202/11. Kromme is inbred to the foundation pair of Bertus, Witpen Wittenbuik and the Gaby Hen. 43202 is a daughter of Golden Eye (one of the best breeders Bertus ever owned) when he was paired with a g/daughter of Bliksem. Two full sisters of 16953 were also very good racers. ZA 16763/13 for Egbert O'Kelly; she was 10th ace pigeon GPU. Another one ZA 63241/13 "Goldie II" was 2nd ace pigeon at Dinokeng Lofts up to the Trompsburg race. She got lost from this race and came back four weeks later with an injured wing.

Bertus and I have a joint venture; he sends me around 80 youngsters every year which I race. At the end of the racing season he can select any pigeon from the ones that he has bred to strengthen his breeding loft. Last year he selected only one which was 16953. The rest will be raced again in 2015.



Deon with ZA 16240/13

ZA 16240/13. This cock was bred by Dr Gavin Rous and he was the 3rd best Bird in the KPF Fed and best Cock. He is a 5 times equal winner. His father is an imported Andre Roodhooft cock, BELG 6201034/06, and his mother is the LONG HEN, ZA 43826/10. The father of the Long Hen is Wolfhound and the mother is Blue Queen. 16240 is now in my stock loft.

Do you consider the eyes and pedigree important when putting pairs together?

Obviously a good eye is nice to look at, but to me the performance of the pigeon is more important. The pedigree is only important when the performances are there. A bird with a great pedigree but no performance credentials means nothing to me.

You only competed in 11 of the 18 races. What is the reason for that?

To be a successful fancier one must put a lot of effort and time into the sport. The disadvantage of this is that many fanciers put the sport first and their families second. My family comes first. I have an agreement with my wife that I will only race pigeons from June to the end of August.

Last year I raced my pigeons in the first 9 races, then my father and mother visited us and we spent the weekend on our farm near Van Zylsrus. As a result I did not compete in the 10th race. I raced again in races 11 and 12 and then I stopped as promised.

My farm is 180km from my loft and it is extremely difficult to continue racing for longer than 3 months without any help. I feed, water and clean the lofts myself. My wife helps whenever she can but a fancier needs to be at his loft most of the time to be successful. To race for 18 or 20 weeks is not possible for me. Therefore I race as many birds as I can for 12 weeks.

What do you consider the secrets of being a successful pigeon fancier?

There are many aspects that will determine whether you are successful or not. Good pigeons, a good loft (dry and well ventilated), good management, correct training and feeding, good observation and keeping everything as natural as possible are key elements in my opinion. Good pigeons alone are not going to make you a champion. Everything has to fall into place.

I also believe a novice should have a mentor. I received very good advice from Bertus and we talk daily in the racing season. He told me to keep things simple and not complicate things like he did when he started with the sport.

His advice was to start with the best pigeons you can lay your hands on, select on racing performances only, forget about theories, race as many pigeons as you can and only keep the best. The best are the ones that can race week after week and still win top prizes.

He also told me to keep things as natural as possible and to stay away from wonder potions. After my fourth race stories started circulating that I was using some wonder potion, a steam box and a special racing mixture that sells for R800 a bag. These stories spread and a fancier from the Western Cape called me and asked if I used a steam box. I don't and I never want to, because I believe selection must be on a natural system. If I send pigeons to one loft races, which many believe are the future of the sport, then the birds that are going to perform well are the ones selected on a natural system.

What special moments were there in 2014?

For me having 16 out of the first 20 Best Birds in our Federation was real special. For me that is what the sport is about; breeding and racing ace pigeons! Being Federation Champion in my first year of racing in the Kalahari was a bonus.

What are your expectations for 2015?

This season should be very interesting because this year we will race from the North East and not the South. We will also have two separate releases of Yearlings and Open Birds, 30 minutes apart. The theory behind this is that the old birds pull the yearlings home and now the yearlings will have to fly on their own.

I don't understand this reasoning because last year I raced only yearlings and late bred and had no old birds to "pull" them home. If the theory is true then I shouldn't have won a single race in 2014. We now also have to nominate our teams well in advance of the racing season and we are not allowed to change birds between our teams.

A very interesting season lies ahead of us!