

Hoosier Weekend: Million Dollar Adventure!

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October 12th Friday

My wife Norda and I flew into Chicago's Midway Airport on a cold Friday afternoon. After we picked up our rental car we drove about an hour to Michigan City, Indiana. Which is a small tourist town on Lake Michigan. The town has a nice beach, zoo and casino. It seems like it would be great destination site especially in the summer. We had a room at the Blue Chip Casino & Hotel which is about 30 minutes from the Hoosier race site.

Shortly after unpacking we went down to the lobby. I was hoping to bump into others there for the Hoosier race. Scanning the crowds in the lobby I spotted Frank Nebig in a small group of people that looked like they were pigeon fanciers. Frank is the Netherlands race agent for the million dollar Hoosier Classic Race (HCMDR). We introduced ourselves and Frank explained how he is the operator of a transport company named Animals to Fly. They send animals all across the world, including exotic African Lions for zoo's and earth worms for farmers!

Also in the group was Germany race agent Nadine Huenten. She is an elite pigeon racer (7th SAMDPR Final 2017 & 4th Ace 2016 Victoria Falls) and had the first bird back from Europe in this year's Hoosier Final race at 225th place.

Hanging out in the crowd was renowned pigeon grader and writer (with many expertly written articles on his website www.ehoremans.com) Bill "The Book" Richardson. Later that evening we had a discussion about breeding and selection.

During some small talk Hoosier Classic owners Jim and wife Kelly Ward came through the casino doors and generously treated us all to a dinner at the casino buffet!

The Hoosier Weekend was a fun-filled experience full of meeting new friends and taking in the experience! I jumped at the opportunity to handle several of the best pigeons in the world at Ganus Family Loft. (There will be a short article covering my loft visit to GFL coming soon.) We also attended the GFL auction on Mike's hunting ranch in La Porte, IN which was a great experience.

The weekend was full of exploratory conversations with top OLR performers like Geert Kolvenbag and Steward Harvard. I had some nice chats with Tim Lucas, Frank & Dan McLaughlin and was able to talk pigeons with Jelle Roziers & Bart Geerinckx from Belgium.

Several times I caught excellent advice from living legends such as Lou Colleta.

Mike Ganus took the time to answer just about any questions and openly discussed his praxis for success.

I expanded my handling experience by watching and getting a few tips from young superstars Shi Lim, Andy Skwiat and Da Dong. We handled all the South African winners (including "Mix") together.

Why the Hoosier?

The Hoosier has a bright future as an alternative to SAMDPR. South Africa is the most prestigious race in the world, but it has some challenges. I have had several conversations with SAMDPR participants (and winners) including former USA agent Frank McLaughlin. There seems to be a common challenge causing problems. Getting the birds to and from the race! Sending youngsters halfway across the world, through quarantine and in good enough shape to perform well is a challenge itself. So is getting the birds back from the race.

All races have challenges. In fact the difficulty it takes to overcome the odds and win SAMDPR is one reason why it is the most prestigious one loft race.

The Hoosier may prove to be a better alternative for USA breeders.

5 reasons why:

- 1) The Hoosier is the largest race in the United States with over 3000 entries and prizes over \$1,000,000 guaranteed!
- 2) Jim Ward and family run this event with warmth and mid-western charm.
- 3) Traveling to the Hoosier is pretty easy with access from Chicago with amenities such as the Blue Chip Casino & Hotel.
- 4) Indiana & Chicago are home to some top U.S. breeders which naturally helps provide support the event. For example Debby and Mike Ganus were generous enough to open their beautiful loft and home to visitors. (Which I appreciated it very much!)
- 5) The Hoosier has room to grow. It already rivals SAMDPR, Algarve, and Victoria Falls as a premier OLR with huge prizes! The capacity to handle 6,000 pigeons is there!

The professionalism and competence of Jim Ward and his family builds confidence with me. I enjoyed the friendly atmosphere. For being such a large race the facilities were superb. I inspected the lofts to see how the birds looked. Overall the loft health appeared very good. I paid close attention to every bird that I handled during the basketing. Most handled good, one was thin, one handled great. Overall a solid group considering the size of the race.

Saturday

Visiting the home of Ganus Family Loft

On Saturday morning we visited the loft of Mike & Debby Ganus. They live in Granger, Indiana which was an hour drive from the Casino and 30 minutes from the race.

It's not every day you get to visit the loft (and beautiful home) of one of the world's top pigeon breeders and performers. I felt a bit like a kid in a candy store! I was very excited to handle some of the best pigeons ever. Keep an eye out for the article in which I share the experience a bit more depth!

The Ganus lofts are classy and appealing. They sit on a perfectly maintained lawn in what is essentially a huge and beautiful back yard.

Mike's loft has many traits that I would expect from a world class operation. Some of the things I noticed: How well kept and clean the lofts are. Pigeons are not crowded and appear very healthy. The pigeons acted quite good, which is probably do to the quality of birds Ganus.

The lofts are efficient, well prepared, and without much non-sense. To my surprise there is no office or lounge. (Not that there needs to be one!) I get the impression that Mike & Debby do most of the cleaning, feeding and care themselves. These birds are well cared for, I must say fine job!

Mike showed us some very nice loft features. The floor is a closed wood floor (not a wire-grate floor as I expected) and is heated during the cold season with a black electric film that is placed under the boards. There is multiple exhaust fans in the ceilings that do a tremendous job of pulling plume-dust out of the loft. So the air quality is quite good, something I normally don't expect in a closed floor loft.

The main loft is large with 4 wings in total. (2 main wings with aviaries, each with a branched off smaller wing without aviaries). Each section is well organized with plenty of room for the birds. The large aviaries are made from sturdy chain-link fence anchored to cement ground. There are many individual breeding pen sections small enough to house 4 or more birds at a time. Many only had one breeding pair some had just one bird.

There is two additional smaller loft buildings, both with large aviaries. It seems these lofts house youngsters and extra birds. In past conversations Mike mentioned that he likes to see his birds loft fly (for fun) so that would be done from these lofts.

Sharing my observations on Mike Ganus

For those that have never had a chance to meet Mike I will share what I have observed so far.

As a professional Ganus appears to be very serious when it comes to pigeons. He politely listens to others thoughts on breeding and racing, etc. But his beliefs are strongly formed and reinforced by success.

He has proven to be adaptable by adjusting his approach and selection methods. For example, he does not place any value on eye-sign like he did in the past. I got the sense from past conversations that he is competitive, but it's honestly tough to see because conducts himself in a friendly matter.

As I got to hear his stories I was surprised that he seems to have a fun streak and is a bit of a practical joker! He has some pretty funny stories tell.

He had many of us belly laughing while telling a story about antagonizing his friend, champion Holland racer Ad Schaerlaecken. In short Ad was bragging that the local news was covering him because he found a rare (and probably valuable) meteorite on his property. So Mike went out and bought some exotic rocks to stash in Ad's yard to trick him into thinking there were valuable meteorites all over the yard! It was a funny story.

Sunday Morning

The GFL auction

In total there was 60 Birds that were auctioned for a total of \$202,000! The highest bid pigeon (GFL 179 2018) son of 2018 SAMDPR Final winner "Mix" sold for \$27,000.

The GFL auction was well organized and fun with complimentary pizza and beer. It was held (Oct 14th) at Mikes 150+ acre private hunting ranch in Laporte, Indiana. The ranch is nestled in the country amongst grass covered hills, large elm trees and rows of corn and squash. There is a couple of ponds on the property and several deer and duck hunting blinds. The lodge-house is modern with several taxidermy deer heads on the living room walls. There were some big antler racks including an 11-pointer!

The auction was held in a large shop behind the lodge-house. The pigeons were lined up in cages so all in attendance got a chance to handle the beautiful birds.

I would estimate 100 people were there including those from the PIPA crew like Frank McLaughlin, Jelle Roziers, Big Andy, Bart Geerinckx, Tom Van Gaver, Nicholas Gyslebrecht and Niko Sakividas.

Well-known Americans attended like legendary Lou Coletta. Tim Lucas was there with a determined energy. I noticed Paul Daniels helping out with the auction. Geert Kolvenbag was keenly observing. Stewart Harvard was taking in the activities. Shi Lim was inspecting the pigeons. Da Dong appeared ready to invest in a good breeder. Jim Ward was there, he ended up doing some serious investing in his breeding program. I saw he took home a few of the birds, including one of my favorites down from "Wolverine" & "Halover".

Bids came from both the live auction and www.l-pigeon.com. The highlight was when Tim Lucas won an intense bid on a son of "Mix" for \$27,000! The crowd was pleased with the action and applauded loudly as just a few minutes earlier he won the daughter of "Mix" for \$21,500. He paid a total of \$48,500 to get them both. He stated on I-Pigeon that he also bought another son (outside of the auction) earlier. Tim later on exclaimed in a friendly manner, *"I really wanted these birds. You got to corner the market! My strategy was to corner the market."*

The auction birds

Overall the birds were great. I personally liked most that were out of "Said in Spun Silver" including (GFL 120 2018) a unique BC daughter of "Said in Spun Silver" bred to a daughter of Jan Hooyman's "Harry". She was won for \$2,100. (Whoever won her, please email me.)

"Wolverine" was also responsible for some of the nicest pigeons including (GFL 106 2018) BB son of "Wolverine" mated to "Halover" and he sold for \$6,100.

A blue hen (GFL 150 2018) sold for \$7,500 which was the most other than the "Mix" birds. Her father is "Sun City" mated to his daughter SAMDPR final winning "Laura is a big winner today"

One of the choice birds in show (as far as body and feather) may have been (GFL 418 2018) BB daughter of "Doc Holiday" (1st Algarve) mated to 6th place Golden Algarve race.

Young superstar Belgian flyer, Tom Van Gaver (1st National Champion Long Distance KBDB 2016) gave me a lesson on pigeon grading. We used a hen he won at auction which he graded it as a 9.5 out of 10. He explained that he liked her strong front, chest and wing structure. He examined her throat a few times. I noticed the hen had a perfect pear-shaped body which is a body type I also like. She was very buoyant and had nice shiny feathers. Eye sign was good but not mature enough to know. I had to agree that she was a gem!

Sunday Night

The classy and fun Hoosier banquet

Sunday evening the Hoosier Classic held a formal gala and banquet at the Blue Chip Casino Banquet Hall. It was a classy event with a band, delicious food and free drinks! Some were in formal attire, including Mike Ganus who seemed happy to get a chance to wear his SAMDPR jacket. After all there is only a handful of people in the world that has one!

It was a nice time to socialize, discuss strategies and have fun. Many in attendance were taking advantage of the free libations and laid back atmosphere.

My wife and I were lucky enough to bump into Tom and his wife Nichole Schilling who invited us to sit at they're table for the banquet dinner. Tom is fairly low key, I asked him why he was not wearing his SAMDPR winner's jacket. He said it doesn't fit him properly! Truth maybe it's not his style.

Monday

The race basketing

Due to weather the final race was pushed from Monday to Tuesday. The basketing took place on a cold and breezy day.

The Hoosier race is located in Wanatah Indiana at Jim Ward's home and large property. There is good sized metal building that houses his Vita-King business along with several other buildings and the lofts. It really is a beautiful facility with well-kept lawn and very large newer lofts. A huge white tent was set up for the race. I was very impressed with the facilities.

People were there taking pictures, exploring the beautiful property and inspecting the lofts and pigeons. Most helped with the basketing process, some were trying to get a sneak peak at they're pigeons. Local law enforcement kept count and escorted the trailer to the race release point. As you can imagine it took a few hours for the 1500+ birds to be processed and put in the trailer.

A neat moment came later in the day when Jim explained how the trailer works (allowing all the birds out at once) to many of the women in attendance.

Jim emphasized doing what is best for the pigeons. He instructed his team to set aside any pigeons that may be questionable so he can evaluate each one.

"We do what's best for the bird, I'll hold it back (from the race) if I don't think it can make it!" – Jim Ward

They use the Benzing band and clocking system to scan the birds who also received a large stamp on the wing.

"We can not say enough great things about Benzing and their technical support representative that was in attendance Eric Brown from South Africa. Eric has played a key role in the Hoosier Classic clocking this year as this is the first year we have used Benzing One Loft Program. Eric has spent countless hours ensuring that our new clocking system was working at 100%." – Jim Ward in an email after the race

Tuesday

Since the race was pushed back a day we were not able to attend the race day itself due to a scheduling conflict. Here is an analysis of the race final.

The Hoosier Classic Final Race

1535 birds from 641 Lofts were shipped to the 350-mile race release point in Tennessee.

"Our final race was a challenge for the birds. The start of the race was a light head wind for the first 200 miles, then changing to a strong tail/side wind. Here at the loft we saw wind gusts at about 20-25 mph from the west. The first drop came from the east, battling the wind to get to the loft" - Jim Ward in an email after the race

The Winners!

1st through the trap

The race winner was "Storm Bird" of Tigre Lofts in Wisconsin who partnered with Frank McLaughlin as breeder. The bird came in on the first (32 bird) drop at about 1,424 yards per minute and he trapped first. A true hybrid (backing up Frank's theory of "mix them up" when breeding) with Hebberecht, Casaert/Van Reet/Van loon and Janssen in the pedigree.

Average Speed

Champion overall average speed (and 1st drop) was awarded to Mike Ganus with his hen "Magic Leo" who is daughter to "Scorpion" tracing to one day long distance bloodlines from Belgium. Considering this bird also was a co-winner it clearly had the superior performance of any pigeon in the race series.

Tom Schilling won 2nd overall average speed with "Little Estelle" a full sister to SAMDPR winner "Little Miss Nikki" from his hit pair, a Rudi De Saer (Vandenabeele) hen and a Geerinckx/Kannibaal cock. Tom, also had a strong showing from "Little Nikki's Pick" a BB Hen that placed 53rd.

Sanso Loft of south Florida placed 3rd overall average speed and was also 1st drop with "Unanswered Prayer" 1172 AU18 HRPC a "Papa del 20" Janssen/Houben blend. Probably the 2nd best performance of any pigeon in the race series.

Other honorable performances:

Shi Lim (Shi Loft) of Pennsylvania scored extremely well with (1st drop) 18th & 22nd and also 43rd. His birds appeared to be mostly from GFL pigeons with some Baldwin & Tilson and Koopman mixed in.

Gibara Family Loft of south Florida was on the (1st drop) 13th with "Wild Love" 2602-AU18-HRPC and also had the 46th bird with what appears to be the nest-mate 2601 AU18-HRPC. Although the pedigrees are not complete I hear that some of this Jibaros family traces to Clausing's "Ziko".

Randy Walz of Zephyr Lofts in Colorado, placed (1st drop) 9th in the Final with 13th average speed with a hybrid bird down from his excellent Red Fox Janssen hen and a McLaughlin (1/2 Hebberecht) cock he got for a bargain at online auction.

“The most important trait in a good pigeon is the desire to come home. Our Red Fox Janssen’s want to come home.” – Randy Walz

Lou Coletta of California had a great result in the final placing (1st drop) 6th and 90th with HVR/Grondalaers & Vandenabeele cross down from top 2017 Hoosier performers.

Baptista Loft of Illinois had one of the nicer BB hens (1st drop) 23rd with “High Hopes” 0017-AU18-BAPT who is another hybrid of Stichelbaut/Fabry and Baldwin & Tilson bloodlines tracing to 2006 Digest Ace YB 6043 JNC 2006 a (Dreamboy-Van Loon).

Nanez Family Loft represented Wisconsin well scoring 36th and 37th in the final with his “Iron-Clad” & “Constans” dynasty. He also won 1st in the previous 217 mile race and had the 7th overall average speed bird.

David Clausing also scored well, taking home 50th with “Borrowed Time” 89-IF18-CLAU. Clausing’s family was surprisingly well represented. I saw 10 pigeons in the top 50 that had a reference to Clausing in the pedigree! Clausing mentioned to me that he thinks at least 12 pigeons in the top 50 had his Houben bloodline.

International results at the Hoosier:

The U.S. dominated most top spots. We could use these results to validate that the best pigeons in the world (for one loft racing) are in the USA. However not enough international lofts entered the race to make the statement count.

1st Canada loft was (1st drop) 17th was Tavares & Son tracing to Oak Haven Farms Van Loon.

1st Mexico loft was (1st drop) 21st Hermanos Castaneda with a hybrid tracing to “Sister Purdy” and “Fantoom” down from Arie Dijkstra/Protege cock and Eijerkamp/Heremans hen.

1st European loft was 225th Nadine & Jochen Huenten of Germany. I don’t know the breeding of this bird but when I spoke to Nadine a few days prior to the race she told me she had Vandenabeele, Koopman, Gunter Prange and Heinz Meier pigeons.

1st African loft was 347th Hattingh Family Loft of South Africa. I don’t know this birds breeding but Hatingh is known to have success with Eijerkamp-Van Loon pigeons.

Conclusion

This was a really fun weekend packed full of interesting things to do! Mike Ganus has a very nice loft and beautiful pigeons. His auction was a huge success.

The Hoosier race is well managed, the facilities are nice and the birds are well cared for. It’s a popular race to be in and has a chance to rival SAMDPR soon! Although training was tough, the final race was itself was not tough with a fairly fast winning speed of 1424 YPM. There was a mix of head-winds and tail-winds but a large group came in the 1st drop. Some prefer the huge prizes as draw. I think having a lot of co-winners is

actually positive because more people are encouraged by the shared success. USA dominated the top spots.

Most pigeons were hybrid/crosses many with Clausing, GFL, Baldwin & Tilson, Protégé, Nanez and McLaughlin (to name a few) represented in winners pedigrees.

Next year will probably be a big year for the Hoosier with \$500,000 to first place and over 1,250,000+ plus in total prizes guaranteed! See you there!

Good Luck.