



Photo: Roberto Comi.

THE DRAGOON

**Text: Club judges and breeders
Drawings: Jan de Jong**

Intro

Text: Kees Verkolf

Our Dragoon Pigeon is under the spotlight, in the limelight and now in the Sun. This more than British powerhouse; this strongly muscled fighter; this precursor of the King of Pigeons; this source of dispute and confusion; this gene-source of the breeders art. In the nineteenth century still the most common Thoroughbred Show Pigeon, in various types, at the unforgettable, large English exhibitions. Indelibly recorded in the literature of the big ones; yes, amongst those of the greatest. A Wattle Pigeon for anyone with taste for a combination of power and beauty. The British themselves may no longer want to be one with us, due to their 'Brexit'; but this doesn't apply to the Dragoon; they can't take that away from us, that's for sure!

The text below is taken from an older article by the late Jan Jacobs (NL).

THE DRAGOON IN THE LITERATURE

The Dragoon as a breed is an English creation, but the origin of all Wattle Pigeons and Baghdads is in the Near East. The exact origin of the Dragoon and its ancestors is in fact unknown. For the oldest writings on wattle pigeons we have to go back to the year 1599, when Aldrovandi described the Turkish pigeon. This breed seems to be the longest domesticated of the pigeon breeds still alive. Together with the Persian Carrier, the Turkish pigeon stood at the cradle of the 'Horseman'. All these ancestors were of a Carrier-like type with coarse wattle structure and striking, broad eye ceres. Another common trait was that they flew well and had excellent orientation capacity.

In 1678, Wiloughby in his 'The Ornithology' described the Horseman, regarded as a direct ancestor of the Dragoon. For the first description of the Dragoon we

have to wait until 1735 when John Moore described the breed in his 'Colombarium'.

If we look at today's Dragoons, with their streamlined bodies and their huge beak volumes, we can no longer imagine that the foundation material was so completely different. The Dragoons from around 1900 had a Carrier-like type, with long, thin necks; long, pointed beaks and Barb-like eye ceres. Generations of fanciers have spent their entire life making the Dragoon what it is today. Once again it was the English specialists who provided both 'scope-statement and drawings' of what they saw as an ideal Dragoon. Originally two types were known: The London type and the Birmingham type. The 'Birmingham type' had a more angular headline, but the 'London type' was soon preferred. Except for a few small details, the English Standard has remained practically unchanged in 100 years.

**Below: Drawings by J.W. Ludlow 1880 - Cassell Pigeon book.
Left: Birmingham type, right London type.**



THE DRAGOON IN THE NETHERLANDS TODAY

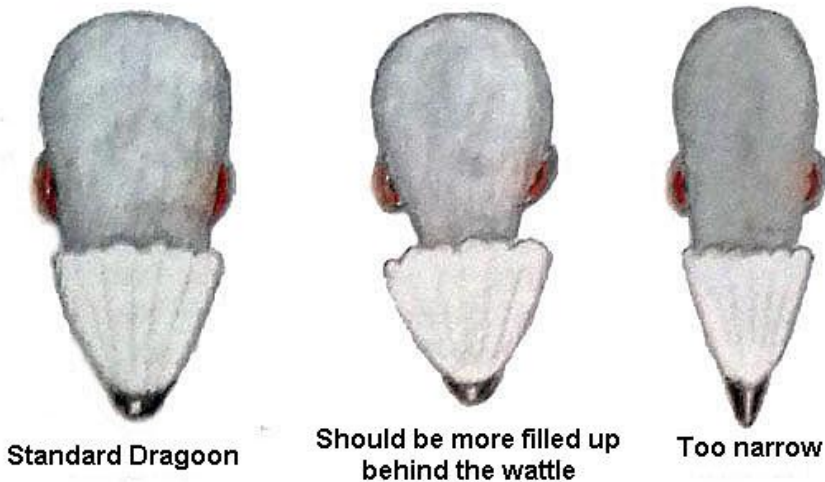
Text: Club Judge Daan Admiraal

The Dragoon is classified with the Wattle Pigeons, in the Form pigeon class, and is one of the eleven breeds of the Dutch Specialty Club for Beauty Homer Pigeons.

Type and stance

The Dragoon is a medium-sized, powerful pigeon, rather short in the legs, with a full, broad breast, protruding in front of the wing bows. The most striking feature is the short, thick neck; called a 'bull neck' in Holland.

The position of the body is slightly sloping, and the tail must not touch the ground. The head carriage and neck largely determine the overall point score.



Head

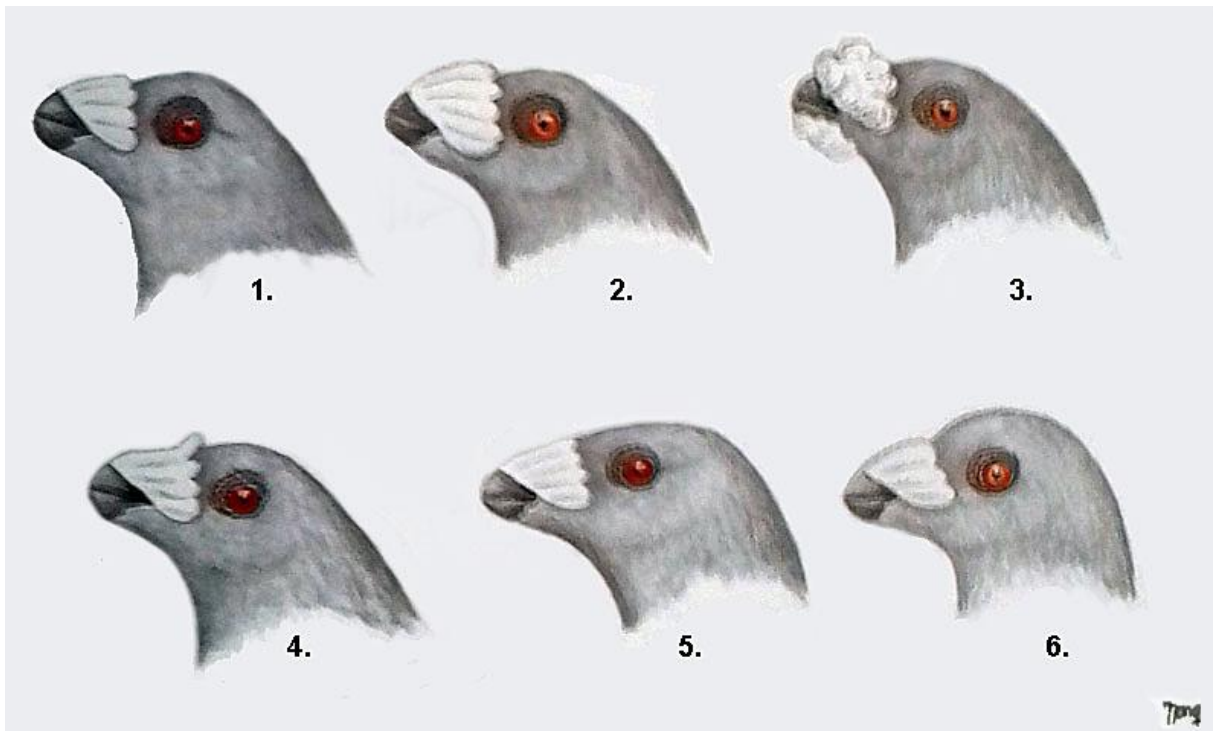
This is unique in the pigeon world, especially the head carriage. It should be such that the beak line points slightly upwards. The nick-name for this is "stargazer" - and is one of the most typical characteristics of the Dragon. This must be seen as a breed characteristic, and to my

knowledge does not occur in any other breed. The skull should be fairly massive and deep in proportion to the size of the bird and in profile should rise gradually from the base of the wattle, forming a gentle and unbroken curve to the back of the head, thence descending to the neck without angularity or lumpiness.

Beak

The beak is very powerful and must be quite blunt. Both mandibles should be stout, straight, of proportionate width, of equal substance, and close fitting. Every time you see a Dagoon, you have to be amazed, particularly by the powerful lower mandible. This lower mandible with the required heavy substance is especially seen as a breed characteristic - and of course the beak must be well closed. The latter may require some extra attention from the breeder and often needs regular conditioning to ensure that the beak halves are perfectly aligned. The correct beak setting should have a continuing beak line pass under the eye.

Wattles



1. The ideal Dagoon.
2. Large wattle, only in older cocks.
3. Loss of texture in wattle, excess growth of wattle on under mandible.
4. Wrong wattle shape.
5. Weakness in the head and a down-faced appearance.
6. Head too high, wrong backline of the head.

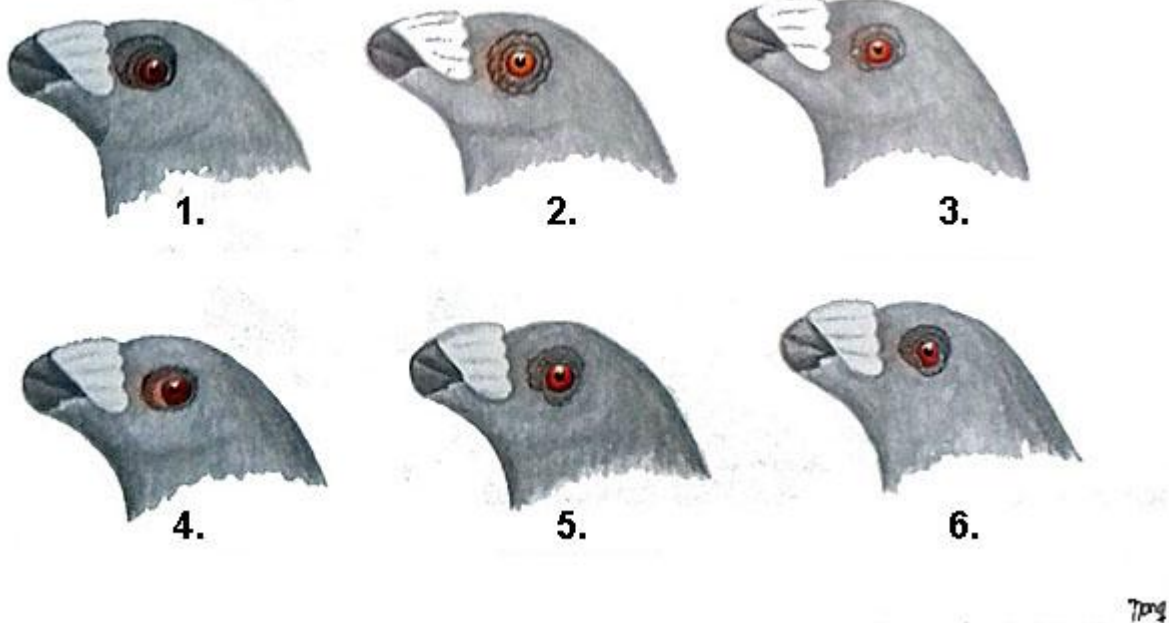
The wattles are unique too, with longitudinal furrows towards the termination of the upper mandible and merging almost imperceptibly therewith. For a good wrinkling there must be an appropriate length in the wattles. The wattles should rise slowly and regularly from the beak tip, but certainly not too much; after all, the larger and coarser the wattles are, the harder it will be to keep the furrows straight.

We often see that in the cocks these wattles become too large, especially with the advancing of age, and that the beautiful straight furrows completely fades into a kind of involuntary curved lines. Hence the Dragoon is also more of a 'hens breed'; with the latter, the wattles are often not as large as in the cocks, which has a favourable effect on the straight lines / furrows and keeps them within the acceptable range with the aging of the hens. This is in contrast to the cocks, who quickly reach an age when they can no longer be showed due to these faded furrows and too coarse wattles, which also adversely affects this desired straight structure.

With this knowledge we have to judge the older cocks that inevitably will develop rather coarser wattles, a bit milder with regard to the wattles and if these cocks show nice regular furrows, even if the furrows are not as straight as could be, still award 96 points - of course if the other breed characteristics are present.

The wattles must be smooth and firm without a noticeable middle seam or coarse irregularities.

Eyes and eye ceres



1. *Wattle touching the too-coarse eye cere.*
2. *Eye cere not to breed standard.*
3. *Swollen eye cere.*
4. *A so called 'loose eye'.*
5. *Drooping eye cere.*
6. *Inner eye cere irregular.*

The eyes are deep red and are often called 'ruby coloured' - a beautiful shade of colour in combination with the dark beak and eye ceres. We cannot demand these of the diluted colours; in this case the eye ceres are less intense in colour due to this dilution and the eye colour is also less deep red and goes more towards orange. The Whites have a dark (bull) eye colour.

The eye ceres are three-rowed at the front and top, becoming narrower towards the underside and backside. Like the wattles, eye ceres become increasingly coarse with age, especially in the cocks, another reason for old cocks not to be shown. One should be wise in this and not enter Dragoons with overhanging eye ceres and eye ceres reaching the wattle in the show.

Colour varieties in the Netherlands

They are all described in our Pigeon Standard. It should be noted that because the Dragoon belongs to the Homer pigeon breeds and so, as with many pigeon breeds, colour and marking come last when assessing, so a perfect checker marking is not a must if you want to get the highest award

The colour of the eye ceres, especially in the rare colours and in the dark colours - as discussed earlier - should not be compared to the key colours in the blue variants.

Nowadays we see that Dragoon hens are regularly chosen as the Best in Show at large shows. They also play a big part at club shows and regional shows.



In conclusion, which points need our attention?

The type - we often see Dragoons that are on the small side, so too little chest protruding from the wing bows and a too-narrow breast. Despite the strong, short neck, a Dragoon must show itself and not make one wonder if it actually has a neck, or if its head is just glued on the body. Even worse is a Dragoon with a long slender neck; this is a not breed-like trait and will be assessed down by the show judge.

The stance / posture must be upright so that the tail does not touch the ground. Sometimes we see a Dragoon is upright to the extent that it rests on its tail. This is certainly not desirable. In this case, the judge will give the pigeon a second chance and if

it does so again, will deduct points. We best not include such a pigeon in our breeding program.

It is also undesirable to have a Dragoon long in the legs; a bit lower - a length between medium and short is ideal.

The head carriage, the so-called 'stargazer': the head should be slightly directed upwards. This is an absolute breed characteristic and must be present in every Dragoon, as along with the correct furrows in the wattles and the short, thick neck that barely narrows towards the head; these points make the Dragoon and shortcomings in them are not tolerated.

The beak is also of great importance. A lesser substance - especially in the lower mandible, as we see often - will also result in less points.

As already more or less discussed, wattles that are too large/coarse and eye ceres that protrude above the head and are far too large, ought not be present

at the show. The fancier should be sensible enough not to enter Dragons like these at shows.

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To end with

The Dragon is a problem-free breeder, able to rear its own youngsters. It is a great breed, especially for the more experienced pigeon fancier. With its unique characteristics, the Dragon is the pride of the hobby.

Fanciers who want to start with this beautiful breed can contact the secretary of the Beauty Homer Pigeon Club in the Netherlands or Breed Clubs in their own country.



DRAGON BREEDERS

In our country, the Dragon breeders can be counted on the fingers of one hand, which should not be the case with such a beautiful breed. Fortunately we have two breeders, Dennis van Doorn and Jack Kort, who regularly enter their birds at the various national shows.

We asked these two breeders about their experiences with the Dragon.

Two Dragon breeders: Jack Kort (left) and Dennis van Doorn (right).

First, Jack Kort's story.

My pigeon hobby started when I was a boy of 10 -11 years old. At that time keeping small animals was a very normal thing in the countryside. Friends had rabbits and chickens and you grew up with that. I still recall clearly how my brother and I bought our first rabbit. He a white one and I a black / gray. We paid 2.50 guilders for it, quite some money at that time, for small boys. Due to a renovation, the rabbits had to leave a few years later and my father built a chicken house in the barn with an outdoor run. Two white pigeons came with the chickens; a cock and a hen, crosses of a Helmet Dove and a Cropper. In that year, six young were bred. Suddenly, the sight of two eggs in the nest seemed a miracle and the love of pigeons came with it. You cannot explain that, it just happened. Later there were homing pigeons, which also went when I had to go to Groningen for study. But the memory and love remained.

Twenty years with nothing, until one day my brother invited me to go with him to the Noordshow. There I saw two pigeons, Dragons, for sale by Otto Schatzke. And they had everything I was looking for in a pigeon. Nice strong wattle and yellow colour, a bit racing pigeon-like but slightly different. I did not know a thing about a Standard, but I just loved them. Via the catalogue I became aware of the National Pigeon Association NBS and through them, to a local club and the specialty club the Beauty Homers, SPC, of which at that time Jan Jacobs was the secretary, and Sander van Rijn chairman – the latter an amiable man with a huge knowledge of pigeons. A week later I was invited to his loft and got five Dragons in racing pigeon colours. I also purchased a blue black barred cock bred by Dennis van Doorn, which he had offered for sale at the Avicultura Show.



Above: Jack Kort and his Dragoons.

The rest is history. And this was 20 years ago, how time flies! There are still bloodlines of these pigeons in my current strain. With Dennis I regularly change some Dragoons and we try to lift the quality to a higher level, which works fine. Too bad it is only the two of us who breed them. Others who try, drop out again. It is a challenging breed for non-stayers.



The Carriers and American Show Racers have also been added to my loft. Through the years, you just develop love for other breeds, too, but yes, the loft is not built of elastic. You have to make choices.

Dragoons are still pretty good flyers but because of the many cats in the neighbourhood I keep them in the aviary. Birds of prey are also around but in my view they belong here. That is nature. Cats do not, they are directly linked to people.

Mating Dragons is fairly easy, but it must be done with precision. I put the pairs together on paper, with a photo and all. Then between mid-February and mid-March they are actually mated. Locked in their breeding boxes, the pairs are released and put back one by one for a short time during the day. Just till they are well able to find their own nest box. This way, I have the least problems.



At the moment I have eight pairs. Fertilisation is always good. Rearing of the youngsters goes well for up to 10 days, but then the cock starts courting again and you have to be watchful. The young are still naked and get cold when the parents are in a corner again. A tight feeding is the best solution, if you do not want to lose young unnecessarily. But yes, they remain livestock and nature cannot be organised. Sometimes you have to hand feed the young a bit extra for a few days until they are fully feathered. However, this does not apply to every pair.

The Dragoon is an easy pigeon to handle. Not affectionate, no, but quiet. When you're weaning, you can immediately see whether the stance and body type are good and quality is also immediately seen.

The inner eye cere must remain round during the first year; you do not want to have a sagging inner eye cere. You have to select for that. The 'shelf life' of the pigeon will then increase considerably. With Carriers you sometimes see an eye cere like that; then showing the bird is already over and done with after three years, while eight years really is possible. It is all a matter of selecting.

Left: Ideal eye cere and wattles.

I regret that the Standard description is based on a young pigeon. Hens can meet that description the longest, cocks don't; you have to take that into

account as a judge (and fortunately some do). And 96 points must be achievable; even if the wattle is no longer exactly correct. The rectilinear furrows are the hardest to achieve. Three seasons ago I had such a pair, which mainly produced youngsters with excellent rectilinear furrows. Then you can discuss its fineness. To me, I want it as fine as possible, if it concerns a young bird. And fine blue eye cered of course. Everything in favour of the 'shelf life'.



Coarse eye ceres always coincide with coarse wattles, especially in the cocks. Above the eye the cere is three-rowed. The upper and lower mandibles should be of equal strength, the lower can be a bit stronger but not at the expense of the upper mandible. And of course, they should close well. We want, good and firm, heavy, blunt beaks; again, a matter of selection.



Only during the breeding season are the pigeons in both the indoor loft and the aviary. The rest of the year, they are all in the aviary day and night, which in my opinion optimises health. I used to vaccinate and cure in the past, but then one or two always died, so I don't do that anymore. I treat them with Parasita (® Beaphar) against lice. Works fine for now. I breed about 40 youngsters spread over my breeds. That is not many in a year. But I think it's enough. I also see myself more as a fancier who practices a hobby.

As a grain mixture, I feed two pigeon mixtures from the Beyers® brand; the Pigeon Mix with corn and the mix without corn, supplemented with a number of Enzymix® mixes from the same manufacturer. It ensures better digestibility of the grains and optimal intake of the feed by the pigeon. In the breeding season the pigeons receive extra minerals and brewer's yeast with garlic oil through the feed, as well as a starter from Teurlings®. This year I'm going to try Usnea; the usnic acid in Usnea, is said to help against trichomoniasis and cocci. I am curious!



As far as exhibitions are concerned, I actually only participate at the shows in the three northern provinces; the SNN, the Noordshow and the shows of a number of local small animal Clubs. And the young bird day of the SPC - I almost never miss it. A wonderful opportunity to be among pigeon friends, to build up knowledge and to add new blood to your line. It's then the internet comes in handy! The youngsters are judged by the club judges and together we discuss the results at the end of the day. You do have to be objective about your own

pigeons. Always a nice day.

And these are the experiences of Dennis van Doorn with the Dragoon.

By 18 months old, I had already crawled in with the pigeons. Not so strange, of course, I did learn from the master. I really began breeding my own birds in 1986, when I was 9 years old, and became a junior member at our local club in

Walcheren. I am now 40 years young, so, easy counting, I have been active in the show pigeon hobby for over 30 years!



Above: Dennis van Doorn with a Dragon in front of the aviaries.



Left: A pair of Dragons.

In 1986, when I started as a junior member, I was allowed to choose a breed myself and this was the Show Antwerp, which my father (Han van Doorn) then bred. I am still loyal to this breed and now that I write this I realize that I now have had it for more than 30 years! How time flies.

It is a breed for the real enthusiast and especially the go-getters, because it is a difficult one to breed. That is why Show Antwerp breeders can be counted on one hand – let alone the breeders who also show them ...

After a while I wanted a new breed and that's how I started in 1995 with the Dragon and the Show Racer.



The Show Racer I had for in my loft for 20 years, successfully and with great pleasure. I have since "exchanged" them for the German Modena, an easier breed; I always say: two eggs and three youngsters; this in contrast to the Show Antwerp and the Dragoon for example. I have now had the Dragoon for over 22 years.

Since 2000 I have also breed the German Beauty Homer and in 2013 I began with the Genuine Homer. And as mentioned before, in 2014 I also started breeding German Modenas. In short, at this moment I have five breeds.



Of course you want to know what attracted me about the Dragoon in particular. A Dragoon differs from all other breeds in the head and the head carriage. As far as I know, there is no other fancy pigeon breed that has a slightly upright head carriage. We call this breed the "Stargazer".

Left: Outstanding head of a young Dragoon from 2015.

Other points by which the Dragoon clearly distinguishes itself are the three-rowed eye ceres, the breed-typical ribbed wattle and the very powerful and blunt beak. For me, these are the most important breed characteristics by which a Dragoon distinguishes itself from all other pigeon breeds and that particularly attract me.

Other points by which the Dragoon clearly distinguishes



Mother and daughter. Left: Mother, twice won Champion, in 2014 and 2015. Right: Daughter, twice won Champion, in 2016 and 2017.

I would not recommend this beautiful breed directly to a novice breeder, as it requires a lot of attention and is like the Show Antwerp for the go-getters. It is not for nothing that only a few breeders are active with this breed.

Mating is fairly simple, they do, though, need some space in a breeding box; my breeding boxes are 1m wide x 40 cm deep x 40 cm high. All my breeds fit well together, because they staunchly defend their nest box against intruders and stand their ground.



Left: Two Dragoon young (2008), 10 days old.

Below: Two week-old Dragoon young (2014).



Fertilization is generally pretty good in the Dragoon; this also applies to hatching. They rear their youngsters well, especially in the first week when there is so much crop milk in and around the nest box as to be unbelievable. The most difficult period is that from the time they are rung when they do not get any more crop milk and sometimes a youngster dies. On average, a pair rears about 4 to 5 youngsters.



Left: A blue grizzle Dragoon from 2016, two weeks old, with a very good beak.

During the show season, you are already thinking about which breeding pairs to put together. After all, management is looking ahead! I always start breeding in February. I breed with a number of colours, so cannot put two same-coloured birds together. For example, I always mate a blue grizzle to a blue black barred and not two blue grizzle together.

If the hen has a slightly less powerful beak, she definitely has to be mated to a cock with a powerful beak. And the worse the ribbing / furrows in a cock's wattle, the better it should be in the hen.

These are a few facets that are essential for the breeding of a Dragoon.



Left: A fine chequer marking in a young Dragoon.

Every year I go to about 10 exhibitions. The majority of these are Provincial Championship shows of the NBS (National Pigeon Association) and of course the Grand National of the NBS. Apart from that, I also attend to two local shows and the annual show of my own club, the Young Birds Day of the Beauty Homers Club, which is also a kind of show as you can bring your birds. In the majority of cases I show my Dragoons there; however, that of course

depends on how the breeding season went. After all, you cannot exhibit them every week.



Dragoon hen, winner of the Giesbers prize, Best Young Hen at the Avicultura Show, January 2018 in Boskoop.

I have won several prizes with Dragons over the years. The most recent and one that is on the wish list of every pigeon breeder is the Giesbers prize. I achieved this at the NBS Bond show / Avicultura in Boskoop in January 2018 with a Dragon; Best Young Hen in Show!

I also won an NBS champion diploma for four years in a row (2014–2017), all with this breed, the Dragon. The special feature is that it was achieved in 2014 and 2015 with the mother and the subsequent two years with her daughter, and they were assessed by 6 different judges.

I have also won the Grand Prix of the Netherlands (KNV Ornithophilia) with a Dragon at the Champion Show of January 2013 - also the Grand National Championship show of the NBS.

In the 2015-16 season, I won National Champion in the Classes for Hen Pigeons, Form Pigeons and Wattle Pigeons; this was however with one of my German Beauty Homers.

Another nice memory is the one from the Champion Show in January 2015, where my father (Han van Doorn) was honoured at the show's opening and named Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

Fanciers abroad also know how to find the way to my Dragons. Recently four pairs of Dragons and three pairs of Show Antwerps were sold to the USA. For this I don't even need Facebook, or things like that. They find me in other ways and in catalogues!

A final word from Jack Kort

Despite the fact that the pigeons came at a time when my children were still young, not one was bitten by the pigeon bug. A pity, yes. But every generation knows its own time. The future of our hobby? I do not know. It will survive, after all, the pigeon bug also mutates.

Below: A pair of Dennis' Dragons.



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