

A visit at Jan Spaepen in Dessel, Belgium

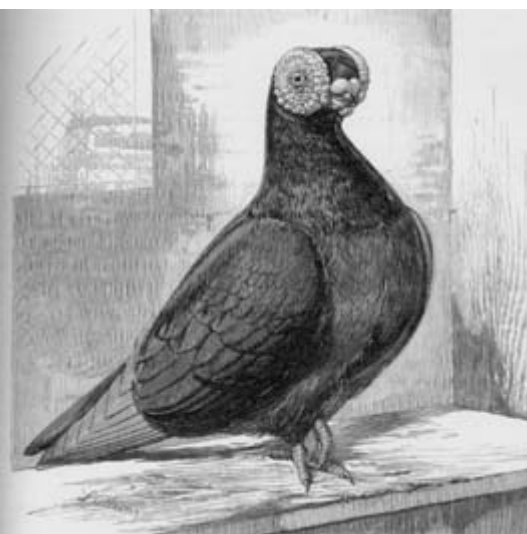
Text and Photos: Nico van Benten



Jan Spaepen is from a family of farmers. His father had cattle, mostly cows, with horses as a passion. These horses were Belgian workhorses, but he also had Gelderlander and Groningen horses. In those days it was quite common for farmers to write everything down. People lived much closer to nature and were most dependent on the weather. Weather was the dominant factor in how the farm moved on.

After his father had died, Jan started to read

the things that his father had noted in his diary. To his astonishment he found a note, stating that at the 14th of May 1953 there had been heavy rain, but also on that day, he (the son Jan) was given his first couple of pigeons. That was a pair of Old Dutch Capuchines, which were kept at the grain attic. Jan was 6 years old at that time and pigeons never disappeared from his life.



At the end of the fifties there was a man from Poland working at his parents' farm, who brought him a couple of pigeons from Poland, which he called 'Polish', but in The Netherlands and Belgium this breed was known by the name 'Valkenet'. Still the name Polish is not strange, as you know that the name of that breed in France is 'Polonais' and in Italy Polacco, which all mean 'Polish'. The pigeons were red and black coloured and the Pole also handled over some fine standard drawings of the type and the head. Jan used his Old Dutch Capuchins as foster parents.



Left and right: The English Barb drawn by Ludlow and described in Fulton's 'Book of Pigeons' from 1895. This breed resembles the Dutch 'Valkenet' very much, in contrast with the German version, which is called the Indianer and has a longer head shape. According to Fulton this breed, the Barb, originated in the North of Africa, but it was already imported to Britain before 1600 and described by Shakespeare. According to the description of C.A.M. Spruijt in 1927, the relationship with the name Poland is due to the importation in Europe via Marseille to France and Italy by a Polish pigeon salesman.



Left: One of the other hobby's from Jan Spaepen is rummaging the flea markets, looking for everything related to animals, like this painting.

Jan was breeding his Valkenetten for years and most of the time in co-operation with a breeder from Beersel (Belgium), with whom he exchanged birds and crossed them with his own pigeons. In the early seventies (Jan had just married) some breeders decided to go to England. One of them knew a big show with thousands of pigeons and with many for sale. However, there

where no pigeons at all, so there they all stood, six men in great disappointment. Luckily the secretary of the show succeeded in finding a breeder that had some Barbs for sale; an old man, who offered four cocks and two hens. So some pigeons were bought and hidden in the inside pockets of their jackets for transport, to pass through the Customs control. One breeder was so afraid of being 'caught' that he held the pigeon too hard to his chest and the pigeon died. Back at home, the pigeons turned out to be an asset, having much broader heads. The imported pigeons were crossed with his own birds and the offspring showed a lot of improvements.

Right:
All over the garden you will find collector's items, gathered at flea markets and added to Jan's collection.



In those days Jan became a member of the Royal Fancy Pigeon Club 'De Prachtduif' in Turnhout (Belgium). But in 1975 he had an accident and had to stay in hospital for over a year. During all that time his wife took care of his pigeons. Fortunately Jan is completely recovered now and he has picked up his hobby again and started breeding the smaller birds. He even became a judge for exotic birds and hybrids and also for quail, turtle doves and Galliformes. Eventually he also picked up with his fancy pigeon hobby again.



Left: A look in the garden with the pigeon loft at the back.

About 8 years later he became an A-category Judge for fancy Pigeons. Today he is a member of the Committee for Animal health as part of the Flemish Technical Committee and he is a member of the Standard Committee and the fancy Pigeon Judges Committee.

Right: A nostalgic garden barn, made by Jan himself. Just as an idyllic reminder of the old days.

At that time he kept about 38 different breeds of pigeons, like Carrier pigeons, but also Scandaroons and Hungarians. For years, he and some other Belgium breeders visited the Cambridge show, where sometimes at least 100 Barb were exhibited. He and his friend Bert Kuns bought some more Barb, and in 1982 he participated with his Valkenetten in the European show in Amsterdam, organised by Savoa Pigeon Society in the RAI Halls.

Later he switched from the Barb to the German Modena and imported some black German Modena from Germany's best breeders, although these pigeons did not compete with the current German Modena. Especially the neck and leg length were not as well developed as today.





In the eighties Jan was breeding with 35 pairs of German Modena with great enthusiasm; his aim was improvement of the type and particularly the head shape, for which he used English Long Faced Tumblers. That was not an easy cross and the positive results were only visible in a few pigeons. Most of the offspring was useless and found their way to the Children's farms. Nowadays he is breeding with 'only' 25 pairs and most of them are magnani marked/coloured or mottle coloured German Modena. This is his greatest interest now.

Right: A statue from a German Modena in the magnani colour. Made by the artist Marleen Brouwer from Hilversum (The Netherlands).



Left:
As the wings are spread this way, done by a specialist and with utmost discretion, you see the colour pattern of a magnani coloured German Modena in full splendour.



Breeding this colour and marking pattern is a constant compromise and teamwork of colours. Mixed coloured with yellow, red and black colour spots on an even ground colour.

It is not like the almond colour that we know from the English Short face Tumbler, but the almond factor must play a part in it. In the magnani German Modena, a blue coloured tail is not a fault, as it is at the Almond coloured Short Face. Further more we know that the magnani colour on the German Modena is getting darker over the years.

Right: A beautiful garden, with a lot of flowers, plants and surprising decorations.

Sick Pigeons and care

If a valuable pigeon that cannot be missed in the breeding program falls ill, it is separated immediately in hope of recovery. Jan, does not support the use of pharmaceutical medication and in particular antibiotics. Although his pigeons are vaccinated against Paramixo virus, which is required in Belgium to participate at the exhibitions. He also uses Ivomex against parasites (one drop in the beak). According to Jan's philosophy a pigeon needs a dry and draught-free loft; this prevents a pigeon from most sicknesses. Moreover he gives a good grain mixture, the Liege mixture without maize from Versele Laga; it is not the cheapest but it gives the best result for his pigeons. There is also a mixture from Versele Laga that looks very good, the Bavarian Pearls, but Jan considers this mixture to rich for fancy pigeons, which are not really working pigeons. In the autumn he supplies his pigeons with a purification mixture with much barley. He also supplies a good mineral mixture with seaweed lime and grit. As a precaution he adds a few drops of Chlorine to the drinking water to prevent bacterial contamination.



Left and above:
The Seldschuken Tumbler modelled for these wooden pigeons with a length of 50 cm. These wooden pigeons come from Poland, where they were made during the WWII.

Exhibitions

Jan enters his pigeons at ten different shows a year in Belgium, besides that he also participates in a few shows in The Netherlands and Germany. The most beautiful prize he ever won was at a Belgium show when he was only 20 years old. In Belgium it is customary that each winner may choose his prize from the prizes table. And at that time Jan was second to choose and he picked a very small stump-stone like thing; at that time it seemed the most attractive thing to him! Over the years he has won wagonloads of goblets and other prizes, which he gives away. He remembers a show in Dessel where they offered freezers and televisions to win. That show became so popular that one certain year there were 5000 pigeons entered!



Left: Jan has some red coloured Belgian Tumbler in his loft.



Right: Also the Belgium breed 'Ghent Owl' is present at the loft of Jan Spaepen.

Right: This old magnani coloured German Modena male has already become darker over the years. He shows a splendid broad head shape.

Below: Red eye ceres are not appreciated, but at the red and yellow pigmented pigeons (like magnani coloured) that already have pale eye ceres, it is a problem to combat. The only variety on which red eye ceres are permitted is the white feathered German Modena with dark eyes.



The different marking varieties of the German Modena

The German Modena is known in three different marking varieties. First the Schietti, or the unicoloured selfs. Second the Gazzi, or pied design with coloured head, with a small 'bib', coloured wing shield including the wing feathers, and coloured tail feathers; the upper and lower tail covers is desired to be coloured as well.



Right: German Modena Schietti, blue barless



Left: German Modena Gazzi blue barless

The third marking variety concerns the magnani, which is described here into detail.

Right: This magnani coloured German Modena could show a more varied colour and the colour spots must be more similar in form and spacing.



Magnani

The more variation and the more even colour partitioning the better it is. Wing and tail feathers must have marking. The males usually have more marking. The design increases in darkness during the years. There are two colour varieties in magnani, namely: multi-coloured and silver mottle.

Multi-coloured

At least three colours must be recognisable, ground colour light or dark almond yellow, partially blue grey at the feather edge, with mottle (colour spots) in all the common pigeon colours in all feathers.

Silver mottle

White ground colour with black mottle.

In every wing feather at least several (3) colours must be present. In the tail two colours are sufficient. Of course males are the most multi-coloured, that's a matter of chromosomes. As they become older the magnani will become richer in colour and spotting. Young females with a rich ground colour and multi-coloured wing and tail feathers are very valuable.

Faults

On the magnani it is considered a fault: if there are less then three colours, or unicoloured feathers in wing and tail, too dark ground colour and the lack of colour spots.



Left and right: Two examples of a magnani colour marking at the German Modena.





Above: The pigeon on the right is a lot better in silver mottle than the pigeon on the left.

Right below: Magnani Multi-Coloured, with mainly the cream coloured ground colour present. Undoubtedly the colour spots will develop later.

Left below: Magnani Multi-Coloured.



Right below: Magnani Silver mottle. This is already an older male with a lot of colour spots.

Left below: Magnani Silver mottle. Young female, that needs more development.





Left: Magnani Silver mottle, with tendency to multi-coloured, as seen in the cream coloured ground colour.

*We were invited at Jan Spaepen's place. For more information you can always contact him by phone.
Tel.: 0032 (0)14378958.*

Some addresses of Specialty Clubs of the German Modena in some European countries:

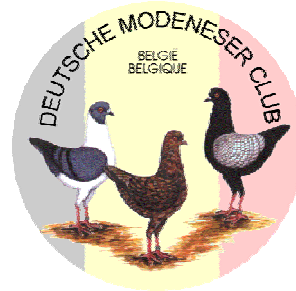
The Netherlands:

Duitse Modena Club Nederland, Secretaris: Freddy Knobben,
Rijssensestraat 101
NL-7442 MS Nijverdal Nederland, tel.: 0031 (0)548-612621,
e-mail : f.knobben@zonnet.nl
<http://duitsemodena.sierduif.nl>



Belgium:

Duitse Modeneser Club België, Secretaris: Henri Cloostermans,
Coolhemveldstraat 5, B-2870 Puurs-Kalfort België, tel.: 0032 (0)3/8892462,
e-mail: henricloostermans@skynet.be <http://www.deutschenmodeneser.be/>



Germany:

Sonderverein der Modeneserzüchter, Vorsitzender: Edelbert Muckenhirn,
Auf der Höhe 6, D-75181 Pforzheim Duitsland, tel.: 0049 (0)7231/1396839
E-mail an: emim@vr-web.de
<http://www.modeneser.de/>

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