Wal & Hans Zoontjens, Riel

Again successful in 2005/2006/2007 with 9 National top 10 positions!!

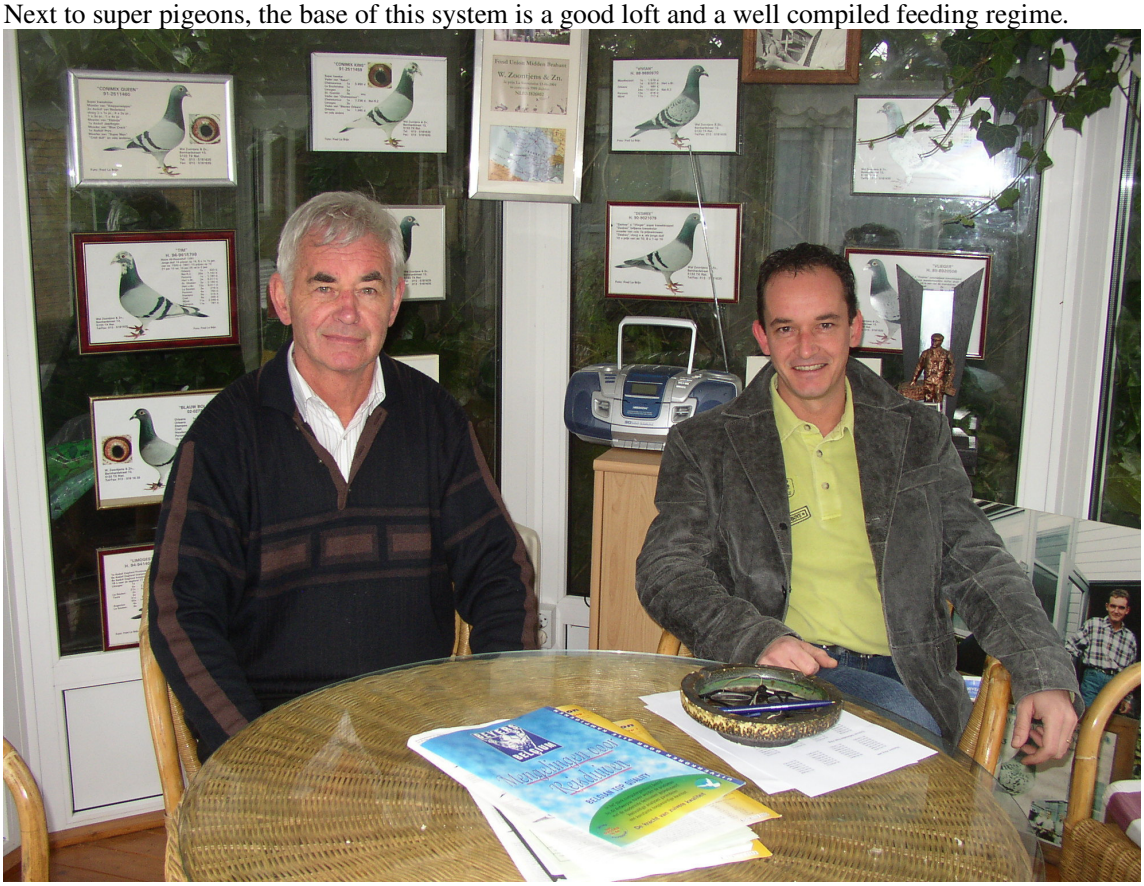
About thirteen years ago we visited the town of Riel to compile a loft report on these great champions. Wal and Hans Zoontjens were then already amongst the very best in Dutch pigeon racing for 25 years. This was mainly due to their superb performances on the one day long distance races. And now, thirteen years later, they are still at the top!! Last year they again had an extremely successful year with several victories and 7 National top 10 positions to add to the thick book of successes of the Zoontjens family.

Father Jan Zoontjens

Wal Zoontjens had the best tutor that he could wish for in his dad Jan Zoontjens. Jan was one of the biggest champions ever in the province of North Brabant. He was not only a succesful in racing his pigeons, but was also a great connoisseur, a story-teller and a very skilful tutor. He assisted many fanciers by word and deed to know more about racing pigeons..

"At our home the kitchen was full of fanciers many nights and my dad taught them all about pigeons," says Wal. The knowledge of pigeons, feeding, breeding, etc. that Wal learned from his father, he put into practice from 1968. My dad however never set foot in my lofts, he let me be the fancier I wanted to be. Of course I discussed certain issues with him. Now about 40 years later Wal basically uses the same system, known as the 'Zoontjens system'. Wal still likes to talk about "our system".

Next to super pigeons, the base of this system is a good loft and a well compiled feeding regime.



Wal and Hans Zoontjens

Janssen A.
The Janssen pigeons are at the base of the Zoontjens strain. As far back as the 1930's Jan purchased the first Janssens, direct from the illustrious brothers and also from other top fanciers in the closer surroundings who performed sublime with Janssen pigeons. During WWII he kept some pigeons hidden and after the liberation, he got more Janssen pigeons. Dad Jan and later his son Wal kept the strain pure, by practicing inbreeding and breeding into the lines.

To keep the performances of the birds at a high level e a few new pigeons were added, mainly also of Janssen origin or pigeons from the old Zoontjens lines. When Wal started to race on his own he could draw from the well of knowledge and skill of his father and soon he was amongst the champions in the Tilburg Federation.

In the last era descendants to the famous 'Vagebond' of the De Laure partnership (Tilburg) were acquired as well as pigeons from Ad Schaerlaekens from the line of 'Mattens' x 'Sissie' (Vandenabeele). Corporative breeding with amongst others, Fred La Brijn from Zoetermeer and Piet Valk from Assendelft also took place. Also pigeons were purchased from Berry van den Brand from Boxtel and a Flor Engels cockbird from their good friend Herman Van Der Sande from the Belgian town of Vosselaar.
Wal and his son Hans also acquired pigeons from their own lines at fanciers that flew superb with them, like Joop Koch (Eindhoven), Hans Rietman (Eibergen), Harry van Boxmeer (St. Oedenrode), Dik van Oort (Zaltbommel), Braad de Joode (Woudrichen), Hans Dekkers (Hedikhuizen) and Verburg & Son (Wissenkerk). These pigeons were paired to the old line again and the young were thoroughly tested on the important discipline of one day long distance racing. When they performed well and produced quality offspring, they obtained a spot in the breeding loft. However, this privilege is only awarded to very few exceptional pigeons. This method ensures that the good qualities of the strain are preserved and the necessary vitality to perform well is mantained in the family..

Breeding at the loft of Wal Zoontjens is all about ace pigeons. Pigeons that win top positions on long distance races for many years and that have already proven to pass on their top quality genes are used. Using this method enables Wal and Hans to recognize new champions who then become stock pigeons at the base of a superb breeding line.

One of these is the top breeder '**Donkere As**' **from 1996**. He is a son to the already mentioned 'Vagebond' of De Laure partnership from Tilburg. He was an exceptional racer and in the year 2000 he was crowned as 3rd provincial ace pigeon on the one day long distance. Paired to a daughter of the 'Conimix Queen' he bred the 'Donkere Favoriet' from 1998 with a/o 1st prizes from Bourges, Tours and Montlucon (average 400 birds) and 1st provincial Montlucon 3,257 b.

After that he was paired to '**Vivian'** (a/o 1st Morlincourt 6,000p.) and until the present day they already produced a great group of outstanding pigeons:

- **'Donkere Kampioen'** 1st prov. St. Ghislain 6,149p. and 1st young acebird in combine.
- **'De Vooruit'** - 1st Limoges 2,172p. (7 minutes lead) and 2nd prize Interprovincial 6,229p.
- '**Zidane 1** - 1st Creil 4,889p. (7 minutes lead)
- **'Zidane 2** - winner of ten top 15 positions against an average of 900p.
- **'Duivin 239** - winner of 1st Nijvel 2,235p.
- **'De Donkere 802** - 1st Strombeek 765p, 1st La Souterainne 2,754p, 2nd National NPO 9,313p.

At the **Million Dollar Pigeon Race at Sun City in 2008** a pigeon bred by **Piet Valk**, **Benzing's Fire,** was sixth in the final race and 4th in the grand averages. **Benzing's Fire** was sired by a son of **Donkere As and Vivian, Zidane 3,** when paired to a daughter of the famous **"019" hen of Piet Valk.**

A grandson, the '031' from 2000 was already crowned 3rd provincial ace pigeon on the one day long distance.

Since Wal started racing on his own, 40 years ago, many superb breeding lines have come to the fore at the lofts in Riel which have made the loft stronger and stronger. Again and again new ace pigeons are bred at, this already legendary lofts.



Lofts with oriels
The lofts in Riel were build some 40 years ago according to the principles of father Jan. This entails lofts with oriels, to catch the warmth in the lofts and with a very slow ventilation to keep the lofts warm. There are 4 sections that can house about 50 widowhood cocks. The youngsters have 3 sections at their disposal, all with aviaries in front. The stock pigeons are housed in a loft opposite to the widowhood cocks and are free to fly around. The widowhood hens are housed in an aviary. Although not too much space is available in the garden the lofts are comfortable and well suited for racing and breeding. A cozy little bower for the guests completes all.

Traditional widowhood
Wal still races his pigeons on the traditional widowhood system. Wal experimented with racing his yearlings on total widowhood for a few years but the results were not satisfactory.
The real top prizes and super results were not forthcoming.

Every year the stock pigeons and racers are mated around 15th December and the breeders and the main racers raise two youngsters. In March the racers are mated again and the cocks destined to race one day long distance are allowed to raise another youngster!!
Wal shortens the widowhood period with this method and he believes that the widowhood cocks perform much better at the end of the season.

The racers entered on the middle distance races get to see their partner before basketing for two or three times and no more. He likes to basket them as calm as possible so they waste no unnecessary energy in the basket. The cocks entered for long distance races, are never shown the partner before a race. The only exception Wal makes on this method is before the last race. They then get to spend the

whole afternoon on the day of basketing together. When the cocks return from the race, the hens are waiting for them on the floor of the loft and they get to spend one or several hours together. The long distance racers spend until late in the evening together. They are trained twice a day for an hour with the lofts closed during this time

Youngbird racing
The young birds are darkened for 6 weeks, starting around 15th April until two weeks before the first race of the season. Each round of youngsters is housed separately until they are strong on the wing, after which they are housed together. They are raced on various nest-positions. When the racing begins, Wal puts pea-straw on the floor to enable them to make a nest in all possible corners of the loft. In the beginning the eggs are taken from the nests but on the last races Wal likes to race some of the young hens to the nest. In order to do this he pairs them up to old cocks.

Zoontjens Food
The feeding of the pigeons is a chapter on its own at the Zoontjens residence. The feeding system and the mixtures of both father Jan and son Wal Zoontjens became famous all over the world. The food firm Beyers produces two Zoontjens mixtures, also known as 'Zoontjens Yellow' and 'Zoontjens Blue'. Wal always keeps in touch with Beyers in order to improve the nutritional value of the mixtures.

Wal feeds his widowers as follows: every morning and evening all widowers get a hand full of the light mixture. On the short distance racers the cock birds get the heavier mixture for one or two nights. For middle distance racing this is fed for two or three nights and for the one day long distance races this is fed for three or four nights. The quantity of this heavier mixture also depends on the race. Wal makes sure they still have a healthy appetite on the last day before basketing and sometimes in the morning some more heavier mixture and less light mixture is given to keep them eating until the moment they are basketed. For a one day long distance race they must have half or three quarters of their crop full with food. A hand full of Super Energy from Beyers is also given for extra replenishment.
The last two nights before basketing the one day long distance cocks get 5 grams of an own made mixture consisting of paddy (50%) – tovo (20%) – bantam seed (used by fishermen, 7%) – candy seed (7%) and P40 (7%).

Often this feeding mixture has been criticized as being too heavy. However the many years of top results have proven the feeding system to be very good. It is very seldom that the pigeons return home fatigued and most times they still have energy left to make an extra victory lap after a heavy one day long distance race.

Medical
The medical picture at Wal Zoontjens is quite simple. After the moulting period they get a paratyphoid treatment of De Weerd and the usual vaccination. When they are on eggs they get a five days treatment for canker with Ronidazole. During the racing season they get again a canker treatment with Ronidazole or Belgatai of De Weerd. The old birds get a canker treatment twice per season and the youngsters get a canker treatment every three weeks. If anything goes wrong unexpectedly, Wal asks advice at a veterinarian and treats accordingly.

Top results

Despite problems with the electronic clocking system, the year 2005 brought many supreme performances in old and young bird racing for Wal and Hans Zoontjens. Especially in the one day long distance racing their old birds displayed exceptional class. From the 5 one day long distance races 4x 1st and 1x 3rd were won in the club!! The two best results were:

May 15th Chateauroux (577 km) 20 pigeons entered and 15 prize cards
Club 276p.: 1-2-3-5-7-11-13-16-etc.
Combine 2,914p.: 2-3-5-10-15-37-49-57-etc.
National NPO 13,607p.: 4-7-19-37-53-126-158-etc.

July 10th Argenton (606 km) 30 pigeons entered and 16 prize cards
Club 119p.: 1-2-3-4-5-7-16-18-etc.
Combine 1,141p.: 1-2-3-5-8-11-35-46-94-etc.
National NPO 4,318p.: 4-8-11-23-44-59-etc.

In young bird racing the race from Etampes was extremely successful. 64 youngsters were sent and the following performance was obtained:

Club: 671 b.: 2-3-4-7-9-10-11-21-28-36-etc. and 25 prize cards
Combine 4,434 b.: 3-5-6-22-27-28-29-etc. and 25 prize cards
National NPO 17,700 b.: 4-7-8-etc. and 30 prize cards



Top Young Cocks

Introducing all top cocks that now house the lofts of Wal Zoontjens & Son in Riel would take too much time. However the following two stars we can not keep from you.

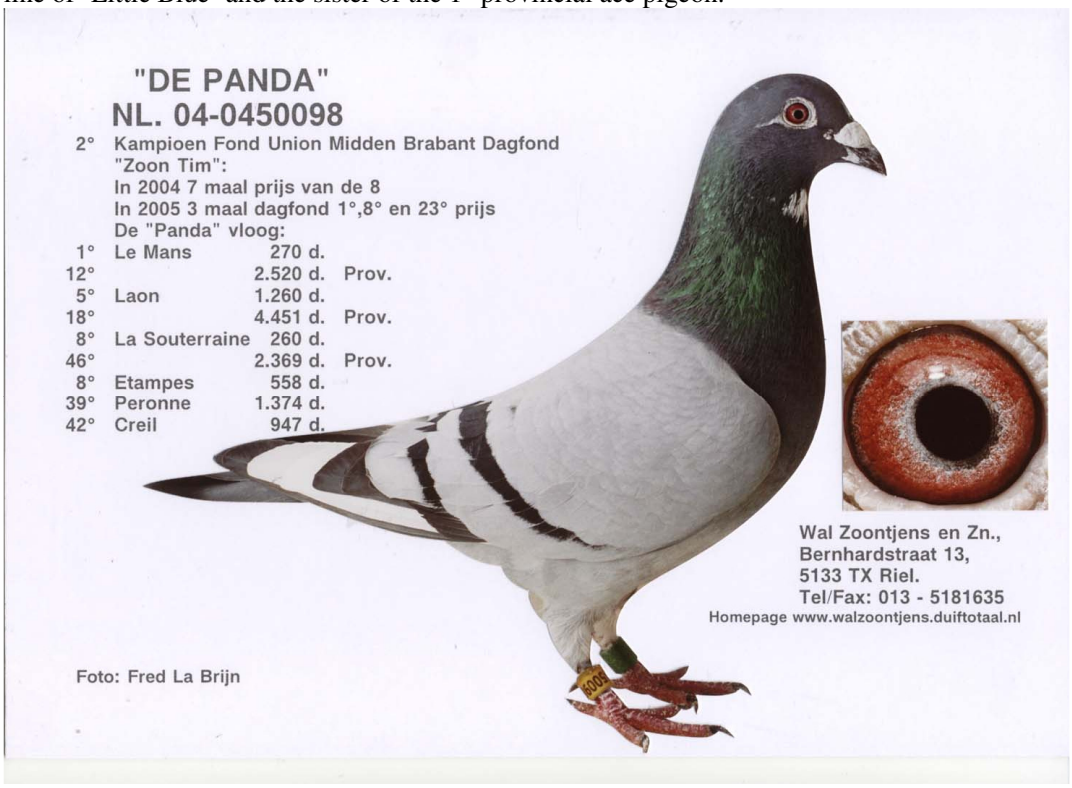
'Teletekstdoffer' NL03-0376794

In one day long distance racer already winner of:

Chateauroux	1st	276p.
	2nd	2,914p.
	4th	14,898p. (National NPO)
Argenton	1st	119p.
	1st	1,141p.
	4th	4,318p. (National NPO)

La Souterainne	2nd	220p.
	2nd	1,989p.
	7th	9,319p.
Tours	9th	297p.
	25th	3,385p.
	76th	16,154p. (National NPO)

His sire is the '177' from 1999. The '177' was himself 1st ace pigeon in middle distance racing 2002 and he is a grandson to the great 'Turbo', in 1994 and 1996 1st ace pigeon Federation and in 1996 1st provincial ace pigeon. The 'Turbo' was paired at the time to the '474' of 1996 a Schaerlaekens x Koopman hen.
Dam to the 'Teletekst-doffer' is a supreme breeding hen and a pure Ad Schaerlaekens pigeon from the line of 'Little Blue' and the sister of the 1st provincial ace pigeon.



The 'Panda'
A second champion is the yearling cock named 'De Panda' and rung NL04-0450098. His sire is the superstar 'Tim', as youngster winner of 14 prize cards from 14 entries. Dam is a hen from the fancier Spek from Tilburg (Zoontjens x Lehmler). As a youngster he was basketed 8 times and he won 7 prize cards. Last year, as a yearling, he was entered for three one day long distance races and he won the following prize cards:

Le Mans	1st	270 b.
	12th	2,250 b.
La Souterainne	8th	260 b.
	46th	2,369 b.
Ruffec	23rd	155 b.

A young cock with 100% prize cards, that is going to be something exceptional for the future!! In **2007 Panda was the best pigeon out of 2700 competing lofts**!

Championships
In his club, Gevleugelde Luchtstromers Goirle:
1st champion one day long distance – nominated and not-nominated
1st champion young birds long distance – not-nominated
1st champion overall –nominated and not-nominated
1st acebird one day long distance
1st acebird young birds long distance
2nd champion young birds – nominated and not-nominated
3rd champion young birds long distance – nominated
In province:
7th champion one day long distance
In long distance specialists club:
1st champion one day long distance – not-nominated
2nd champion one day long distance – nominated
4th champion young birds long distance
5th champion overall – nominated (without overnight races)
6th, 12th and 13th acebird one day long distance
7th champion overall – not-nominated (without overnight races)
Amalgamation:
2nd champion Golden Rings – province Middle Brabant (1st place was won by H&O from Nieuwendijk, with many Zoontjens pigeons.

Some results 2007

Pommeroeul 08-07-2007 1.195 pigeons
2e – 4e – 14e – 15e – 16e – 17e – 20e – 26e –31e – 53e – 54e – 58e – 59e – 61e – 63e –65e – 41/77
Pommeroeul Hart van Brabant 4.192 pigeons
8e – 10e – 43e – 44e – 45e –48e – 58e –87e – 41/77

Bourges 27-05-2007 533 Km
3e – 4e – 6e – 8e –11e – 12e –16e –20e –21e – 23e – 31e
Provinciaal 1671 pigeons
14e – 17e – 25e –50e –63e – 64e – 80e – 150e –109e – 119e – 18/29
Bourges Nationaal 6.929 duiven 41e – 45e – 75e

Chateauroux 10-06–2007 577 Km
2e – 3e – 5e – 6e – 7e – 14e – 17e – 1e –23e –35e
Provinciaal 1.943 duiven 20e – 26e – 41e – 53e – 54e – 77e – 106e – 107e 15/28

Blois 23-06-2007 513 Km 3e – 4e – 5e – 12e – 17e – 18e - 21e –48e
Blois Nationaal 7.384 duiven 47e –59e –57e
Some Championships:

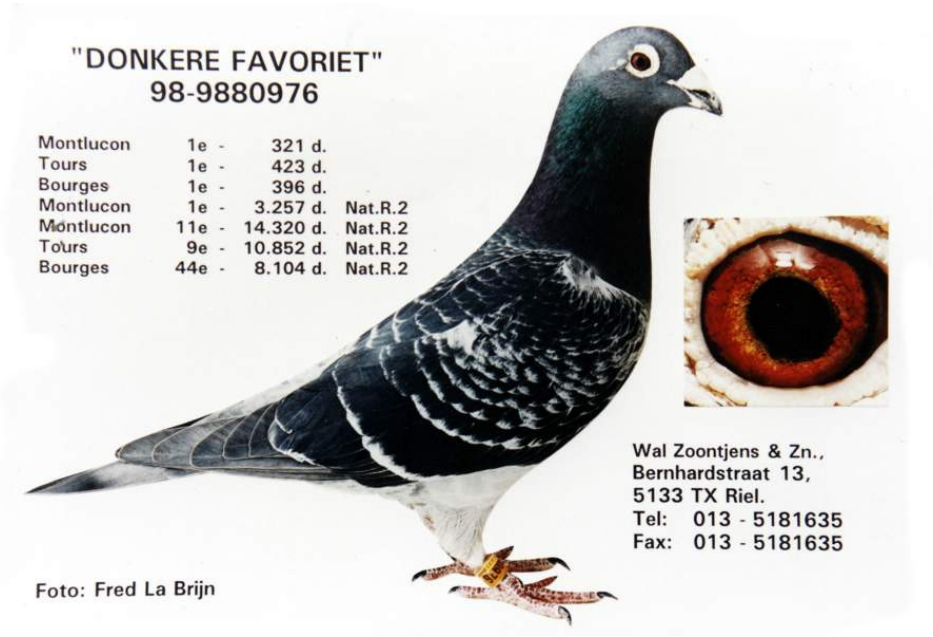
At the one day long distance races, the pigeons raced very well, with 2 x teletext (top 10 National NPO races).

Fond Union 1st Ace Pigeon
2nd Champion Fond Union
The "Panda" is the best pigeon Brabant 2000 of the 5 one day long distance races and the best pigeon of Brabant 2000, about 2.700 members.
{Probably the best pigeon of Holland, over 5 races).

In Brabant 2000 Comb. Braad de Joode was 1st Champion with **Zoontjens pigeons**. **Wal Zoontjens became 2nd Champion.**
On the N.P.O. races the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 7th Champion pigeons are 100% Zoontjens pigeons!

Conclusion
A visit to the lofts of Wal and Hans Zoontjens is an adventure on its own. They always supply enough food for thought and for writing. Talking pigeons and pigeon racing and handling some of their favorites gives enough input to write a whole book.
Wal and Hans can again add a new chapter to their book of successes. The Zoontjens pigeons are spread over the entire world and many references endorse the statement that many fanciers have been extremely successful with them.

We thank Wal Zoontjens in assisting us with bringing some of these top **pigeons to South Africa**, including three direct off the **Super Pair Vivian x Donkere As**. We are especially thankful for him selling **Zidane 2** to us.



This article and the information herein have been compiled with the permission of Wal Zoontjens and is an adaptation of an article by Marcel Gortzen published in the NP Orgaan in February 2006. The 2007 results and other information were supplied by Wal Zoontjens via Wim Van Elsland in Holland.