



Sottobanca

at

Raymond Daalmans in Hoogerheide (NL)

Text and photos: Aviculture Europe

Raymond Daalmans is not only a pigeon fancier, but also a busy business man, plus father of two young children. Thus organizing this interview took some improvisation. The date was set at a Monday in November, late in the afternoon, and in order not to waste any precious time, we were kindly invited to have dinner with the family.

For generations the Daalmans Family run and own a paint shop in the Centre of Hoogerheide. Raymond (38) is the owner today, but he is on the road all day long painting, glazing, and all he can think of in this line of work is the task ahead, while his wife is keeping shop.

At only 6 years old Raymond already had his first pigeons, being English Modena. These were not show quality birds, but kept as pets. He truly enjoyed the pigeons, but when he was 13 the doctor advised that he should not keep birds anymore due to lung problems. It took years before he decided to give it another go. That was when he settled down with his wife; a home needs a pigeon loft, doesn't it? This time it was a large collection of Old Dutch Capuchine, English and German Modena and Archangels, again just as pets, but later also as show pigeons.





Left: This certificate, awarded for being Best Pigeon of the appointed Judge, Raymond won with one of his Sottobanca at the Delta Show in Middelburg, 2007.

Raymond became a member of the Local Pigeon Breeders Club in a neighbouring village, must be some ten years ago now. There he started showing his black Schietti Modenas. About the same time he purchased a couple of Sottobanca at the well-known Sunday animal market in Mol (Belgium) and ever since he has been devoted to this breed. Being the only Sottobanca in the Netherlands, the stock base of the breed was very thin and hard to get, thus he searched abroad for other fanciers. In Brussels he found an experienced fancier of the breed who was willing to sell him several red and yellow Sottobanca. Since that meeting he has never had to find any more new pigeons, as the Sottobanca is a very productive breed. Six nest rounds per year, giving 12 young guaranteed, is no exception. By the year 2004 he had 16 breeding pairs, however, after participating in a Belgian show, he lost 9 hens in a short period. Since that time he is very selective

in choosing the Shows were he wants to participate and these are mainly shows in his neighbourhood, such as the Club Show in Halsteren and the Delta Show in Vlissingen. And every two years the big event, The Fancy Pigeon Show of the South Netherlands.

Right: Raymond with his blue grizzle Sottobanca hen. As you see, the breed is really hand-tame.



As I mentioned before, the productivity of this breed is very high. Moreover they are very docile and don't have high demands on housing and feeding. At Raymond's they are fed a four-seasons-mix from Slaats Animal Food in Asten; an old and renowned Miller's Firm that for years and years produces a low-budget quality pigeon food.

During the breeding season they get an additional added feed of Hope Farm P-40 pellets, mainly to give the youngsters something extra. According to Raymond this helps them to grow up evenly and prevents crooked breastbones; a thing that frequently occurs in (rather) heavy utility breeds like this one.

Left: Although it was dark the Sottobancas readily came outside when we were taking photos. Here we see the Sottobanca in black, red, yellow, gold, black barred, blue dilute dark barred and cream.



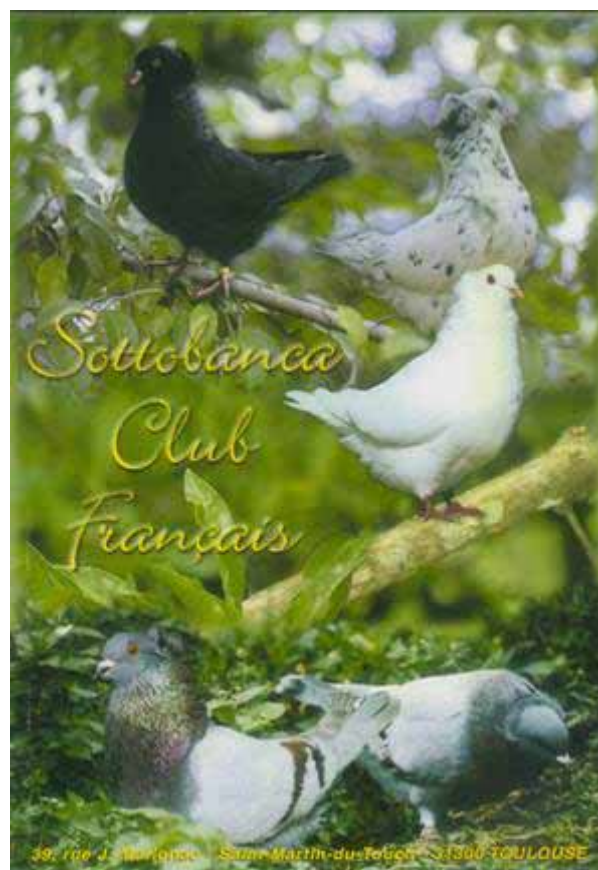
Right: In 2006 Raymond contacted The Sottobanca breeders' Club in France, who sent him their Club magazine, pictured here in the right. According to the members' list, there were 186 breeders in France at that time. In the 2008 version of the list there is only one less.

History of the Sottobanca (French type)

The breed originated in Italy and according to the most recent information it was mentioned in and around the 15th Century. It was kept in the region of Modena, so when we search the Italian history books, we notice that the names 'Modeneser' and Sottobanca are often mentioned in the same breath. The Sottobanca is a very common pigeon in Italy. In the catalogue of the National Italian Union Show, held in December 1998 in Venice, some 250 Sottobancas were entered in a large variety of colours.

In Italy, the name Sottobanca literally means 'under the bench or seat'. The given explanation is that these pigeons, being so tame, often walk into the houses when the family is eating, and then pick up the crumbs that fall on the floor, and stay under the seat.

The Sottobanca was not only kept in Italy, but also in France. The birds were of (almost) the same type and there was never a problem with that. Until the French Pigeon Union during the Entente Européenne Meeting – in Bergamo, Italy, if you please! – Moved a motion to adapt the Sottobanca Standard and because Italy did not agree and would not accept the proposed new standard, the roads parted and a French type Sottobanca was recognised apart from the Italian type.



Left: This is the Italian type Sottobanca, showing several eye-catching differences compared to the French type. First that is the weight; the Italian Sottobanca cock weighs 850-1100 grams and the hen 750-1000 grams, while at the French type this is proximately 800 grams for the cocks and 700 grams for the hens. Thus the French bird is much lighter and by that also looking more elegant and tight.

Another difference is the eye cere that is wanted well developed and fiery red in the Italia type. In the French type they are wanted red, but small. Finally the Italian type must have crest rosettes, which are a fault in the French type.

Right: The badge of the participants at the Entente Européenne Congress in Bergamo (I) in 1996, when the separation between the Italian and French Type Sottobanca were initiated.

Right: A Blue Grizzle Sottobanca. Note the red eye



ceres; these should not be broader. In the 'blue' series the beak colour may have a black tip at the upper beak. This photo was taken April 2001 at the Show in Argentat, Correze (F).



Left: A black Sottobanca. The back covering should be better and the setting of the crest could be a bit higher. Also the eye ceres are a bit coarse and pale, but this fault often occurs in the blacks. This photo was taken at the Antibes Show, Côte d'Azur, (F) in November 2001.



Right: The head lining of this Sottobanca is much better with a good rounded forehead, only the shell crest could be better, although that is maybe a matter of grooming. The eye ceres are a bit pale, but the overall type of the bird is fine. Antibes (F) 2001.



Above: A bird with rather loose feathering. A nice filled forehead, but minor crest. Also the tail carriage is not correct and gives the impression of Modena influence.

Right: This bird looks less heavy and deep. It has the perfect head shape, although we would prefer more feather structure and no feather parting in the neck. The colour is fine. Both pigeons (above and right) belong to Raymond Daalmans.



Above: Two pigeons of Raymond Daalmans. The left bird is the most ideal in type; it has nice small eye ceres, but lacks a good crest structure. The right bird is a bit too upright in stance and the shell crest could show better. This eye colour is good for yellow birds.



Above: Two blue black barred Sottobancas of Raymond Daalmans, with striking differences. The left bird is perfect in type, stance and crest; it could just have a bit broader and more filled forehead. Strange to see that the other pigeon is of such a light colour, but this could be due to some French colour experiments. The bird is making itself very broad and it also seems too low in stance. The beak colour should be pale, as these birds carry the smoky-factor, allowing a black tip at the upper beak in the 'blue series'. However, these two birds, the beaks are plain black.



Left: A Blue Grizzle Sottobanca of Raymond Daalmans; the shell crest could be a bit better and the eye ceres a little more red. Note the grizzle colour marking, causing white feather patches on the head.



Left: Note the ochre coloured fleck at the breast, this must be a (dark barred) blue dilute Sottobanca.



Right: A Red Sottobanca with a good crest.



Left: Another Red Sottobanca, with an outstanding head and crest.

Right: A last view of the pigeons and with our thanks for the hospitality we end this interview at Raymond's and his beautiful Sottobancas. As far as we know, he is the only breeder of Sottobancas in the Netherlands, and there is also no Breeders' Club here.

In the Netherlands the Sottobanca is recognised in the French type only, and comes in the following colours: white, black, red, yellow and blue black barred.

In France much more colour varieties are recognised. See the next pages for the Standard description and more information.





Left: From up to dawn:

- White
- Black
- Red
- Gold (chamois)
- Yellow
- Blue checkered
- Blue black barred
- Blue white barred
- Blue grizzle

Standard

Overall impression:

A large but short and strongly built pigeon with a slightly upright stance and almost horizontal body underline.

Body:

A strongly built pigeon. Measurement from the point of the beak to the end of the tail is 40 – 42 cm for the cocks and 39 – 40 cm for the hens. Total height of the bird is 26 – 27 cm.

Weight:

About 800 gr. for the male and 700 gr. for the female. The weight has to be taken in account, as this is important for the quality of this breed as a utility pigeon.

Head:

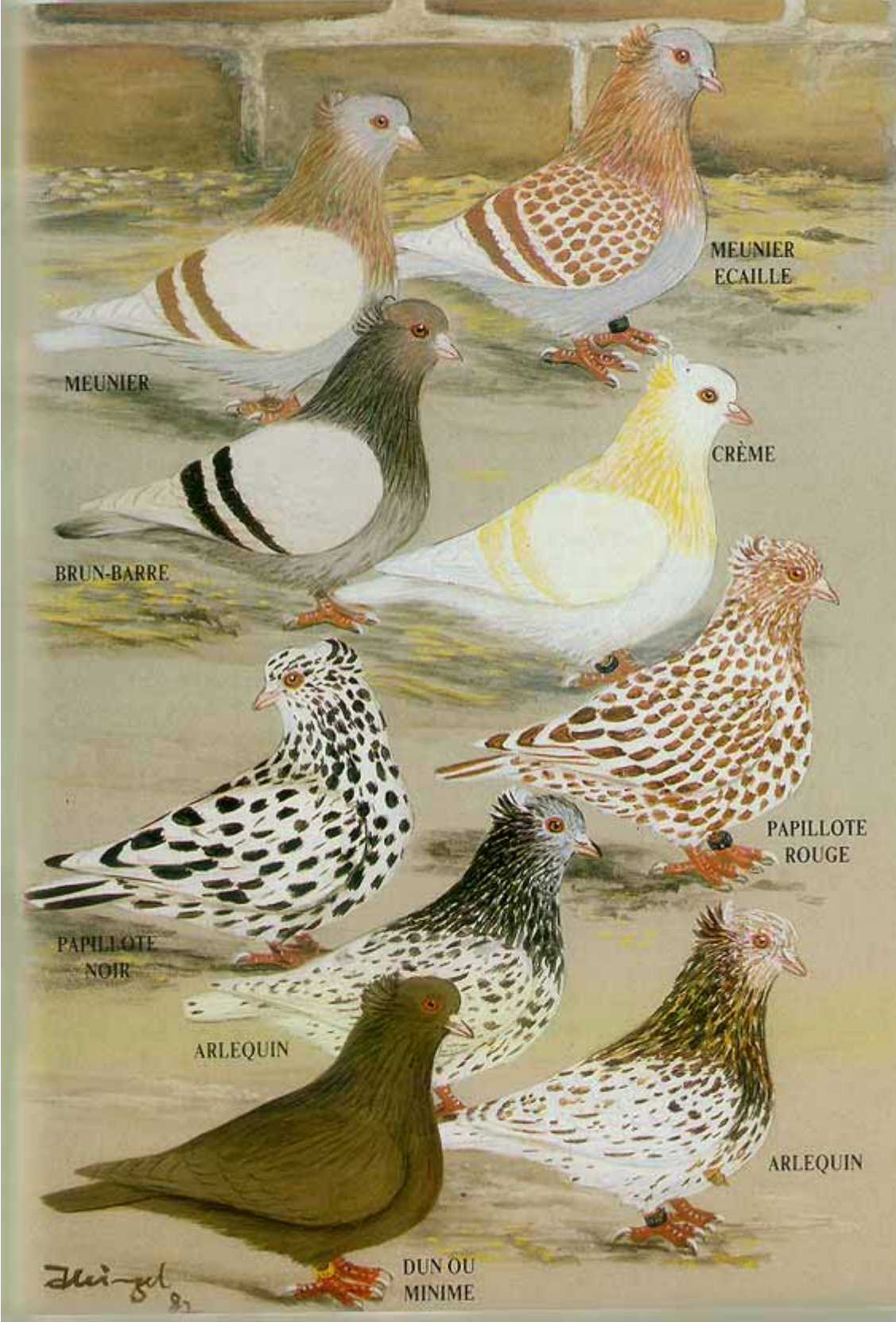
Large and broad - width between the eyes ceres measuring 2.8 tot 3.2 cm. - with a well curved (arched) forehead, showing the characteristic shell crest to full advantage.

Shell Crest:

Full and set high up on the back part of the head. The crest is broad and compact with 5 to 6 rows of dense feathering and with no side rosettes. The top of the crest is 0.5 to 0.8 cm. above the flat feathering of the skull. The crest is supported by the neck feathers, without causing the crest to fall forward or pressed down to the scull. There should be a clear separation between the crest and the neck feathers.

Beak:

Medium length, strong, length 2.3 to 2.6 cm. Flesh colour, except for blacks, blues and red barred, a slightly pigmented tip is allowed for. But these varieties are also accepted with a dark beak. The wattles are medium size and mostly a light fleshy colour.



Left: From up to dawn:

Red chequer
Brown barred
Cream
Black pied
Red pied
Black magnani
Red magnani
Dun

Standard

Eyes:

Orange-red for all colour varieties. Eye-ceres narrow and a reddish colour.

Neck:

Appearing thick, flowing harmoniously into the breast.

Breast:

Broad, well rounded and prominent.

Back:

Broad and slightly concave.

Flights:

Medium length, held tight to the body and ideally covering the back well. The tips are carried on the tail without crossing. Spread wings measurement between the tips: 78 – 80 cm. at the male and 76 – 78 cm. at the female.

Tail:

Appearing short, well closed, carried as an extension of the back line. Tail width is 7 to 8 cm. with broad feathers.

Legs:

Short (5.5 to 6.5 cm.), and straight. Legs set wide apart, thus providing a firm foundation and showing the prominence of the breast. Thighs are thick. Legs and toes must be unfeathered and of a red colour.

Nails:

Nail colour to match the beak colour; flesh colour for all varieties with a pale beak and dark for the others.

Varieties:

All known colours are allowed; most seen are gold (chamois), yellow, red and black. The colours rich and clean. The reds, yellows and golden without any bluish sheen in tail, rump or vent and undertail feathering.

Faults:

Head: flat or narrow forehead.

Crest: too narrow, split, wry, with discernable rosettes or hairy feathering.

Beak: dark beak at the light coloured birds.

Eyes: other colour than orange/red (pearl, dark), faults in the form of the pupil.

Eye ceres: too thick.

Body: small, long or narrow body, flat or narrow breast, too broad lower back, too elegant.

Wings: too long, hanging or not covering the back sufficiently.

Tail: too broad, carried upwards or split.

Legs: too long, too narrow, cow-hocked or spread, any sign of feathering at legs or toes.

Nails: colour not matching the beak colour.

Stance: too low or squat. Wanted is a proud stance, fully showing the bird's rounded forms and the beauty of the shell crest.

Points of appreciation:

Type, form and condition	20 points
Head and shell crest	20 points
Beak and nails	5 points
Eyes and eye ceres	8 points
Breast	15 points
Wings	5 points
Rump	8 points
Tail	5 points
Legs	4 points
Colour	10 points

Total	100 points

**Right: This very nice booklet, 64 pages, on the Sottobanca can be ordered at the Boutique of the French Specialty Club for the Sottobanca: Serge Martin, 178 rue de Frémur, 49000 ANGERS. Tel. : 0033 (0)241 66 64 16
LIVRE SUR LE SOTTOBANCA: €12,20 (+ shipping costs)**



Latest News

For the latest news on the Sottobanca we give you some complementary information, gathered from the French Sottobanca Club and several French Judges and Sottobanca breeders.

The 'Sottobanca Club Français' was founded in 1976. Today, 33 years later, the Sottobanca and her Club belong to one of the most popular in France. This popularity is stated by the large number of entered Sottobancas at the National Championship Shows. At the moment the Club has 185 active members, while that was 137 in the year 1990.

In 1990, 600 Sottobancas were entered at the National Championship Show in Macon; in 1998 800 birds were entered in Rodez and in 2007, 850 in Chambéry.

One of the aims of the Club is to encourage the members to create new colours, and also is given the opportunity to enter those new colours if they satisfy the test: 'All recognised colours'. The Club publishes a bulletin 3 times per year and club meetings are organised to discuss the breed and keep it of present interest.

The best birds are found in the colour varieties Gold (Chamois), White, Red and Black. But to birds are also shown in Blue black barred and mealy. Some new colours, that are still rare, are Magnani black and Magnani red in French called *arlequin* – and also Andalusian Blue is seen. To improve the type other breeds are crossed in, such as the English Modena, Strasser and Mondain, but this has consequences for the i.e. the colour of the beak, which has to be pale, with an allowance for a black tip at the birds of the blue-series. Recently it was decided to allow a black underbeak in the pigeons of the blue series.

Now something completely different: the weight of the Sottobanca. In France, the weight of the winning pigeons is checked at the National Championship Shows. This is done to hold the Standard reference, although the all over harmony of the bird is always the most important. One of the founders of the French Sottobanca Club and bringing champions in the show pens for some 30 years now, is Mr. Yves Millet. He put it to the test to weight his birds for several years in a row, resulting in this remarkable outcome.

In 1979 the weight of his cocks was 945 grams and of his hens 790 grams.

In 2002 the weight of his cocks was 813 grams and of his hens 766 grams.

In 2007 the weight of his cocks was 920 grams and of his hens 877 grams.

Meanwhile the French Standard wanted a weight of 800 grams for the males and 700 grams for the females. The weights of his pigeons varied over the years without noticeable reason. But if he weighed his birds after they had raised 3 rounds of young, he noticed that the cocks on average had lost 137 grams and the hens 116 grams. Increase of weight during winter was put down to building up fat reserves for the cold. Besides, this showed that the difference in weight between males and females was not 100 grams as stated in the Standard, but only 50 to 60 grams. Moreover the Standard weight didn't allow any tolerance, which was always very confusing. After the latest National Championship Show in Geugnon, the Standard Committee of the SNC (French NPA) agrees to follow the motion of the French Sottobanca Club to adjust the weights as follows:

Males: 850 grams, with a margin of +/- 100 grams and females: 750 grams, also with a margin of +/- 100 grams.

For more information please contact the French Sottobanca Breeders' Club:

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