

Dutch Pinball

The Big Lebowski: re-start of a dream

In 2016 The Big Lebowski (TBL) from Dutch Pinball (DP) went into production. After about 50 enthusiasts (Early Achievers) had received their order, there was unfortunately a problem. Production company ARA did not want to continue producing TBLs under the same conditions, while Dutch Pinball only wanted to make an adjustment to the contract and the agreed price if production was to be increased considerably. That dispute resulted in a production stop and a lawsuit. The well-known “New Shit Newsletters” from DP really became “shitty”: first there was a delay in delivery, later it seemed like the end for Dutch Pinball. But after the negative outcome of the court case in early 2019 with ARA for DP, something special happened: DP rebooted and in 2019 around 20 new Big Lebowski’s were made. Reason for an extensive update.

Recap 2017-2018: a whole lot of shit

Starting a business involves trial and error, that is a well-known fact. In the case of Dutch Pinball, that certainly also applied. A good percentage of start-ups perish within three years. For a long time it was uncertain whether DP would survive when two very difficult years followed after a promising start. It is therefore wonderful that by the end of 2019 there is a future again. But before we go into that, it is good to also review the intervening period. We ask Barry four questions about the difficult years behind him.

1. The court case with ARA: what was that all about?

Barry: A stalemate arose at the end of 2016: ARA did not want to produce anymore because they felt that the contract we had both signed was not reasonable. They wanted a price adjustment and we could not agree with that. The games were already sold for a fixed price after all. Doing business means taking risks, we asked ARA to also look at the longer term with us. Immediately paying more to ARA would have an impact on the financial stability and thus the continuity of DP. In the longer term we were able to take this into account in our pricing, then there were more options. Of course we started a conversation, because although we felt we were right: we wanted TBLs to be made. I still regret that we were unable to work it out together.

TBLs
being picked
up at ARA

2. The Chinese Adventure - how do you look back on that now?

Barry: When the deal with ARA went wrong, we looked for alternatives. Through personal connections, contact came with a company with roots in the Netherlands and with production capacity in China. Everyone was enthusiastic and decisions were quickly taken and of course we wanted to be “back in business” as quickly as possible. I went to China to work on making the new pre-production samples and to train people there locally. In the end however it turned out that building pinballs is just too complex to do this in China. The distance and communication make it very difficult to achieve and maintain the desired quality. A pinball is just too complex for this. I do think it might be possible but than I should go over to China to live there for at least 6 months to supervise it constantly. Still the outcome would be doubtful and thus I decided at that moment not to do this.

3. Dutch Pinball: continue without Jaap Nauta - why is that?

Barry: Of course, the business troubles have a big impact in the personal life, but this has really been the hardest thing in recent years.



“It was a Houdini act that Dutch Pinball performed in the summer of 2019”

Jaap and I were partners, but if you interact so intensively with each other, you also become personally involved in each other's lives. When Jaap fell ill, this was tough. Then you think: what are you doing it for? He is a true fighter, but at some point he had to choose what he was going to spend his energy on. That choice was difficult, but again not: the focus had to be on his health, on his family. In good mutual consultation we then decided that I would continue the DP adventure on my own.

4. Processing with ARA - how did it work?

Barry: After the judge's verdict it was clear: ARA did not have to resume production of the TBL. In addition, DP had to pay for already produced TBLs. But that money wasn't there. The bankruptcy of DP seemed close at that time, we were really standing with our backs against the wall. ARA knew that too and, strikingly enough, this created space that was previous not available in recent years. We needed each other to minimize the damage. Because in addition to the already built 40 pcs TBLs, ARA also had a large stock of new materials: playfields, cabinets, displays, printed circuit boards, pinball assemblies etc.



TBL in
DP Head
Quarters in
Roermond

They could not do much with that. I made a proposal to ARA not only to pay for the TBLs that were already made, but also to take over the entire stock of unused parts. ARA wanted to go along with this and we agreed on a price. Of course I needed a hefty amount of money for that. The only way to raise that money was to deliver the already made TBLs to new buyers through our distributor in North America. And I took out a loan within my family for the remaining amount that I needed to get back to work with the acquired spare parts.

Recap 2019 - careful restart

It was a Houdini act that Dutch Pinball performed in the summer of 2019: the debt at ARA was paid, the TBLs that stood at ARA were delivered to new buyers and the supply of spare parts moved to Limburg. In Roermond, Barry found a workplace and went there with Guus (best friend of Barry, who had been involved in the TBL adventure since the beginning of DP) to do something that had not been successful in the past two years: making new TBLs. In order to make his dream come true and to deliver the TBLs to the people who

Preparation of a TBL playfield



had given their trust to DP. Barry developed various scenarios for the restart of DP. On the one hand, it seemed attractive to tackle it immediately in a big way: after all, not only did new TBLs have to be made and sold to put the finances of the company in order, there were also some 125 previously ordered TBLs to be delivered. On the other hand: high volumes would also lead to

higher risks because the costs, such as personnel costs, would quickly increase.

Finally Barry opted for a cautious restart. DP rented a business space in Roermond, racks were filled with containers for the parts and tools and with the help of friends, DP succeeded in making and supplying around 20 new TBLs in 2019. The start is there.

Barry: what a great feeling it was when the first TBLs of the new production were ready. Box around it, pallet underneath and on transport!

Dutch Pinball 2020 - the plans

The conclusion that we can draw at the end of 2019: there is a future for Dutch Pinball again. How that future will exactly look like is still uncertain however. How many TBLs are going to be made in the coming year? Will buyers who already ordered in 2015-2016 (the so-called Early Achievers) also get their TBL this year? Will it stay with the TBL or are there still plans for a successor to the TBL? Another three questions we fired at Barry.



Racks full of boxes with pinball parts



TBL
production
line in Roer-
mond

to a new buyer and one goes to an Early Achiever. In the beginning, the ratio may be a bit different: 3 new to 1 ordered. In this way DP's cash flow remains stable and that is important for the longer term. So if you ask me now: I am convinced that we will be able to supply many Early Achievers with their TBL in 2020, but it may take until 2021 before everyone will receive his or her TBL.

7. In 2017 DP published information about a successor to the TBL. Are there still plans for a second pinball?

Barry: I dare not to say anything about that at the moment. But for 2020 it is simple: we will fully focus on the production of the TBL. When we announced in the fall of 2019 that we would accept new orders, the response was overwhelming. We found it very exciting, also because the pricing was considerably adjusted. It means that we can move forward in the coming year, especially if you count that there will be another 125 additional TBLs needed to meet our obligations.

But of course there are plenty of ideas in my head... So at the moment there are no concrete plans for a second game, but please come back at the end of 2020. If things go well, there will come a time when this question becomes relevant...

5. How many TBLs is DP planning to make in 2020?

Barry: we are currently making the cabinets in miniseries of four. Because we still have the parts in stock and experience is growing, we succeed in making such a set of four games in two weeks. If we continue along that line, you will come to around 100 games per year. The ambition is to go to four games per week in the first half of 2020. To make that possible, we need good staff and we must make the production space even more efficiently. More staff also means training, management, quality monitoring, etc. There will also come a time when we need to give logistics more attention: ordering parts, delivering the games, at the moment I'm doing it all myself. I know one thing for sure: I want to be able to remain in control. I prefer it to take a little longer than to lose control.

“Delivering all ordered TBLs is a matter of honor. So those pinballs must come...”

6. Will the “Early Achievers” all have their TBL in 2020?

Barry: delivering all ordered TBLs is a matter of honor. So those pinballs must come. I have learned to be careful with commitments, so I don't dare. If the financial basis is more stable, then the intention is to work according to the principle: if two new TBLs are ready, one goes

