

Sport Recognition -

I have been a major advocate that Pigeon Racing should have recognition with Sport England.

PIGEON RACING

I believe that Pigeon Racing to be recognised as a sporting activity by the five sports councils in the UK.

Under the current criteria of a 'sport' as recognised by the sports council, pigeon racing does not fully fit the bill. I understand that this is because the human input of building and managing a team of racing pigeons, combining loft management, skill, ability, hard work and dedication to produce an 'avian athlete' possibly requires less physical fitness by the fancier as it is the pigeon that is undertaking the activity.

What I would like to see is a category within 'sport' that allows the ability of pigeon fanciers and the efforts achieved by their pigeons to get the recognition they deserves.

Introduction to Pigeon Racing –

Racing involves the release of specially trained pigeons, which then return to their lofts over a carefully measured distance. The time it takes the bird to cover the specified distance is measured and the pigeon's rate of travel is calculated and compared with all of the other pigeons in the race to determine which bird returned at the highest rate of speed.

The winner of a pigeon race is the bird with the highest velocity, that is, the distance flown divided by the time taken. Races can often be won and lost in seconds or tenths of, and to counter this, many different timing clocks have been developed. The traditional timing method involves rubber rings being placed into a specially designed clock, whereas a newer development uses RFID tags to record arrival time.

Pigeon racing is very like horse racing in that it involves highly bred contestants, although no horse race on earth matches the many thousands of birds that can take part in a pigeon race. In fact the most expensive pigeon sold in the world is a Belgium pigeon sold to China for 1.6 million US Dollars.

Lord Carter's report shows that as many people race pigeons in the U.K. today as play volleyball, hockey, sail or learn gymnastics.

The Royal family race pigeons from the Sandringham Estate. HM Queen Elizabeth II was a third generation fancier because it was her grandfather King George V who first established a racing loft at Sandringham over a century ago

How Pigeon Racing meets the criteria

Pigeon Racing does already meet the criteria of a sport in the following aspects;

1. Pigeon Racing is **not** in any way age, gender or disability discriminated or restricted. Approved clocking systems are available that allow pigeons to clock themselves in automatically, on the return from races. This allows individuals with physical or mobility disabilities to compete fairly at all levels of competition
2. Pigeon Racing provides a mental challenge to the fancier: an example of which is for pigeons to perform they must be provided with a balanced diet, assessed by the fancier who has to take into consideration the race distance, the weather conditions and the wind direction. The fancier then has to adjust carbohydrates levels, protein build up feeds, energy amounts, vitamins required and mineral additions. Feeding is a vital part of the skill required by the fancier to mentally outwit his fellow competitors. Pigeons race from 50miles to 750miles.
3. Pigeon Racing provides a physical challenge in the form of training and racing and it is the achievements of the pigeons and pigeon fanciers to get the birds to produce such results that deserves recognition.
4. Pigeon Racing provides a positive social impact on the local community. Pigeon fanciers and their families meet at the headquarters of Pigeon Clubs to race mark their pigeons for competition, just like any football, rugby or tennis club. There are many public houses, community centres and clubs that rely heavily on the trade of pigeon fanciers as the trend for social drinking, particularly in rural areas has declined dramatically.
5. Pigeon fanciers work very hard to give back to the local community and have raised over 2 million pounds for charities.
6. The long distance Confederation of Pigeon Racing has been recognised as a sport by the Central Council for Physical and Recreation Sport along with football, Rugby, tennis and many more !
7. Countries such as China with over 600,000 pigeon fanciers accept pigeon racing as a sport. On one of my many visits to China a meeting with the Vice President of the official press office of the Chinese Racing Association with regards pigeon racing and the Beijing Olympics, Mr Gao Peng, explained 'Pigeon Racing is not a hobby or a pastime as this is classified as something that can be picked up and put down. Pigeon Racing has reached sports status in China as the achievements of both the pigeon and the fancier are therefore regarded as a sporting activity'.
8. When the Olympic Games opened in London in 2012, tradition calls for the release of pigeons to mark the official start of the games. This is symbolic of an ancient friendship. During the original games in Greece it was common for an athlete to carry pigeons from his village to the Olympics. If he won a race, he would tie a strand of the finish line to the bird and release it to fly home and let his fellow villagers know of his victory. Pigeon Racing dates back well over 2000 years and is in fact one of the earliest methods of sporting competition.
9. The basic structure of the Pigeon Racing network over the UK is as follows. All individual members have to be a member of one of the

main Unions. Individual members then make up local clubs which are members of Federations. The unions are run strictly with a set of competing rules, AGM's and yearly accounts.

10. School participation comes from involvement with local fanciers and learning about the homing instincts and calculations to work out racing pigeon speeds and velocities as well as One loft Races, where Schools can follow the progress via websites.
11. Anti Doping rules and regulations are followed see attached.
12. Pigeons were awarded 32 out of the 54 Dickins medals given for their heroic bravery in saving many lives during war time. This is the animal equivalent to the Victoria Cross. One pigeon GI Joe for example is believed to have saved 1000 lives which could have been otherwise lost.

Can we call pigeon racing a sport

In the United States Professor Ken Dial is one of the world's foremost experts on how avian flight . For over 20 years this Harvard trained scientist has conducted experiments on bird locomotion. He has been recognised universally for many breakthrough findings, particularly on how dinosaurs learned to fly. Professor Dial has studied the greatest fliers in the avian kingdom and he calls our pigeons the ultimate 'Olympic athlete'. **According to Professor Dial 'no bird, in fact no creature on earth, can match the speed and endurance of a modern racing pigeons'.**

It is obviously very much a topic of the 'government today' to encourage sport and active recreation for young people that gets them away from television and video games, and into drug free activities that engage their minds. For many experts sport is the answer and the additional recognition of pigeon racing being classified as a sport would certainly go a long way to adding credibility to youngsters to think of pigeon racing as either trendy or socially accepted.

Pigeon Racing has been a part of our heritage for over 150 years. Recognition as a sport would help establish accreditation for the unbelievable performances that pigeons and their fanciers achieve from their hard work and dedication 365 days per year. Optimum fitness and well being is required to reach competitive edge and race form. Unlike many other sports pigeon racing is not age or gender restricted, and over time pigeons are getting faster and more powerful and exceeding expectations every year. This is down to the pigeon fanciers and their understanding of the pigeon and its capabilities. Pigeon Racing is certainly a 'sport' and their achievements deserve the recognition of sports status.

Lee Fribbins