

Rick Osman

Past RP Editor

It is inevitable that when an adult child takes over a family business from their parent that there will be a considerable overlap, the soon-to-be editor slowly taking on more responsibility as the older person steps back. And so it was with The Racing Pigeon, older editors stepping back slowly as their successors carried out the bulk of the work. Thus, RP editors carried through some of their more important innovations whilst not nominally the actual editor. Whilst Bill Osman was editor all three of his sons, Tony, Colin and Brian came to work at The Racing Pigeon although it was Colin who stayed on to become editor himself.



Colin brought a degree of photographic appreciation to the role. Colin had a lifelong interest in photography having supplemented his meagre pay at The Racing Pigeon through commercial photography notably of winning greyhounds at London's dog racing tracks and for magazines such as Parade.

Arguably Colin's two greatest acts whilst in charge at The RP were organising the 9th World Pigeon Olympiad in London in 1965, the first in the UK, and the launch of the first monthly full colour magazine for fanciers, Racing Pigeon Pictorial. The first was during the tenure of W H Osman and the second when Colin was more in control. At this time the pigeon loft on the roof of 19 Doughty Street was still in use.

The 1965 Olympiad held at London's Alexandra Palace attracted teams of competing pigeons from across the world together with fanciers and their families. It was the largest pigeon show held in the UK although it was affected by the funeral of Winston Churchill which closed many roads in the capital including The Strand where the hotel for the Olympiad judges was cut off. Despite this it was a great success and the use of Alexandra Palace led to The Racing Pigeon Old Comrades Show moving there from The Royal Horticultural Halls.



Racing Pigeon Pictorial, launched in 1970, set new standards for the presentation of pigeon racing, it was Colin's firm belief that pigeon fanciers should have a glossy magazine they could proudly show to people, friends and family so as to raise the profile and image of the sport.

It was during this period that the weekly achieved its greatest ever circulation for one giddy week it touched 75,000. In those days it was all hands on deck as every week thousands of race result cards were collated ready for publication.

One big change in the content of The RP at this time was a greater emphasis on photography; with a system of good quality compact



cameras being freely shared with RP correspondents. They would be posted off prior to a big race and then returned after the winners had been interviewed ready for the pictures to appear in that week's issue.

About 1975 both of Colin & Grace's



sons, Rick and David, joined The RP and helped introduce further initiatives such as the Racing Pigeon Research Fund and The Racing Pigeon Museum; coupled with much greater attendance at pigeon shows and prize givings up and down the country. To facilitate this Colin developed a substantial trailer which would fold out into a show stand to store and display the ever-increasing library of books being published and sold.

When Colin took more of a back seat Rick Osman assumed the role at a time when the sport had entered a decline. There were a number of landmarks during this period notably the move of the Old Comrades Show from London to the giant National Exhibition Centre near Birmingham. This had followed the disastrous fire at Alexandra Palace which resulted in the show returning to its previous

venue the Royal Horticultural Halls.

The move to the NEC saw a number of improvements at the Old Comrades Show; the greatly increased floor area allowed for a much better display of pigeons on a single level rather than as double or

even triple tiered pens used previously and more space for trade stands as well as more seating and a bouncy castle and creche area for the youngest visitors. It was at the NEC that the first car presentation took place after The RP sponsored the NFC's first car nomination.

In later years more shows were organised with events being held in Bournemouth and again in London. It was about this time that the Royal Star & Garter Home for Disabled ex-Servicemen and Women acknowledged the donations raised through the Old Comrades Show, the show was the largest single private contributor to the home, with a special ceremony at The Guild Hall.

Rick also organised the first one loft race to the UK with a loft built on top of London's Royal Lancaster Hotel overlooking Hyde Park. Seeing the loft sections being hauled up the outside of the 20 storey hotel was a memorable day.

Rick was always proud of the history of The RP and was exceptionally keen for the newspaper to get to its 100th anniversary; to enable this an outside investor came in, and Rick felt able to move on in 1998. Dave Allen later took over the whole of the business and so the next chapter of the story began as Steve Dunn who had worked with Rick for many years took over as editor.

However, any story of The RP would not be complete without reference to the many staff, some extremely long standing, who worked with the editors to produce The RP every week, the Pictorial every month and Squills Yearbook every year as well as attending the many winter shows. There are really too many to mention but the Bissett family should be referenced with Ron Bissett being the mainstay of The Racing Pigeon weekly and his son Ray and his wife Louise taking over as secretaries of the Old Comrades Show.

Also worthy of acknowledgement from this period: Michael Shepherd, Ken Melvin, Colin Hoskins, Colin Nicholson, Paul, Leila Alberici, Tony Greethurst, Walt Martin, Joan Knott, Jean, Ken Melvin, Howard, Terry Rossiter, Reception Debbie, Melanie, Liz, Sue, Stewards of the Old Comrades Show Alan & Angela Noyce and Secretaries Sid & Cis Beard, Ron B, Debbie, Pete Turner and Colin's beloved wife and my mum, Grace.

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