

# PIGEON RACING IS SIMPLE

An Interview with Jim Biss

by Michael Shepherd

As many readers will be aware in recent issues of the Pictorial we have been featuring articles on management, breeding, training and racing all written by successful fancier Jim Biss. Who of course is highly successful in the long distance National events, this year (2000) being no exception. His loft at Brundall won 9th, 70th, 73rd, 89th etc, Open National Flying Club Pau, also winning 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th etc, at Section level. This being the eighth year in succession that

Jim has won his NFC Section from Pau.

In the Barcelona National, a distance of 774 miles, he was 1st, 7th, 16th & 22nd. He sent thirteen birds to this race and twelve of them homed. Ten birds were entered in the Marseilles National. They went on to win 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, 13th & 16th, ten birds sent, ten home.

With these results in mind I went to

find out how Jim obtained them and ask of his methods and preparation. Having known Jim for as long as I have I should have known what his answer would be, 'this is the equivalent to writing enough to fill a book'. Anyway he agreed to cover the basic requirements, because, as he said, pigeon racing is simple, it is only fanciers who complicate it.

I mentioned the word 'simple' because it is simple and only simple basic requirements are all that are needed to achieve success. In most respects pigeon management is a matter of plain common sense. Lofts come in many sizes and designs but whatever the style or size might be the function at the end of the day is to provide shelter for the birds with plenty of fresh air without draughts. I would suggest that unless a fancier's loft, be it racing or stock, reach these standards the chances of success will be negligible.

I would also suggest that the lofts should be maintained as dust free as possible, the elimination of dust is very important indeed. Dust getting into a pigeon's system can in itself cause respiratory or other problems. A good deal of this dust could well be germ laden which makes it an even greater health risk.

There must be plenty of room within the loft. Overcrowding is a gross mismanagement on the part of the fancier. I am one of what seems very few who take the view that one of the biggest enemies of young birds and the major cause of young bird losses is disease. It is only by having a properly designed loft with good ventilation will the birds enjoy the good health they need for success. Remember, always guard against dust and overcrowding. It is a well known fact that the better the ventilation the less the likelihood of the respiratory problems. If a bird

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Blue chequer cock 'Century', 7th National Barcelona 2000, a grandson of 'Vend' winner of 1st Open NFC Pau when he was paired to a daughter of 'Kaiser'

brings a respiratory problem home to a loft that is properly ventilated and the birds are not overcrowded the risk of the infected bird setting up an epidemic is much less likely because the physical condition of the other inmates is such that they can resist infection. Compare this with an overcrowded and ill ventilated loft and it will be realised how quickly one affected pigeon can contaminate the rest. Compare this also with the advice we usually get from our health officials when health hazards such as influenza are about – avoid stuffy, crowded premises and public gatherings etc.

Dust carries the majority of pigeon ailments and it is bound to harm birds that are continually exposed to it. The birds are continually drawing dust laden germs into their systems, in particular their

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respiratory tract. A pigeon that is expected to race from any great distance must be able to breathe with complete freedom and gain maximum benefit from the air it breathes. If not, what chance has it of success? Very little.

When it comes to breeding stock I am sure most readers are aware of my insistence of retaining as many winning genes amongst the breeding stock as possible. Tried and tested birds with plenty of recent winning birds in their pedigree are the only sure way of producing a winning family of long distance pigeons. There is nothing difficult or complicated about this. There is absolutely no value in going for a family that has not been winning for any length of time no matter how good its performances might have been over an earlier period. If a loft has not won anything of note for ten years I would have to assume that the owner has not been doing his job properly and that the winning genes have gone. Once this happens nothing short of a fresh start can bring back success. I always advise people to go for the best they can afford, two good pairs are a better proposition than four inferior pairs costing the same.



Blue cock 'Unsaid' a grandson of 'Supercrack' and 'Favori', he is sire of 'Vend' 1st Open NFC Pau, great grandsire of 'Davit' 1st Section, 9th Open NFC Pau, grandsire of 'Certain' 1st National Marseille 2000 etc

Apart from physique and balance aim for a quiet temperament. These qualities add so much to your own enjoyment, for the real fancier should find it a joy to be among such pigeons. If you keep wild or otherwise ill tempered pigeons they will breed pigeons with the same traits. In all my years in the sport I have never had success with birds of this type. All my good racers and breeders have been quiet in temperament and have handled well. I am, of course, talking about winning long distances. Anything can win a short race. You can take a young bird from the nest off the church roof and win a short race with it. I know it has been done, but you need quality to win the long ones.

I think that most people know that I fly my birds entirely on Widowhood and have been doing so since 1970 and from the shortest races through to 750 miles. I have no fads or fancies with perhaps one exception – if that can be called a fad – I like quiet pigeons with personality –

trusting pigeons that are pleased to see you and do not rush away when you enter the loft.

There are too many fads in the sport that cannot stand scrutiny and I am afraid many are misled by them. I relate the eye to the

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state of the pigeon's health and general well being. I regard other theories relating to the eye as utter nonsense. Nor do I take any notice of the so called wing step theory. There are no short cuts to what will breed or what will race. The old saying 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating' can certainly be applied to this sport of ours. The proof of the reproducer is its ability to breed

winnrs and the best fancier I know and the only one with 100 per cent ability to select correctly is Mr Basket who tests and provides us with the true answer. As I have previously stated there is nothing complicated about pigeon racing and success will come if common sense is applied at all times. Winer is a time when, although not racing, the pigeons must still be given your best attention. Maintain a keen lookout for anything untoward, particularly signs of colds. The term one-eyed cold is rather misleading for the illness is really a respiratory problem, the first indications of which usually appear in the eye. If neglected it can lead to more serious virus infections. If a look at the eye suggests one-eyed cold, confirmation can be obtained by the presence of mucus in the nostrils which may be obvious, but if it is not obvious a slight pressure on the wattles towards the end of the beak will give the answer. Other infections of the eye can be set up by such things as a peck or blow by the wing of a loftmate. Great care should be exercised with birds that return from mid September onwards. Do not be deceived. Whatever its appearance, isolate it immediately and keep isolated for 14 days.

Always let moulting birds have regular access to the bath. Do not reduce the quality of the food during the moult, ensuring that it

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includes plenty of oils and fats along with the carbohydrates and proteins. There are those that think that once racing is over the quality of food given can be reduced because they are not very active physically and they should be prevented from becoming too fat. This reasoning is faulty. They need plenty of good food for good feather reproduction and maintaining good bodily health. If the birds become overweight this can be reduced once the moult is completed and before breeding starts. Always make sure ample supplies of green food are available during this period. I am often asked about feeding. I have no really fixed ideas on this. Unlike years ago there are now plenty of good

mixtures available, so many in fact that fanciers are spoilt for choice. I feel that it really is a matter of personal choice. The only thing I would advise is that if one is intending to change one's feed then do it gradually, say over a period of five or six days. This way the birds' digestion is not upset by sudden change. They can adjust to the gradual change without any problems.

Fanciers should always remember that successful pigeons have to start life as perfect healthy babies, even whilst they are still in the egg. No matter how well a pair of stock birds may appear to be matched first class youngsters will not be produced unless the hen lays top class eggs. She must be sound internally and be functioning correctly. The diet

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must be such that she can put into each egg the full amount of correctly balanced food (the yolk) on which the embryo will live and grow into a well developed chick with the required physique to break its way out of the shell when the time arrives. Any flaw in the egg, quite apart from any food supply, whether it is present from the start or develops during incubation, is going to show itself sooner or later to the detriment of the young bird. Always remember, ample supplies of grit should be available to the birds at all times.

It is a well known fact that prevention is far better than cure and great care must be taken to ensure that all of your management efforts are concentrated on the prevention of problems. If all your energies are having to be channelled into curing problems your pigeons will never achieve the ambitions you have for them. Remember most of what you do is simple common sense. Don't forget the little things like ensuring that the nest boxes are thoroughly cleaned and treated against parasites prior to pairing up. It is essential that pigeons are not troubled by insects, for if they are they will not sit or rest properly. If the birds are troubled by pests there is an easy way to find out. I suggest you visit your loft now and

again at night whilst it is dark. If there are pests in the loft it will become very obvious, the pigeons will be restless, some will be stamping their feet whilst others will be pecking at various parts of their body because of the irritation these pests cause.

In recent years I have not bred from my Widowhood cocks, all young birds being produced in the stock loft. There are no early bred youngsters here, all pigeons are paired around mid February with the Widowhood cocks being allowed to sit a round of pot eggs prior to separation. My young birds are treated in the traditional

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manner, no Darkness here. The Widowhood cocks get a few training tosses prior to the start of the season, these tosses being given when the weather is fine. After that initial training, tosses are only given during the competitive season if it is felt necessary. I am looking to maintain fitness not wear the pigeons out.

Young bird training is thorough. Once fully accustomed to the crates training begins with the first tosses at around ten miles and working up in stages thirty to forty miles. No doubt many are familiar with my view on young bird racing, indeed, everything I do for young birds is race training as opposed to young bird racing. I have long since given up racing young birds across the Channel. I feel that far too many young birds are lost on this route and I certainly do not think that all those lost pigeons are bad ones. All my young birds are raced in the Bradwell Club, they receive six races from 80 miles and two from 140 miles. That race distance for babies is perfectly adequate. Plenty of short races for young birds provides them with plenty of education which in turn prepares them for future old bird competition, it also builds their confidence, a very essential ingredient for successful old bird racing. All of my successful pigeons have been treated this way as young birds and as I said at the start, pigeon racing is simple, it is only fanciers who complicate it.