

THE SPORT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

By John Hofman

The Origin Of The Famous Keith Wickham Strain.

S.A.H.P.A. Master Flier for Over 50 Years.

Keith Wickham was born at Clarence Park, Adelaide in 1916 and commenced flying with the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association in 1933. He missed six years whilst serving his country, in his last years of flying he amassed countless SAHPA top thirty prizes including 18 SAHPA first prizes, which is a record number of Association wins. He won the SAHPA Aggregate Points Title in 1958, 59, 61, 62, 64, 72 and 81. He finished 10th in 1983, 9th in 84 and 15th in 1986.

Keith's pigeons have performed brilliantly over all distances but one of his most memorable days must surely have been in October 1958 when he clocked his SAHPA Benalla (670km) winner, a hen which had been placed 7th and 4th from this point on previous occasions. Approximately two hours later, Keith clocked another hen from Junee (830km). This hen, which had previously been placed 15th and 6th from Junee, won on this day by 2 3/4 hours and was beaten home by only 8 Benalla birds. Both races commenced at 5.30 am the previous day in similar conditions.

The following is the base of the Keith Wickham strain. In 1946, Keith imported eight pigeons from England, where he had been stationed during World War 2. Four came from Sharrock Bros., Haskayne, near Liverpool. Two from Jack Howard, Fazakerley, near Liverpool, and two from E.. Bradshaw of Manchester. Gits Bricoux Sion were the main bloodlines and one cock was a Havenith Logan.



All of the pigeons produced winners for him, but the most outstanding of them was a pure Gits Red Chequer Pied Hen 449, bred in 1938 and sent out to him by Sharrock Bros, when she was eight years old. She was a full sister to "Champion Giles" which won 16 races into Scotland for the great Scottish Ace, Tom Morgan of Airdrie, prior to the Second World War.

449 produced many outstanding stock birds for Keith when mated to the two Howard cocks, RCC 5382 (feathered legs) and RCPC 3060. From the mating 5382 x 449, Keith bred the following:-

12370 --Sire of many club winners and Association placings including 2nd Marree (580km) and 1st Oodnadatta (870km).

1279 -- Dam of 1st Association Alice Springs (1320km).

12738-- Sire of BPC 312 which bred two Association winners and one second. 312 was the sire of BH 745- 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 10th Association.

But it was from the mating of 3060 x 449 that the best results were obtained. In 1949 this pair produced three hens:

MH 369, BPH 26929 and BCPH 26930.

Both 369 and 26929 bred Keith an Association winner, however it was 26930 which became the greatest stock hen he ever owned. It may be of interest to know that all the progeny of 449 were unflown and kept for stock except for 26930 which was flown through to Ballan (580kms) where she was 1st South Suburban club and 17th Association, with less than 30 birds homing in race time. She too was then immediately put to stock and proved outstanding, being the dam of the following :-

255 -- BCH 2nd Association Marree (580kms).

499 -- BCC 2nd Association Arrarat Derby (480kms).

1148 -- BCH 1st Association Benella (670 kms).

1161 -- BCH Unflown.

Following on these successes, 1148 in turn bred two Association winners, Ballan and Oodnadatta, the later by 14 minutes on the day of liberation, and also 1st Benella with MH501 by one hour on the second morning 501 had previously won 7th and 4th Association winner and many other good pigeons. 225 bred 1st Association Ballan.

Of course, there were numerous other Association placings bred by the progeny of the imported Gits hen 449, but the aforementioned should be enough to prove her quality. Every one of Keith's 18 Association winners contained her blood.

Another imported pigeon which left its mark was an Havenith Logan cock (also from Sharrock Bros.) which had won from Fonteney in France (800kms). He was nine years old when Keith got him so naturally his progeny were kept for stock although one hen was tested and she was placed in the Association from Oodnadatta. The Havenith Logan blood was very successful in the long distance races although one son, when mated to 1161, previously mentioned, produced a BBC to win 1st Association Marree (580kms). Stewart Gregersons Alice Springs (1320kms) winner, only bird and sire of 'Barossa Belle", SAHPA Bird of the year in 1981, was inbred to the Havenith Logan cock.

Besides the eight imported birds already mentioned, Keith was fortunate in 1950, in being loaned by his great friend Bill Virgo, late of Port Augusta, a BC NEHU. 45.C 7232 imported by him in 1947 from the late Fred Birmingham who lived in Yorkshire. The father of his cock was a great long distance champion, and his blood proved very successful for Keith from the distance (800kms and over).

To complete the history of the Wickham strain, two locally bred pigeons were introduced in 1949 and 1951, and they both played a small but significant part in its creation.

One was a BCC given to him by the late Bill Francis of Mitchem, when he disposed of his pigeons. He had been placed from Albury (780kms) and was a full brother to his 1st Association Oodnadatta. The other local pigeon was BH 839, bred in 1949 and strayed to Keith's loft as a very young squeaker. She belonged to the late Arnold Smallacombe and although many attempts

were made to coax her back to where she was

bred, she liked Keith's loft too much and would always come back. Arnold gave up in disgust and decided he would dispose of her if Keith did not want her.

Keith saw something in her that he liked and three of her grandparents had all won Association races. Keith trained her to Coonalpyn (140kms) before sending her to Melbourne (660kms) where she finished 4th Association, 4th Combine. She was also 12th Association Junee (830kms), arriving very badly hawked. 839 bred many good long distance pigeons for Keith when mated to a son of his greatest stock hen 26930.

Well, that is the history of one of Adelaide's greatest stains which has its roots in some of the great British strains of the 1930's and 40's and is still winning here some forty years later.



Above:-"Barossa Belle" S.A.78. 12796.
Bird of the Year S.A.P.H.A. 1981.