

Tribute To John Pryor

by John Hofman

Several weeks ago a Director of the Australian Pigeon Fanciers Association asked me if I would contribute a regular article to the magazine. I accepted on the condition that it would not be on a regular monthly basis, perhaps once every two months at best. Well this is my first article since being asked and I am sure that all pigeon fanciers Australia wide will understand that this article is one that I never thought I would be writing and one that gives me no pleasure in reporting. In fact by the time you all read it, it will be old news but never the less, news that must be reported.

At 7.30pm on the evening of Monday, 6th December, 1999 John Pryor, arguably the best pigeon flyer in Australia at this present time and probably for at least the past ten years, died in Sydney at the age of 58. He left Adelaide with his friend and fellow fancier Curley Maricic on Thursday, 2nd December to attend the 1999 Australian Pigeon Convention & Expo. He was one of the guest speakers on the Saturday and Sunday along with others of the calibre of Dr. Colin Walker, Dr. Rob Marshall, Dr. Michael Cannon, Graham Davison and of course the famed Jo Herbots of Herbots Brothers of Halle-Booienhoven, Belgium.

John had a heart attack on the bus on which he was travelling after spending a day visiting several sothern lofts on the tour. All efforts to revive him failed. Word of his death spread across the Australian Racing Pigeon Fraternity with the speed of lightning. I learnt of it myself with utter disbelief less than two hours after the tragic moment. On that day back here in Adelaide, around 7.00pm, my wife Beverley and I were driving home along Grand Junction Road from Port Adelaide. Without saying anything to my wife, for a few fleeting moments my thoughts were with John and Curley. I was wondering how they got on in Sydney, never doubting for a second that they would not have had a great time, and briefly thinking that perhaps I should surprise John by phoning him at his hotel room later in the evening. The thought quickly disappeared after arriving home when other tasks and phone calls took prece-

dence, and after all, they'll be back tomorrow evening. Later, a call from John Cock around 8.45pm advised me that John Pryor had died.

As shattered as we both were, almost disbelieving, at the same time we imagined how shattered Ross Hocking must have been as he was the first person in Adelaide to be told the news. Ross had to break the news to Ruth, John's wife. I believe he did so with the assistance of Kay Paterson, wife of John's long time friend and fellow Hampstead Clubmate, Grant. What a dreadful moment that must have been for all of them, Ruth, her family, Kay and Ross. And our thoughts were also with poor Curley who was still in Sydney.

I won't clutter this article with John's results, as they would take several pages of small print in this magazine to list. But I will say that in the decade of the nineties John won the SAHPA Aggregate Points, the highest honour in pigeon racing in South Australia, no less than five times including four consecutive victories from 1995 to 1998 and was never lower than 9th position, competing against up to 450 members. His dominance of pigeon racing in Adelaide was ultimately recognised in February 1999 when a new method of calculating the aggregate points was introduced. With 16 outright Association wins during his career he was well on the way to overhauling the record number of 18 wins held by the late Keith Wickham. With three outright Association wins alone this year and at the age of 58, the general feeling in the fancy was that it was only a matter of a short time before a new record would be established. He was arguably the best flyer in Australia during the past ten years and undoubtedly the number one long distance flyer in the country. He wore the unofficial title of "The King of Alice Springs".

John was absolutely delighted when I had the pleasure of advising him a few weeks ago that one of the pigeons he sent to the Greenfield Stud on Holland in 1991 was the grandsire of 4th Nation Bergerac for Hans Eijerkamp & Sons, against 14,284 birds over 569 miles. A few weeks later John himself won the SAHPA event from Springhurst (460 miles) with a pigeon bred by Curley Maricic. It was a "Grizzle", the sire being of the old Rocco Horrocks bloodlines and the dam being direct from a pair of imported Eijerkamp-Muller pigeons. This is a strange coinci-

dence but it becomes even more bizarre now that both families have suffered tragedy within weeks of these wins. Mrs. Eijerkamp, who had been battling breast cancer for 18 months, finally succumbed on Tuesday, 2nd November, a few weeks after the Bergerac success.

Ruth told me that John's next challenge was to win four SAHPA races in the same season, something that has never been accomplished in the history of the Association. He came within an ace of accomplishing this feat this year in the last race of the season from Holbrook. His pigeon arrived home at 2.33pm and after landing on the loft decided to fly to a neighbour's backyard swimming pool for a drink. A well-aimed "missile" saw it take to the air and it eventually returned to the loft and went in. The best part of five minutes was lost in the process. John never winged about this but Greg Hamilton who had called in to watch John clock witnessed it. John eventually finished 9th in the race, just 3.7mym behind the winner. I believe another of his ambitions for the year 2000 was to win the 820 mile Alice Springs race with a straight-bred Janssen and he was quite confident of doing it. These are examples of goals that John was continually setting himself and accomplishing. It will be a long time, if ever, before we see another of the likes of John Pryor.

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Our staff at APFA have taken hundreds of calls from pigeon fanciers that attended our 1999 Pigeon Convention expressing their sincere condolences to John Pryor's family and appreciate the knowledge that John imparted to them at the seminars. Private discussions, whether it be at the breakfast table early in the morning or late at night in the Resort lounge, he gave a total commitment to the Pigeon Convention as he did on the other occasions he attended as Guest Speaker to all four conventions held in Sydney, being the inaugural guest speaker in 1996, our first Sydney convention.

The Australian pigeon fraternity has lost arguably our greatest distance flyer ever.

Editor