

The Temora Winner

By John Capel

Preface. I've written too many obituaries for deceased members of the pigeon fraternity. In fact I believe the first piece I wrote for this magazine was an obituary for former St Kilda footballer Trevor Barker, who at the time of his death was a fellow member of a local club within the VHA.

However this one is different. The death of Phar Lap shocked Australia when it happened, because we'd taken a horse to heart. The people of this nation hold three folk heroes: Ned Kelly, Don Bradman, and Phar Lap – a bushranger, a cricketer and a horse. What was their commonality? Probably their courage and perceived tenacity. Our pigeons win our admiration because of similar traits, especially those that contest the very long events. One such champion died recently, and an obituary is due. She was a great champion, known widely as Grant Paterson's 'Temora Winner'. Her picture, taken when she was aged seventeen, adorns the front cover.

She was twenty-two when she died, a grand age for a grand hen. It was a decade since she laid her final eggs, yet she lived as a boarder in retirement at George Desira's 'Ponderosa' lofts, where I'd seen her about four years ago. Grant would regularly visit the old girl, taking her some small seed, and he'd feed her by hand, with the old-timer reacting ferociously to any other bird that tried to take seed from her master's hand.

George finished cleaning his lofts one sunny morning when he noticed the old hen, now in her twenty-third year take a position in full sun, on the aviary floor, and stretch out to rest. Suddenly her head dropped, and that was the end of a grand champion with a great story..

I recently came across the 1976 yearbook compiled by the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association. I must have found it when cleaning out my late father's papers soon after he died. He'd probably kept this particular one because he'd won one of the two jubilee races conducted that year by the strong Port Adelaide Association which was affiliated within the SAHPA.

Colin Hawke, currently in his 90th year, was part of the SAHPA's Management Committee that year – a most competent group comprising Allen Goodger, Jack Bergin, Keith Wickham, Colin, and John Doyle. Prominent names abounded: Bob Marchant was Minute Secretary, John Pryor was Race Secretary and Clock Chairman, and Stuart Gregerson was Chairman.

The Yearbook contained the names of all Association race-winners since 1946. Name after name of prominent fanciers of the day came from the pages, and when I spoke with Colin Hawke recently we discussed the 1962 season when he'd won two Association events – a formidable feat against such tough opposition. His brother Don also featured in several Association victories.

On looking back over those SAHPA Association winners since WW2, several remarkable instances became evident. In 1952, Keith Wickham won the Alice Springs event with a

magnificent mealy hen. The following year saw him win from Benalla, followed the next year with victory from Maree on the north line. The next season, 1955 saw him win from Ballan, and twice from Benalla, and in 1956 he won both Oodnadatta races. One victory from Ballan followed in 1957 before another three victories came in 1958 (Oodnadatta, Benalla and June) and a further pair the next year from Ballan and June. To assist matters, his twin brother Ross won the SAHPA's Maree event that year.

1960 was a barren year for the Wickham twins, however brothers Gus and Colin Nelsen each won SAHPA events before something interesting happened in 1961: Keith Wickham won from Benalla, and a new name appeared when Allen Goodger won from Maree. In the following year (1962) Colin Hawke won those two Maree races and a fancier named 'C Elliott' won from Tarcoola. The significance is considerable, because it would be a young 1964-rung hen given by C (Colin) Elliott to Allen Goodger that sparked the creation of a family of pigeons which came to rival and probably exceed the influence of the Wickham family of pigeons. It was 1965 before Allen Goodger won another SAHPA race, this time from Maryborough, and yet another four years before he won again from the same racepoint. These were birds he considered his 'Maryborough family'. They were effective up to about 600km, but tended to be uncompetitive after that. The 1964-rung 'Elliott Hen' was about to change that. Allen raced her to Finke (1120km) and she finished 17th. Allen disregarded the performance. He didn't particularly like the hen and told one person that she'd probably homed with another pigeon. However when she took 19th place the following year from this same, distant point he had to apportion the appropriate credit to her, and she entered the Goodger stockloft and left her indelible footprint all over it. Within the next few years Allen was able to win the longer, harder races – including Oodnadatta and Cook, a task that would have eluded the Goodger birds prior to the arrival of that great hen.

She was known to have produced at least thirty direct children who each produced at least one top-30 Association position – and many of them produced numerous positions.

This all came to a head one day when Ray Rowe, who had purchased two special pigeons at the Goodger dispersal sale in 1982 (one of them being the famed 'Lot 60') had some spare cocks at the end of the 1983 season. A spare cock at Ray's place was apparently in a similar position to a spare young cock at Allen's loft – in real jeopardy of being culled. Knowing their heritage, Grant Paterson suggested that they might be given to some of the 'workers' within the SAHPA. Ray fortunately concurred, and that's how the young cock SA82 11829, the son of Lot 60 found his way to the loft of John Pryor where he became the head of John's wonderful family.

It's interesting to note in that 1976 yearbook, that the name of John Pryor doesn't appear as the winner of any SAHPA race to that date, however young fanciers would be wise to note that he was already participating in the Association's management, and this had brought him into close contact with the leading fanciers of the day – and that's good company to keep. As Bart Cummings once said, you should "keep your horses in the lowest company (i.e. the easiest races) and yourself in the highest." That's what John Pryor was doing, and it was about to pay

handsomely when, as one of the SAHPA's 'workers' he took home the young, gifted cock 11829.

Without going into all the exploits of this phenomenal pigeon, he was to become a part of one of the most incredible races within SAHPA history. He was of course a son of that wonderful hen known simply as 'Lot 60'. She herself contained the famous Goodger champions known Australia-wide as the '\$1900 Cock', the 'Nundroo Winner', the 'Cook Winner' etc. Her paternal grandsire was a son of the Elliott Hen, and on her maternal side her graddam was a granddaughter of the Elliott hen. She was to produce three sons (one of them being 11829) that duly produced the first three placegetters in that memorable Temora event won by Grant Paterson's hen.

Grant's hen only went to three SAHPA races, winning 21st Mitiamo (550km), 20th Benalla (690km), and 1st Temora (820km). Then, in her first year at stock she bred the SAHPA 'Bird of the Year' for Roy Dangerfield, when Roy's young hen won 4th & 6th SAHPA Booroorban (560 kms). Many more top class birds would follow. Few of her youngsters ever got to a race, because of their immediate value for stock. Grant raced six of her youngsters to win Association positions, and many were gifted to other fanciers. One gifted young hen produced thirteen top-30 SAHPA positions for her fortunate recipient.

But back to that famous Temora race. Firstly, Temora is a terribly tough racepoint. Like releases from Bathurst and Junee, the birds must fly from east to west, and that usually means the birds have to face into the wind. One fancier reminisced that he'd take a young fancier to a group of top Adelaide fanciers and reported that he didn't realise that there were so many 'Junee Winners' in Adelaide. "What do you mean?" came the older fancier's reply. "Well", said the young fellow, "everywhere I went people kept showing me their 'Junee hen'."

"They're not Junee winners," came the elder's retort. "They're pigeons which managed to home from Junee." That's how tough this point (and Bathurst and Temora) were viewed.

Now back to the 1991 Temora race itself. Grant related,

"It was no surprise when none of the Temora birds were home on the night, however I knew that I had a very good hen in the race, and hoped that she wouldn't be far away. She duly arrived at 5.40am on the Sunday morning, and knowing the race conditions I considered she had to be an early clocking. I'd had a lot of good placings to this stage, but her success was icing on the cake. John Pryor was to finish second and third – not an unexpected result for John – however we soon came to realise that something special had occurred - each of the three placegetters were from three different sons of the famous Lot 60".

Now we need to step back a few years, because Grant had earlier bred a phenomenal Goodger-line hen rung SA 76 51397. She had already produced a heap of SAHPA positions when Con Moukas purchased her at Grant's 1983 sale. Her sire was a son of Allen's 2nd Oodnadatta hen (a very dominant hen in the Goodger family) while her mother was bred from a brother to Allen's famous Cook winner. Pedigrees don't come much better than this one, and 51397 was

destined to eventually travel to John Pryor's loft to mate with that gift cock 11829 – and together they produced the sire of John's marvellous Morundah winner and a heap of other champions. Grant was later to acquire from Con Moukas a son of 11829 and 51397, the hen he'd sold in 1983, and he became famously known as 'The Port Lincoln Cock'. He was to become the famed mate to the Temora winner, and references to them were subsequently to be found in top quality pigeons throughout Australia.

Few fanciers experience the joy of owning a 'great' champion. Grant was to have two: 51397, the wonderful stock hen who became the subject of Tim Fawcett's excellent article titled 'The Power of One', and secondly a race hen of the quality of the Temora Winner. Her death finalises a great story, nevertheless within the story remains the lessons – perhaps better described as an 'instruction manual' - regarding how a wonderful family of pigeons were created, maintained, and extrapolated.

I had no idea when I set out in 2007 to write the story of the Goodger pigeons that it would reach to five articles. There were so many champions, and so many fanciers who had won important races because of pigeons gained from Allen. Allen Goodger was an incredible fancier who was much admired within the fancy because he shared the wealth he had acquired within his loft. The clever way in which he put together this enduring family, and the manner in which he was so amiable about sharing them with fellow-fanciers (*and that's the really important bit*) make him one of the truly-greats of our pastime. He was a winner who enjoyed helping others to win.

I don't believe there are any long-distance pigeons in the world better than those tested and proven within Australia. I can't prove it, but I firmly believe it to be true. And within the annals of our great races and special birds sits that famous race from Temora in 1991, when three hens bred from three sons of Lot 60 filled the placings, headed by a hen that had now gone to three races that year and been well placed in everyone of them. Such champions are rare.

And such stories are rare too, and we need to understand, record and cherish them. We don't have the folklore that pertains to the thoroughbred industry, nevertheless, the efforts of these wonderful birds continues to attract, amaze and sustain our interest. When people ask me why I enjoyed racing pigeons I'd tell them of a bird released 500 miles away in the early morning, and I'd see it coming at 6pm that same day – a tiny speck in the sky – heading my way – landing in front of me. Sometimes I think they didn't believe me – surely a one-pound bird can't do such a thing? But they do. Sometimes they can't quite reach home and have to spend a night tired, hungry and thirsty - on a rooftop - and take up their quest again at first light, just as that Paterson hen did.

No wonder they fascinate us.

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