

# Bill Verco asks "WHAT IS ENOUGH?"

I guess that the most asked question within the pigeon fraternity is when should we start tossing the birds, and how much do they need. The first part of this question I believe is easily answered; the birds should not be taken down the road until they have been ranging well away from the loft for at least three weeks.

Most fliers generally like to toss from about five kilometers, then possibly increase at increments of approximately ten kilometers, especially with the young ones. I usually give mine two thirty-kilometer tosses then out to a hundred, the reason for this is that before the car the only method of training was by

train. The first suitable release point in those days was forty clicks out and old habits are hard to break, although I must admit that I changed their format this year by giving them one fifteen km toss first.

I am possibly very fortunate, as I live very near the sea and when they are tossed north they have a tendency to hug the coast. Along this area there are very few resident Falcons, but even so they still get an occasional bird. I can sympathize with those fliers that fly the birds in areas where there is a high density of raptors, it must be devastating. It is easy to understand why fliers start at such a short distance; we all know

that when there is a hawk attack the birds become traumatized with fear. Especially so the youngsters who really panic and go for miles off course, before they can start to get the old thinking cap on and rationally start to orientate on to the line required that allows them to find their way home. So it is obvious that these short tosses are a necessity to give the birds every possible chance. For it is true that the further out that the birds are taken on their first toss, especially in this high density area where they are continually bombarded by the falcon their inexperience could lead to unacceptable losses.

We should never condemn a youngster which has an early set back, because remember that they are still learning. We have all seen or been told of people finding pigeons in their garages or hiding under an object in their yard, apparently unharmed but reluctant to fly, nine times out of ten this can be put down to a hawk attack.

The second part of this article is how much tossing do they need? Possibly it should be broken down into two parts and that is education (young birds) and to achieve some degree of fitness. There is no doubt that like children the youngsters need to be educated, we all know that if children are not sent to school that they soon fall behind the others that do. An older person, one who has learnt the ropes and can impart his or her knowledge to them, educates the children going to school. So it is with our birds, it should always be a practice to send a few old birds to help the youngsters on their first few flights, for these wise old birds have been there and done that. Like me I believe that most fliers would agree, that training is essential for education.

At this point I thought that it would be a good idea to look at the training methods of the four top fliers in the SAHPA as told to me. The winner was a very dedicated tosser, the comment was made, that he wore his car out tossing the birds. How much flying around the loft is unknown to me, but very little I guess, for I believe that he was out on the road each and every

day tossing them to a hundred km's plus. It should be said at this point that he won the aggregate convincingly.

The person that finished second, tossed his birds at least twice a week up to a hundred km's until the first race. Then they were sent only on a thirty-kilometer toss once a week, this he said was done just to keep their minds on the job. These birds were expected to work around the loft for at least one hour in the morning each day excluding race day. He tells me that he has not changed these methods for years, and every year this flier is consistently in the top few.

Number three because of his poor breeding season decided to be lay back and reduce their training from previous years, which he did. His birds had five tosses from seventy km's before the first race and then tossed from the same distance twice a week (the average time on these flies was fifty five minutes), the birds were let out once a day and were allowed to free range off the roof not forced. This flier had his best year ever.

The next flier, early in the season trained his birds fairly comprehensively up to the first race, and from then on they were given a toss which took about two hours on the Sunday and then a forty-minute toss during the week. The birds were expected to work around the loft for about twenty-five minute twice a day

Again I must point out that this flier is the epitome of consistency, he

very seldom misses being placed in the SAHPA points.

Summing up it appears that all these fliers send their birds on the early tosses firstly for education, and to bring them up to some degree of fitness. Their training at this point appears to be on a par, but it seems that after the first race they all traveled down different roads metaphorically speaking. One was a heavy tosser, two of these fliers pigeons spent very little time in the training basket and the other gave his pigeons what most people would call a medium amount of basket work and yet they all achieved similar results.

What does this tell us, I know that I am possibly drawing a long bow here, but looking at the facts it appears that the tosses are essential to educate the babies. After that if you keep the birds well and fit then basket tossing can be kept to a minimum.

Not only does this save wear and tear on us, but also reduces the chance of the pigeons getting hit by a raptor. I can hear you saying but the top flier thrashed the living daylights out of his birds, sure this is true, and I am **not** knocking his training methods. But I have made this assumption on the fact that the two fliers who's pigeons saw less of the inside of the basket were small to medium fliers and were possibly in the poorer locations within the SAHPA.

To me pigeon flying is like a picture frame and it is really up to us on how well we paint the picture within.