

IT IS THE BREEDING THAT COUNTS

It is a truism that it is breeding that counts. For many years Ireland and similarly New Zealand have been credited with producing the tops in race horses, and the assumption that "there is something in the soil" in those countries which affects the animal's diet and nutrition may have some merit in it. However whether it be race horses, greyhounds, pigeons, cattle or sheep breeding is an art as well as a science, and for some, producing top quality stock is simple while to others it appears they must have some magic touch.

Actually whether a person is trained scientifically or whether they have "an eye" for stock is relatively unimportant, as in actual fact both types of breeders of good ones, are working more or less on the same lines. Whether they know this, matters little, the fact remains that when the situation is analysed they have come up with the same answer and through what could be called the same means.

You may say this is all double dutch to me and I can't see what you are driving at. The answer my friend is simple. To produce anything worthwhile you must start off with something of merit. In other words you can't breed with bad ones and get good ones. Put a good cock to a good hen and you may get good ones, but put bad birds together and what chance have you to produce outstanding specimens? No, the odds against even reproducing the outstanding from outstanding stock are in the balance so the chance of producing a Combine winner from two road peckers is astronomically remote. Yet you will see fliers year in and year out breeding with the same stock and hoping that some mischance will cause the production of a winner. It is a mischance because the chances are considerably weighted towards even making his loft worse. Nature always tends towards the mediocre this is why horse, dog and pigeon breeders to say nothing of cattle and sheep find it so difficult even after

paying out enormous sums of money for top class animals, to maintain this high quality standard.

Many theories have been dreamt up regarding how to breed the champion, and most of these have been proved by time and experience to be wrong. Possibly the one theory which has been proved to be of value in practice is that of line breeding. Those who do not believe in this approach to the situation usually don't adhere to the idea because they started off with their efforts at line breeding with mediocre birds and ended up with the same or worse. Then they say "Oh that is a lot of rot, and all you get is a lot of weedy birds that can't fly over the fence." In their case

FOR THE BEGINNER (By GRADUATE)

this could have been quite true, but reliable breeders for centuries have been following this system in actual fact whether they knew it or not. You may say why say whether they knew it or not? The reason I say this is because although the breeders that had success years ago by this method they were completely unaware of what they were doing from what could be termed a scientific viewpoint but they knew that if they put old

Sam to Mary they would get good ones because they had done so before and they knew that Sam was actually Mary's uncle when they thought about it but no one ever discussed what we know as line breeding so they just sort of used what stock they had and all these belonged to the one family and they kept on getting good ones. Any weeds were smartly disposed of by selling to some unsuspecting person or were knocked on the head.

This is why pedigrees came into existence to keep a record of what was in a particular animal's family or background, and so that the owner of a top bird, horse, bull, or ram could see how he was produced. In other words a pedigree to a knowledgeable breeder is an open book. He can see where those sturdy wings came from, that low set body, that attractive and alert head, that keel that follows through and that tapering body that is streamlined for performance. He can also see what type of temperament, how much heart he can expect from the bird when it is under pressure, as he knows the family of birds to which it belongs.

It is all right to say "Old So-and-So has no education and he doesn't keep pedigrees and all that jazz but he can always come up with a winner." Of course he can but does old So-and-So go and buy in other birds each season and cross them into his? Not Pygmalion likely. No he has had that loft intact for many years and started with good sound stock that were never far out of a place and he has kept up that "winning streak" for years. Of course he has and you would expect him to because he hasn't introduced this bird and that bird into his loft. He had very few faults

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in his birds to start with and he introduced no more faults so he could only breed the same as what he had. This is actually the theory of line breeding that by keeping the breeding within a family although you may "fix" certain family faults you similarly "fix" the good points and you certainly can't get a multiplicity of outside because they weren't there to start with so where could they come from?

What happens to form a bird, a pup, a lamb, a goat? In simple language the two cells join to form one, one from the male and one from the female to make one unit, the new being. Both sperm cell and egg cell have their own chromosomes, so it would appear that the new living creature would contain twice as many chromosomes but this is not true. Nature discards half of each so in round figures there is half the father and half the mother's characteristics in the offspring. But what features are lost and what are retained? This you won't know until the animal is fully developed and tested and even then some features may be dormant or

hidden from view and so you won't ever know except by using this animal for future breeding and seeing what is then apparent in the offspring which was present in the grandparents. It is quite easy to see that from every subsequent generation and this losing half of each unit each time just how little of a great grandparent these possibly could be in a great grandson or daughter. How much less of the famous ones will there be if you fiddle about and keep introducing other stock that had no connection either in blood or general appearance? So what chance have you reproducing that outstanding bird of yesteryear if you have crossed everything except the garden cat into the breed?

Now the old timers did not know the theory of line breeding, that is of mating related birds together but they actually carried out line breeding through pride, pigheadedness or poverty because they kept to their own loft for their breeding. In breeding means breeding birds together that are not further apart than two generations such as mother to son,

brother to sister etc., and this only varies from line breeding in the degree of intensity of line breeding. In line breeding one ancestor does not appear twice in three previous generations, whereas in in breeding one ancestor appears twice in two immediate generations. Sometimes there are more than one ancestor in the pedigree in these two immediate generations but this is not a must to be in breeding. Old hands and new ones will tell you that their best birds showed an uncle and niece relationship or the same thing with sexes reversed or a mother to son which was very like her in general make and shape and performance. Or it may be a grandfather granddaughter production or half sister and half brother with the father of both a wonderful bird that flew terrific times and was a stud force in the stock box.

Actually this sorting out of what birds to keep and breed from is sorted out somewhat by the race basket as the weak ones don't home to be used as stud forces and if you have any birds in the stock box that haven't

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produced anything worthwhile then you get rid of them irrespective of pedigree or appearance. The main thing is that if you have attained any success with your birds then don't start buying in "better" ones from glowing advertisements that someone is being big hearted and is dying to sell you their best birds so you can win races. If you have had no success at all and it hasn't been through any fault of yours, as you have fed them right, trained them right and did everything with methodical regularity then dice the whole damned lot of them and start looking for something worthwhile. You can buy it if you have enough money but don't get a bird here and a bird there and then end up with a fruit cake sort of thing with no two parts of the whole alike. You should avoid obtaining different types of birds. Breeding a big one to a weed doesn't produce a medium sized beauty, or if by some fluke or freak of nature you do then watch out what it produces because there is more likelihood of it producing weeds or giants than something like itself.

Yes, good birds are obtainable and always have been from reliable breeders or from genuine sell-out sales of reputable lofts where the owner has passed on or has become crippled with arthritis or something that has made him almost bedridden and he can't carry on any more as an active pigeon flier. These things unfortunately happen to us all so there's always the chance for a newcomer.

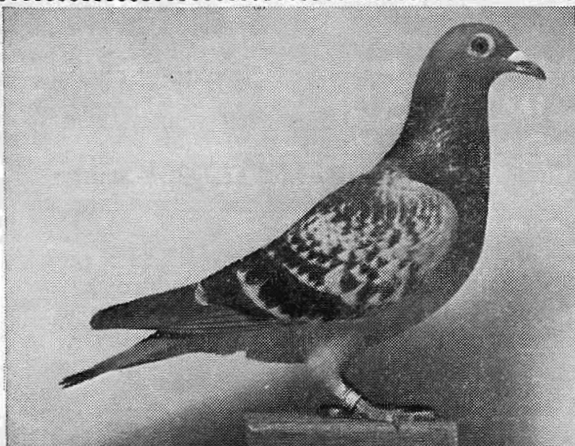
Or even without such an unfortunate event occurring you must realise that all the birds anyone can breed, especially well known fliers who have a good sized stock box, are not required in a flying team, as you will find upon examination that the best fliers restrict the size of their flying teams. Thus it is that there are top quality birds available to you and it is possible to get the nucleus of a future loft from the top fliers. When you get these birds don't go racing them out to the bitter end but regard them as your stock birds for future seasons. You have the same blood, the same pigeons as the man you got them from so look after them and build your loft on these quality ones.

Opponents of line breeding will always be able to quote some instance of where they crossed different strains or types of birds and got winners. Of course they can, but watch what results they get in future years or ask them what did they breed from this "sport" for that is all it could be. I realise that many good lofts have bred Harrison Gits Soffle pigeons and you may say "Well there are three crosses, so where is your argument?" Yes many known winners have been Edmondson Barkers, Stassart Sions or Gurnay Grooters or other double or triple named strains but did the winners come in the first crossing? I think you will find that the breeders made the cross to change type slightly and then obtaining what they sought, they kept exclusively to the

new family they had produced and over the years kept to this.

Anyway this type of crossing as you may term it (I call it a combining of qualities) was done during the formative years of pigeons and pigeon racing just like the various breeds of sheep and cattle were developed and have been improved. No one needs to change "type" nowadays for fortunately it has all been done for us, and all we have to do is to preserve the quality that was produced for us, so get the best, breed with the best and you will have the best. Don't be chopping and changing your birds and getting one from here and one from there because you are introducing possible reductions of quality and most surely you will get the worst coming out, not the best. Remember that those chromosomes split and you lose permanently half of what you have from both sides of the pedigree, and as the chances are equal that you will lose the good as well as the bad so even with careful breeding you stand to be unlucky, so what chance has the haphazard breeder unless he has some guardian angel attending to his needs.

The old timers knew type and what was required and they only bred those birds together that were of similar type and performance. Maybe they didn't keep records like we do these days, but they had more leisure time then. Life wasn't so much hurry and bustle and pigeons or whatever hobby
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they had absorbed their complete spare time. Thus it was they could remember and know their pigeons better and "lived with them" more wild birds also especially in areas where shooting is permitted as the number of birds per acre is always much of a constant. If an area is made into a sanctuary for five or ten years at the end of that time you'll find that the number of birds in the area isn't any greater. If it does get to extremely high numbers and the amount of available feed is far below requirements for that number of birds the weak ones die off or botulism or some other disease breaks out and Mother Nature brings the numbers back to normal and everything that lives is sound and healthy.

Such things are expected or we call them natural, and thus it is with pigeons the tendency for Nature to be a great leveller and it is only Man who can improve on the average or the normal by careful and selective breeding, and you my friend are one of the men who can develop pigeons rather than let them fall into the road pecker type, or on the other hand by not knowing what you are

doing you can contribute and assist nature to revert to the mediocre. It is up to you. Regarding the production of weeds, albinos and all the rest by line breeding or in breeding let me refer you to an experiment carried out by an American University on rats. They used rats because they bred quicker and there were more generations in a shorter time which expedited the experiment. The scientists concerned started with several related rats and just left them to their own devices to breed as they wished brother to sister, father to daughter, mother to son and so on and all rats that were produced of small size or off type the scientists dispatched very smartly. At the end of ten, twenty or even more generations of this inbreeding, this line breeding the rats produced were bigger and healthier than the original root stock. However remember they disposed of any weeds or off type productions. This is what you must do with your birds. The basket will sort out the ones you miss but don't stock birds that you don't send in the basket because you doubt their ability or strength, but have kept them because of "their blood". The chances of

breeding strength from weakness are most remote and in actual fact you will be wasting your time and deteriorating your loft. So go to it. Check your loft for good birds, discard the others without any compunction and then if you haven't what you want left start looking for what you do want elsewhere and even if it means starting all over again in part if not in total, then do it and you'll find that the future can hold some prospects for success for you.

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