

Tony & Sue Edinborough

1st SAHPA Marla 2004

The circumstances surrounding the 600 mile Marla race can be viewed two ways

For the winners Tony and Sue Edinborough it is sad that it will go down as their first and only SAHPA win due to Tony's battle with a life threatening illness - so debilitating that in January 2005, the couple were forced to sell all their birds because Tony was not well enough to look after them.

Tony is a very interesting character, having migrated to Australia from his childhood home of West Indies.

He raced pigeons there on the island of Trinidad. Distance is a problem so races are conducted between islands.

When he came to Australia he met Sue and rekindled his interest when he discovered that her uncle Jules DeBrenni had birds in Broken Hill. It was from Jules that Tony and Sue obtained their original birds 15 years ago. Since then other additions of SA birds have blended into that team.

Until Marla, Tony and Sue's best win had been in the Southern Fed. From Bathurst so we can see that the loft had plenty of long distance blood.

The Edinborough's live 60 kilometres South of Adelaide at the seaside of Sellick's Beach, a well known tossing point for many flyers.

On the day of their Marla win, no birds have been

clocked closer to Adelaide so Tony wasn't expecting anything for hours. He was mowing the lawns when his bird arrived.

Being an extreme back-marker, it was an amazing effort to clock in before any other loft, even those 100 kilometres closer to the race point.

Others can speculate whether or not their bird went down Yorke Peninsula before coming across the water. Perhaps it simply flew on into the night. Without doubt, it was a runaway winner.

The breeding is interesting. The sire comes down from Alan Thede's in-bred red Goodger family. Some time back Alan mated an old original Goodger to it's grandchild to preserve the strain. Tony and Sue bought one of these stock birds from well known distance combination Buxton and Snyders. He mated this bird with an inbred Catthrysse down from Peter Roumelitolis.

The resultant Marla winner was the product of two in-bred pigeons. Grandfather to grand-daughter on one side and brother to sister on the other.

As mentioned, it is disappointing that Tony and Sue may not again experience the joy and satisfaction of winning a long distance SAHPA race, but the positive is that they achieved it despite Tony's illness. Perhaps it was meant to be.

Phone masts confusing pigeons

A growing number of homing pigeons are getting lost due to interference from the new "unseen enemy" of mobile phone masts, racing experts claim. The birds' natural instincts are being confused by radiation signals from an increasing number of transmitters, the Royal Pigeon Racing Association said.

Racers say anecdotal evidence shows poor returns over the last two years. Pigeons are thought to find their way home using landmarks and the earth's magnetic field.

Peter Bryant, of the RPRA, said its Stray Birds Committee had proposed attaching a GPS tracking device to pigeons to investigate the problem. "It's fine with eagles and albatross, but for the poor little pigeons it would hamper their return," said Mr Bryant.

'STRESSED'

He said it was impossible to estimate how many pigeons were vanishing because of the transmitters.

"During the World War II, thousands of aircraft carried two pigeons in case they the plane was downed so they could send messages," he said.

"The birds were also parachuted to the Resistance. Now they're facing this unseen enemy in the form of mobile phone masts." Pigeon fancier Anne Pitkeathly,

50, from the Isle of Wight, said she was losing more and more birds. "When I started I was told I would lose baby birds but never the big ones. "A lot of people think it's mobile phone masts."

She claimed one of her pigeons had recently reacted badly after being near a mast, saying it was "stressed" and "trying to be sick".

Previous research by German scientists in 1999 suggested that short wave radiation had an "undefined negative" impact on homing pigeons. It was found that exposed birds took longer to get home, flew at lower levels and were reluctant to go near transmitters.

Between 50,000 to 60,000 pigeons are estimated to have gone missing last year due to problems such as bird of prey attacks and poor weather, the RPRA said.