

THE RIGHT STOCK

by Vin Blanden

When the decision is made to embrace pigeon racing, it is cheaper in the long run to start with the right blood.

The novice must realise at the outset that good pigeons eat no more than bad ones, and if the base of the venture is built on cheap birds without much history, his introduction to the sport can be costly.

Apart from procuring proven breeding pairs, which is not very likely, the beginner's best chance to get away to a good start is to obtain strong, healthy young stock not too far removed from good winners.

Children and grandchildren of proven birds have as much chance of producing the desired result as the actual winners themselves and these can be obtained from most established owners.

It is not just a matter of pairing winners with winners, as any successful owner will admit. For if this was so, the maintaining of a winning loft for years on end would be easy. In pigeon racing there is probably nothing more difficult than to stay at the top for more than a decade.

Most owners who have enjoyed this success are content with their lot and are invariably willing to assist the newcomer with the proper advice needed to start him on the right track.

In most cases the old hand can advise the novice where to obtain his foundation stock and in many ways help him to steer a course not so likely to end in disappointment. It is a safe bet that the young owner will be told that he will have to work hard for what he gets and that he has a head for other purposes than on which to keep his hat. Young virile hens of the proper bloodlines are more likely to produce good winners than old hens of the same blood. If he can procure hens of one, two or three years which have completed reasonably hard races without signs of physical distress, he has a good chance of making the grade early.

It does not matter so much if they have not won, the important factor is that they are bred right and are of tough constitution. These are the hens which can produce the good long distance hard day winners if paired to the right cocks.

There are exceptions to the rule, but old hens which continue to leave good ones in distance races are rare.

It does not matter how old the cock is providing he is still fertile and willing to do his share in rearing the squeakers. In most cases it is the male which provides

the quality (winning traits) and the female the vitality (endurance).

The hen is like the earth if it is old and played out the resultant crop is weak. Strength is the essential requirement for a good breeding hen, and despite what may be claimed to the contrary, if she cannot raise four rounds of youngsters without breaking down she is not strong enough to remain in the breeding loft.

Whether he is a winner or not, and keeping bloodlines in mind at all times, there is a lot to be said for the cock which tries so hard that he topples over when he gets home. Many a good trier has proved his value as a breeder when given a mate with a strong constitution.

Courage will not make a good winner unless it has the strength and strength, likewise, is of no use unless it has the determination of purpose. It is the combination of both that winners of long arduous races possess.

It is likely that as many good winners, and probably more have been bred by parents which have not won, than by winners. But few have resulted from birds which have not possessed the desired genetical background.

FLIGHT TECHNIQUE STUDY by Vin Blanden

Experiments on the valuable aerodynamics of a pigeon's wing have been carried out by Dr C.J. Pennycuick at Bristol University.

Dr Pennycuick's observations, which were published in "The Journal of Experimental Biology", provided material for the science report on aerodynamics in "The Times" of January.

The experimental bird which had been taught to take its feed, fed to it down a tube, learnt to glide in a stationary position in a wind tunnel so that its performance could be measured.

Watching how the pigeon held its position in the wind tunnel, the observer was able to note the techniques it used to control its flight.

An important part in the control process is played by the feet. They are carried in a retracted position pointing forward below the wing in free flight, but are used as a delicate mechanism for controlling drag in the wind tunnel. Any tendency to move forward in the tunnel, and out of range of the feed, is corrected by lowering the feet and increasing the drag. Untrained birds tended to pedal with their feet and the most talented never learnt to control themselves in the wind tunnel with their feet in the fully retracted position.

The wings were also used to control drag. At slow wind speeds the wing is carried fully spread and extended more or less at right angles with the body. The wing becomes more swept back as the wind speed increases and its total area is reduced by overlapping of the wing feathers. The wing is swept back so far at the highest speeds that its leading edge is almost parallel to the air flow, producing a significant reduction in wind drag.

Although the lift to drag ratio is never very high, the pigeon is able to maintain it at near the maximum value over a wide range of air speeds by adjusting its wing geometry. (The article went on to say that this at least is something which is only beginning to be achieved by aeronautical engineers).

Calculations of the power consumed by the pigeon in flight were also made by Dr Pennycuick. These suggest that the speed range over which the pigeon can fly runs from three to sixteen metres a second.

Note: Contrary to this calculation racing pigeons in top physical condition have proved they can fly at forty-five metres a second over distances in excess of 500 miles.

These velocities are calculated from time of release to time of clocking and do not allow for time wastage at release point after liberation or any deviation from the straight and narrow line en route for home.

It is obvious that pigeons must fly at a greater speed than which is credited to them. The maker of the world record made here in 1947 from Marree (SA) 360 miles, averaged about 50 metres a second for its flight of just under four hours.

The experiment seemed to show that the pigeon fuel consumption is lowest when it flies at sixteen metres a second or slightly more than thirty miles per hour.

Performances of winning pigeons in some of our hardest Alice Springs races of 830 miles, when the event was not won until early in the third day, tend to agree as the winning velocities were around the 880 yards per minute mark.

The importance of fat as the supplier of energy was also noted in the observations. However, before any observations of such experiments can be accepted as really worthwhile, it is most important that the birds used are in top physical condition. If they are not, the conclusions reached are just as worthless as those which would result from the times and performances of racehorses and human runners if they were in full training.

LARRY MAYNE