

## A BLAST FROM THE PAST

### "PIGEON NOTES" by Graham Badger

#### • MERV HATCH

For members of the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association winning a place in the top ten flyers in any one season is a major achievement.

And last year, West Torrens flyer Merv Hatch had this distinction.

He finished ninth behind Hampstead competitor Fred Delsar.

Merv is a milkman at Henley Beach. His interest in the sport began when he was a youth at Port Pirie. During his service overseas, his parents took charge of his pigeons for him.

After being discharged in 1946 he settled in Adelaide, and has been flying birds in Adelaide since.

He has flown as a member of the Henley Beach club (1965-71) as well as with his present club, winning the points on a number of occasions.

Pigeons from the Hatch loft earned their owner third place in the SAHPA aggregate points in both 1970 and 1971.

An added bonus won by Merv last year was the trophy for the most points earned in the six middle distance and in the South Derby.

Merv's main objective now is to take out top position in the points.

During the past year Merv received the "thrill of my life" when he clocked the treble from 1,710 birds in the SAHPA Benalla race. All three birds homed in the dark, the first two arriving at 7.50pm and the third at 2.45am the next day.

The last time a SAHPA treble was achieved was in 1937.

Merv has had three families of pigeons which have flown very well for him. He has now mated them together and formed his own strain.

He has six SAHPA race winners and numerous placegetters in his loft today, and many of these he has bred himself.

Age of his champions does not deter him from attempting to breed better progeny. One of his old Gurnay cockbirds is 17 years of age and still breeding winners.

Merv finds that pigeon racing is not a lazy man's sport and that pigeons must be looked after the whole year through – not just at racing time.

Both feeding and hygiene play an important role in the success or otherwise of any man's loft.

Like all fanciers, Merv would be at a loss in the sport without his wife. Every day she lets the birds out for exercise when they are in training. In addition, she will if necessary, keep a look out for birds returning on racedays, particularly on the long distance events.

Two prominent owners who have strains represented in the loft include Ron Eitzen, and the Blatchford loft of Victoria.

In the past Merv has paid up to \$70 for one pigeon for breeding; however the results have not been of value.

A mark of a good loft is that owners keep their champions and don't sell them to other competitors. This is the case with the Hatch loft. He has however given some away to friends in the past.

About 150 pigeons are housed in the now established loft. However the Hatch family also met with pigeon racing success when they previously lived at Seaton Park for 10 years.

#### • 'ARTY' MORRIS

The distinguished pigeon racing career of South Australian Homing Pigeon Combine flyer Frank "Arty" Morris goes back to 1926.

And this is one of the reasons he has proved such a hard man to beat.

Up until 12 years ago Frank flew in the top group of flyers in the SA Homing Pigeon Association.

He made a name for himself, with consistent placings and wins, including a hard race from Albury.

Since his switch to the Combine he has had continued success, and now can proudly say he has won from just about every release point used.

Last year Frank's birds won two Marrees in the Port Adelaide Association and an Oodnadatta in the Combine, as well as a fourth and a third in the same races.

And they won for him second place in the PAA aggregate points behind Alex Wear.

His original birds came from the stock of Dick Collins (SAHPA) and the Stein loft of Balaklava. Main bloodlines are those of the Stassart and Jurion strains.

Early in his career Frank flew with his late brother, Les.

Because of strict family breeding, Frank would now have possibly one of the few remaining pure Stassart and Jurion families in SA.

Other Stassart and Jurion birds to have been introduced came from Charlie Henderson.

It is only through a gift that pigeons from his loft leave his care. He does not believe in selling to other owners.

However, those that have been loaned out have come good with champions for other owners.

These include a hen which was loaned to SAHPA flyer Colin Copeland two years ago, and which bred him his Cook winner this year, and a pair which bred a Maryborough placed bird for another association flyer.

Of the 200-250 birds Frank looks after, about 50 would be stock pigeons.

His formula for success starts with good pigeons from good flyers.

He says you should not have too many to start with and that if your original breeders are performed flyers "you are half way home".

Breeding good strong healthy youngsters is important, and if a youngster falls below the health standard the owner should not waste time with it.

Frank believes champion racing pigeons are "made" in the first few weeks of breeding.

North or south races suit Frank and his birds, even though he was told he would never win on the south at the time of his joining the Combine.

He does however have a slightly better chance of success on the north because of overfly.

Pigeon racing is purely a sport for this champion.

Since his start in the sport he has only had three years break . . . and that was for no special reason. He had the birds but did not fly them.

His keenness for success usually sees him waiting near the loft on race days long before the birds are due home.