

SA's top racing pigeon owner for 1972, Keith Wickham of Mitcham, is not just an overnight success.

He has held the yearly crown on an least seven occasions since he first began racing with the SA Homing Pigeon Association in 1933.

In his career, which spans almost 40 years, he has built up a reputation as one of the hardest flyers to beat anywhere in Australia.

His twin brother, Ross, is also a very formidable opponent. His loft is at Clapham.

The two Wickhams began in the sport together and have founded their lofts on similar bloodlines.

Ross has diversified a little from the stricter breeding beliefs of his brother, who has 95 p.c. original blood dating back to four imported pairs.

During the war Keith was based in England for almost four years, and it was during this time that he cemented friendships with several top British flyers.

In 1946 he imported four pairs from the lofts of the Sharrock brothers and Jack Howard (both based near Liverpool) and Ted Bradshaw in Manchester.

Restrictions were placed on such imports in the early 1950s, thus limiting the available blood.

The imported birds were based mainly on the Gits and Bricoux families. However, Logan and Stasart blood was also present.

Clever line breeding from these originals has proved the undoing of many a good flyer.

Keith, who is a member of the Hyde Park Homing Pigeon Club, has kept his family closely knitted — and the result has been success.

He is a member of the management committee of his club as well as a member of the five-man committee which administers the affairs of the SAHPA.

All his flying, with the exception of one year (1967) with the SA Homing Pigeon Union, has been with the association.

He built a large two-storey loft in his backyard in 1946 and this has gone practically unaltered since.

His racing birds appreciate their living conditions and the treatment they are given. This shows up in their results.

Most of his birds have a racing life of four years, before they are put to stock. And, in his experience, it has been his top racing hens, which have produced his new champions.

Keith races 75 p.c. hens and 25 p.c. cocks and most of the birds which have won him 17 association races since 1933 have been hens.



Mr. Wickham

The family started to become prominent in association results in 1952 when his favorite mealy hen won from Alice Springs.

His tally is one better than the previous record, set by the late Bert Minnerds.

In addition to wins, Keith has had birds placed second in 12 association events.

Since the war he has amassed about 200 association race certificates.

His birds have won from every race point except Ararat and Maryborough. The best he has been able to manage here has been two seconds and a third.

A buyer for Simpson Pope at Dudley Park, Keith is married with two children. His wife, Nancy, is regarded by Keith as the mainstay of his success.

Keith starts the season with about 90 to 100 flyers and Nancy feeds and exercises them while Keith is at work.

"If you haven't got a co-operative wife to help you out in this sport you might as well give it away," says Keith. "It is also no sport for the lazy."

"I have always tried to consider pigeon racing as a recreation rather than a business. The game, however is becoming far more professional than it used to be, therefore you have got to try a lot harder."

"Once you had a chance if your birds were fit, but now they have to be super fit," he adds.

"Main essentials to success are careful observation, correct deduction, determination, regularity and attention to the laws of hygiene," he says.