

Revisiting Greg Friese Queensland Racing Pigeon Federation.

By PJ Matthews.

Back in 2015, I did an in-depth interview with Greg on his methods and philosophies concerning the sport of pigeon racing and not much is changed since that initial interview. I understand that Greg is planning a clearance sale at the end of the year to allow him to spend more free time with his dear wife Sue. My initial conclusion has not changed but I state that Greg is a living legend and a Queensland Racing Pigeon Federation icon. He is usually not short for words, as what he has to say about the sport has been justified by hundreds of Federation, club and section tickets over his 40+ years racing with this Federation. He has earned the right to make comments on the observations that he has made over the years below and his record would attest to the fact that he knows what he's talking about.

Greg's Own story:

The purpose of this interview is to try to leave a blueprint for new flyers to achieve success based on my knowledge which they may or may not possess. This knowledge may help them to improve their birds when they are struggling for answers. It is not specifically designed or intended to place any disparaging comments on the imported pigeons that landed on our shores, nor the performances they may or may not have since they have been here.

In this regard, I would have to say that nearly everyone who has previously purchased birds from me has won Federation tickets out of them. One flyer that bought my birds and bred from them, placed second in the Federation averages with these birds.

These days with Sue being ill, we tend to spend as much time as we can together and travel whenever we can. I squeeze in the birds in between these times so I guess maybe I could have flown better, but one has to live too and have a family life and as I said it is only a sport. No matter how you look at it the sport, it is only a hobby and the one thing you must always endeavour to do is be honourable and fair to your competition and fellow pigeon fliers. No matter how you look at it, it's a hobby and should be treated that way as a mode of relaxation and pleasure.

I've been offered a lot of money for some of these birds and I rejected most offers in the past, but this time I intend only to keep a small nucleus of young birds to start again if I return to the sport after my wife and I do extensive touring.

I am a returned veteran and I have suffered a lot of post-traumatic stress since my return from Vietnam. I found one thing in life, which has been made obvious to me, and that is sanity is knowing what you are doing, how are you doing it, where you are doing it. Simply with pigeons, I know what I'm doing, where I'm doing it and I know how I'm doing it, so, it all adds up to keeping me sane when others may not be so lucky to have such a pleasurable distraction.

I race predominantly Australian bloodlines. I am not in the business of denigrating imported pigeons but like any other animal, there are horses for courses. I find from experience that pure imports don't do very well for me unless they are crossed into my family. Historically I have high losses of pure imported birds compared to my Australian bloodlines. I have however found that some imports cross very well with my birds to produce Federation ticketed pigeons. If any of these birds can't produce, I eliminate them out of my loft, even

Federation ticketed birds go if they are unable to reproduce themselves or produce better birds than themselves.

I want the bird to keep reproducing, as those who do are your future and if people continue to improve their birds, and work on a good genetic base, then it all gets easier each year to be competitive in every race. To do that one must have a bloodline crossed into them to be competitive in all races, with the prime object in mind to race and return home each time.

I like to think of breeding as a cake mix, where you adjust the different ingredients to make your cake perfect. I have found that it is best to have a quarter, eighth or a half cross, but it depends on what you need to make your cake mix suit your particular mix of genetics and needs.

You need to experiment with these crosses because they must compete in different types of conditions each week. The race may not necessarily suit one particular genetic bloodline. As an example take last week, which was a nine-hour fly in which the short distance birds simply just can't compete at these distances.

Each race is determined by the amount of time on the wing and long-distance birds must have both the aerodynamics and the genetics behind them. They might initially fly slower at the start of every race, but they can fly 16 hours without breaking a sweat, whereas the sprint middle-distance birds peak at their preferred tolerance and comfort distance and then start to lag. Long-distance pigeons continue to push for home.

The imports have their purpose. They are extremely fast, but I found from my experience they tend to be lost easily. So, in saying that, I do better with making my cake mix by infusing some of my tried-and-true proven long-distance genetics with them.

Generally, imported long-distance pigeons have a soft silky feather, whereas the old long-distance bloodlines have what I call a cotton feather. The imports have a soft feather which is an excellent feather for bright sunny days and allows them to cut through the air very quickly and very efficiently. Now the drawback with this soft feather is, as it gets towards the dark with moisture in the air, it tends to slow the birds up- contrary to what people seem to think.

Now, with a cotton feather, we have a bird that has an efficient tight-grained feather which is not fluffy. It can repel moisture, which is helpful if they are flying into the dark or the birds strike a bit of rain. The imports are excellent birds with bright sunny days and helping winds, however the long-distance pigeons like it dirty with more wind down their throat. The harder it is, the better they fly. In saying that, if you cross a bit of the silky feather into them, they do not do as good at those extreme distances as if they were a cotton feather of the original long-distance birds. The cotton and silky feather crossed produce excellent short to middle distance birds with improved returns.

Imports are all upfront and have muscles with plenty of power that powerfully scoop through the air and as a result, produce a faster animal at the start of a race. However, these birds can't maintain that pace after about six hours on the wing. The long-distance pigeons have a short back wing and well-ventilated primary flights with decent steps between the fourth and sixth primary flights allowing them to be very efficient over great distances.

The most important thing of all is to have a very short back wing. If one logically thinks about it, this allows the bird to flick release any unnecessary pressure by flicking the air out of the wing during the aerodynamical figure 8 movement of the wing through the air. So, the point I'm trying to make here, is that the sprint imports will eventually fatigue as they can't release

the air from their generally well flighted, full wing structure. This boils down again to wing structure, genetics and aerodynamics inherited by the birds.

I strive to produce birds to fly different distances with good returns. I am always confident that I will get my long-distance candidates home from the long races. Wing theory is essential when choosing birds to breed. The best way to describe this criteria and wing configuration is looking at the shortest distance from the wing butt to the joint, the shortest distance from the front of the wing to the back onto the secondaries, and the longest distance to the tip of the tenth primary. It is preferable to have two big steps on the fourth and the sixth flight from my experience.

With the long-distance imports, I find the colour is generally a problem with predator attacks targeting a coloured bird. With many piers (especially in the performing Jan Aarden bloodline) this can be a problem. Again, in the cake mix, one can gradually breed out the colour if one is working with exceptional birds and their winning progeny. Most of my birds are either line or inbred back to each other and still produce the goods. This can easily be seen by studying the pedigrees and if you invert the pedigree sheet you will see that the connections between the generations, which are shaped like a wineglass on the pedigree.

If that wineglass information doesn't directly relate to multiple Federation positions continually, then you have reason to doubt the quality and long-term viability of these birds in your loft. Interestingly, I have seen time and time again people bringing in new birds in with almost monotonous regularity. For some reason, pigeon fanciers must have the new flavour of the month, but rarely have I seen a long-term success of these birds to remain at the top of the game, whereas, the Balfe Harrison has won me top Federation positions in the Queensland Racing Pigeon Federation continually over the last 40 years.

So, what more do I need to say to prove my theory, as you will find that the birds that have been enhanced are always in the Federation positions, but unfortunately, with the imports it is generally hit and miss? I acknowledge that last week a Jan Aarden import beat me with only two birds coming through in the dark. It is worth noting that I just so happen to have the same import blood crossed into mine and acknowledge the quality of this bloodline when crossed into my birds also. Interestingly, Neville Jeffries from Warwick got my Balfe's and crossed them into the Jan Aarden's and he won six Federation placings with that combination. So, that stacks up against the previous comments I made about two compatible long-distance bloodlines clicking. I understand Neville got these birds from Pat Murphy from Toowoomba as did I. I only bred out of them for one season and returned them to Pat rather than breeding them into the ground, as I believe one must be honourable in the way one treats this sort of opportunity. I take my hat off to Pat for having such an incredible quality long-distance import family such as the Jan Aarden.

I'm endeavouring to breed off the originals to make sure they are genetically bred right as I do not wish to have numerous old birds which may become hit and miss in another loft. Sometimes you might go five or six years with the bird before they kick in. It took me six years to choose a cock bird from the Balfe's to cross into the imports. He was fourth Roma Federation and his sisters have been placed in the long distance Federation races. His full sister ran second in the Morven Federation and bred the long-distance Windorah Federation winner which was one of the hardest races you could ever have in Queensland.

My number one cock is 1096. I used 1096 as a cross into the sprint middle distance pigeons, which then began to be competitive during the early part of the season. Whereas, his half brother, when crossed into the original blood, produces birds to fly the extreme distances. It is extremely hard to beat the pure speed of imports in the short races, but on the other hand,

I like to get better returns and live to fight another day and despise sending birds away that I know can't get home.

Back in the 80s, I would purchase birds from both Noel Randall and Billy Sloan, and I remember spending a week's wages with Billy Sloan for one particular bird that I wanted. In the following weeks I bought birds from Noel Randall who bought them from Bill. Noel would double back most of these birds in the 2 long races and I would be there buying them the minute they landed on the landing board. That is the basis of my bloodlines today which are proven hard racers, that can recover quickly to do the miles over and over again. I should mention that I also bought the parents of the birds that I bought from that landing board and subsequently, I won the Federation averages the first year that I raced that bloodline. Unfortunately after that year, I had to move up north to work in the mines. The next 9 years saw me out of the sport, however, I kept my birds. On returning from up North in my first year that I flew the West(my preferred direction), I placed in the top 10 in the Federation averages with these birds. The following West I won the Top flyer for Federation averages and once more the next time. I have won Top Flyer 3 years from the West.

Something I have noticed is that the imports put weight on far more quickly, whereas the Balfe Harrison's always seemed to remain lean and mean. So, you have to be fully aware of what you're feeding the imports to get them to perform to their optimum and not overfeeding them. Simply put, I like to feed 19% protein for breeding and 15% for racing and all are kept on a basic mix the entire year-round.

Grain choice is important. There are certain grains that I could use to put an extra ounce on the birds body weight for a long-distance event and they will fly twice as far as they normally would fly. Yet feeding a similar amount of another grain has no effect whatsoever and no benefit.

I buy all my seed (corn, wheat, milo) in bulk for under 50 cents a kilo though it may not necessarily be the best quality feed that you can buy, it does the job. I am not a fanatic on polished feeds and simply buy in bulk to suit my pocket.

It is the protein content which determines whether the birds survive for long races. If you continue to deprive them of the protein content, they are generally not there at the end of the year. I feed lightly in the early part of the season and as the distance increases, I layer the feed ensuring that the protein content is not restricted because this will spell the end of pigeons for long-distance racing.

Again, it is horses for courses, so choose what you want to win and plan accordingly. For me I just change the mix slightly and make it a bit heavier and leave it in front of them for a little bit longer to lay a bit of extra weight on the birds for the marathon they intend to complete in the next few weeks.

If they come home and stagger, they are not getting enough, but if they come, in good order and blow out the next day as though they've never been away, you then know you're on the right track.

I like to race them every week to sort out those that can handle it from those that can't. Those who can't just don't come home. But if I put the Balfe's into the mix then and I can give them stick every race. If they don't do it there is an old saying " a good bird can handle anything" and even though we all know that position can account for a lot of top Federation tickets it is generally understood that consistency on a regular basis throughout the season determines who has got their finger on the pulse in regards to the management and success of their birds in open competition.

I am not in a favourable loft position, but I am consistent even though I don't win many open Federations, I certainly get a lot of seconds and thirds and I'm happy with that.

It's not necessary to breed a lot of pigeons from lots of bloodlines every year (though I am guilty of that at times). Reflect on your results and choose the right family that flies well for you. You need a family that consistently produces your clock birds. It is not the number of birds that you have, it's the quality and until you get that mix right it's like pushing a fully loaded wheelbarrow uphill.

Bird health is very important to me. I am disappointed that some flyers in recent years have been using certain vaccines to enhance their birds to get an advantage in racing. I prefer the tried and true ways that we have been doing all of my years of racing. It works for me.

Well, I hope what I've told people may be useful about how to plan for the future and hopefully, the younger pigeon flyers may get some insights and learn something to help them with their hobby. Pigeon racing is a great sport and hobby which has been an important, essential part of my life. If you would like any more details about me and my birds go to gregfriesepigeonlofts.wordpress.com