



Ace Pigeon Fancier Q&A Series

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The PIGEON RACING Formula

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Interview with,

Byron & Mo Williams

WilliamsFamilyLoft.com

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1. What qualities do you look for in a racing pigeon?

Byron likes pigeons that have tight vents, pin tails, nice wing, and nice body, and do not carry a lot of weight. Mo likes the cosmetic qualities of a nice racing pigeon, but believes that what motivates the pigeon is more important. She believes that what is in the heart and in the head can be a real deciding factor on which bird will win a race. We will often times choose pigeons to fly races that we feel have been bred for that type of race.

2. What in your opinion is the most important aspect or quality of a champion loft?

Healthy pigeons. You can have the best birds and the most outstanding loft, but if your birds are not healthy...they will not have a fair shot in the races.

3. How do you section your loft?

We have 6 race team sections, three for Old Birds and three for Young Birds. Our twin sons are Junior Flyers, so they have a young and old bird section for themselves. To allow them to have their own racing team, we added a breeding loft to the side of our loft which is working very well for us.

4. How do you select birds when pairing?

We try to select pairs that will compliment each other. Byron would prefer to have the same colors mated together. He prefers mid-size pigeons, so he would make sure that a larger pigeon would be paired with a small one. Mo does not care about the color or the size so much except when it comes to grizzles and whites. She likes to win with white birds, since many people have no faith in them.

We like all of our pigeons and they all have the potential to breed winners, so it often comes down to what we want their youngsters for. Some pigeons are meant for short, middle, or long distance. We tend to do our best to create middle distance birds for our loft. We do match up short distance birds for the shorter races and long distance birds for the longer races. We have however, had our best success when we cross long distance birds with short distance birds. We would never say that it would work for everyone, but some of our most successful pairs are matched this way.

5.What is the best breeding strategy in your opinion? and why?

We have learned very quickly that there are two ways to breed. 1. Breed to sell. 2. Breed to Win! When breeding to sell, it is important that you have pigeons that are marketable. Most buyers want a nice, pretty bird, with a great pedigree, and a winning history. Serious breeders usually have something in mind that they want to add to their family of birds. If the bird is inbred, that is a serious plus factor. Now when you are breeding to win....put your best with your best and race those youngsters. If a pair does not produce a youngster that does not show up on the front of the race sheets in a YB season or OB season...that pair will not go back together. Our first round of youngsters are usually birds that have been sold and for Money races. Our second and third rounds are also birds that have been sold and for our own race teams. We want the first rounders to be mature for the money races and our local buyers and ourselves do better with second and third rounders due to our climate and hawk season.

6.How do you select birds for breeding?

Winning genes! The chances of breeding winners is best when you breed from winners. We are happy with the birds we have and the fanciers that we have gotten them from, so we would just continue to get birds from them. We would however, suggest to fanciers looking to purchase birds to ask one question to a breeder and that is.."What is your best"? So many times we miss out on good birds by not buying the right ones.

7. How many young birds do you breed each season?

For our personal race teams, we start off with 105 birds, 35 for each YB section.

8. What racing system do you use most?

Byron flies the cocks and Mo flies the hens. Our twins will fly the natural system.

9. How do you train your birds?

After breaking the youngsters to the loft and trap training them by using feed, we allow them to loft fly. If we feel that the birds are getting lazy we will force fly them by flagging for 15 minutes. Usually, by doing this a few times, they understand that they are expected to fly. Usually after 15 minutes they get a surge of energy

and want to fly. Soon they start kitting up together and routing off, then it is time to road train. We will start them off at very short distances and work them out to 85 miles. We like to do a 30 mile toss on Tuesday, 50 mile on Wednesday and 85 mile on Thursday if the weather will allow. When not training we like to loft fly them and rest them totally for one day a week.

10. Do you have any feeding and nutrition tips?

We pretty much do light feed at the beginning of the week for two days like barley and diet mix and work our way up to heavier more tasty food for the birds up until shipping day. We also like using treat feed such as pigeon candy, peanuts, and minced dried fruits and vegetables. You always want health to be a top priority in your pigeons, so it is important that you treat them for cocci, canker, and respiratory every week during race season. Probiotics, vitamins and grit are also staple items in our health program. The most important thing you can do for your birds is be consistent on whatever good feed, health, and training system that you choose.

11. How do you get your birds ready before a race?

The first thing Byron will check is the weather forecast for the day of the race. It helps us to prepare the birds for the race course and the weather conditions they will have to fly in. Their feed would have to be adjusted to amount of energy that we will estimate that they will have to use. They are allowed to rest the whole day before the race. We will allow the cocks and hens to be together 30 minutes before basketing. Afterwards we pretty much select birds based on which ones looks and feel race ready. A lot of times the winners sometimes give you the "pick me" pose.

12. Do you have any tips for pigeon health?

Apple Cider Vinegar, Honey, and Elderberry Extract, and Probiotics should always be a part of your pigeons diet. A teaspoon per gallon of water once or twice a week will do. They all help build up the immune system in some way. Apple Cider Vinegar will help with the digestive tract, Honey will keep the throat clear and Elderberry helps with the respiratory tract. You will also notice that Probiotics will help keep droppings tight and dry. And the most important thing we can all do for our pigeons is not overdo anything...especially medications. Do what the instructions tell you.

13. What do you like to race more, cocks or hens? and why?

That's an easy one. HENS! Mo races the hens and tends to win more races, but the cocks will do what Mo calls "Exploits". The hens are very consistent and have much endurance and really don't seem to need the cocks as much as the cocks need the hens. It makes for a very easy system. But the cocks will really be the shining stars on the hard races when it takes a lot of muscle. It is very easy to motivate the cocks to come home to their boxes or a hen that you let him have for a week. They will have the big wins.

14. What do you think fanciers can do to promote the sport better?

The most important thing that a fancier can do is make the sport a positive experience for his/her family. Positive experiences are passed on. Another thing is to show your love for the birds especially if someones contacts you about finding a lost bird. The worse thing you do is nothing. We can all do our part in promoting this great sport by taking opportunities in our communities to introduce what we do at fairs, libraries, schools, etc. We should also make sure that our neighbors view our hobby as a subject of interest and not a nuisance. We can do that by being considerate by keeping our lofts clean and managing our birds.

15. Where do you think the future of pigeon racing is headed?

We are hoping that pigeon racing will be a hobby that our children will be able to enjoy as adults, but it is hard to say how much freedom will be available to do it. This sport requires a lot of time and energy and I think that our love for the birds and the competition really keeps us going. If the love for this sport is passed on to others, I believe that people will find a way to continue flying. If the backyard racing would be forced out due to increased neighborhood restrictions, etc. God forbid, I think that the one loft races would multiply. Fanciers will still want to fly their birds.

16. What are the 5 most important things you think every fancier should know?

1 .When it is your race, be ready.

2. Stress stops the moult. Break your youngsters to the loft when they are very young and then allow them to go through a good moult before training them.
3. Brown nose cere and a slimy throat is a sign of a respiratory problem.
4. A healthy pigeon will have a white nose cere, clear throat, clean warm feet, will appear perky, drive, and will have shiny tight feathering.
5. When pairing up breeders make sure that you pre-mate a new pair by putting them across from one another for a few days. Some males are too aggressive and may injure or kill an uncooperative hen. All new pairs should be watched for their safety. A sure sign that they have mated up is when the hen settles in the bowl and they kiss and snuggle with each other.

17. Can you give us an idea of what a year in your loft would look like?

Our loft is truly a full time operation. Two weeks before breeding season we put the breeders on 18 hours of light. In our climate the light system works better for us than the darkening system. The day after Thanksgiving we start putting our breeding pairs together. We use individual breeding cages. At this time we are also putting our OB's on a light diet. Youngsters are moved into the YB sections as they are ready, 25-28 days old. Some flyers vaccinate their youngsters before they come out of the nest bowl, but we prefer to wait until they are at least 2 months old. Youngsters are transferred to the racing loft and put out on the board as soon as they are weaned. At this time they are put on the light system and will kept on the light system until the end of May. They are allowed to get accustomed to their surroundings and learn the feed call, etc. We never stress them. It is very important that the youngsters are broke to their loft at a very young age to prevent fly aways. This will cause the birds to start their body moult. In January we are already starting to work with our OB's. Old Birds pretty much have the experience, so all they need is their muscles to be fine tuned. Our OB season begins in March and will last 10 weeks. By the month of May, we are finished breeding and we are working with the Young Birds, the birds are loft flying up until 6-8 weeks before the young bird race season in September begins. At that time it is time to road train. Our pigeon hobby is an all year event!

18. What do you like best about pigeon racing?

It's the thrill of wondering which bird will come home first and the amazement that you feel when you know that the pigeon has flown hours and sometimes days to find the place he calls home. It's fun to win, but to us, the birds are the true prize.

19. What are your views on eyesign?

We don't get into that too much, but we find it interesting.

20. What in your opinion makes a successful pigeon racer? (both in terms of the bird and the fancier).

In my opinion a successful fancier and bird are the ones who can go the distance. Any one can do things in the short term and any bird can win a short race, but when the going gets tough and nothing seems to go right, the supers will stay in the race. My husband to me is a successful pigeon racer.

21. What are the most important elements to pigeon racing?

1. A good loft that will work in your climate.
2. Have a good solid health and feeding program.
3. Breed from the best birds that you can afford.
4. Don't be afraid to recruit new flyers. Competition is a good thing! Promote this great sport.
5. Train, Train, Train.

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