



## Ace Pigeon Fancier Q&A Series

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# The PIGEON RACING Formula

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Interview with,

# Richard Clark

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

Consistency. Being able to make good time week after week. Good health. Not having a tendency to becoming ill. Siblings that also have proven themselves.

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

Plenty of ventilation and sun light. A good view of the surrounding outside areas.

## **3.How do you section your loft?**

My primary breeder loft is a twelve foot by forty foot mobile home that I converted into a loft. I cut the floors and walls out and replace the floors with expanded metal. I built walls out of wood and wire to separate the compartments. I have folding doors throughout the loft for changing configuration. I added vents on the roof. It's not much to look at but it works very well. The climate here is ideal for raising and racing pigeons.

For the racing loft I built an eight foot by fifty six foot open style loft with wood walls though out for wind protection and airflow control. It is completely open on the front, partially closed on the back and completely closed on the ends. There are five separate sections to this loft that can be closed if needed, but left open most of the time so the birds can use the whole loft to find their special place.

## **4.How do you select birds when pairing?**

By performance and their breeding. Long distance families to each other and short distance families to each other.

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

Mating as early as possible and a maximum of three rounds. I like the early breeding so as to be as far as possible in the outer flight molt. Three rounds is pushing the breeders in my opinion about as far as they can stand and still remain healthy and produce strong youngsters.

After the breeding season, I take out the nestbox floors and all

nesting material. The breeders stay together and keep claim to their nesting spots or perches. After a couple of weeks the hens stop laying eggs. All of the breeders are content and happy with no undue stress put on them. When breeding time comes, I put back in the nest floors, nest bowls with nest pads, and soon there are eggs everywhere. I do use special individual breeding sections for when I want to regulate who is with whom. For the others, I separate the families into individual sections and let them choose their own mates.

## **6.How do you select birds for breeding?**

From the race basket. Best to best.

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

Around 100. This number has been about right to allow me to find 25 to 30 birds that perform well and consistent. They have to be able to go to all of the young bird races and maintain their weight and health.

## **8.What racing system do you use most?**

I do not have a system. Natural is what some would call it. I fly to the loft and to the perch or nest box.

## **9.How do you train your birds?**

For young birds start training about three months before the first race. I basket the birds for 20 minutes, then release them in the yard. I think this is important in the beginning to accustom them to not fearing the basket. Many young bird losses at the beginning of training could be due to basket fear, added to new surroundings. Do one thing at a time and do it right. I did this every day for a week this year and didn't lose any youngsters in early training.

After this, I gradually move them from 1 mile, 3, 5, 8, 10, 15 and 20 miles - giving several tosses at each place. Only after they come home in good time from one station do I move to the next. If they have a problem at one station I drop back to the shorter station and continue.

After 20 miles several times, I go to 45 a few times then back to 30. Training is every day the weather allows (not in rain or fog). All tosses are in the line of flight for the races, and I don't train past the 45 mile point until the week before the first race, then they go to the first race station about 100 miles. Both old and

young birds are trained this way. Old birds may not need it, but it makes me feel better. I never single toss young birds. On days I can't train, the birds get open loft in the evenings and flagged.

In old birds I start out at the four mile station. I don't single toss until they have reached the 45 mile station. Only after they were well trained from the 45 mile station do I single toss them. For single tossing I find a road that runs perpendicular to my loft and release them at least 2 miles apart until I have gone around 30 miles. Then I turn around and continue tossing to the first release spot. If I still have more I just turn around again and continue. This way they all have about the same distance to the loft.

## **10. Do you have any feeding and nutrition tips?**

I add quality pellets to the grain that adds the vitamins and nutrients. There is feed available to them all day long. They eat what they want. During the racing season a couple of days before the race I add corn, safflower and peanut hearts. I do not feed light to heavy. They get full rations upon returning to the loft.

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

During the racing season they get short 20 mile tosses everyday the weather is good. Not on shipping day. Our shipping baskets have water and feed trays on the sides. On all races they get water and all races over 300 miles they get feed in the feed tray on shipping night that is more than enough to keep them fed up to the time of release.

## **12. Do you have any tips for pigeon health?**

When you are not racing and having your birds around others birds only medicate if needed. During the racing season when they are around others birds I do use a preventative medication schedule. All of the supply houses offer good plans.

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

I like both equally. Either can win a race. In young birds I have had more hens to place in the top than cocks. However, I have had that special cock that seems to dominate some years.

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

First off, Personal dislikes should not cause clubs to separate. We all need each other to survive. Having several small clubs in the same area just does not make sense. And talking negative about others does not impress potential new members. The ballot box determines how things are done and it takes people with the right character to accept the outcome and then if you don't like it, to try and change the vote at a latter time.

What we can do to help promote the sport is to train and release in high visibility areas. Parks, schools, anywhere there are people around and take the time to talk to people about what you are doing. Go to breakfast and release the birds, a few at a time, in the parking lot. I frequently have people come over to see what I am doing. Let children rub and touch the birds.

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

The A.U. reports that the sport is growing. Overall that may be true. Locally we are in a trend of losing members faster than we are growing. We in general are getting older and eventually get out as we can no longer do what is needed to stay in the sport. The youth of today have so many more options for entertainment with much less expense than maintaining racing pigeons that this sport doesn't interest them. We as fanciers need to continually look for ways to let people know we exist and what we do.

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

First that you are an individual and a part of a larger collective. For the collective to survive it needs individuals. The collective is controlled by a democracy. That the direction of the collective is controlled by the majority of that collective. Acceptance of the majority decisions is imperative to the survival of the collective. I have seen what was solid clubs disband due to person agenda, personalities and the unwillingness of people to accept the decisions of the majority. We all need each other.

Proper loft setup.



Healthy birds.

Good birds.

Proper training/conditioning.

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

There is always something to do. Starting at the first of the year with the breeding season. Pairing up the breeders. Next the hatching, banding, recording information and the weaning of the youngsters. Then preparing for the old bird season with training and conditioning the birds. The old bird race season. When this is over it is the beginning of training and conditioning of the young birds for their race season. When that ends it's time to start getting the breeders ready for breeding season. It is a complete circle of events with very little time between on event and the next.

## **18.What do you like best about pigeon racing?**

I enjoy the old bird racing the best. If you have worked at it correctly you should have a very good old bird team that should perform well.

## **19.What are your views on eyesign?**

I don't get into this as some people put a lot of trust into it. Personally I prefer that the birds have two.

## **20.What in your opinion makes a successful pigeon racer both in terms of the birds and the fancier?**

Dedication to achieve excellence. As with most everything, you usually get out of something what you put into it. Always learning and being able to change if something better comes along. Learning from your mistakes as we all make them so as not to make them again.

## 21.What are the most important elements to pigeon racing? (breeding, training etc.)

I believe it is in the beginning of the circle, the preparation for the breeding season. A house is only as strong as the foundation it is built on. All aspect of the sport are important. As with the foundation you have to use good materials and good skills to finish the job.

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