



THE AUSTRALIAN PIGEON CENTRE

“Where Passion takes Flight”

How do you teach racing pigeons to break away from a group of pigeons racing to different Lofts?

By Dr Barry Trewin

To teach racing pigeons to break away from a group of pigeons racing to different lofts, takes work and patience, some ideas are as follows:

1. **Individual Training:** Start by training your racing pigeons individually. This will help them develop their flying skills and become familiar with the training routine. Begin with short training sessions and gradually increase the distance as they gain confidence.
2. **Homing Instinct:** Pigeons have a strong homing instinct, which means they naturally want to return to their loft. Enhance this instinct by ensuring that they associate their loft with safety, comfort, and reward. Provide a clean and comfortable loft environment, and regularly offer food and water inside the loft.
3. **Directional Training:** Once your pigeons are comfortable flying alone, begin directional training. Initially, release them from different locations near their loft. Gradually increase the distance between the release point and the loft, ensuring that they consistently return home.
4. **Visual Markers:** Introduce visual markers near the loft, such as flags or banners, to help the pigeons visually recognise their home. These markers will assist them in identifying the correct loft even when there are other lofts in the vicinity. Visual Markers can also be landmarks along suspected flight routes the pigeons will take when racing home from a particular direction. If pigeons are released near these Land Marks, they can then see these on their way home and break from the group and not follow, which can cause time delay before the pigeon realises to break and head for home and the loss of time can effect race outcomes.
5. **Training Tosses:** Conduct training tosses where you release the pigeons with a small group of other pigeons from different lofts. Start with short distances and gradually increase the distance over time. The pigeons will learn to distinguish their own loft and break away from other pigeons, focusing on returning to their familiar territory.
6. **Reinforcement:** Reward the pigeons with food, water, and praise every time they successfully return to their loft. Positive reinforcement is crucial in reinforcing their training and encouraging them to break away from other pigeons.
7. **Progressive Challenges:** Gradually increase the complexity of training by releasing your pigeons with larger groups of pigeons from various lofts. This will challenge their ability to differentiate and navigate back to their own loft.

8. **Patience and Consistency:** Training racing pigeons requires patience and consistency. Stick to a regular training schedule and provide ample time for the pigeons to learn and adapt. Every pigeon is different, so it's important to observe their behaviour and adjust the training approach accordingly.
9. **Loft Familiarisation:** Allow your racing pigeons to become familiar with their loft surroundings. This includes providing access to the loft and allowing them to explore the area freely. By doing so, they will develop a strong sense of their loft's location and recognise it as their home base.
10. **Loft Management:** Ensure that your loft is well-maintained and organised. Pigeons should have designated perches or nest boxes clearly labelled with their names or identification tags. This will help them associate their specific spot in the loft and reinforce their bond with it.
11. **Socialisation:** While individual training is important, it's also beneficial to socialise your pigeons with other pigeons. This can be done during training tosses or by allowing them to interact with other racing pigeons in a controlled environment. Socialisation will help them become accustomed to flying with other birds while maintaining their focus on returning to their own loft.
12. **Gradual Exposure:** Gradually expose your racing pigeons to various race scenarios. This can be achieved by participating in training races or competitions where they compete with other pigeons. These experiences will enhance their ability to differentiate their loft from others during actual races.
13. **Breeding and Genetics:** Consider the breeding and genetics of your racing pigeons. Pigeons with strong racing instincts and a history of successful racing performances are more likely to exhibit the desired behaviour of breaking away from a group. Selecting and breeding pigeons with desirable racing traits can improve the overall performance of your flock.
14. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continuously monitor and evaluate your pigeons' performance during training sessions and races. Observe their behaviour, flight patterns, and ability to navigate back to the loft. Keep track of their racing records to identify areas for improvement and adjust your training techniques accordingly.
15. **Expert Advice:** Seek guidance from experienced pigeon racers or trainers who have a proven track record of success. They can provide valuable insights, tips, and techniques to help you train your racing pigeons effectively. Make sure you also take note if the Fancier lives in the "Golden Mile", whereby his location plays a big part of his success, not necessarily the quality of his birds or knowledge.

Remember, training racing pigeons to break away from a group takes time, effort, and dedication. Be patient with your pigeons and maintain a positive training environment. With consistent training, reinforcement, and proper management, your racing pigeons will develop the skills necessary to navigate independently and compete successfully in races.

Can Racing Pigeons be motivated to break from a group or lead a group?

Yes, racing pigeons can be motivated to break away from a group or even lead a group during races. Here are some strategies to encourage and motivate them:

1. **Competitive Spirit:** Racing pigeons, like other animals, can possess a competitive spirit. By selectively breeding pigeons with a strong drive to excel and win races, you can enhance their natural inclination to break away from the group and take a leading position. Look for pigeons with a history of independent flying and a strong desire to be at the forefront of the race.
2. **Training with Competition:** Incorporate training sessions where your racing pigeons fly alongside experienced, competitive birds. Pigeons have a tendency to follow the lead of others, so exposing them to skilled and independent flyers can inspire them to break away from the group and strive for a leading position.
3. **Motivational Triggers:** Establish specific triggers or cues that signal the start of a race or training session. These can include the sound of a whistle, the release of a flag, or a distinct visual signal. By consistently associating these triggers with racing and providing rewards or incentives at the start, you can stimulate your pigeons' motivation to break away and lead the group.
4. **Natural Instincts:** Racing pigeons have innate instincts, including a strong homing instinct and a desire to establish territory. By reinforcing these natural instincts through regular training and exposure to racing situations, you can encourage your pigeons to assert their dominance and break away from the group to lead the way back to their loft.
5. **Positive Reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement techniques to reward and encourage desired behaviours. When a racing pigeon successfully breaks away from the group or takes a leading position, provide immediate praise, treats, or other rewards. This positive reinforcement strengthens the association between independent flying and positive outcomes, motivating them to repeat the behaviour in future races.
6. **Individual Training:** Emphasise individual training sessions alongside group training. By honing their flying skills and building their confidence as independent flyers, racing pigeons are more likely to break away from the group and take a leading role during races.
7. **Observation and Selection:** You need to observe your racing pigeons closely during training sessions and races. Pay attention to those that consistently exhibit independent behaviour and show the potential to break away or lead the group. Select and breed pigeons with these desirable traits, as they are more likely to pass on their leadership abilities to future generations.

It's important to note that not all pigeons may possess the natural inclination or ability to break away from a group and lead. Each pigeon has its own unique characteristics, and some may be better suited for different roles within the flock. Patience, observation, and selective breeding are key to cultivating a team of racing pigeons with the motivation and capability to break away and lead during races.

Widowhood system for Racing Pigeons

The widowhood system is a popular method used in racing pigeon competitions. It involves separating the sexes of the pigeons during the racing season to enhance their racing performance. Here's an overview of the widowhood system for racing pigeons:

1. **Pairing and Breeding:** Before the racing season begins, pigeons are paired and allowed to breed. This ensures that they have a strong bond and motivation to return to their mate and nest after races. The eggs or squabs are removed to prevent the pigeons from becoming preoccupied with nesting duties.
2. **Separation:** Once the pigeons have bonded through breeding, they are separated into individual sections or lofts based on their gender. The males are typically placed in the widowhood loft, while the females are kept separately.
3. **Training and Racing:** The widowhood loft is where the male racing pigeons reside during the racing season. They are trained and conditioned for races, with regular training tosses gradually increasing the distance over time. The goal is to prepare them for the upcoming race events while maintaining their focus and motivation.
4. **Motivation:** The motivation for the males to perform well in races is derived from their desire to return to their mate waiting in the separate section. The anticipation of reuniting with their mate and nest serves as a strong driving force for the males to fly swiftly and complete the race quickly.
5. **Training Routines:** The widowhood system usually involves a strict training routine. The male pigeons are released individually or in small groups during training sessions. This helps them develop their flying skills, stamina, and navigation abilities. Training tosses simulate race conditions and progressively increase the distance, challenging the pigeons to perform at their best.
6. **Rest and Recovery:** After races, the male pigeons are allowed a period of rest and recovery in their individual sections. During this time, they have access to food, water, and a comfortable resting area. The rest period allows them to recuperate before the next training session or race.
7. **Race Day Routine:** On race days, the male pigeons are transported to the release point with other competing pigeons. Once released, they compete against other birds, aiming to complete the race as quickly as possible. Upon returning to their loft, they are greeted by their mate in the separate section, reinforcing the bond and motivation for future races.

The widowhood system is based on the principle that the anticipation of reuniting with their mate and nest serves as a powerful motivator for the male racing pigeons. By implementing this system and providing appropriate training, care, and conditioning, pigeon fanciers aim to maximise the pigeons' racing performance. It's important to note that different variations of the widowhood system exist, and individual trainers may adapt the method based on their own preferences and experiences.

Does the Widowhood system in pigeon racing work better for Hens or Cocks?

The widowhood system in pigeon racing primarily focuses on the male pigeons, or cocks. The system is designed to maximise the performance and motivation of the male pigeons during races. While both hens (female pigeons) and cocks can be trained and raced using the widowhood system, the majority of trainers and fanciers find that the system works better for cocks. Here are a few reasons for this:

1. **Natural Motivation:** Male pigeons naturally exhibit a strong homing instinct and a desire to return to their mate and nest. This instinctual motivation can be harnessed in the widowhood system, where the anticipation of reuniting with their mate after a race serves as a powerful driving force for the male pigeons to fly swiftly and complete the race quickly.
2. **Competitive Drive:** Male pigeons tend to be more competitive and possess a stronger desire to establish territory and dominance. This competitive drive can be channelled effectively in racing situations, where the cocks strive to outperform other pigeons and return home first.
3. **Hormonal Stability:** Male pigeons generally have more stable hormonal levels compared to hens. This stability can contribute to a more consistent focus and performance during races. Hens, on the other hand, may experience hormonal fluctuations due to their reproductive cycles, which can affect their racing performance.
4. **Physical Attributes:** Male pigeons often have a slightly larger size and more developed flight muscles, which can provide them with a slight advantage in speed and endurance. These physical attributes can contribute to their success in racing.

While the widowhood system can be adapted for both hens and cocks, many trainers find that male pigeons generally respond better to the system due to their natural instincts and competitive nature. However, it's important to note that individual pigeons may vary in their aptitude and response to training methods, so it's crucial to observe and assess each pigeon's performance to determine the best approach for their racing success.

What other systems for motivation of racing pigeons are there besides the Widowhood system?

Besides the widowhood system, there are several other systems and methods used to motivate racing pigeons. These systems aim to enhance the pigeons' racing performance and competitive spirit. Here are a few examples:

1. **Natural System:** The natural system allows pigeons to freely pair, breed, and raise their offspring. This system relies on the pigeons' natural instincts and bonding. The motivation to return to their mate and nest after races serves as a driving force for performance. Pigeons are not separated by gender, and both cocks and hens participate in races.
2. **Roundabout System:** In the roundabout system, pigeons are allowed to pair, breed, and raise their offspring. However, the sexes are separated during the racing season. The pigeons are trained and raced separately based on their gender. The motivation to reunite with their mate after races serves as a motivator for both cocks and hens.

3. **Darkness System:** The darkness system involves exposing pigeons to extended periods of darkness. The pigeons are kept in darkened lofts for a specific number of hours per day or night, simulating the conditions of long-distance races. This system is believed to enhance endurance and prepare the pigeons for races of longer durations.
4. **Balancing System:** The balancing system focuses on equalising the racing performances of individual pigeons within a loft. The goal is to ensure that all pigeons have an opportunity to win races, preventing a single pigeon from dominating consistently. This system involves adjusting training distances, resting periods, and race schedules based on each pigeon's performance and abilities.
5. **Motivational Training:** Various training techniques can be employed to motivate racing pigeons. These include utilising flag systems, whistle cues, or other visual and auditory signals that signify the start or end of a training session or race. Associating these cues with rewards or incentives can enhance motivation and performance.
6. **Competitive Training:** Training pigeons alongside other competitive birds can motivate them to perform better. By exposing them to skilled and independent flyers during training sessions, pigeons can be inspired to break away from the group and strive for a leading position.
7. **Selective Breeding:** Selective breeding is a long-term approach to improve racing performance. By selecting pigeons with desirable racing traits, such as speed, endurance, navigation abilities, and a competitive spirit, breeders aim to produce offspring with enhanced racing potential.

Each system has its own advantages and considerations, and trainers may choose a system based on their own preferences, experiences, and the specific characteristics of their pigeons. It's important to experiment, observe the pigeons' responses, and adapt the training methods to maximise their motivation and racing performance.