

Les Mitchell

Wagga Wagga NSW

By Barry Trewin

I had met Les a number of times on previous visits to the club breeders plate sales, but had never had the chance to visit his home lofts. He had just won the club aggregate in 2003, so time was set aside and a home visit organised by John Clay, I thank John for his hospitality and time, it is much appreciated.

Les started in the birds some 33 years ago through his son Garry, who was bringing birds home from under the water tower at Lockhart. The birds housed at present are Goodgers, Saggers Jurions, Doug Ince, he calls these his birds multi-purpose birds, which seem to excel from 50 miles to 400 miles.

He has 30 pairs of stock birds (10 Ince, 10 Goodgers & Jurion and 10 crosses) and likes to breed around 130 youngsters each year and he has around 10 OB's in the team as well. He likes the crossbreeds as the hybrid cross gives vigour in the race birds and his most successful breeding pair has been a Goodger/Jurion pairing which the birds have come from Keith Saggers, Hillcrest Lofts. Les will pair down at the start of September each year and take 2 – 3 rounds.

He maintains his birds on the same mix all year round made up of wheat, peas, corn and a little bit of oil seed, but not much. He feeds very little corn, mainly peas, but he does add corn to his race birds when the distance increases. He starts his birds early on 1 oz per bird (when they are not doing much) and then increases it to 1 ¼ oz per bird when they start working harder. He also feeds the birds twice a day and doesn't feed before letting out his birds and he will let his birds for their morning flight at first light. He likes the birds flying for at least 1 hour and working well. Most mornings Les's and John's birds will join together racing each other across the Wagga sky line.

Les weans his birds around 28 days old, then 1 week later he places a cage on the landing board and will water and feed them on the board. He believes

that this way if the youngsters get a fright later on they will fly straight to the board for safety.

Les begins his road training short for the first 5 tosses, 1 mile, 3 mile and then 5 miles, he likes the birds to have approx 20 training tosses out to 20 miles before the start of racing. Once racing he won't toss again until the 150 mile mark and then the birds only have 1 training run per week from 25 – 40 miles with the club, this is due to convenience and for the birds to gain experience with other birds. He likes to fly the OB's, but will never toss his OB's until 150 miles, he believes OB's can teach the YB's bad habits and bad flight lines. For racing he likes his hen birds and finds his cocks fine early, but a bit of a nuisance later on. He does separate his cocks and hens and when selecting for a race, will never handle them, he likes to "pick from the perch", and he looks for sharpness and brightness in the birds he selects for the race each weekend.

As well as winning the aggregate in 2003 of which he has won a few times, he has also won bird of the year a few times and had his share of wins in special races, money wise he has been pretty lucky!

He will use medications as little as possible in the breeding season and doesn't treat for canker. Any sign of illness he will individually treat if needed. He uses a Yankee trap and likes this because the birds don't know they have been trapped, No birds have become trap shy, "that's usually caused by the fanciers own stupidity"!

Les states "to start racing you need good birds, without them you have no hope", "you must also be 100% dedicated"! He also believes vermin such as flacons and fox's need to be controlled or we will have no native bird life left and then the only option for them will be to feed on our birds. We as a sport need a National Body to promote the sport, assist clubs and individuals with Councils and also to co-ordinate race programs.

I thank Les for his time and look forward to catching up with him again on my next trip.