

Norm Milner's pigeon racing interests gaining altitude

Hobby's in full flight



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NORM Milner is known for his prowess as a butcher, but it is his birds that attract national attention.

The Rockhampton man has previously been crowned Central Queensland's sausage king for his Italian sausages and now with the help of his racing pigeons he's snagged more awards.

In his first attempt competing at a national bird racing event at Ballarat, Victoria, last month Mr Milner, 64, had birds placed eighth in the main race of the Best Western Mallee Classic, fifth in another race and one of his birds was chosen as Queensland's best performing bird.

"I've been racing pigeons for the past 30 years but I've kept birds all my life and always wanted to race them," Mr Milner said.

"I've got about 150 now, I don't name them. They are tagged though."

From the age of about four weeks, Mr Milner's birds know how to fly home.

To demonstrate the point, Mr Milner let one of his birds go

A growing concern

INTEREST in pigeon racing is growing in Australia.

The Mallee Classic at Mallee near Ballarat, Victoria, started in 1998 and is now an annual one-loft race held in September which attracts up to 650 interstate and international entrants.

Promotions officer Duncan MacGregor said a one-loft race meant all competing birds had to try to fly home to the same loft.

He said they were taken from their homes to train for the event weeks in advance.

"The first bird to enter the loft as timed by an electronic system, similar to a supermarket scanner, is the winner," he said.

from his Campbell Street butcher's shop to fly back to his South Rockhampton home.

As the bird took to the skies, Mr Milner said he was hoping to take more birds down for the Mallee Classic next year.

Mr Milner is not the only person in Rockhampton interested in racing pigeons.

There are 35 members in the Rockhampton association, including Mr Milner's daughter Melissa, 32.



IN A FLUTTER: Norm Milner with one of his racing pigeons. Picture by AMY GLASS ag20/1005/2

Bird facts

Largest pigeon: A giant ruck cock pigeon called Doc Yeck, owned by Leonard Yeck of Brantford, Ontario, Canada, is the world's largest pigeon.

On March 6, 1999, the bird weighed 1.8kg and had a chest width of 12.7cm.

Oldest pigeon living: The world's oldest living pigeon is the former racing pigeon Old Man, who was born on February 16, 1980, and is owned by George E. Seagroatt of Shrevenham, Wiltshire, UK. A true racing pigeon, Old Man won his first race in 1981, competing against 2114 other birds.

Longest flight: Despite being known for flying long distances, the world record for longest record flight goes to another breed of bird, the tern. A common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) that was banded on June 30, 1996, in central Finland was recaptured, alive, 26,000km away, at Rotamah Island, Victoria, Australia, at the end of January, 1997.

Source: Guinness World Records - www.guinness-worldrecords.com

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