

Racing Pigeon Welfare!

The care of our racing pigeons should be the utmost priority!

Care being Bird Welfare, Club and Individual aspects regarding the Sport!

These are a few items for people to think about!

- **Water - During Transport**

Soft foam inserts placed into the water troughs, with holes punched into them assist the availability of water to the birds. The foam holds approx. 60 - 80% of the original water, thus a bird can get a drink at any time. Water should be available to the birds 24 hours a day while in transit before a race. The foam strips can be obtained from Clark Rubber Stores! Just take in your drinkers and have them cut the foam to size and punch the holes for you. Make the foam inserts a little larger than the drinker, so they fit nice and snug, so they don't come out. The pigeons can still drink by dipping their beaks into the foam and sucking the water!

Important Note: If the foam is allowed to fully dry when the unit is returned to home, this stops any bacteria, as it cannot survive in a dry environment.

- **Transport**

The less time the birds are made to endure transport conditions is another area to be addressed. If we can reduce any cause of stress for the birds, this is a move forward. Distance Racing should be treated with greater care and maybe made to be specialist races for older pigeons compared to Day racing (races which the birds are expected to return on the day of release, up to 560 Kms). The Novice will not know how to prepare birds for the Distance races compared to Experienced Fanciers. Some fanciers feed differently, so if the birds are kept in the transport for over a day and they require feeding, the birds may eat grains, which could affect their performance for the race they are about to fly. If birds are fed a high carbo diet and are given a high protein mix on the transport, this could dramatically effect each bird's performance.

Maybe we need to adjust part of our loft so the birds are accustomed to drinking from the same type of drinker that is on the transport.

Thus they will have no difficulty finding a drink when they need it, as long as the water is available 24 hours a day on the transport. I have seen bird's drink at night while I have been transporting birds!

- **A Code of Conduct**

The way we maintain our lofts and the treatment of our racing pigeons is also another priority area. Different Codes are being formulated, but they fail in many ways. Still this is a step forward. They should aim to cover everyone in the sport and make allowance for different situations which can be found, but fanciers should at least be working to a standard for keeping pigeons.

- **Conduct at Club or Federation Level** - Updated 28/12/2004

Meetings attract all kinds of people, from those who just like a social atmosphere, to those who want to share ideas and reach common decisions, to finally, those who revel in Regimentation, Authority and Power. Tolerate the first kind, Welcome the Second and get Rid of the Last! Too many people use the Club as their vehicle to aspire to be something they have never been before in their life, IMPORTANT! In doing so they destroy any chance of the Club, as a Group, to Progress!

Club Minutes - It is essential that every entry in the minutes book be the Absolute Truth and any attempt to falsify entries, or record mis-truths, should be treated as an act that deserves expulsion from any organisation. The minute book is to be treated in law as Prima Facie evidence and stands in law as fact!

- **A National Body**

A National Body for the sport of Pigeon Racing and Keeping in Australia is a huge step, but it must be taken. Too many small groups cannot have the proper input required for the future development of our sport. Proper National and even State Bodies could pave the way for our future, with a single voice of the sport, managing Welfare, Administration and Marketing, by professional and qualified people, not the current wishful thinking attitude taken by most clubs and organisations.

- **Development of a Promotional Kit**

A Promotional Kit for beginners would help those who are just starting in the sport. Even a mentor program to assist newcomers and more seminars and workshops!

- **Racing Pigeons not Lofts**

This gives recognition to individual pigeons and not just the first bird home. How does this help the welfare of the birds? By being able to select birds instead of sending teams week in week out and hoping for the best. Different Aggregate points systems and handicap systems will also help everyone and not just the ones who live in a good area, thus keeping people interested. This brings fairness into the sport and keeps people interested, this encourages fanciers to lift the level of care to their pigeons.

- **Old Racing Pigeons Vs Young Birds**

You cannot put an old head on Young Shoulders!

Old birds can be a very good asset to any race loft, their experience can be invaluable! Why push young birds further than 500 Kms in their first year? Nurture them, and then use them as 2 year old's and so on. Your enjoyment will be increased! Learn motivation systems and have some fun with your birds. For more information please do not hesitate to contact me.

- **Consistency - When a Winner is Not a Winner!**

Did you win the race with other birds hot on your tail?

Too many people stock a winner when the bird in question may have only followed the other birds and by chance of overfly or loft position, won the event. Consistency should be taken over anything else, even if the bird is clocked a number of times and is leading bird back to your loft, I would take this bird over a bird which maybe a flash in pan.

- **Imports Vs Old Bloodlines**

Don't forget that all of our birds originally were Imports!

The imports of today have been developed using different racing systems than the current system used in Australia. Mostly they have been developed using the widowhood system and then are expected to fly on the natural system here. They are also usually much larger in size then the traditional birds and are then fed out dated high protein mixes and expected to win. They require a different feed mix - Carbohydrate - and even motivation systems to encourage them to race. This can also be of benefit to the old bloodlines!

- **Horses for Courses**

Don't send a Sprint bird to a Distance Event!

There are many different strains of thoroughbred birds now in the country, they all have been developed for differing distances. So don't expect a bird to bring home an exceptional performance, if it is out of its league. Nurture your birds and if they are sprint specialists, keep them each year for the sprint events. You may be surprised at the difference this will make to your seasons racing. You may even have to train and even loft fly the birds differently, separated from each other (sprint/distance). If you think you have not got the time to do this, then I suggest that you only concentrate on Sprint - Middle or Middle to Distance racing, but take notice you cannot win the Aggregate with birds which are only set for the last 5 races of the year (distance). You need to be competitive from the start to the finish!

- **Injured Birds**

Give them enough time to recover

If any bird returns injured from a race or training run, let the bird recover before sending it again. Feathers may need to be regrown and other more serious injuries will require treatment. Don't think the birds are machines, they are living breathing creatures.

- **Road Training - What is it For?**

If you think that your birds are not ranging enough around the loft and need to be taken on road training to get them up to speed, you know nothing about performance training or how to handle any animals, this will usually end in disaster for the fancier! Road training should be under taken once the birds are flying well around the loft, maybe for 1 hour at a time. Road training is purely to teach your birds to race! They do not know that they are racing, so the road training is there to switch them onto heading for home, hopefully along the shortest route. Usually the weather, maybe rain and wind, will play a large part in the flight route taken by the birds. If the winds are predominantly from the West then the birds will be pushed to the East, as the clocking times can be shown over the past decades of racing, the lofts in the East have the advantage. The only fanciers who disagree with this are the ones who live in the East! Terrain can also play a big part in the flight route taken by birds, they will not try to fly in the open, rather trying to hug the ridge lines of ranges to get some protection from predators, also if there is a ridge of hills the birds will generally fly around them, rather than flying directly over them. Current experiments overseas have found that the birds will even follow roads, even fanciers have found in Australia that when new freeways and highways are constructed, the birds can change from previous flight routes to follow the new roads and then break (Leave the group of birds they are flying with) later than normal towards their lofts, usually losing time and effecting the outcome of events.

- **Keeping your birds Warm!**

Your birds will use a lot of energy trying to keep warm in cold weather. Make sure your loft is a warm haven for your birds and they will maintain their race form longer. If you have open fronted lofts, arrange to have some way of closing your loft down on cold nights. If you live in a cold area, make sure your loft has good ventilation, but you can keep the adverse weather and cold winds out! I have found that the birds love the heat and have seen the birds on days of 30+ Degrees, laying in the sun, a wing held up, just about all piled on top of each other; they love it! On cold days you watch your birds fluff themselves up to try and keep warm, this is your birds using energy instead of resting peacefully. If you go into your loft and you are cold, your birds will be the same!

- **Buoyancy for Racing!**

I have seen a lot of people sending birds to races that are basically too Fat/Overweight! The best way to explain what to look for is to get a full can of Beer/Soft drink (whatever is to your liking) and an empty can. You are looking for the birds that have a nice full body, but they have no weight, just like the empty can. If your birds fill like the full can, don't send them, you are only asking for trouble and force the bird to take longer than normal to get home, maybe needing to stop and rest, as he is not prepared for the event. If you go through your team and only have a few birds feeling right, only send them, don't send birds because it is their week to go, send them because they are ready! Hopefully using this, you should find that your returns are better and also your performances!

- **Birds returning Late from a Race or Training Run**

Please take a minute or two to think about why the bird maybe late! If a bird returns late there maybe a number of reasons; weather or falcons. If a bird is taken off course, maybe it has helped spare the other birds in the kit, with the predator chasing it and not the other birds, so they get home before him etc. If a bird returns late, at least it has got enough motivation to do so. Give the bird the benefit of the doubt, give it a second chance! If a bird is taken off course by weather, he may fly a huge amount of distance, well out of the way to try and seek the easiest way home.

- **Stray Birds**

Some people do not like the idea of their bird straying into someone else's loft or place. Keep this in mind, that racing pigeons only know that a loft is a safe haven and people care for him, so when he is tired or injured these are the places he will seek out. Please give him his dues for seeking a safe haven, hopefully to be reported and returned to his home loft!

- **Knowledge**

You will never know it all!

Try and read as many different books, magazines and even websites for information. You don't have to believe everything you read, just use the ideas which may suit your needs. Do not believe everything you are told, as sometimes fanciers will give you misinformation to hold you back. The good fanciers will always try to assist you! In time you will work out systems which suit you and your birds, if you make a mistake, don't worry, but don't do it again! You can always fail by trying new ideas and at least you can still hold your head up and perseverance will eventually bring you success, but if you fail trying the same idea over and over you are an idiot!

More information about racing pigeon welfare can be found by contacting us!

*The biggest problem we have, is to stick our heads in the sand and expect problems to go away.
Please take time to work on new ideas, or improvements, which will enhance
involvement in the sport and the future of pigeon racing.*