

“BIG D” DOES IT FOR KEN!

FLYER PROFILE OF THE K&A ROBERTS PARTNERSHIP OF INGLE FARM

By Rob CAESAROWICZ of OLD NOARLUNGA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Ken and Dorie Roberts live about twelve kilometers N-NE of Adelaide and compete in the Para Hills club. Dorie, (affectionately known to Ken as ‘Big D’) hails from the Philippines, where she at one time assisted her brother Oliver, to race his pigeons in the San Antonio Pigeon club. Ken is a Sydney born lad of about contemporary age with the writer and has been around pigeons it seems, forever. His father (also Ken) flew pigeons for most of his life, as did his dad Spencer, in turn, before him. Ken’s maternal grandfather, Alec Monroe was also a racing enthusiast to boot and went all over Europe purchasing and importing his selection of birds. Alec was into ‘trotters’ as well and his pigeons were housed on top of the trotting stables. Alec was one of the founding members of the Leichardt club.

When Ken first flew in the Juniors his grandfather helped him. Ken’s mum and dad were estranged at the time and so he would trip over to his dad’s place as often as he could to learn the trade, but it was Sandy Lathlean who acted as his mentor and under whom he served his apprenticeship in the game. Ken remembers Sandy as well in the capacity of President of the Auburn club, which somehow prompted him to reminisce about the long-distance ‘Eddie Crane’ birds that he used to fly at the time. It was with the Auburn Juniors that he was ‘blooded’ to the Sport way back in the late 1950s. He then went to live with his dad at Guildford and flew in the Merrylands club Juniors (which his dad had founded), before joining in the Senior’s competition with him. A shift of residence saw them competing in the Fairfield club. Later on dad moved to old Macquarietown/Kurrajong Heights near to the Blue Mountains. When Ken was first married he raced in the Regents Park club to his ‘Miles End’ loft, which used both ‘open door’ and ‘yankee’ trapping entrances.

About 25 years ago, the haulage Company for whom Ken worked, asked him to move to Adelaide to look after their operations here. Pigeons were off the scene at this stage. He lived at Salisbury Park for a period. It was here that during a visit to Mike Nicholson (now Southern Vales club), that he spotted his loft and the ‘pigeon bug’ bit again, however, working long hours, as a haulage contractor left no time to pursue the hobby at that stage. By misfortune and chance Ken was involved in a truck accident and could not work for a time. As a result his doctor recommended that he take up a hobby. Instantly ‘pigeons’ registered, his return to the fancy coinciding with a shift of residence to his present location at Ingle Farm in 1987. By late 1990, Ken was back driving road trains up to Darwin, the Gulf of Carpentaria and Western Australia’s ‘top end’ which continued to the end of 1993, when with business re-established, he returned to the racing scene until the end of 1996 and then had a further hiatus before his latest return to the Sport in 1999. Ken is still driving road trains to the present time but these days it is more on a ‘needs’ basis and as required, rather than as a full-time commitment.

In 1997 he fell in love with a ‘different’ kind of bird, Dorie, whom he married in 1998. Both spent an eight-month extended visit (honeymoon?) to the Philippines before finally returning home to good old South Aus.

In his earlier years racing here in Adelaide, good results were achieved by offspring of birds gifted to him by Mike Nicholson, amongst which were BBH SA87.37966, 27th SAHPA Boorooban (1987) and BCH SA86.35688, 14th SAHPA Mt. Willoughby (1987) at 2345 hrs, in the pitch dark. The Roberts Kids flew a third bird of similar European breeding BCC SA87.22533 with distinction in the Junior competition, also in 1987.

Graeme Eitzen, Barry Salter and Jim Marafiote also helped Ken when he returned to the Sport in 1987, after having not flown since 1970. A Tyerman based pigeon BCPH SA88.14701 achieved 1st SAHPA Vin Blanden Memorial, 12th SAHPA overall from Nyngan, whilst an Eitzen based bird SA87.22642 ran 2nd SAHPA from Little Topar in 1989, the latter against 7447 entrants from 395 lofts.

On his return to the Sport in 1999, it was **Ian Edwards** to whom Ken owes a debt of gratitude.

Ken rates Ian as **one of the most genuine people he has encountered in the Sport.** Ian helped generously in establishing Ken’s current team, which consists of a broad base of the best SA ‘Goodgers’. This Goodger mix comes from the lofts of Alan Thede, Graham Markham, Stan Roberts, Rod & Judy Billing and Greg Hodgins (which included a gift bird to Ken for Christmas from Greg’s little daughter Bianca). Some of Bill Walford’s Goodger blood

is also represented. Another genuine bloke Ken has encountered in the Sport is **Barry Trewin**, who has experienced some success with Ken's birds, exchanged across the border. Ken considers **both Ian and Barry as men of action and 'not just talk'**. Ken also rates **Greg Hodgins** amongst the **most helpful** and obliging flyers with which he has had contact.

More recently, the K&A Roberts partnership has introduced some Van Breemans from John Hofman's SA Ponderosa Stud (9th SAHPA, Farina), Leo Broucke -Van Hees, Jan Aardens and some Busschaerts from Bill McDevitt in Canberra. Also, courtesy of George Desira, some Spanjaards blood has been introduced. Ken has raced the Goodgers bred 'straight' and also crossed in with the Van Hees, Aardens and Busschaerts with most success. He also retains his old family of Morrison Barkers ('Pledges') that he obtained from Wally Bartel.

Ken and Dorie have folder upon folder of achievement certificates – far too many to detail here, but a brief summary of the loft performances over various years is included to provide a general overview of the calibre of loft and flyers being reported on.

2001: Para Hills Club Champion – 9 Firsts, 5 Seconds, 3 Thirds & 2 Fourths.

Included a 'hat trick' of wins from Glendambo, Wedderburn Derby & Wedderburn Open.

Won from Berrigan by over an hour and from Holbrook by an hour and a half.

Gained 16th SAHPA, Holbrook, 26th SAHPA Berrigan and 22nd SAHPA Glendambo.

Ran Equal 21st in SAHPA Aggregate Points for the Season.

The birds were trained mainly by Dorie who 'slipped into the breach' due to Ken's work absences.

In **2000** the partnership flew only a few races. Dorie specially trained a BBPH whom she 'talked to' and who achieved 9th SAHPA in the Farina YBC. She was 'tickled pink' at this result and to say Ken was more than a little proud of Dorie's effort is somewhat of an understatement. It would appear that a certain 'affinity' is present between Dorie and her feathered charges - I'd keep hold of her Ken if I were you, and probably turn over all future training to her. After all, when you're on a good thing, stick to it!

The Roberts' loft has achieved 1st Aggregates, Para Hills club in years 1989,1994 and 1996 & 2nd in 1995. In the same years it achieved at club level, all the long distance aggregates, the 1994 middle distance aggregate and 2nd middle distance aggregates in years 1989, 1995 & 1996.

At SAHPA level, aggregate points positions achieved have been 4th in 1989, 12th in 1994, 15th in 1995 and 21st in 1996, before being equal 21st in 2001. Not a real bad effort in anyone's book I would suggest.

Individual performances too numerous to enumerate pervade the impeccable records kept by Ken and the above listing only touches on the depth of performance of this loft. I'm sorry folks that space does not permit a far more complete record but I am certain the readers will get the general picture of the quality of loft being examined.

Ken and Dorie's nine section loft is L-shaped and faces N & E. The birds trap to an open door. It is insulated with adjustable vents at both top and bottom. Each loft section comfortably houses between 25 & 30 birds and as the partnership is in the process of building up the family, more birds are being trailed and proven than ever before. **Ken** is a great believer in the basket to prove his breeding. He **is very selective** and advocates that **each bird must 'work for its perch'**. To this end he will arrive at a number of around 150 to commence the season with, of which 50 will be older hens. The partnership usually races between 20 and 30 each race. Their strong 12 plus member club enforces a 30-bird limit, which is consistent with current SAHPA limit specifications.

Ken approaches the racing season in two phases. The early phase team of mainly cross-breds is for up to and including the Derbies. The second phase team of mainly Goodgers and old blood is for the longer, latter races.

Daily exercise consists of morning work of between 90 & 120 minutes. Birds exercise freely, range and 'disappear'. **There is no 'enforced' flying in this loft.** The birds are simply fed in on return, with no special feed, hopper or standing feed regimes being practiced. Sexes are flown together until about Derby time when they are separated. It is at this point in time that the hens are given preference for morning training, with the 'boys' being shifted to the afternoon time slot.

The partnership's **only personal tossing** is done by way of **education leading up to the first programmed race**. At this point they are reliant upon **Bob Chalmers unit tosses twice a week**. Ken wanted to put in a big plug for Bob on this score – reckons he does a top job – seems to confirm what the writer has heard also – well done Bob and keep up the good work. The only additional training might be with Jim Nisbet when he goes up as far as Port Pirie in SA's 'Iron Triangle' – 'just to bring them up' as required. This loft's birds get tossed wherever the unit is going, N, S, E, or W. One exception to this practiced regime and by way of experiment was when Ken was on the truck and took 5 older cocks to Paskeville every second day. Of special note here is that 3 of the 5 won a race that year. Given the usual training programme, this loft's birds race about once in every 5 weeks but here again, this is dependent on their condition to meet the task on the given day.

Ken feeds light (wheat, peas and small seed) in the early part of the week and moves to a heavier mix from Wednesday onwards. For the longer races he increases the maize proportions to suit the conditions prevailing. Birds are fed morning and night. The loft management supplement their athletes with multivitamins twice weekly, worm as required and vaccinate against pox. Other than this, there is no veterinary intervention, however Colin Walker medications are used on an individual basis if considered warranted. **The building of strong, natural immunity is a requisite of this loft.**

Ken wanted it known that he was becoming disenchanted with the Sport recently and was thinking of giving it away. This was due mainly to the race programme, which he saw as being made to suit self-interests. This prompted him to join the Special Races Committee (Long Distance) to endeavour to get a fairer representation of distance events onto the calendar. He is pleased to acknowledge the SAHPA Committee's inclusion of 2 additional distance events for 2002.

Ken believes we have the best pigeons here in Australia and that this old blood, together with the imports, create a situation where race programming needs to cater for all – long, middle and short distance enthusiasts alike. This is a very fair view in my opinion, given **Ken's obvious personal preference for the distance races**. We wish you well on the former Long Distance Committee and look forward to some additional distance events next season, particularly on the NE line.

The K&A Roberts partnership commences breeding in September each year and breeds from 30 pair of stock. Other than this, **only performed racers are afforded the opportunity of securing a nest box in this loft of competitive bent.**

On our way out, my wife Brenda spotted a trophy on display in the lounge that almost escaped our viewing. It was for 1994 from the SAHPA for the most aggregate points in the last 3 races for the season. In securing this trophy the Roberts loft had achieved 4th SAHPA Cobar, 7th SAHPA Marla and 13th SAHPA Boorooban – not a bad effort, and guess what, all from the distance.

Ken had a number of interesting photographs that he took whilst in the heart of Australia, a few of which are included in this profile to show the type of desolate terrain over which our birds traverse in the course of a race (Coober Pedy, Alice Springs, The Twins). There is also a shot of the Barrow Creek area, which in Ken's informed opinion is just too far as a possible distance race point, given the adverse conditions that characterize this location. He does consider however, that **Tea Tree (200 kms N of Alice Springs) would rate as a possible ultra-marathon distance race point**, worthy of investigation.

Brenda and I would like to thank Dorie and Ken for their hospitality and for a lovely visit. Time went too quickly and we really enjoyed Dorie's freshly made spring rolls. It was a pleasure to get to know you both a little better and to sample the formula used by the K&A Roberts partnership to successful pigeon flying. Ken, with more time on your hands now and with your 'secret weapon' Dorie on board, who is to say where this loft will be in ensuing seasons, given the top results consistently achieved to date on a 'part-time' basis.'

We wish you both well for the future and would like to 'crack a coldie' with you both when you sweep the SAHPA Aggregates in the not too distant future.

Congratulations to you both and "keep on truckin"!



Ken and Dorie in front of Barry Trewin's Loft in Sea Lake VIC

