

Vision, Future, Revolution

Part 2

by Mark Lyford



The Past Few Weeks. Six weeks ago I re-entered the world of pigeons. What a six weeks it's been! Since my first article four weeks ago I have had countless emails, phone calls, letters and messages. Much of the feedback has been supportive and positive. A minority hasn't been. That's to be expected but needless to say I think my first article got people talking which was part of the reason for writing it in the first place.

What's Wrong? In my first article I asked the question. I referred to the falling number of members of the RPRA and other organisations. It turns out I was foolish to think the issue of falling numbers in the sport were down to simple issues. It appears there are far more complex reasons. Some of which I will discuss in this article.

Negativity, Haters And Trolls. If you put yourself out there it is bound to happen. I put myself out there and within a few weeks managed to attract my own little group of haters. It appears my message has spread as far as Australia with my troll network now developed. For some reason these people have already made their mind up that they don't like me. Fair enough. I'm a marmite character, love me or hate me, no real middle ground. They seem to think I have an ulterior motive. The thing with these people is that they will never change, they love being in their own little communities and supporting each other. You will always see them in all walks of life, but you will never see them actually trying to help in anyway. Their behaviour tells you far more about them and their lives than it does about us. For me these little people actually motivate me even more, I laugh at their small-minded capabilities and opinions. It's a positive result of having so many ups-and-downs in business and my personal life over the last 20 years that my resilience levels to carry on no matter what are higher than they have ever been. This, however, is not the case for all. I was disturbed to see a man on Facebook two weeks ago announce that the first race of the season was going to be his last. Why? Because he was sick of all the negativity, haters and idiots making his life a misery. As a result he'd had enough and was quitting. How sad is this? The sport is suffering already yet we are losing people because of bullying and intimidation from people. This man was a good flyer, he was a winner, he had a winning team. This no doubt didn't help the situation with these idiots that caused him to make his decision. This can't be allowed to continue. No one person or group of people should be allowed to affect others like this, it's horrible and has no place in our sport. Remember bullies can only bully if you allow them to bully you. At the end of the day most people just want to enjoy flying their birds. Why is this so hard? Where did it all go wrong?

Fact vs Fiction. Google is a great resource. Most of the time. If you google my name you will see all kinds of things. Some of which are true, some however are not. Some of my haters have gone above and beyond to do their best to discredit me and my name. I have no issue with people who have a problem with me for things I have done in my past, I am ok with myself and my actions, I sleep ok at night. I am an open book about my life experiences, so much so I wrote a book about my life in 2013. I do however have a major issue with people making up pure lies about me and some of these lies have been perpetuated over the last few weeks in the racing pigeon community. In an effort to clear up some of these things I thought I would put the record straight here and now.

FACT: I started keeping racing pigeons at the age of 12 years old.
FACT: My very first proper business was pigeon brokering, buying and selling birds. **FACT:** I did own and run 32,000 adult sites. I made millions from it. **FACT:** I lost millions too. **FACT:** I have been bankrupt twice.
FACT: I did serve a 2 year prison sentence for the cultivation of cannabis 2007 - 2009. **FACT:** Intention is everything and I have never done anything in my life to deliberately hurt anyone. **FACT:** I probably know more about online marketing than most people. **FACT:** My main business is a Bitcoin brokering and trading service. **FACT:** I have zero interest in targeting pigeon people for my main business. **FICTION:** My two websites are not setup to try and steal people's data from them. **FICTION:** I have never been charged with murder (seriously, come on). **FICTION:** I am NOT a scammer. I ran a very technological advanced business in 2015 which was way too early to market and it failed. I have never scammed anyone in my life. (I am smart enough to be a very good scammer, and if I wanted to scam people I could have done and would be sitting in a very different financial position). **FICTION:** I only own one chequered shirt. (Seriously again, I own many of them). I hope this clears things up and people are then free to choose what you think about me based on facts and not fiction. Like I said earlier, I'm happy with people not being a fan of me, I know I'm a marmite character.

Great People. The amazing thing that counters any of the negativity I have talked about above is that I have met some really great people in the last six weeks. The amount of nice, kind, intelligent and fascinating people I have spoken to far outweighs the idiots and it is heartwarming. There are far too many people to mention individually but needless to say I feel blessed to have met these great people. I know this is just the start and over time I will meet many more great people. I have had people sending me DVDs, books and magazines. I have had phone calls with some of the top flyers and experts in their fields. The amount of people who have offered to help me in whatever way they can, shows that there is a great deal of good people in this sport around the world. Let's not forget this, 95% of people involved in pigeon racing are good people.

Governance Issues. In my first article I wrote about the governance issues I see in our sport. The fact that there are 22 people on the board of the RPRA is an issue in my opinion. It's too many people. It should be a quarter of that size. Something I found out a few weeks ago is that none of the 22 people on the board can have any interest in any pigeon related business. Think about that. This rules out the very kind of forward thinking business minded people we need at the top of the board. I understand about there being conflicts of interest but wouldn't it be more realistic to say that if any specific issue comes up at board level that is in conflict of a certain board member who owns a pigeon related business that that person cannot be involved in that specific decision? Ruling out these people from ever being on the board means we are going to never have the mix of the right kind of people on that board. One of the many phones calls I have had in the last weeks was from someone who had some very good points, however one subject that came up was the governance structure and specifically the CEO of the RPRA. The man I was speaking to initially had an issue with how much Ian Evans was paid for his role. During the call I said the level of pay for this position wasn't actually that much. Many CEOs would expect a far bigger salary for such a position. I don't think Ian Evans accepted the job for the money. I'm pretty sure he took a hit on his salary to join the RPRA. I went on to say that in most normal companies the CEO makes the decisions and those decisions are carried out. The trouble with the current RPRA structure is that the CEO can try to make as many changes and improvements to things that they want but at the end of the day every single decision has to go to a board of 22 people. This is screwed up. It's sluggish, anti-productive and doesn't promote the development that is needed. The man accepted what I was saying and I think I changed his mind about some of the issues we are talking about. Without doubt there are some very good people on the board of the RPRA but, with so many people involved ultimately there are others who are out of touch, self serving and genuinely not interested in making real change happen. Something I have unfortunately resigned myself to over the last few weeks is that I am not entirely sure these governance issues can be changed, or at least not anytime soon. The idea that the RPRA is run from the ground up, is in theory correct, but in reality it is simply not happening. After reading the Hall report I agree with it, things need to change, but I'm just not sure how it is going to be allowed to change. People seem to be more concerned with protecting their own positions instead of thinking of the bigger picture and how narrow-minded, self-serving actions and beliefs will continue with no real progress made and ultimately numbers will keep falling. We need a radical shift. We need a revolution of the sport to happen. How can this ever happen as things are at the moment?

Corruption. Some of the phone calls I have had from people are related to what they see as corruption in the sport. Too many decisions happening that just don't make sense, Too many stories of people being wrongly treated. There seems to be an element of corruption happening, which if allowed to continue will slowly eat away at the sport and ultimately harm it and possibly cause it to implode in certain areas.

In The Club. In my first article I talked about some major issues as I see it at club level. My thoughts on this have only been strengthened and I will say again that the level of perfectly decent people being denied membership of a club is astounding. How can this be allowed to happen? Unless a person is proven to have cheated or committed a fraudulent offence, all clubs should allow that person in (in my opinion). Mentality needs to change. It has to happen from the top down. Lead by example.

Winners. We have a fundamental problem in this country, not just specific to our sport. Some of us don't like winners. People like to knock winners, people stop talking to winners. People try to rule out winners from competing. The man I spoke about earlier who was bullied out of the

sport was a winner. If I lose at anything in life and I am beaten I will not stop until I figure a way of competing and winning. What does it say about someone who chooses to not think like that but instead, choose to bully, ridicule or just generally be negative towards winners? If you don't agree with me on this, may I suggest you maybe need to look at yourself first and perhaps change your thought processes on things in your own mind before accepting defeat and taking it out on the winners?

Sport Recognition. Without doubt, no matter how long it takes we have to make sure we get the sport of pigeon racing recognised as an official sport. It's a long road yes, but it cannot be given up on. The idea of putting together a small group of people who work with the RPRA to make this happen one day is a good one. Eventually when our sport becomes official it will open up massive possibilities for us all. This has to happen.

Charity & Not For Profit Organisations. In addition to making the world aware just how much our sport raises for charitable causes I think we need to look at developing more charity-based efforts that go back into the development of the sport itself. Why can't we establish a charity dedicated to the growth of the sport that integrated mainstream good causes? For instance setting up community lofts to help socially isolated people? Putting lofts into schools etc? I think this needs to happen in addition to all the great work we do for external charities.

Vision and development In The UK & Ireland. For sure the UK and Ireland has some of the best birds around. Birds that have to fight a lot harder to win races than many Continental birds. The issue though is that this is not globally recognised. I've had many people telling me I should focus some of my efforts in starting to market and promote UK and Irish birds and their flyers. This is a long term issue. The perception of Belgian and Dutch birds is that they are the only ones to have. In truth, birds flying into Ireland and Scotland are as tough as nails and are far better birds. We are taking a back seat. It needs to stop and we need to show the world just how good our birds are. As I said in my previous article, it's all about marketing. A long term marketing plan can work. I am going to think about this more over the coming months and see what I think I can do to get involved in this and see what I can do.

Live Results. I think as a natural progression from ETS technology live results are a great thing. The Benzing live system that has been developed and used by many of the one loft races out there is amazing. Is there any reason why this technology can't be adopted for Club and Federation racing and it goes mainstream? The idea of being able to see when your competitor has got a bird is brilliant. Are there any rules that

prevent this from happening in the UK other than for use in OLRs?

My Offer. So my offer to any association or organisation in the UK, Ireland and any other around the world still stands: I will offer my consultancy services for free to help make this happen. I will work with whoever wants to work with me to make my vision and their collective progression of our sport. I'm still putting my money where my mouth is. I have already helped a few people who have taken me up on my offer. I am helping some commercial businesses and individual flyers too. I want nothing for it. I am all about simple, easy solutions to be implemented without all the nonsense. If any person or organisation wants to take me up on my offer, I am here to help.

My Progress. I have started two websites since my first article. I have setup RacingPigeonInternational.com to bring a new way of doing things for the sport. My goal is to use the technology available to us to have worldwide news and content from our global sport. I have already launched RacingPigeonNetwork.com which is the first ever social network dedicated to the sport of racing pigeons. It's free to join and we have some big plans for both sites. In addition to this I am developing some other ideas on what I can do to assist the development and revolution of the sport. Like I have said I will help anyone I can with anything that is objective and about progress. Wrapping up I have many more things to talk about but I am aware my first article was perhaps too long and a lot to read in one go. Plus, I have a deadline to get this article in so I will finish here and start writing my next article as part 3 soon. Things I will be discussing in the future article are One Loft Races, Rating Systems, GPS Tracking, Birds of Prey, New Target Markets, Growth In Eastern Europe and Young People & Communities plus whatever else comes up in the meantime. The revolution still needs to happen folks. Let's get going!

I would love to hear feedback from you (good or bad, I can handle criticism as much as I love positive feedback). My contact details are below and I welcome any and all of you to get in touch with your thoughts.

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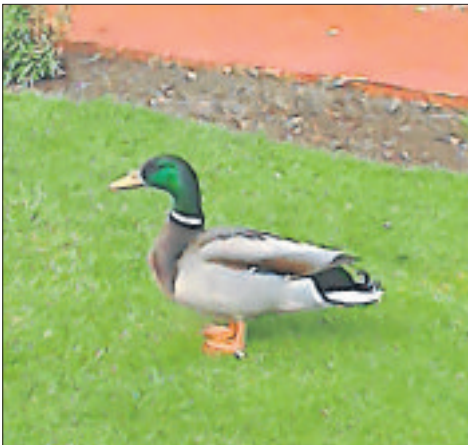
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AROUND BULL FORT

The season finally arrived with the weather playing a major role in the lead up to the first race, having had summer temperatures in February and winter temperatures in April. Anybody whose had a pond will know at this time of the season ducks like any other bird want to be with their mate, and seek anywhere, hoping for that secluded place and if there's a pond all the better. My first young were on the loft top when five mallard on a perfect line to hit the trap overshot into my garden and next door's driveway. The young birds went up in all directions, fortunately all finding their way back after the mayhem, with the two duck instigators seen walking alone down the street. This season the Club decided to have a pre-season



One of the errant mallard ducks.

race from Peterborough and with temperatures about to plunge to single figures and a cold east wind it would certainly be a test. No such trouble for Derek Moore who took all the prizes on 1322, 1321 (2) and 1320. A great start for him in what turned out to be a good training race!

The first Federation race for the **Humberston FC** was from Huntingdon with 12/259. Mr & Mrs Horsfall started the new season with a bang taking 1st and 2nd on 1387 and 1367, winning all pools and 1st 2Bird. In



Des Moore, winner of pre-season Peterborough race.

3rd and 4th Mr & Mrs Dave Gardner 1364 and 1362 with Drinkell, Son & Parrott also on 1362, taking 2nd 2Bird. In the **Lincolnshire South Road Federation** 154/2,856 and it was K. Leech of the Brigg & District leading the way on 1411 winning the Lillian's Dance Studio Trophy; in 2nd and 3rd with two together it was D. Dawley of the Barrow HS 1394 (2), and the final place going to R. Keyworth, Horncastle also on 1394! The next race has been delayed until Sunday 27th April because of the weather.

PIGEON POSTE



Carrying on from last season, top prizewinner Paul Horsfall, winner of Huntingdon!