

John Clay

Wagga Wagga Club – NSW

Loft report by
Barry Trewin

I stayed with John when travelling up to Wagga Wagga for the breeders plate sale on the Saturday and then onto the Temora breeders plate sale on the Sunday. This has now become an annual trip and has been a great way to keep in contact with country flyers. On these trips I also take birds from other flyers around Victoria for the sales as a way to support the people who are supporting the Mallee Classic. We are also joined by Trevor Barker from Cessnock, who brings birds from up around his area. All in all we have access to approx. 5 different races for our birds. This is an excellent example of fanciers within the sport working together for the betterment of the sport!

The hospitality shared by the country flyers is terrific and I must say that on the Friday night I was treated to a BBQ tea under lights while waiting for the birds from the 500 and 600 mile events that were released on the Friday. He shared some good stories of past experiences and some of which were quite humorous.

John's story with pigeons begins in Albury back in 1954. He kept them for a few years and then in 1957 he began competing as a junior. He recalls back in 1968 the Albury club flew its first 600-mile event from Warwick in Queensland. John clocked to take 2nd. Some of this original blood is still found in his birds today. In 1973 he relocated to Wagga Wagga, due to his work commitments as a commercial traveler. He constructed a loft in 1974 and began competing in 1975, of which he flew through to St George 500 miles. John then donated a trophy for a 600-mile race to encourage the club to fly further. The Loft has been extended since the original construction and is now a quite compact double storey loft well suited to his needs. He has breeding birds on the ground level and race birds on the 2nd storey. The birds are clocked in traps set in an open door fly-in, which is set in the middle of the loft and the birds trap to either side.

Some of John's original birds were obtained from Bill Casey, who was in the army in the '70's and they were South Australian Ferguson bloodlines. One of the pairs of birds blended very well for him, and has become the basis of his loft today. He also obtained Goodgers from Pip Harrison and John Pycroft and crossed these with his Casey birds, an original mealy hen can be found through the pedigrees of most of his birds, these birds have also flown very well for him and were also the bloodlines which he sent to the Mallee Classic in 2001. John was the only competitor to have 100% returns in all three races!

John breeds normally around 130 squeakers each year and also flies some birds from the breeders plate sales. Three years ago he purchased some Goodgers from Tim Deslandes from Adelaide and these are now making an impression on the loft. John separates the hens from the cocks at the moment of weaning and they are kept and raced this way. John uses anti-canker and respiratory medication only if needed. He mainly flies to the perch, but has seen the benefits of motivation and has one section with nest boxes to accommodate the old birds. He won an Old bird Derby with a cock racing to a hen on eggs! Although John enjoys racing from 300 mile and onwards, he is endeavouring to achieve better performances in the 700 mile events and has introduced some Cox Grizzles's into the stock loft (Norm Cox passed away recently, he was known for the plethora of long distance birds in his loft). John also believes lights in his loft have helped stop fly-aways, the birds can see inside the loft and will not be afraid to come down.

The Wagga Wagga club has 8 members and there are approx. 35 flyers in the Temora Invitation Combine, which the Wagga club, is affiliated. John and other members have visited 7 schools in the Wagga Wagga area promoting pigeon racing to the school kids. One child asked, "Mr. Clay, How do pigeons have babies?" John handled the situation well and received a tremendous reception from the kids. This type of endeavour by pigeon fanciers is great promotion for our sport; maybe others should take a leaf from their book and see what they can do for our sport. John's thoughts on a National body for pigeon racing were as follows: "we need to develop and promote pigeon racing, it would be a good idea to get our act together with a code of practice and move towards the betterment of our sport and become more professional". Some of John's ideas included helping beginners with pointers, (encouragement is needed) for too long the sport has lost new members, they become disenchanted within the first couple of years if they have little success.

John feels his best achievement in racing has been the only bird from Tassie in 1993 of which the bird homed in the dark. John said, "Like every pigeon flyer you can get 10 disappointments for each highlight".

John's Tips

- John believes that if squeakers have any setback at all they should be culled, as "They'll never be any good!"
- John also likes to have 20 training tosses before the first race; he builds the birds up to 60 miles and also includes his birds in the club tossing. The club tosses from 40 miles every Monday.
- John also purchases enough grain to last a full season, he says this is a key to success for any flyer.
- After a good performance he believes in rest for the birds.

- John also pays more attention to feeding carbo's to the race birds to get them in racing condition, (It was great to see a fancier who has been involved in the sport for quite a number of years implementing the carbo feeding against the high protein pea mix that some fanciers are still using. The benefits can also be seen in the old Australian bloodlines John races).
- All his stock birds have been homed in. It is important to have access to fly around the loft, it is important for the vitality of the youngsters. (John's stock birds were a credit to him they all carried little fat and were gleaming in the loft).
- Let youngsters build their immunity, if they can't handle it and have a weakness, they will be no good for racing.

Some of John's results in 2001:

12 X 1st Club

Numerous Combine positions

1st Combine 3 bird race from 350 miles from Burke, which was a hard race.

At the time of my visit John was vying to win the Club Aggregate against Gary Mitchell, John's sees Gary as friendly competition and someone who is a very strong competitor.

In 2000

John won the Short and Long Series and was overall aggregate winner for the Wagga Wagga Club. This was the first time ever he has won the short aggregate.

Late news to hand – John won the club aggregate in a very close fought contest between Gary Mitchell and himself,
Well done John!