

## **A pigeon Is the Best teacher**

Ken Easley 2020

'It is what we know that often prevents us from learning'. Claude Bernard

I spent my life learning from others and racing pigeons are no different. I glean information from articles and from real life experience of myself and others. I sift through the information deciding what is in line with my experience while being careful not to disregard something I don't know. **In this age of information anyone can do a search online to find out the answer to almost anything.**

Racing pigeons are advancing at a rapid pace with one loft racing and the vast amount of information that is so easily accessible. The access to great bloodlines via the online auction houses has given the rise to top bloodline projects all over the world. Everyone is working a plan.

The challenge is knowing that breeding champion racing pigeons is not an endeavor that can be accomplished like a manufacturing plant with assembly lines and automated processes. That is because there is an artistic element to breeding champion racing pigeons. Some of the greatest artist are misunderstood until many years later in some cases. It is because their scale of understanding of the subject is beyond conventional wisdom.

Sometimes it is just dumb luck. We have all seen the fellow that seems average but somehow manages to breed a super champion that surpasses the rest. He is an overnight prodigy, a guru, the guy who has the answers. Chances are he has no idea why he hit the lucky jackpot, he only knows that he did and is thankful.

Many will study the pedigree of this champion trying to recreate the same occurrence in their own lofts. They will go backwards looking at siblings of the parents and grandparents. They may be successful but may be better served to get birds right off this champion. It is for sure he at least carries the winning genetic.

'Education is not the filling of a pot but the lighting of a fire'. W.B. Yeats

I read everything I could get my hands on for many years. Some books and articles read with trepidation due to having already disproven the information presented. Nonetheless the information is a steppingstone even if only to shore up what I felt confident was incorrect. I spent many years flying other breeds and watching pigeons from a chair. Hours and hours watching them fly overhead Watching how they reacted to hawk attacks, or a strange pigeon joining the flock. How different feed changed the way they flew, the length amount of time they flew, the height they flew, etc.....

What did I learn in the end? Well, it is never the end for an ardent student of the racing pigeon. There is always more to learn.

Pigeons can fool you. They truly can and in ways you least expect. As youngsters we see the potential champions each day at the feeding tray. We watch them with great anticipation of what they may become. We see the one off our prized pair standing front and center with the chest out and legs spread showing great confidence. We rarely notice the shy little fellow seemingly disappearing into the back of the crowd. He eats quickly, drinks quickly and back to his perch almost undetected.

He is smallish but nothing is out of place. Not impressive yet but nothing to prevent him from becoming a good racer. So, he continues his training with the crew in a low-profile manner. We don't pay much attention because his father is a very ordinary looking checker and you only bred him because he had a pedigree pasted with some winners. His mate was a similar type, smallish and not too impressive but a good pedigree and after all her eye color is a good match so what the heck. One day the races begin. The little inconspicuous one comes in the middle to the bottom of the pack. Not more than a few minutes back but far less impressive than the trapping superstars that lead the charge.

As the distance increases, we are more focused on the ones we just know are the future of our loft and still we miss the little shy fellow, but he is slowly climbing to a little better position each week. Then one day we are basketing for the young bird race, a 250 miler. We notice little man is feeling like something useful and catches our attention, but we think nothing of it and away he goes to shipping. The next day we wait with great anticipation. We go through each pigeon in our head one at a time, maybe superstar one or superstar two will be the winner and confirm our suspicions of the parents breeding capacity. Then the dense fog rolls in and covers the mountains. You begin to panic and see your dreams fading as much as the visibility. Your concern reaches an almost panic level, but you try to contain your thoughts. You will surely lose them all.....

As you stare into the impenetrable fog unable to see 20 feet in front of the loft almost giving up but at the same time still optimistic that one will rise to the challenge then suddenly coming out of the fog with wings stretched out in the most magnificent approach you see the fog swirl off the wing tips as he puts on the brakes little man lands on the trap board and your fear turns into dumbfounded surprise. The joy as you hear the familiar beep beep of clocking you rush to check and make sure your eyes aren't deceiving you. Yes, it is little man. You feed him peanuts with a new sense of wonder and then remember to check the time. Is it possible he is in contention for a prize? Surely not after all he is later than expected. But it was a difficult day, and we live offline with mountains. We check the calculations and to our surprise it is a good time.

When it is time to go to clock out at the clubhouse we are filled with questions and again the anticipation that we may have a chance. We even have a handful of birds back now. As we head down the mountains and through the canyon and toward town, we come through the lower canyon dropping in elevation over 2,000 feet and see that it is sunny and beautiful and only the mountains are covered with fog. Our hopes and dreams begin to fade. After all it's an impossible feat to come through such fog and up through the mountains and win against the entire club who lives on the other side. Well, maybe little man is at least a top 10.

We hand in our clock with such a swirl of emotions of the events of the day that we don't know what we think anymore. As the last modules are logged in someone says congratulations, that's quite a pigeon you have there. Little man has won 6th place. The next week has the 350-mile young bird race, my absolute favorite race of the young bird season. I select little man as my pick

bird, and he looks spectacular. Blown up like a balloon and in the pink. The small blood dot visible on the breastbone. Again, he comes in early and alone. I run the clock to town and as the last module is uploaded congratulations again from my fellow racers.

Then numbness takes over. Can it be true, I must look myself to make sure there is no mistake. The drive home is filled with thoughts of the parents and how this mating made such a pigeon. He's bested every pigeon on the property and in the entire club. How can it be possible?

Then we begin to think about pairing any siblings and are there more of the same available.....the big plans begin to materialize as I near home. Then back out to handle little man and admire him some more. What a pigeon, how did I not see him before. How did he escape my attention for so long? He is buoyant and blown up with pink breast muscle, a long, beautiful wing with great ventilation, he looks smart, a keen eye with good dilation.....wow. He was so plain as a youngster.

These kinds of stories have happened to all of us and they are the ones we remember the rest of our lives. These are the stories best shared with men and women of the sport who understand and appreciate it. The outside world doesn't understand. I had such a pigeon in 2015 that this account was about. He was from a pair of Vanwildemeersch pigeons from Belgium. The parents were out of national champions. We flew there and hand selected them. I asked Frans, can I buy the two babies in the two bowls from your national winners? He said no, but you can select one from each nest. I let my son Kendall select the first one. Of course, he selected the almost all white one with blue bars showing. My first thought was to persuade him to select the solid blue check but then I thought no, let the boy have his pick. Then I selected the solid blue check cock from the other bowl. We handled them and did all the possible checks one can do with nestlings with is pretty limited. Good droppings, super health, etc....a pull on the beak just to be sure.

Why then did we not watch this youngster? Because we have been let down too many times to list and you can never trust a pigeon. They always let us down when we pick a favorite. So, we have learned to be suspicious of all pigeons. We know 99% of them are just different levels of culls.... but not all!

The sister of the mother of Little Man was also a Belgium hand selected hen from the same loft. Her name is Mila, and she is also a blue bar with one white flight. I always had a feeling about her, and she was my favorite. Even after

letting some of the others leave, she was always the last that would ever leave my loft. Even the mother of little man was not as nice. I paired her to a super young racer named Saad. I sent the best youngster to the Million-dollar race. Up until the final race all of my birds had died in quarantine or been lost settling them. I had one pigeon really. She was named BB-8 and she was 1st knockout winner and 5th prize on the final South Africa Million Dollar Race in 2019. This little hen was sold to Veenstra loft after the race at auction. She was a product of Saad and Mila. Saad was a successful part of the pairing no doubt, but Mila carries the blood of national champions of Belgium and the same blood that came through the fog on a bad day and 10 minutes lead over 2nd place on the 350 miles. There are no accidents.

I called my friend in Belgium to tell him the good news. He was so happy he was in tears. He had had many national champions and a room with many big Belgian trophies, but his trembling voice told me what kind of a man he is. The best kind, and he was truly happy for our success. Thank you, Frans Vanwildemeersch, for your friendship and sharing of great pigeons, food and mostly your time. I remember what he told me while we sat and talked that day. I asked him, Frans, how do you train your pigeons? He said oh I take them down the road about 35 km (23 miles). I said that's it. He said yes, the race basket will teach them the rest. I have thought many times about guys pounding the birds down the road to win in local clubs and my inside voice tells me it's not correct. I always train on Saturday mornings to 100 miles as if it is a race. I release them each Saturday at sunrise and drive home to wait. The rest of the week I loft fly and take them 50 miles on Wednesday. Pigeons are creatures of habit. I find that getting them into the swing of the race schedule is important. It keeps them confident, focused and excited. Pigeons will peak out at a certain time. Pigeons that are trained too hard will peak out too soon and may miss the prizes later in the year.

What did this experience teach me? To embrace the unknown. To be on the lookout for the gem hiding in the crowd. To be patient. To follow the plan. I have won many awards and titles in my life in business and pigeons, but most don't compare to the feelings I had when little man came flying through the fog that fateful day when he taught me a valuable lesson.

**'An open mind and a passion for new information is the cornerstone of success' Ken Easley**

Thank you Little Man. AU15 EASLEY 51 BB cock, 1222  
YPM with a 10 min. lead over 2nd place November 1st,  
2015.

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