

The Champion      July 25, 2000  
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The true champion is hard to produce but never hard to recognize. We may think we have one coming along but time usually paints a different picture. Most of us are able to produce pretty darn good racers along the way. Some of these are very nice but disappointment usually comes, due to them doing something to let us down. At times I am sure we have all thought maybe this is as good as they get. Maybe our expectations are just too high. If one keeps trying to improve his stud slowly and carefully the results will follow. The addition of a key bird here and there may be required.

At some point we will become more impressed but still not completely satisfied. Then it happens, we will raise a bird that is outstanding. He will race head and shoulders above the rest. With patience and proper use of the champion several outstanding birds from this line will be the foundation for an outstanding family of racers.

These birds will not disappear but will return home quickly. Some of them will be able to race well at all distances, which we very much like to see. These types seem to enjoy flying & racing. We won't have trouble with them getting lost since they have excellent natural homing instincts. For those who may be at an impasse. They can get as good as we make them through proper matings.

It will be noticed that some birds will be very balanced and have all the right physical attributes but lack the mental aspect required for outstanding performance. Another problem encountered when searching for the champion is the occasional bird that is fairly balanced and races to a decent degree and has shown itself to be steady but lacks the perfect body for high speed or tough conditions. To make things even more complicated, there are birds that are perfectly built, balanced, buoyant, orient quickly and have outstanding speed but they can't reproduce themselves.

This is the reason that so very few true champions are raised. The true champion is outstanding in every regard including being a top reproducer of class.

All performance aspects of the racer are a balancing act between the body type and mental type. To produce good racers we need the correct mental type as well as the correct body type. These types may not be identical in every bird. The mental strength or determination to get home must be in correct proportions to the physical strength of the bird. In other words a large heavy pigeon cannot race well no matter how determined he is.

The most important and difficult to establish factor is producing the correct mental type and locking it into the gene pool. What is meant by the proper gene pool? This would be owning a hen and a cock that are of a similar stable racing type and come from common family built from such types for many generations. Offspring are a direct result of the genes of the ancestors, so it stands to reason that you will produce a higher percentage of good racers if there are many good racers in the background.

Second, what is the correct mental type. This would be birds that are strong, naturally healthy and enjoy racing with confidence and determination. The birds that are able to control stressful situations of racing and keep coming. This includes the ability to out maneuver a falcon or hawk and get home. Many will try to tell us that they have picked a good racer from the perch when in reality they have no idea what the bird is capable of. The best and more sound approach is to prove them out on the race team before stocking them.

Another required element is proper training. Proper training is accomplished when these birds have been flown on a regular basis until maturity, which does not take place before the first adult molt. The adult molt is the molt that takes place the second season of flying at 18 months of age.

The reason proper training is important is the fact that genetic makeup can be modified or sharpened through the development or experiences of the individual bird. It is a minuet amount, but everything counts. I further have a suspicion that these life modifications can be somehow passed on the next generation.

Some will have us believe that what is in the genetic makeup is there at birth and all else is learned behavior. Maybe so but we certainly know that the genetics can be maneuvered and sharpened. Remember the Galapagos turtles? One set of turtles on one island had short necks because the shrubs they ate were short. On another island the turtles had much longer necks and could reach higher due to the shrubs being higher on that island. How did this happen? The turtles with the longest necks always survived and passed these genes on. Eventually the neck length was visibly different.

Racers are no different. They evolve how we allow them to. If you want good racers, how should you make them? I think it is obvious to most. I believe that there are many different types of genetic makeup that can surface.

I would say that there are many different types of genetic makeup that will produce a good racer. These would include one race wonders that win at one distance (short, middle or long), some may be all distance pigeons, or combinations both.

One genetic type may produce the sprinter whereas a different type produces the distance tough pigeon. The body type of the sprinter is more appealing in the hand and far different than that of the a long distance pigeon. There is the short race specialist, the middle distance and the long distance. The only way to see the type of racer is by flying them. One may build a decent picture of the genetic makeup of a bird in the breeding pen by switching mates and flying out the young. Good records are required for this type of research and it should be considered second choice behind using proven racers from the old bird team.

The value of a racer is measured by what they do in the air. What they look like should be considered only after they pass the flying test. Anybody can raise a nice looking racer but these beauties are only interesting to the beginner, as their worth in the air is little.

Every time you stock a bird without properly flying them out, it is just like throwing the dice. You are gambling that the bird's offspring will perform like he looks. This will also be a setback in the picture you are building of your breeders and how to properly select mates. For example how would you mate a sprinter that wins at 150-250 miles if you wanted to keep the speed and add distance? By mating a proven distance racer to this bird. How could one know which was a distance bird without flying them out?

There is absolutely no way in the world that one can tell correctly whether a bird is sound by merely looking at the bird on the ground except after many years of flying and observing the best as well as the worst in the races and on the ground.

I would say a minimum of thirty years is required to make decisions with any certainty based on the looks of a bird on the ground. Even then why would you want to do this when you are able to fly them?

The only possible reason is the looks of the bird in question. All is decided by the looks of a bird and not by it's merit as a racer.

The intelligence of a person comes into play when mating birds but nothing including super intelligence will replace experience.

Some will try to convince us that stocking a bird early is not due to the looks of a bird. We will find there is no difference in this and color or show pen breeding. Some will say; I flew them for a season and they were excellent. That is wonderful but we have all seen birds that raced excellent the first season only to get lost in the first old bird race.

Some will try to convince us that the racer can be produced by almost any bird whether it be a cull, champion or brother to such and that "proving them

out” in the breeding pen is a good practice. This can be done, but on a larger scale what is taking place is the correct genetic makeup hits now and again giving the owner a false sense of reasoning.

The suspect bird produces a good one and the owner feels as if his suspicions have been confirmed, (because that is what he wants) when the truth is the bird carried the genetic makeup of many and happened to hit the right one that time. If the owner would use only the best race tested birds’ year after year, generation after generation, he would begin to realize the benefits of multiplying the genetic chances of duplicating the best.

Let us do a little analogy here. What if you had all blue checks? Let us say that you acquired a red check. If you wanted you could turn the whole flock red. You ask how? You breed the red to one of the blues and get a blue that carries ash red. By mating this blue back to the red, many reds can be produced. After a while you will have many reds by using the reds. There will be a time frame when either color may be raised. This is where some guys are stuck raising racing pigeons. They mate a red one and a blue one together and get a red. When they get a red, they believe that this is good enough. When in reality, if they were to keep breeding the reds together and eliminate the blacks they would eventually have a very high percentage of reds.

We will do better percentage wise to use birds that, generation after generation have raced properly thus locking in the multiplied chances of breeding better birds. The genes or genetic makeup that causes a racer to race home are carried from generations back to the present. The more stable birds in the genetic makeup or background, the better the chances to produce the same.

The choosing of birds on the ground by looks alone without the proper years of experience can be detrimental to the family. Many years of this type of thinking has caused the genes to be mixed to a point that you never know what will pop out. This can be corrected, but only by picking properly selected birds that have been flown out and proven to be sound.

Would you rather have a pair of horses that won the Triple Crown to start your family of thoroughbreds for racing, or would you prefer to start with some really attractive Welsh ponies for racing? If you want to take home the money, I suspect you would prefer the proven performers.

The only consideration other than performance should be type. Type is a bird’s physical makeup. This is before a good portion of outstanding racers have been developed. After the best are abundant there will be no need to worry about type. The finest racers always have the right type. If performance is equal, always pick the bird with the best type. If the type is

off on the most stable and decent racer you have to use, then pair this bird with one of exceptional type in order to produce birds with both. You may only get one or two out of 20 young raised that carry the good type and the good racing ability. This will be the starting point to a family that eventually will produce better percentages with proper choices.

To achieve the best results we must fly many racers till maturity, which is not before two years. Then carefully choose the very best in every way to start the gene pool. Then rather than going backwards to older birds in the family tree we must keep upgrading by using only the best from races of the same type, increasing our chances of producing more of what we like.

The best characteristics to keep in mind are:

1. The ability to race all distances at or near the top.
2. The ability to orient quickly when released.
3. Good natural homing instincts. (Some won't tap into this ability until lost)
4. Determination and smarts during adversity.
5. Genetic & Natural good health. (very important)
6. Genetic & Natural motivation.

When we have established a good number of reliable racers, then we should start the process of refining the body type. Refinement of body type is difficult to understand until an idea of what the best look and feel like. It also requires understanding what type is most effective at the different distances. When this is set in our mind, then and only then can we move to the refinement stage.

The body type on a racer is the determining factor on the type of race that he is most suited for. The best are the all distance racers for ultimate enjoyment. These types should be studied closely to put in our mind's eye a picture of the correct body type. An attempt should be made to produce this body type when pairing breeders. All of the champions that I have seen were slightly long casted & wedge shaped, and bent legs with strong wing butts showing. When held in the hand, the body feels compact and lighter than it appears. The feathers should be soft. When feeling along the keel the muscle should feel soft and supple. The keel feels not too long in fact shorter with a good pitch or angled toward the vent bones with a space between the two. The depth is apple-ish feeling, not real deep or shallow, but having more depth in the front. The tail is tight and usually rigid and the bird will be aware of itself including the tail. The tail has a hinged quality wherein if you

are holding the bird in a way to allow the tail freedom, it will go down to 45 degrees showing the presence of a strong back. The tail acts as a rudder, and helps the bird to have greater control of direction flying in side winds and maneuvering.

It will be noticed on most of the best birds that the wing butts will be noticeable, giving the appearance of a strong athlete. The head shape is personal preference only. I like them with a strong wide head a heavy beak base that is medium length beak. The eyes may be any color or multi-colored with a good strong sheen. Looking as though they possess intelligence and good health. The bird should be calm with a ready to go look as if he or she is confident and ready to make adjustments to the situation. An open and honest look is preferred. If one is unable to make such observations, they should not worry. It is not necessary to raise champions. The champion will be noticed by any and all that view the results. One of the reasons that very few are to be seen is the fact that most of the better breeders will lock them up in the breeding pen after their second season, as they should. Should you see a breeder that claims all birds in the stock pen are champions as described above, let caution be the guide. Should a fellow truly have more than three or four of such birds, then he knows the racing pigeon well.