

WHO IS FAT? - Bill Verco

The other morning, a friend dropped around, and as we were sitting down having a heart starter, that adrenalin fluid called coffee, I happened to make a comment, which was, why are some people more successful than others? My friends reply to this was, because they are smarter, more observant, and extremely determined to make sure that they will succeed. He then made an simile, which went like this, if you gave a hundred people a thousand dollars, and told them they could only trade amongst themselves, within a short period of time a couple would have all the cash. Then surprise! Surprise! He got onto pigeons, and made the same comment, by saying that if you bred pigeons in the one loft, and then gave ten flyers an equal amount of these birds. What you would find is that one or two of these people (even though the pigeons were the same) would soon eclipse the rest. Cream always rises to the top. Before we could discuss this intriguing subject further his better half rang and reminded him it was to only be a ten-minute visit, and he had already exceeded it by one hour. So after making these profound statements, he left me to ponder his observations. What he was saying was that a very few are cleverer than the rest, and knew how to get the best out of whatever they set their mind to. This set me reminiscing, and thinking about a couple of the great old flyers of yesteryear, such as Vin Blanden, and Doug Green, men that I looked up to, no held in awe would be more accurate. Both these flyers believed that no race could be won if the birds were not at peak fitness. Fitness! It does not matter which sport you are involved in, you will hear the coach say that if you are not fit it is impossible to win, and he will do everything in his power to achieve this ultimate. In us humans it is fairly easy to get us to peak fitness, what with running, weight lifting, diets, and the added advantage of specialist doctors, who can monitor our muscle stress and fat content etc. Unfortunately this is a very expensive exercise, but with the big money in most sports, as an example AFL, this cost can be readily absorbed. Pigeon flying in our wildest imagination would not fall into this category. You as the coach, yes that's what you really are, have the enviable task of getting the birds fit without the above advantages. Like those two old gentlemen quoted, lacking in fitness will not put you at the top of the tree. But how do we get them fit? Getting back to Vin Blanden; Vin served in the pigeon Corp in world war 11, it is fairly obvious the knowledge he gained from mixing with those flyers under the capable wing of Colonel Cornish made him a formidable flyer. Well I remember going out to see his pigeons, they had just been fed and watered and were settling on their perches for the night. Their ration for that day and every day was one ounce. In his pocket was a handful of peas, as he went around the loft checking each and every bird he would give them a pea, they would be looking around the perch, in anticipation for this treat. My comment was Gee Mr Blanden you are running them a bit skinny, to which he replied pigeons do not win unless they are lean and mean. Vin was the writer for a weekly paper called the Express and Journal which catered for all sports. Back in those days most flyers like myself could not wait for the rag to hit the streets, so that we could absorb a little more of this mans wealth of knowledge. He wrote many articles on how to tell if a bird was fit, but he stressed two things, one was never let the birds over eat, for if this happened they would become fat and lazy.

Two he always looked for the bird that had a shine to it, and did not rush to the feed tray. I always regret that I did not have enough foresight to save his articles. The other pigeonier I

"Honesty is the Best Policy!"

have mentioned is Doug Green; he was a winner of something like seventeen SAHPA races. His birds were fed even less than Vin's, neither of these flyers were ever found wanting in the longer races. I can remember the assoc decided to fly a race from Kalgoolie, and it is a well-recorded fact that these two gentlemen owned the only pigeons reported from this race. Vin called his bird Kalgoolie girl, and what a producer of distance pigeons she was, many of today's successful flyers would still have pigeons which could boast having this hens pedigree in there ancestry. Doug's bird unfortunately did not make it home, it was killed by a car about one hundred and eighty kilometres short of its destination. There was a great demand for Doug's birds when they were sold, and many successful lofts in Adelaide to this day carry these birds as their base. Both these men strictly controlled their birds food intake consequently the birds did not fly around the lofts for very long, and once they were educated did very little tossing. Another very prominent flyer of that era, hopper fed his birds, but they were flagged one hour morning and night, this flyer said that his birds were at their peak when they were blown up but light as a cork. While another, hand fed, until three or four went to water, again this person worked his birds hard, his criteria for when they were at their top was the eye. It had to shine like the diamond in his better half's engagement ring (he never did tell her it was cut glass, but that's another story). It is fairly obvious that as these two flyers birds were fed heavier, they needed to be worked harder, to remove the excess fat. Although all these men had a different method of assessing when a bird was at its peak, and I dare say that all of these points that they stressed, plus many more, such as warm feet, muscles along the keel, pink throat and open cleft etc, would be noticed in a pigeon ready to win. But none of those guides would be there if it was not for that one common denominator, and that was that the pigeons must not carry excess fat. I am sure that if we asked the premier flyers of today they would also emphasise this point. Perhaps I should take notice of what I write, and eat less and exercise more, and who knows, perhaps I can get to the loft quicker and so save some time in clocking in.