

Racing Pigeons: “Champions of the Sky”

A brief introduction for interested people and potential newcomers to the sport.

The



South Australian Homing Pigeon Association’s German built transporter liberating racing pigeons.

Introduction

The Homing Pigeon was developed in Belgium during the period from 1790 to 1870, and pigeon racing remains the National Sport of Belgium to this day.

The sport of Pigeon racing is now enjoyed by fanciers throughout most countries of the world; with some high-profile owners including:

- The Queen of England, with the Royal family involvement in the sport dating back to the 1890’s
- Mike Tyson, the American former World Heavy-weight Boxing Champion, and
- Bill Lawry, a former Australian Test Cricket Captain, and dedicated pigeon fancier.

In Australia

The Sport of Racing Pigeons has been practised since the early 1900’s, with the race programs mirroring Olympic Games track events, with:

- Sprint races from 150km to 450km (equivalent to 100, 200 and 400 metres)
- Middle Distance races from 500km to 750km (800 to 1500 metres)
- Long Distance races from 800km to 1,000km (3,000 to 10,000 metres), and
- “The Marathon,” the 42km event that features in every Olympic Games. In South Australia, the SA Long Distance Club convenes an annual race from Alice Springs to Adelaide, a distance of 1,320kms. ***This event is Australian pigeon racing’s equivalent of horse racing’s world famous the “Melbourne Cup.”***

Like all extreme athletes racing pigeons are fed a special diet and prepared for races by:

- Daily exercise of 45 minutes to one hour around the loft, normally at sunrise, and
- Weekly (x2) training tosses from distances ranging from 80 to 160kms, and
- Lead up races to condition them for flying the longer events.

How Do Pigeons find their way home?

There have been several scientific studies conducted over the years in an attempt to answer this question. British researchers found that pigeons home via eyesight and used landmarks over short distances. Italian researchers found that pigeons used their sense of smell to locate home.

Obviously neither of these provide an adequate solution as to how pigeons find their way home over long distances. ***The most likely answer is that pigeons have a substance called magnetite at the front of their brain and that this allows them to use the Earth's magnetic field (similar to GPS) to set their course for home.***

Most major associations have their own transport units to take pigeons to the race or toss points for liberation. Once liberated racing pigeons will usually circle a few times to gain their bearings before heading for home.

Care and Welfare

There is an Australian National Code of Practice for the keeping and racing of pigeons that sets out guidelines for the care and wellbeing of racing pigeons, and under what weather conditions birds may be liberated away from home. The National Code of Practice is fully compliant with the standards and guidelines set out by Animal Health Australia, as commissioned by the Federal Government of Australia.

To view the National Code of Practice visit www.anrpb.org

The Pigeon Loft

Pigeons need to be kept dry and free from draughts in their home loft. However, loft design and construction does vary considerably. Potential new members to the sport are encouraged to visit several lofts and discuss with the owners what modifications they would make to their loft if starting again, before planning their own design.

Lofts are to be cleaned on at least a weekly basis.

Racing pigeons will also enjoy a weekly bath. Just place a large flat container of water on the ground in front of the loft and watch them enjoy their bath.

Feed and Water

To perform at their best racing pigeons do require a special diet. Most frequently this is a mixture of peas, wheat, maize, barley and milo. Only provide what the birds can eat in ten minutes, never leave excess feed in the racing loft.

Fresh water should be provided at least daily, and twice daily in hot weather.

Your Backyard

Racing pigeons is a unique hobby and sport in that most of the activity is in your own back yard, and the sky above. It is a hobby that can include the whole family. Indeed, many of the fanciers of today were introduced to the sport as a child through a parent's involvement.

Should you require additional information please contact:

The South Australian Homing Pigeon Association General Secretary:

Email: sahpa.secretary@gmail.com or visit www.sahpa.asn.au/