

John Kokalakis - Morundah



I started with pigeons in 1962 in the West Torrens Juniors with good friends Stef Orfanos and Moss Polites. I restarted in pigeons in 1995 after my first love (soccer) playing days were over. I have raced from my present address for 20 years.

If nothing is done the future looks a little bleak as we are a dying lot. I don't think we are getting any new recruits. Word of mouth is not enough so I think the SAHPA could look at something with our limited funds. It's hard but if we don't do something it is curtains. I'm almost 70 years of age and at my club I'm one of the youngsters. Now we have our own transporter perhaps we could look at making it more affordable. I am all for limit flying – more birds for protection doesn't wash with me as we have seen many times the quality of the birds is more important. Putting rubbish out there does not improve returns.

I'm a one-man band and I like it that way as

I have no-one else to blame if things go wrong (my wife has her hands full with the grand-kids). Having said that, my young grandson – John Michael – helps with ringing and feeding and quite often comes with me to train the birds.

Being retired would be an advantage if you are keen and see to the birds every need – being retired and lazy doesn't work. When I was working I still did well. Again if you are keen enough you can achieve anything. Birds can be put on units the night before etc.

My favourite bird of all time is what I call the “freak hen”. She was an outstanding racer and breeder. She has produced many winners and her children continue to produce winners. Her daughter bred 2nd SAHPA Morundah and in turn he bred 1st SAHPA Morundah. Her 14 year old brother bred 5th SAHPA Narrandera. All good management counts for nothing without good pigeons.



JOHN'S WINNER

I clean my lofts daily in the race season and weekly in the off season. My only secret is hard work on my part. Once the birds have gone though the moult I use a slightly lighter mix with the addition of barley. I never starve the birds as I'm looking to the longer races. I like the birds to work well around the loft but I don't play with their food much. Hungry birds won't work - and having said that, I do watch their weight. I do look at the eye but I strongly believe in the first foot on the landing board theory!

You never know where your next intro will come from. I have paid good money for good and bad birds. My stock birds are Wickham x Goodger based and Jim Cox. I have a very good family of Van Loons and Janssen as well. I have created my only family of birds and I inbreed and linebreed and if I see a bird I like I will try it out - always looking to improve.

I have put birds bred for stock in the stockhouse but the criteria is the same – they must produce. If a bird performs on the road and in the stockhouse what more do you want. This



THE STOCK HOUSE

year I am only breeding a few as I'm undecided if I'm going overseas. Normally I would breed about 100 youngsters but it also depends on the previous year and how that went. When I mate my birds I like to see that they compliment each other similar to what my friend Stef Orfanos did a lot of. My birds have their origin from Stef. I will breed from old birds if they still produce winners. If you are mining gold and still digging it up why would you stop!

Apart from patience and observation I don't have any real secrets. I have been known to

double birds back. Personally I think they need the work but if you want them for the pointy end of the season you have to keep them fresh. Birds can get hawk shy and hamper weary, especially the older ones. I like the long distance events.

Breeding is winners to winners and although they don't all produce it's not a bad place to start. Uncle to niece or vice versa is something I like to do and have had very good results. The wind on the day has a big bearing but to be in it you still need to be in the first batch.

Feeding is nothing special - peas and wheat mainly with some small seeds and maize when I think necessary. In recent years I've given peanuts but not too many. I hand feed my birds twice daily making sure they all get enough. I buy my small seed pre-mixed (Pryor mix) and minerals are before the birds at all times. I use barley early in the season and I give my birds vitamin B group. My feed is bought from local farmers but I also use race pellets in small proportion.



NEW FLYER?

I don't medicate as a rule when the birds return but I realise that they can pick things up in the unit so I watch them closely if I think they need medicating I would not hesitate to do so.

My loft is 9 metres long in five sections. Floor is concrete with vapour barrier with plywood overlay. Ceiling and walls are lined. No spartan existence here I try to make them as comfortable as I can especially when it's cold.

I've always talked about grate floors for easy cleaning because of my back and leg problems but it would entail raising the loft and as I'm surrounded by houses it's not practical. I get on well with my neighbours. I keep my birds under strict control. My loft faces east which is ok but north-east would have been better for full use of winter sun. Electronic timing is great for me as I'm often hot home (watching grand-kids play sport) and often miss seeing them even when I am home. Race day I'm a nervous wreck. My birds are flown to the perch and I put a value on a hard day pigeon. I also look for consistency. I have some top producing hens that have never won but were around the mark – super consistent. Any winner is good but I prefer to do well from Derby distance onwards.

At the start I train the birds in stages. I'm not stingy with their feed so if they are not flying well at home I look closely for the reason. I generally have 3 to 4 tosses on my own and then onto the unit for some cover and experience to break. I have tried single-up tosses at different times. I usually fly my birds once a day unless I feel they need more. Anything with east in it is my favorite line. Late breders are good and I personally don't hold them back that much – they go with the rest. I have never tried widow-hood. I am a little harder on cocks and I've had some very good results with them i.e. BOY in the SAHPA. I prefer hens for the distance but cocks can do it – 2015 one cock to Alice Springs and placed 32nd (2nd cock home), 2016 same cock to Alice Springs, 3rd cock home. Head wind races are preferred.

On average my birds get from 3 to 8 races – it depends on their condition. If they have had a bad experience they need time to get over it and if you put them back too soon they are gone.

Absolutely some birds are smarter than others and some birds although regularly on the track don't seem to be bothered with hawks. We should be breeding more of these!



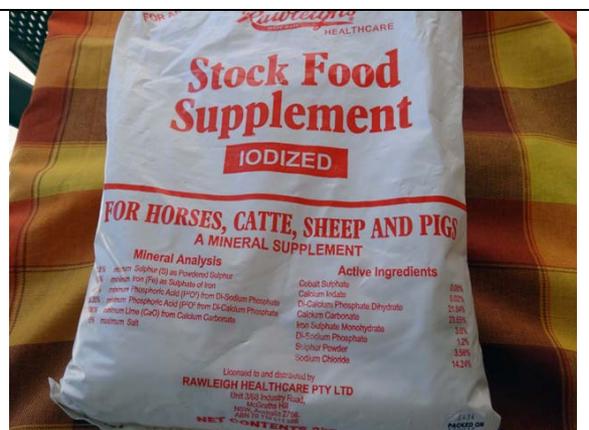
THE WINNING WING



GENERAL VIEW OF THE LOFT



BREEDERS



SECRET WEAPON