

Rob Graham of Broken Hill



My father raced pigeons in Broken Hill for nearly 40 years and also raced one season in Adelaide in the early Seventies. I guess the birds were always part of my childhood and I became attached to the birds at a very young age.

My partner does assist me as my work often takes me interstate for lengthy periods. During my absence Donna feeds and waters my pigeons as well as letting the birds out for loft exercise. Obviously my father assisted me greatly and would to the detriment of his own racing, train and wait for my returning pigeons opposed to his own when I had been working out of town. Trevor Grillett has and continues to gift me quality pigeons and also I would like to thank Brian Ashwood for his assistance and allowing me to use his clock. I have been racing since 2000. Favourite distance is over 400 km.

Very concerned about the future of pigeon racing as no new members coming into the sport

The Birds

My favourite bird (and most memorable) is without doubt a blue bar hen BH14 351, which won three of her six races and in turn has produced a winner.

The Delungra (930km) Championship winner (blue bar hen BH14 1299) is bred directly from two previous 700 km winners. The sire winning for myself from Portland in 2006 and the dam winning from the same race point in 2007 for long time flyer Trevor Grillett. Trevor gifted me this pigeon the day after its win. My strain of birds is a direct result of selective breeding for distance performance over a number of years with the main influences being five pigeons. The two Portland winners, two pigeons from the now passed Bob Warren and a pigeon that was equal winner of The Silver City Classic in 2010 (bred by Manfred Fruse of the VHA). Manfred's equal winner was paired to a Bob Warren pigeon which than produced a daughter that was also an equal winner of The Silver City Classic in 2011. This hen was than mated to a son of the two Portland winners and this mating has consistently produced top distance pigeons, including a pigeon I consider my best ever racing bird. The blue bar hen BH14 351 has only been raced lightly over two years, competing in six races of which she has won three of them. She has now proved herself as a racer and a breeder. Wins were from Cobar (418km), Kyancutta (575 km) and Nyngan (546 km). 351 has already had a positive influence as a breeder with a daughter BH15 472, bred in the flying loft winning this year from Cobar (418 km) and also placing third from Gilgandra (682km). She homed with another two of my pigeons from Gilgandra which were placed first and second. BH15 498) which won this Gilgandra race is a full sister to the Delungra Championship winner noted earlier. All of my seven winners from this season are related.

In General

Broken Hill has had a fixed installment package now for many years and as a Treasurer I can vouch for its effectiveness in not only easing the work load but also you know early in the season the minimum income generated from race nominations.

In Broken Hill there is ample help for anyone wishing to participate. Most flyers are more than happy to assist in any way, from gifting quality birds to assisting with advice.

From an outside perspective the SAHPA seems to be very proactive in raising the profile of the sport in a positive fashion.

Pigeon racing has provided me with many friendships that I value highly. Most weekends now I have former flyers with me awaiting the race arrivals. The biggest negative is the lack of new participants.

Training and Racing

In Broken Hill loft position and wind direction does have a major influence on results as velocities are generally slower here than the major cities, which in turn favours the long markers. I start with 120, usually about 85 young birds and 35 old birds. Definitely prefer the hens. I don't like over racing the young birds. About three to four races only before the distance race. I have found the least raced birds often perform better in the distance races. The wind has an influence in the shorter races.

I believe the more time you can put into training is advantageous. I work full time and often interstate at which times my birds are exercised around the loft but not tossed. Generally after not being tossed for periods of up to ten days my results will diminish for about two weeks. Head wind training is best. I haven't got the time for single-up training.

I have never been placed in the young bird derby, and each year I try to set my birds for that race but I am yet to have any success at all. I will try again next year.

My target is any race over 400km but the longest races are what I set my pigeons for every year.

Winning is great but my real thrill comes when you first see a pigeon returning from a race, especially the long distance races. It does not matter if it's your first bird home or your last hours later. It's just knowing what the bird has been through and its desire to return home.

All wheat prior to training and loft exercise once a day. I do not force fly my birds.

Training is twice a week then often three times a week as the distances get longer. Tossing is usually around 70km and I like to toss them on the Sunday and Wednesday before a race. The average bird would have three maybe four races but I race the older birds more often especially at the short distances and often double them back. The youngsters I race less often and don't usually double them up. I don't educate them in the basket but I train them in the club unit with other members.

Memorable Moment

My most memorable moment would be my first win which was in my first season of racing in 1999 when Broken Hill had two active pigeon clubs. I was racing in the Barrier Homing Society at the time and had only achieved one or two minor placings in short distance races competing against over thirty members. I sent only three pigeons to our highest prize money race, a Breeders Plate from Bourke (475km). All three pigeons returned, I took first and fourth placings with birds bred by my father, winning by over seven minutes and earning over five thousand dollars in prize money. Needless to say I was happy with that for a first up win.

Winning the 2016 Championship by two and a half hours was a memorable moment. There was no pigeons home on the day from the 930km race so I was up before the sun on the second morning hoping for an early arrival. At 5.30am I said to my partner I'm going down with the clock now to wait even though I could hardly see due to darkness. I opened the trap and set my clock up and straight away a pigeon flew out of a large gum tree in my yard. At this stage I thought it was most likely a late arrival from the 680km race the previous day but as it was not light enough to see the colour of the race rubber I timed the pigeon in anyhow. When I saw the pigeon having a drink I immediately knew that the pigeon was from the Championship.

Important Factors

I put no relevance in winning short distance races where the majority of pigeons return in one mob regardless if you win or not. To win the tougher races not influenced by loft position or wind direction the most important ingredient is definitely breeding and prior race performance.

I look for well bred pigeons that consistently return early from training and racing and are eager to loft fly without flagging. If a bird has all these qualities at once and is not over raced then I think you can safely judge its form.

I use to clean regularly and top the floors with creek sand but due to family and work have not done so for a number of years now. Definitely deep litter for about the last six years.

I hope to avoid those periods where results are below standard.

No importance give to eye-sign or wing theory but the wind is definitely an influence.

No medications used but birds are wormed once before racing begins. Drug testing is not a concern.

Advice

Acquire proven birds from your local area, race them and breed from only the best performers. Do not start with birds of low quality and think you will perform consistently.

The imported birds may be able to compete in the major cities but definitely not in Broken Hill.

Creating a family is ongoing and only achievable through help from Trevor Grillett who has quality long distance pigeons which are very similar bloodlines to my family.

In Broken Hill I believe we should race all directions possible not just west and east.

Feeding and Medications

Feed is very basic this year, three wheat, one peas, one lentils, half milo. Increased the peas as the distances increased. I do all the mixing. Never tried pellets.

Racing birds fed by hand as much as they want with anything left removed shortly afterwards. Stock birds fed by hopper. Young birds fed only wheat until about four weeks before training begins.

For the longer rages I increase the protein. There is usually 20 pc peas but increase to 40 pc for long races.

Yes my birds have grit available at all times. No small seed is fed. No supplements are used. No barley. Occasionally used multi vitamins added to the drinking water. Birds are not medicated after a race. *I do use* Raspberry Essence Mix

I don't have any secrets but if I did they would not be secrets as I would share them.

Breeding

Only breed from top quality performers and blood lines that have proven themselves in your local environment. Do not keep a large amount of stock birds or large teams of racers.

I have lent a number of my birds to a current member this coming season to breed from and I hope they perform well for him.

I keep only 12 pair of stock birds, but will breed at least one round from the remaining race birds as they are all related closely to my stock birds. Birds are not put into stock unless they are proven.

The things I consider when pairing is performance and breeding. Are they far enough apart in parentage yet close enough to maintain performance. I have previously put a bird straight into stock but now will only introduce birds that have performed at distance for me.

I certainly try to pair winners to winners as well as maintaining my family. I look at the pedigree more than the confirmation of the pigeon.

I introduce pigeons that have performed and mate to my family. The introduced bird is then usually removed and all the youngsters are raced and if any of these youngsters perform themselves then they are introduced on a permanent basis.

My strain of birds is a direct result of selective breeding for distance performance over a number of years with the main influences being five pigeons as noted above.

The stock has definitely improved. Five years ago I removed all non consistent breeders from my stock and concentrated on birds mainly from the five birds mentioned above and I have noticed improvement each year. I would go to Trevor Grillett and borrow proven birds that had raced the current season. I would than mate them to my family and race all the youngsters. If any of these youngsters performed they would then be introduced

Pairing is done at the completion of racing.- usually early to mid October. No more than 100 are bred each year.

Stock sense is a skill learned.

I do breed off older birds until they stop producing performing youngsters



**Blue Bar Hen BH-2014-351 1 - First Kyancutta (575km),
First Cobar (418km) and First Nyngan Produce (546km)**

I like mid to long distance races - anything above 400 km and probably on the east line. I look at the breeding and the race / training form to select my race birds.

All birds are tossed at least twice a week from around 70km. Birds are exercised once a day



**Blue Bar Hen BH-2014-1299
First Delungra Championship (930km) – winning
margin 2.5 hours, Second Nyngan Produce (546km)
and flew Nundroo (871km) as a yearling.**

The loft

Approx 9 metres long, 2.5 metres deep, 2 metres high divided into 5 sections with the trap facing North East. I keep around 120 pigeons to start racing but have 280 perches available. Stall trap with bob wires.

General training and racing

I definitely place more value on the slow race winner. Birds are never separated. Towards the end of the season they are often raced to eggs. I try not to de-motivate them by allowing them to nest and not force flying them. I try to achieve condition by regular tossing.

I look at the breeding and the race / training form to select my race birds.

All birds are tossed at least twice a week from around 70km. Birds are exercised once a day

for 45 mins to an hour depending on my work commitments. They are not forced to fly but are locked out for this period. This year due to unforeseen circumstances the birds had their first toss on Wednesday from 60km prior to racing on the Saturday. Normally I would like to start 5 weeks prior to the first race at 15km, than 25km for about three tosses than onto 60km. Later in the season from about 75km. Exercise is once a day, usually in the morning – depending on the peregrines.

All birds are trained together but the late bred birds are raced only later in the season with their first race often at 400km. I definitely prefer hens for the distance races and cocks for the early short to mid distance races. Some birds are definitely smarter than others.