

Australia's Premier Long Distance Race

Long distance races has fascinated pigeon enthusiasts for as long as men started to race pigeons. Over the last 100yrs or so special pigeons have been developed to compete at extreme distances not at all envisaged by early day fanciers.

Europe has a special place in their hearts for pigeons that can compete and home from race points such as Barcelona, Dax, St. Vincent etc. Pigeons that have been developed over many years, pigeons of the Jan Arden, Van Wanroy and Van de Wegan's to name just a few of the old tried, tested and true long distance bloodlines.

In Australia the pinnacle of a long distance race is the one conducted in Adelaide Sth. Australia by the South Australian Long Distance Racing Pigeon Club Incorporated. Which is registered under the Sth. Australian Associations Incorporations Act 1985. (Refer to attachment, a very official State Government registration) I'm not sure how many other racing pigeon organisations around the world would actually be government approved.

The SAHPA Inc. was established in 1895 and incorporated in 1926. The SAHPA has always been a strong supporter of distance racing, those of 1000 plus kilometres with the Alice Springs back to Adelaide race being introduced to the race program in the early 1900's.

In conducting the first race from Alice Springs a special

Long Distance Race

By Paul Gibbs, exclusively for The Pictorial

wooden hamper was constructed, large enough to house the 24 birds that were entered. This hamper was then carried by train to the "outback" town of Oodnadatta that took 3 days to get to, the hamper was then transferred to a "Stage Coach" to continue the journey to yet another "outback" location known as "Horseshoe Bend" that took a further 3 days, and finally another 3 days travel to complete the trip to Alice Springs was by "camel". (Real wild-wild-west).

In those early years the race was given a five day race time, and many a time this was needed. Over ensuing years there began to develop a continuing improvement in birds being bred for the event and as a result fanciers began to birds homing in the late afternoon of the second day, with the main convoy homing on the third day.



In recent times a specially built unit has been manufactured and fitted on a commercial utility vehicle that now allows for a two day journey to Alice with hampering taking place on a Tuesday night, leaving first thing on Wednesday morning and arriving late on a Thursday afternoon allowing plenty of time for the birds to be fed/watered and rested for a 7am release on the Friday morning.

The race itself is held in late August (end of winter) and/or early September (early spring) to avoid the heat that comes to this particular the region soon after. It has been estimated that the birds generally achieve around 750km on their first day with sunset being around 6:15pm with sunrise being approximately 6:15am the next day. Today it has been recognised that the average race time taken to complete this race is around 19hrs.

This particular race, as described above, is conducted from the town of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, basically in the centre of Australia, not far from Uluru (formally Ayers

Rock, a land mark that many fanciers would have seen on TV and/or in magazines). Alice Springs is over 1350km or 840mils to the city of Adelaide and is flown over some of the most inhospitable terrain, consisting of mostly desert, Ranges of ironstone, rolling red sand dunes and open flat country used for grazing cattle, with some of the cattle stations (farms) being the size of the country of Belgium.

The race to Adelaide sees Scarce opportunity for the birds to find a water source which is highly dependent on the last rains, and apart from some dams and cattle troughs that could be many hundreds of kilometres apart there is a need for the liberator/conveyer to try and ensure that they are well hydrated before their release.

Over the last 600km they encounter massive dry (sometimes wet) salt lakes and larger ranges of hills before arriving at two gulfs of ocean to either crossover, or run down depending on which side they decide to fly on.

As you can imagine Alice Springs birds are a very special breed, having been developed since the late 1880's, with the aim of birds being capable of doing this 1350km event. All the birds bred for this race have been bred down off the very early imports from the UK with those early Bloodlines being Barkers, Logan, Gits, Grooter's and Harrison's, along with a gift of pigeons

from King George V to the Adelaide State Government around the same time (late 1880/early 1900's). These birds being bred down off pigeons presented to the UK Royal Family by King Leopold the 2nd of Belgium.

No doubt today there is still a small amount of the bloodlines of these very early imported birds in combination with what could be a small amount of "Royal Blood" in many Sth. Australian fancier's lofts to this very day, considering that the present day strains, which are still highly respected, such as the birds from the late Alan Goodger and John Pryor that contain traces of this Royal blood in their ancestry via the birds from the late Vin Blanden's strain which contained the Royal Strains from a Mr A. E. Hall and a Mr Talbot.

The late Vin Blanden wrote in his, "Origin of his Strain" that the Royal birds came to Australia via birds presented to the City of Adelaide from the then Grand Father of the late Queen, Queen Elizabeth the Second. He stated that at this time (1900), the Royal Lofts contained the bloodlines of Dechateau, Jurion, Jules Janssen, Vanderhaegan, Gits and Delmotte. Unfortunately though, the one thing that Vin did not write sadly was the actual arrival date of this consignment of Royal Pigeons, although an article was published in the Adelaide Advertiser dated the 23rd of May 1902 that announced a Royal visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall would be coming to Australia and mentioned in great detail the gift of Royal Pigeons with the title of the newspaper article reading "A Flight of Pigeons".

In all there were two separate consignments, the second consignment was not recorded, but a total of 10 birds in all over two shipments were imported into Adelaide from the royal Lofts in Sandringham. Below is a list of those first 6 birds in the first consignment that arrived in 1902 on the vessel SS Port Denison all rung as His Majesties (HM).

HM 524 Blue Check Hen	HM 541 Black Check Hen
HM 526 Blue Hen	HM 622 Blue Cock
HM 533 Blue Cock	HM 652 Mealy Cock
The second consignment consisting of 4 birds, these being rung with the prefix D as below.	
D 10 Red Check Cock	D 12 Blue Check Hen
D 14 Blue Check Hen	D 17 Blue Check Cock

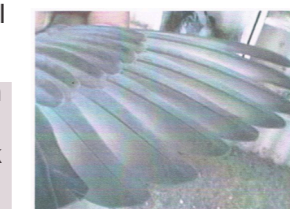
There's no doubt that these early "Royal Pigeons" contributed greatly to improving pigeons here in Australia, and the descendants of the original gifted birds are still with us today, in such modern successful strains, especially in Adelaide, pigeons today that carry the names of Pryor and Goodger,



King George V



SS Port Denison brought the first batch of Royal pigeons to SA in 1902.



The wing of the 1992 Alice Springs winner. Also had four Association placings before that win.



1993 2nd Alice Springs. Van Roy x John Pryor No. 1 cock.

birds that dominated long distance races that include the Alice Springs 1350km marathon along with many other races of 900km plus events. Of course over the years other long distance Bloodlines have been used as crosses by some fanciers, but in general the names Goodger and Pryor are those referred to by many fanciers in South Australia.

The history of the Alice Springs race can be traced back to 1908 and up until now (2023) has only not been raced from for various reasons that include transport issues, the Second World War and prolonged adverse weather conditions. Since 1908 this event has been raced on 67 occasions with 14 fanciers having had multiple wins, in the early years a

fancier by the name of Walter Sellick won this event 3 times 1930, 1934 and 1939. A fantastic effort when you consider it wasn't until 1984 that another fancier, John Pryor won it 4 times, 1984, 1990, 1992, and 1998, unfortunately John Pryor Passed away at too young an age from a heart attack and it makes you wonder if he had lived on how many other wins he would have achieved with his champion family of super long distance pigeons. It is interesting to note that John Pryor's father, Keith won this race in 1983, a fantastic family effort. Other fanciers that had multiple wins were Brian Donovan in 1996, 2005 and 2016. Another to have 3 wins was the partnership of W & K Moyle in 2000, 2004 and 2012.

An exceptional and very worthwhile mention is the