

John Patsos

Central Coast Racing Pigeon Federation

By Paul Gibbs

John is a very well-known pigeon fancier who resides on the Central Coast of NSW having only lived on the Central Coast for the last 6 years, but has only raced from his present address for the last 4 of those years. In saying that John is very well-known comes from the fact that John has been a member of several clubs since his involvement in the sport from 1982 when he first began racing as a senior fancier. Prior to that John told me that he has had pigeons since he was 5 years of age.

At this time his family was living in the Sydney suburb of La Perouse prior to moving to Rooty Hill in the western suburbs of Sydney, and it was here that his father built him a small cage from which he flew as a junior member in both the Rooty Hill and St. Marys Pigeon Clubs. At the time both of these clubs had very large memberships with both boasting a membership of 30 plus thus allowing John to mix and learn from some of the best fanciers that competed in Australia's largest federation, CCF that during this time had well over 600 members, thus allowing John to learn his "pigeon apprenticeship" from many of the top fanciers.

Since these early days John said that he has competed in four different clubs - The Rooty Hill Club, St. Marys Club, Mr Drutt Club and now the Budgewoi Pigeon Club on the Central Coast. For those not sure as to where the Central Coast is located, it is about an hour or so drive north of Sydney. Along with these four clubs John has also competed in three different federations, these being the Central Cumberland CCF, The Nepean Federation and now the Central Coast Federation, the involvement that John has had with being a member of these organisations have certainly contributed to John being a very "well-known" fancier as mention in my opening sentence.

Not only is John well-known but he is very well-liked by all that know him, a fancier willing to help out where he can, give advice if asked, support worthy causes and a good club man.

When it comes to his pigeons John is very meticulous with his overall management, from the loft environment, to training his race team and to the selection of his stock birds. John telling me that his bloodlines are a mixture of the "old Van Cutssem" obtained from Colin Warwick, a very reliable family that he has had for many years. Others include the long distance family of the late John Pryor, a tough reliable family on hard days, the old and well-known all-purpose Ward Grizzles obtained from Kevin Boyce, some Smeulder's Janssen's from Mark Gammal and a small number of Koopman's obtained from Pioneer Lofts.

These families being raced both "straight and crossed". A pigeon for all occasions, especially when you take into account the various routes flown, the unpredictable weather conditions that can be experienced on the coast along with the Peregrine Falcon problem with all these issues impacting on generally what could be described as a small liberation each week consisting on an average of 500 birds.

The Central Coast Pigeon Federation is a relatively small federation in relation to the federations in the major cities with a membership as of the 2023 season being 44 that send on average around 500 birds each week with a 20 bird entry limit per flyer. Although the membership consists of only 44 the competition is quite fierce with many of the members having retired and relocated from the big cities seeking that quieter and slower life style with many of them having been at the top of their game in the bigger city federations and clubs.

The 2023 season saw the Central Coast Federation fly the hard Nth. Coast route, a route that most federations for one reason or another find it difficult to race as losses along with at times slow velocities seeing many fanciers not completing the year. The 2023 season only consisted of 20 races commencing from a distance of 100km with the last race finishing at Kingscliff, a distance of 600km.

John competed in 19 of these races winning 2x1st Federation and 6x2nd Federation along with having finished 17 times in the Top 10 Fed positions.

John said that he keeps 24 pair of stock birds and breeds around 80 youngsters each year, and when asked does he keep the sexes separate he said no, keeping them all together. Trapping is via an open door and timing is via an ETS. Each section is fitted with the normal box type perches. I asked John what would be the dimensions size of his loft to which he replied that his race loft is $7\frac{1}{2}$ metres long, 2.4 metres high and 2.4 metres in width. The front is an open wire affair and the external walls are made of a standard cladding material.

Moving on to how John trains, manages and maintains the health of his birds. I asked how long he would work his birds around the loft prior to tossing and what might be his tossing regime. John's reply was that he likes his birds to train around the loft for at least 40min each day, maintaining a set speed or effort for all of this time and roaming the neighbourhood for most of it. Once they have been doing this without effort his thoughts begin to starting the "road work", saying that when he starts tossing his birds he has no set time or day and no set location, saying that it all comes down to where he feels like going that day.



John with his National Hen



As he mentioned earlier he keeps hens and cocks together and as such I asked that if he had a preference for either of the sexes, answering no he doesn't saying that he has had equal success with both and generally it has been dependant on distance, velocity flown and the time of year.

I proceeded to ask John about how and what he feeds his pigeons, to which he replied that he feeds a commercial mix to which he adds various other grains at various times of the year and is dependent on whether they are breeding, racing and/or the weather conditions saying that a fancier should always monitor what's happening in the loft especially in regards to race results and adjust the feed mix and amount fed to suit the results being obtained, saying that much of this comes down to the fanciers experience and nothing should be done haphazardly.

When asked about treatments, medications and supplements, John said that he routinely uses Dr Rob Marshall's supplements that include Megamix, Dufoplus, Ioford and Turbo booster that are all basically vitamin health boosters. As for medications, he only uses them if required and not as a preventative with the only exception being Turbosole for the treatment canker. As for veterinary examinations John said that once each year he will send off droppings to be examined, but has not had throat swabs undertaken for some years now.

I asked John if he holds back young birds after a few races to keep as 2yr olds to which he answered no, all birds go to the races and/or sent as surplus to the races where possible, and that all his birds are expected to race the entire race season with only those that are left or been injured early in the season being kept to race as old birds, and when it comes to keeping or selecting birds for the stock loft John said that they have to have been winning pigeons or down off an exceptional good line of pigeons.

When asked if there was anyone in his club and/or federation that he admires as a fancier he had no hesitation in naming Frank Anderson, saying that when you're near him on the scoreboard you know you must be doing something right, saying you need guys like Frank not only at the club level, but also in the federation level as it provides the incentive to try harder to achieve your own goals. (Frank Anderson winning Federation Flyer of the Year in 2023, 2nd in 2022 and 1st 2020). (A future article regarding Frank Anderson will be forthcoming soon). John did say that there are several other top competitors in the federation and it would be unfair to try and name them all, but others that he believes deserve a special mention are Brian Solomon, Mick Scroggy and John Bansfield.

It's always interesting to hear fanciers concerns, if they have any with regards to how they think things are being managed, especially in their own clubs and federations. John is of the opinion that in his own club and fed that things are operating fairly well apart from experiencing the number of losses each year and that the frequent changes of rules and routes flown each year could be a contributing factor.

I asked John if he could provide me with a list of his major wins successes from those clubs and federations that he raced in as mentioned earlier, the list was quite extensive, so much so that I have reduced it for this article to those I thought most warranted and included the following:

Nepene Federation: 1st Fed Wonthaggi Combine 710 km
1st Fed Orbost Combine 485 km
Central Cumberland: 1st Fed AAD Nth West Section Balranald 523 km
1st Fed Nth West Section Orbost 490 km
1st Nth West Section Sale 591 km

Among the list of prizes won within the Federation level there were 3 x 1st Nth West section of 490 km and over along with 8 x 1st place in Breeder's Plate and Blind Auction wins

Central Coast Fed: 1st Fed Ballina 523 km
1st Fed Combine Lakes Entrance 604 km
2nd Fed, 1st Club YBD Ballina 523 km
2nd Fed, 1st Club YBD Grafton 420 km
3rd Fed, 1st Club All Age National Kingscliff 587 km

Now while I have only listed Federation and Special race wins there were countless Club wins and Merit Card Certificates for winning 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th etc. It would take me a long time to list them all.

When asked was there a particular pigeon that he had a fond memory of he said that he had a soft spot for a BB Hen ring MTD-10-102 that won 1st Club Capertee 106 km, 1st Club Mudgee 178 km, 1st Club Nevertire 363 km along with a 5th Place from Dubbo 265 km. The other reason that he is particularly fond of this hen was the fact that her nest mate sister, a Blue Checker ring MTD-10-101 went on to win 3rd Nth West Section, 9th O.A.C.C.F. Fed Two-Bird race from Mudgee 178km.

Wings of Dreams



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I asked John what his fondest memories were to-date, to which he replied that there were several, with the following three examples being what he believes to be his standouts. The first being from a race from Little Topur 831km in 1985 when he timed in to win 2nd club, 11th Fed when there were only 3 birds home in the club in race time that had 23 members send birds, with the weather on this particular weekend changing dramatically not long after liberation with torrential rain setting in for days.

The bird that won this race belonged to Will Fletcher with fellow club mate Harry Eggers taking 3rd place, both these fanciers being two of the best back in the day. John said what topped this race off for him was that he ended up getting 4 birds home from 4 entered.

Another would have been the 1992 season when he won the Federation average that included winning the Fed Combine from Wonthaggi having entered 14 birds, homing 10 with 3 of them in a drop together, along with winning the "Two Birder" that day as well.

This being topped off with his final race result this year (2023) when he won the Federation All Age National from Kingscliff a distance of 587km flying a velocity of 921mpm with the only bird home on the day clocking at 5:40pm. The amazing thing was that he also won the Federation Combine with a velocity of 879mpm from the same race point with both birds homing together. Amazingly, these two races were liberated $\frac{1}{4}$ an hour apart, with the National birds being liberated at 6:30am and the Combine birds being released at 7:00am.

More amazingly, John had the first two birds home in the Federation the following morning that could have won 1st Prize in both races as well, showing me a photo of the times on his ETS. One being from the National being timed in at 6:21:36 am and the other from the Combine being timed at 7:02:34 am. John certainly must have had his birds primed that weekend, a weekend not to be forgotten.

When it comes to what he would like to achieve in the future John said he wanted to work towards getting more birds home from races.

I asked John if he had any advice to offer to new or novice fanciers, to which he said that you need to prepare for a huge commitment, success in pigeon racing does not come easily, build a sound loft, talk to as many pigeon fanciers as possible, research and read many of the publications as you can, the internet is a great resource and don't be afraid to ask questions.

John said that he would like to finish his story by thanking some very special people, saying that over the years of pigeon racing he has met and made many



friends and in particular would like to thank Colin Warwick for his support in the early days by providing him with some very special birds along with helping John out whenever he could. Another good friend is Loui Gottardo, no longer with pigeons, but for his time and work in helping to build two of his lofts over the years and to the many others out there that have helped him out along the way.

Last but by no means least, to his partner Liz, for her full support over many years, John saying that if not for Liz he would not have achieved as much as he has, saying "I couldn't have done it without her". John going on to say that Liz is sadly missed, having passed away on the 27/4/21 and that he thinks about her every day.

I would like to conclude this article with what I believe to be a suitable quote from Cesare Pavese, who said:

"We do not remember days, we remember moments".