

Modernise or Perish

By Paul Gibbs

How many times have you heard fanciers say that pigeon racing is dying and that it has no future? I've lost count of the of times I've heard fanciers say that young people are not interested in the sport and that it's a dying pastime, with little or no idea as to how to promote this wonderful past time so that future generations can enjoy what we have for many years.

It's sad to say that many fanciers are in their "Twilight Years" (so to speak), with many being in the 60 – 70 year old bracket including myself, and unfortunately many have the view that if the sport for them only lasts a few more years their not concerned as to what future the sport has after that.

We need to break the shackles of this type of thinking and that of the general public who view the sport as an "old man's" past time, a hobby that belongs to yester-year and look to how we can promote the sport in a modern way, capturing young people's imagination and putting to work all the technological advancements available to stimulate their interest. Technology and science needs to be researched by all federations along with our national body, the "Australian National Racing Pigeon Board." For if we don't modernise I feel we will perish with declining membership to continue that will result in increased costs for those remaining and "One Loft Races" being the only option left.

Some readers may say "that's rubbish", maybe so, but we cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand and ignore current trends in declining club and federation memberships for much longer.

It doesn't seem that long ago that many fanciers argued against thimble-less clocks, and then battery powered clocks, these seen as a disadvantage to those who for one reason or another would still have us all still using the windup "clunkers" along with thimbles. Even today after several years of using the Electronic Timing Systems arguments are ongoing, about how unfair it is, and that those who still use a "clunker" are disadvantaged. Then there's the argument as to where the scanning pad should be located, before the bob wires, behind the bob wires, wholly within the loft or as long as it's under the main roof in one way or another. It's surprising how many clubs have a variation/rule as to where it can be placed. Although it is now widely used and accepted there are still members within clubs that for one reason or another continue with "old technology" (if you wish to call it that).

I'm also surprised as to how few pigeon fanciers, even some of the well-known champion flyers do not use a computerised pigeon program like "Hawkeye" from Comproware or Panache for example. These types of programs I would have thought are a must and would go hand in hand with using an ETS. Besides being able to generate professional multi-generational pedigrees, a program like Hawkeye can be used to store a wealth of information regarding training and records of medication usage these being just two examples. Much like keeping a written diary but much more convenient and professional.

We only need to look around to see what is taking place not only in public places, but also in one's own home if you still have children at home or if the grandchildren visit. They can't seem to take their heads out of their electronic devices – iPads, phones or laptop computers. These devices are the younger generations way of gaining their information, be it news, sports and/or entertainment. For us to survive in the modern world, we as pigeon racers need to join in with this technology or we will become like the dinosaurs and become extinct.

While many of us shun the thought, it's something that in my opinion we have to address, and address it sooner rather than later.

Here we are, part the way down the track with Electronic Timing Systems like the "Benzing M1", "TIPES" and "Bricon" and when you explain how racing pigeons are timed in to non-pigeon racers they are amazed that "Super Market" style technology computerised chip rings passed over a scanning pad can register all the birds information including the time of arrival much the same as running a can of baked beans over the scanner at the supermarket.

Well I did say that we are part the way down the track, but there's a lot more technology that has already been developed for use with pigeon racing, but unfortunately at least in this country is being under-utilised. One being the use of GPS satellite tracking bands that enable you to track your bird's flight path and altitude on your computer.

Then there's programs like "Benzing Home", so that you can see the race results wherever you are without going to the club on "ring-off" night. These are the types of technical advances that are starting to change the way we view Pigeon Races.

Modern young people don't want to spend their evening generally sitting in a cold club house in the middle of winter gathered around a few electric bar heaters as is the case with many pigeon clubs. How good would it be to be at your local pub, licenced club or café with your fellow flyers, friends or family while monitoring the results as they come in. The same can be said for GPS tracking. These are just a few of the changes that we (older pigeon racers) are going to have to except, but more importantly promote in the best interest of the sport.

Change is generally hard to except, especially as you age, but for the sport to grow we need to consider and explore all that is "new" and to promote and embrace it whenever and where ever we can. Computers are a great tool that offers pigeon racers so many advantages besides those things mentioned above, things like weather maps and forecasting, magnetic sunspot activity, going forward with technology is our best hope in both promoting the sport and seeing that it remains such a fascinating past-time for generations to come.

Here's a short one to finish up with that may well sum up this short article – "***My hopes are not always realised, but I always hope***".