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BRITISH BARCELONA CLUB'S 50th ANNIVERSARY

GOOD PIGEONS—WELL MANAGED LOFTS

By E. A. Rivett of Mr. and Mrs. Rivett, High Wycombe,

1st British Barcelona Club, Barcelona 1965

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[The Racing Pigeon](#))

It is a great pleasure and honour to be asked to write for *SQUILLS* and I trust others will derive the same pleasure as I always do from reading the interesting matter contained in every issue of *SQUILLS*.

There is a saying that pigeon flyers, like poets, are born, not made. Be that as it may, pigeons have attracted me since I could recognise one, and I found it was one of the great charms of our sport, that the fancier has sole control of his birds, and can experiment with them to his heart's content, thereby increasing his interest and knowledge. Moreover, if long distance racing is the aim, the birds must be given tasks to make them use their heads as well as their wings so as to eliminate the fools as early as possible. One must always be on the lookout for improving the stock, and the replacement of the good ones which will not last for ever, by something even better if possible.

I have come to realise that it is not sufficient to have good pigeons, one must always be trying to find how to get the best out of each individual bird. Timing is very important in getting a bird to the peak of condition for when the effort is required in a long race such as Barcelona. Condition your birds to be bright of eye, hard of muscle and velvety and silky in feathering, and always breed for stamina. The main fact with old and young birds is superb health with vitality to spare, the mental system then functions to its fullest

capacity. Birds racing in this state when form arrives, will outpace all the birds that have been wearily trained from milestone to milestone.

The majority of winning pigeons will be found to have been bred from generations of birds which have flown in testing classics annually. It will also be found that the fanciers whose names appear regularly in National prize lists have cultivated a family of pigeons definitely of their own. Their racing records in the Nationals are their pedigree, and what better "hall-mark" or guarantee could one look for if your aim is to win from long distances. I consider my birds are now well blended together and they win at all distances. My wins in the long races convince me that I have really laid the foundation of a long distance strain.

When you are winning, pigeon racing is the simplest thing in the world, but when you are out of the running it is the most exasperating and perplexing sport imaginable.

In an article of this sort it is usual to indicate those factors and methods to which we attribute our modest successes, or, on the other hand, to attempt to isolate the cause of our failure. My case —a good loft manager (Mrs. Rivett) is all that I require over and above my own attention. In my pigeon career I have had to rely quite considerably on my wife as loft manager, to feed the birds and even on some race days she is solely in charge, and as is now common knowledge it became her responsibility to deal with "Barcelona Pride" on the day she found him in the loft, to complete his Barcelona effort.

As I am a corn merchant by trade I perhaps find the feeding management a rather simple matter. May I say without hesitation, it is a mistake for one to feed pigeons in the belief that this keeps them healthy. Those who do so, are usually the cause of their own failures. As I am a hopper feeder, I find my birds restrict their daily ration at all times to just requirements, and even with their "open hole" during the summer, I never can find a better diet than good beans to race on, after having changed from a mixture at the termination of the first round of squeakers.

Immediately old bird racing is completed, our pigeons receive special care, particularly with a view a furthering the progress of a successful moult. A very varied mixture of the best quality grains to supply the growth of the feather and its replacement during the moult. For this a kind of protein diet may not be

prolonged except for the late bred, who must receive a rich legume (peas and beans) diet for the time being. In very cold weather it is permissible to add a little rape, hemp and sunflower seeds.

I never send a "chancy" bird to a race, always a bird well trained and tried. I believe in testing our birds at all times and will "have a go" at any distance within reason, but I like conditions to be such as to make a good race possible.

Always be on the lookout for the pigeons to be clean and free from lice. A pigeon which is playing host to lice cannot be expected to win or even home from long and trying races. I have frequent lice inspections and none of my birds escape the little dose of insect powder. I believe in giving my birds weekly baths even during the close season for I consider that this helps the moult and growing feathers. Any individual fancier will have his own little whims and theories, some controversial, some generally accepted, some kept secret. For example, separation of the sexes during the close season is generally regarded as essential. Some people believe in "doctoring" the drinking water, but I give my birds water straight from the tap. Some fanciers are impressed by what is known as "Eyesign" but for myself I think that the eye secret could refer more appropriately to the fancier's eye and his ability to use his observations to guide his selection for the race.

My advice to novices, obtain birds only from a successful winning loft, where the pedigree is through the basket, and the owner is a real worker with his birds. Be patient and tolerant, don't attempt to run before walking, and attach yourself to a really successful fancier or two and learn. During my years of pigeon flying my ambitions have found wider and still wider horizons. My ultimate objective has been to win an open National event, and I know that it was with a stroke of good fortune, but represents the culmination of many years of hard work, careful thought and painstaking preparation. Agreed, we give much credit to the pigeon, but good pigeons only achieve success when they are fortunate enough to live in a well managed loft.