

ROGER & COREY OWERS 1st & 2nd OPEN BBC PALAMOS

To many aspiring long distance fanciers to time in from the twin Spanish race points of Palamos and Barcelona represents the ultimate challenge in the sport of pigeon racing. Just to get a bird home in good time from either of these two locations can be regarded as an achievement but to get two birds home on the same day to win 1st & 2nd Open in a National race at close to 700 miles can only be described as phenomenal. This is exactly what Roger and Corey Owers of..... managed in the 2015 Palamos race- a race that proved hard even by past standards.

So it was that I contacted Roger Owers with a view to produce a loft report in recognition of this marvellous achievement. The following article is based on answers to the numerous questions I put to Roger.



THE BEGINNING.

Roger started in the sport in the waning years of the 1960's and his first major influences when entering the sport were Fred Griffin of Chippenham, himself a winner of 1st Open Palamos in the late 60's and Bert House of Maiden Newton.

Roger's first "proper" loft was a 12 ft x 8ft Kidby structure. To this modestly sized loft Roger raced a small team of natural pigeons but did on occasions "flirt" with a form of round about from time to time.

A move to Portland in Dorset saw Roger race birds from the Dorset coastal town for a brief period before a move to his present location around ten years ago.

THE LOFT.

The present loft set up includes a 12ft x 6ft timber loft for old birds. This is fitted with an ETS sputnik trap and ordinary nest boxes along with some "unusual" ones. There is also a small young bird loft 7ft x5 ft with a sputnik trap for the birds to leave and enter the loft. Roger does not normally race young birds but if he does have "a dabble" the babies are dropped in the "deep end" so to speak with their first race being from across the channel.

The old birds' nest boxes are cleaned once a day, followed by a complete scrape out 3 to 4 times a week if possible. With the young birds Roger cleans the box perches every day and allows the droppings to fall onto a sand litter. As he has found that the babies seem to build up a better immunity by doing this.

THE BIRDS.

The Owers stock team amounts to just a couple of stock birds mainly from his own bloodlines which are Southwell, Cannon, Jan Aarden, and Tony Hustler [himself a winner of 1st & 2nd Open Palamos]. The old bird race team amounts to just 35 racers supplemented by a young bird team of around 30 young birds plus a few late breads which Roger feels is essential.

The old birds are always raced on the natural system so that he can switch pairings and keep different breeding lines on trial plus of course he is constantly testing not just the cocks but the hens as well. The birds are mated at any time from late February to the end of March. Nothing is set in stone but all birds, both stock and racers, are mated at the same time.



“Corey Boy” & “Gilli”

MANAGEMENT.

Roger does not like to fuss about in the loft but does like to sit in the garden observing the pigeons as he feels the loft is their home and spends as little time as possible disturbing the birds in their home environment. The birds are never forced to fly around home as Roger says “they get all the flying they require later in the season from the long distance race points”. In his opinion you cannot bring a pigeon into form and back out in a matter of days. True form can only be achieved by gradual preparation over a period of time. Roger firmly believes that whether it’s short or long distance, if birds are kept in good condition after a couple of tosses they should be able to face their first race whatever the distance.

Open loft is Roger’s favoured form of home exercise but this is not always possible now due to the population boom in the UK’s raptor numbers. As far as training goes Roger normally starts the team off with a 10/20mile toss followed by a couple of 30mile tosses. If all is well after that they normally never get less than a 40/50mile trainer when he thinks they need it. When racing is underway he will single them up the same distance.

When getting the individual pigeons ready for a target race a couple weeks before they will then get a couple of 80/100 mile single ups.

In the final days before basketing he likes to, keep out of the loft as much as possible, preferring to sit in the garden with a pint and just watch the pigeons exercise and observe. As he says "There's nothing you can do by that time."

Young birds are not raced, which means that there is plenty of time to train them when he feels they are ready. They are trained in stages as normal. Once they are coming well they get plenty of training without the stress of nights in the basket. No holdovers, no mixing with other young birds which may have young bird sickness. He usually trains the babies on Fridays because everybody's young birds are normally in waiting to go to the young bird races on that day. Hopefully, by adopting this common sense practice he can avoid clashing with other pigeons going in various directions. At the end of the year young birds are singled up at 40/50miles for their final series of tosses. Roger has never, and will never race young birds on the darkness system.

FEEDING.

All birds, both young and old bird racers, are fed by hand until they have eaten enough. Roger uses a variety of mixtures and a couple of times each week he will feed them a small seed mix just for condition. In the build up to the long races he uses peanuts as a treat.



PERFORMANCES.

One of the first top class performances that Roger can recall was winning 6th Open Dax in 2003 when Brian Sheppard of Trowbridge won 1st Open International beating more than 19,000 pigeons from all over Continental Europe.

Then there was the Nantes race when there was only 6 birds home on the day and Roger's bird finished well up in the result from an entry of 21,000. The Owers pigeons have attained many positions from Tarbes, Bordeaux, Bergerac, Nantes and Saintes. One of the best being 5 birds timed on the day out of 11 sent in the Nantes Centenary race being 30th Open out of 65,000 birds.

3rd Open BBC Carentan 3,700 birds. 8th Open West of England Combine 6,000 birds. 1st Open Dorchester single bird Guernsey.

Over the years Roger has won lots of other positions on both the North Road and South Road when living in Dorset. However, his one aim has been to gain success at Pau,

Tarbes, Barcelona & Palamos. Which as you can imagine is a pretty hard task to achieve when racing a very small team. Obviously he is now a very “happy chap” having won 1st & 2nd Palamos BBC and thus achieving his ultimate goal in the pigeon sport.



MEDICATION AND SUPPLEMENTS.

As far as medication goes there is none – the birds have to rely on their own in built immunity to any and all of the common ailments. With regard to supplements, Roger uses Cider vinegar, garlic, grit, clay blocks and that’s it. Of these he believes garlic to be the most important.

With regard to his ideal type of pigeon Roger told me that he likes medium sized birds and has an aversion to big pigeons. However, if they are big and fly well he loves them! He regards his pigeons as his pets that are made up of flesh, bone and feathers, rather than racing machines - a point that is often forgotten in the cauldron of modern day pigeon racing.

On that poignant note I will close this report on one of the major race winners in the UK in 2015. Thank you Roger for your candid replies to my questions and good luck for the future.

Gareth Watkins