

**Bruce Oakley Maryborough Racing Pigeon Club.**

**Winner of the Qld 10000 Race 2008**

**By P.J. Matthews.**



I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Bruce Oakley who by now everyone knows blitzed two out of the three Qld 10000 Races held at Gympie in 2008. These feats are nothing new to Bruce but as far as I am concerned this effort will always be recorded as a legendary performance by which fanciers should measure their own performances now and in the future.

Here is his story straight from the winner's mouth, if you are like me please have a good read and maybe pick up a pointer or two.

Q1 Bruce you have had phenomenal success at this years Queensland 10000 but I believe you have been consistent at other ventures?

Bruce: Regarding this years Queensland 10,000 I entered 3 birds from 3 different pairings picking what I believed were hens and from pairs that I considered to be fast 1 day pigeons. I didn't believe that pigeons bred out of distance birds were warranted. There were to be 3 races from the north being 150ml, 250ml, and 350ml. At that time of year (late August) especially for the St Lawrence race (350ml) I found the northerly winds would assist the birds, as was the case for the 350ml race. Strangely, even with the wind assistance, the birds were kept on the wing for 7 ½ hours and only 18 birds made it on the day. The majority returned the 2nd day.

This is the 1st One Loft Race that I have entered and I prefer this type of racing. All the birds are under the same roof and looked after by the one person, the birds all fed, medicated (if need be), trained, and all racing to the same loft. This takes away the advantage of winds and loft position that favour individual lofts by position.

Q2 Tell me a bit about your early life up to the present, when you first started with pigeons and who were the mentors in your sport and what influences they had on your success in later life?

Bruce: As is the case with a lot of present flyers, I had pigeons when I was 14 or 15 years of age and got right into the game when I joined the Brighton Homing Club in Melbourne which at that time was a very strong club. I would say my mentor would have been a lady by the name of Beth Hamilton who was the Secretary of the club at the time.

She was always up amongst the prize winners and she assisted me by way of gift birds and advice as well as sewing up my injured pigeons. Pigeons were put on hold for quiet a few years and the bug hit me again when I was living in Cairns. A group of dedicated Cairns flyers at that stage sent the birds mainly to the west via Atherton, Ravenshoe, etc through to Normanton. The conditions were pretty tough on the birds, with the heat and having to traverse the Great

Dividing Range into Cairns. These would have to be some of the highest mountain ranges in Qld, which needless to say are plagued by the peregrine falcon. I understand the boys are now flying south with great success from Yaamba (500ml) just north of Rockhampton. I had ten very good years racing in Cairns and I enjoyed the racing with the likes of Derek Murray, George Mills, Dave Richards, and the late Jack Hiddlestone (SCF). I was President of the club for many years and the members got on very well and made my position very easy. I remember getting birds sent up to me from John Brislin (Melbourne) they were small dark checks or blacks if my memory serves me correctly. My first reaction was what church roof did he get these off but I was soon to change my opinion, as these birds would fly all day in any conditions. They descended from John's Deweerdt's crossed with Hansenne, Logan, Wegge that I believe Bill Pritchard (Melb) flew with success. I wish I had a loft full of them now.

Q3 You fly in Maryborough. Tell me a bit about the club, it's history and the flying conditions you face. Where do you live, how is the position and how have you fair amongst club results over the last decade.

Bruce: We moved from Cairns to Maryborough Queensland in 1993 on the advice that it would benefit my wife's health after she was unfortunately diagnosed with MS. I joined the very good and financially sound membership of the Maryborough Racing Pigeon Club (which boasted 25 members). The club owned their own clubrooms, shed, and Isuzu transporter primarily due to the efforts of members running the local bingo. I moved the loft from Cairns on a semi trailer as well as my individual breeding pens and starting racing. At the time I was still working for Telstra and working away from home most of the week and it was hard to maintain a training regime. My good wife was doing all the work through the week but she could only do so much. My results were consistent and I was competitive but there were some good flyers that were always up there, one that stands out being Ian Goodall a ex SCF flyer from Dapto whom I would say has been the most consistent flyer over the years I have been flying with Maryborough. There are a couple of guys in the club that are starting to really get there act together which will make the flying very interesting over the next couple of seasons. I have moved onto acreage and built a new home and new loft on the western side of Maryborough. I have now since retired and have a small business where I can regulate my hours and concentrate on the pigeons a bit more.

The biggest mistake I ever made was when I put a high gable roof on the old loft and enclose the loft in. I had read too many articles on overseas lofts that recommended high roofs and enclosing lofts with the right ventilation, well that year of racing, my birds were

regularly 30 mins behind the front markers. I had droppings tested, birds were blood tested but to no avail. The only conclusion was that the ventilation was not up to scratch and since building the new loft with open front and ventilation at the back the results have been turned around with me now being highly competitive.

Q4 How do your pair for success, what are your breeding plans, what do you feed them, what medications do you use and if not what natural remedies do you use.

Bruce: Before breeding season commences I go through my race book and see what birds have performed and what is the strike rate of each pair and what percentage flew well and what percentage were lost early. I also look at velocities that the birds were doing which gives me a good indication of what to pair up for the coming season. Feed for the stock birds are based around the 16% protein.

I mix all my own grain that I buy in bulk from Valentines produce in Biloela, 100kms west of Gladstone each year. I buy approx 1 ton in all of small corn, sorghum, wheat, dun peas and safflower. The quality of his grain is excellent, clean fresh and weevil free.

However, I have found over the years that if you were to run low of feed through the racing season and you brought more grain from the same supplier the consistency would be different to the grain drought earlier. I thus found the birds were put off peak form by the change.

By buying in bulk there were no problems regarding feed throughout the racing season.

The use of medication in the race loft is very limited with Turbosole being the only drug used and administered (only on the race birds) and then only when racing commences. If an individual bird has a problem then the bird is separated and given the appropriate medication. I believe we are very fortunate to have the likes of Dr Colin Walker and Dr Rob Marshall on call to tend to our needs if required and with the excellent publication of their respective books that takes you step by step through the many problems that can face the fancier today.

I used to treat for respiratory etc as a preventative measure but found that it was a bit of overkill and was not warranted. I use probiotics and vitamin supplements on a regular basis and found that if your husbandry is up to scratch the birds will stay healthy. I find my birds now will devour herb garlic chives when chopped into small sections, they love it as they do silver beet. I am led to believe that silver beet contains a certain amount of iron, which is also beneficial to the birds. I read many years ago that a small bag (stocking) of sulphur hanging in several places in the loft kept lice and other creepy crawlies at bay, I have practiced this method for a fair amount of time

and have never seen any lice as such on my birds, maybe an old wives tale?

**Q5** Do you train hard on the road or around the box, do you regularly stick to a yearly plan or do you deviate for whatever reason?

**Bruce:** Road training starts roughly 6 weeks before the first race starting at 5kms until leaving the basket and heading straight for home. Then I go to 30kms and that is as far as I will take them, that toss point will be used throughout the race season. Before they are taken on there first toss they must be ranging and flying for 1 hour.

I only let the birds out once a day for 1 hour's exercise and in that hour (based on articles that I have read) the birds range around about 60kms in that time. I believe that is enough when you are giving them mid week tosses. Tossing or flying around the loft will be cut back if the birds seem to slacken off for any reason and I have always found that a day or two in the loft without any exercise brings them back to the level required.

I don't believe in the starvo system where the birds are kept on a very light ration in the first part of the season, my race birds are fed morning and night and the feed left in front of them for 30 mins before being taken away and I find this not to interfere with trapping after exercise as they race to the traps once the feed shaker is rattled.

**Q6** How many stock birds do you have and how many do you breed for racing? Do you fly any system other than to the perch? Are the losses up there as abysmal as ours? Do you retain birds for two year olds or do you concentrate on yearlings or younger?

**Bruce:** I only have 10 pair of stock birds! I found that over the years I would get a bird from here and there and the stock loft was getting a little crowded and I would find that a lot of birds were not being used for 2 to 3 years and longer.

I scaled down and find that I can certainly find out what's working and what's not, a cock or hen will be re-paired if their progeny has not come up to expectations during the race season. If either does not produce the following season then out the go. I like half brother, half sister matings and it keeps a family pretty close, this season I paired a Goodger cock a son of a pair I purchased off Jack Vanderlinden (SA) to a silver shadow hen, bred from a pair from Keith Saggars which produced "124" which was clocked and with my clock bird on several races. She was 1 of only 2 birds to be clocked in race time from Bourke (515mls) so it tells me that this pairing is worthwhile, brothers and sisters from this pairing also flew well. A pair of Van Loon Silver Shadows I purchased from Keith Saggars in 2004 have bred some terrific race birds when paired together or crossed. The cock is a blue check pied with a fantastic green eye and the hen a grizzle with

a similar eye. When paired together the offspring are grizzles, blue bars, blue bar piers, blue checks, I have only ever got 1 blue check pier that is a dead spit of the father, the offspring are producers as well.

I paired a grizzle hen to a blue bar cock sent to me by friends Leo and Terry Sylvester from Wollongong who fly with the SCF, the cock was 75% O'Brien Harrison with 25% Van Loon. I entered one of these young ones in the Qld 10,000 this being a blue bar hen "146" she was placed 36th in the Agnes Waters race (150ml), 1st from Yeppoon (250mls), and 1st from St Lawrence (350mls) so this cross was quite successful, once again the Silver Shadows crossing well. I have received many top birds from Leo and Terry, one that I best remember was a O'Brien Harrison cock blue bar SCF- 91- 15329, this cock bred many fine race birds from start through to the 500ml plus.

This cock when paired to the Noel Randall bloodlines (Qld) really started to produce birds that would home in the dark and fly the distance, there is not a lot of this blood around any more but I have a 1998 cock paired to a very close 1/2 sister, so hopefully something will transpire. I also have the Deweerds from John Brislin and they have not as yet been crossed with the Shadows, the Deweerds are a tough pigeon and will not give up, I have a lot of success with the cocks more so than the hens and lastly I have some young birds from Noel Randall. I was fortunate to organize his last sale here in Maryborough, these birds have been fairly inbred over the last couple of years so as you can see Peter I have some interesting breeding plans in front of me

I must also mention the Bill Walford Goodgers. I bought some birds from Bill Walford (SA) in the mid nineties and they certainly improved my results, one particular cock BCPC SA-93-24120 when paired to a BCH SA-92-36332 really bred terrific race birds from the distance. What stands out in both of these birds was that in their pedigree was RCH SA-74-44735 known as "Allan's Hen" and RCH SA-81-494 known as the "Red Ace hen" this pair is predominant throughout the pedigrees and I would say was the mainstay of Bills loft.

I have obtained another pair from Bill (who is no longer racing) but still retains some of his old blood, there was an article written about this pair by John Capel in the May edition of ARPJ in 07.