



## BREEDING



### MAKING A PLAN TO WIN-WIDOWHOOD STYLE

### THE ART OF STOCK SELECTION

### MATING STRATEGIES

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When breeding along family lines, variation is kept to a minimum. The resulting animal is more predictable in size, coloration and ability. The “family” technique follows basically an in-line breeding format in an attempt to isolate the genetic characteristics that made the champions of this family famous.

The idea here is that if enough genetic characteristics are retained in each producer, then eventually the entire loft will be directly reflective of those past champions. The goal is to have a loft full of racing champions based on a single, or several bird(s).

Two concerns enter the picture at this point: (1) As the genetic pool is concentrated with “like” genes, good and bad things happen. “Good” genes are doubled-up enhancing the new offspring’s likelihood of repeating the champion’s feats. If this were the only result of close breeding, then there wouldn’t be any challenge.

Unfortunately, the “bad” genes are also doubled-up. These are more likely recessives and don’t physically appear in the champion, being overcome by the dominant genes. But as they double-up, the recessive “bad” genes become dominant and trouble starts.

This introduces the second area of concern: (2) Even with “sound-appearing” inbreds, performance can suffer as vitality and drive (heart) wane. In severe cases deformities occur. One way to combat this genetic slide is through severe culling and “basket-judging.” Top performers survive to reproduce—The Law of the Jungle.

Unfortunately, this method can not stop the slide if there is a major genetic flaw in the line.

The use of family line breeding also produces a large majority of “average” pigeons. Average pigeons ruin a loft faster than poor pigeons. They somehow eventually find their way into the stock loft and reproduce more of their own kind. In contrast, crossing of two lines produces fewer average pigeons and more at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

When working with family line close breeding, looking for variations within the family itself, helps maintain genetic vitality. Difference in eye color is a good example. The noting of birds with contrasting eyes has been found to yield a higher degree of competent performers (probably not supported by scientific fact, just observations made by many top breeders).

Another method of maintaining strict family lines, but avoiding the pitfalls of overbreeding, would be to establish linebred families within the inbred (related) group. Inbreeding back to two different champions and hen crossing the offspring works wonders.

Finding ways to keep variation within a tight family pays dividends in the long run, for the mating of related inbreds brings the percentage of good racers way down.

Top breeders are produced by inbreeding and the best racers come from these crosses.

### HYBRIDS

As just about every animal and crop production expert will attest, the crossing of two inbred lines produces offspring that far surpass the capabilities or performances of their parents. The same holds true for pigeons. Maintaining two pure lines of impeccable quality is an absolute must for this program to work. Finding the crossing combination that works is sometimes difficult and sometimes it drops out of the sky. Once the right cross is found, the wise flyer will attempt to make as many matings along these lines as he has breeders.

Breeding late youngsters out of the top producing breeding cock and hen from family “A” and likewise from family “B”, assures the flyer of additional candidates for crossing. Don’t be afraid to mate-up brother-sister, father-daughter, etc., as long as strict selection (culling) is adhered to.

Whether the fancier uses family lines or crosses families, keeping a good record is especially important. Without records, everything is hit-and-miss based on a fickle memory.

No matter which route chosen, be patient. Make inquiries. Weigh information. Get second opinions. Seek sound advice. Don’t jump at the first offer of opportunity to put birds on the perches of your new loft.

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### ESTABLISHING FLYING GOALS

Another critical consideration in pair selection is: what exactly is the end-product expected to be able to accomplish?

If the flyer/breeder himself is unable to **set down in writing** the goals of his own program, then he is condemned to mediocrity. Occasional wins will only tease him with glimpses of hope, while his race record will continue to be inconsistent.

The established goal of the flyer will dictate the type of stock selected and the kinds of pairing he will make. It is important to note that the goal is to be successful at the long races, then it is of paramount importance that a family with long distance capabilities be selected.

The concept of building around a plan (a breeding plan with an eye to success within a well-defined area of the racing program, i.e., 100-300 old birds, 300 young bird futurities) is very sound advice.

### FAMILY LINES

The techniques to use basically fall into two areas (with many variations within these divisions): The straight (pure) family line method is very popular in England and for a large part, in the U.S. This breeding method is based on the concept that families are genetically closer and have similar gene pools and there is less likelihood of variation in the end product.

Variation, in and of itself, is not inherently good or bad. It can be either.

## BREEDING

Beginning flyers or dissatisfied ones, face a perilous challenge in the process of stock selection. It's a phase of the pigeon game that has many possible avenues to travel in search of success. It is probably the single area that determines the degree of success to be experienced in the immediate future.

Most flyers get into the sport hoping to successfully compete right away. Unfortunately, the high cost of establishing a loft and purchasing the necessary equipment, often leaves a noticeable dent in the wallet. These concerns often temper the new flyer's decision-making when it comes to putting breeders in the loft.

There are many ways of securing "birds that breed." The trick, of course, is to secure those birds that breed *potential* winners.

Each of the various methods that follow have been successful for starting flyers, or those changing stock birds.

## NO U.N.

A method **not** recommended, and one most of today's flyers started with, is the "hodge-podge-United Nation" approach. The new flyer receives a variety of local birds, given for a variety of reasons. Sorting through this mess is time consuming and frustrating and is one of the primary reasons flyers quit during their first 3 years in the sport. Good ones are there; it's just a matter of finding them.

While obviously a large number of flyers have survived the above ordeal, there are short-cuts to being competitive.

## LATE HATCHES

One method is to go to a top-notch local flyer. Make sure the individual selected wins from the distances of interest. No sense getting sprinters when the distance is the most appealing, or the other way around. Make arrangements to get the late round youngsters that he wouldn't normally allow his breeders and/or flyers to raise.

Either offer the man a fair price or ask him if he'd be interested in helping out and what would be his price, either per bird or for the whole round.

Some of these men might not be interested in allowing their pairs to raise another round. Respect that decision and try another of the methods that follow, if this is the loft of interest. For those looking to improve stock, purchasing the eggs is a cheap viable option. Just ask that they be identified so top producers and/or flyers can be traced and that line supplemented. Switching eggs with your breeders (if that far in the game) produces great results.

If successful in securing late hatches, ask the breeder his recommendations regarding which ones to breed and which to fly (if over 20 birds were secured). Also ask how he would pair them.

## OLD BIRD RETIREES

Another method may be in securing selected older flyers off the Old Bird team of the top flyer. Often times, at 5 or 6 years old, these birds lose their edge in the races and might be available.

Rarely will a top loft retire more than two or three top birds per year. Since the number of birds available through this process will be limited, it may need to be repeated at several local top lofts that are compatible in type and distance disposition if the birds are to be mixed.

## DIRECT STOCK PURCHASE

A third method would be to purchase older stock directly from the top flyer's stock loft. Despite the claims, the best birds in the flyer's loft are not for sale. To sell the very best is suicide. Purchasing in this fashion is reserved for the financially committed. When pursuing this approach, attempt to get the brothers/sisters of the top flyers, or even better, parents/aunts/uncles of the same.

## DISPOSAL SALES

A fourth method that requires patience and awareness for acquiring top stock, is to attend and select candidates from a complete disposal sale. Be aware of those leaving the sport. Despite the unfortunate situation of a flyer quitting or because of death, his birds deserve an opportunity to carry on his efforts and dedication. Be careful that the sale is a complete disposal. If the birds have been picked over or birds held back, then be extra cautious in the selection process as the very best are going to be missing.

An excellent strategy, particularly for the new flyer, is to have one's mentor accompany him to the auction. Get inside the head of the experienced flyer. Ask what he is looking for, and why. Gain hands-on experience while handling these prospective stock birds. There's nothing like doing.

## ADVERTISEMENTS

The ever-present temptation of magazine advertisement provides the new flyer with yet another avenue. The possibilities for success with this method depends largely on the honesty of the seller. Sage advice would be of the utmost importance if the new flyer decides on following this route. Perhaps some of the local flyers have had success with a group of birds from a particular advertiser.

Ask other flyers locally and elsewhere about the individual in question. Answers and knowledge only come after questions and inquiries.

When purchasing birds "sight unseen," and from an individual unknown and unfamiliar, it would be a wise investment of time and money to make personal contact with the seller. A series of telephone calls/letters can give an insight to the man, his methods and birds.

## IMPORTS—OFF IMPORTS

Oftentimes the charm of imports is overpowering. Make doubly sure that the birds from this loft are performing for others in conditions and courses similar to yours. Also plan on paying dearly. Imports and the added importation costs border on the unbelievable. Do some investigating. Contact "satisfied customers." These should be available through the advertiser.

Time and money spent now to make sure what is purchased will pay huge dividends. Wise decisions now will save years of disappointment and frustrations.

Purchasing stock out of imports is a way of cutting costs. This also takes the stock one more generation away from the famous birds they are already remotely related to. Again ask around. Find a source of imported stock that has been successful in your area or one similar.



## QUALITY PRODUCTION

Once the new flyer (or old flyer securing new birds) has managed to acquire the best birds possible through late hatches, retiring old bird champions, disposal sales or whichever method, he is ready to devise a plan of pairing up these birds, in hopes of producing the best youngsters possible.

A good guideline when deciding partners, is to envision the desired youngster as being better in physical qualities than either of his parents. While this might sound quite simple, it is actually more difficult than it seems, especially if the flyer has done a good job in selecting his stock. For while it is possible to improve the quality of the young bird over his parents, it is also possible to do the opposite.

The secret here is to improve less-than-perfect physical characteristics in the partners. Thought should be given regarding depth and/or length of the keel, width of flights, length or type of body or even size of the bird itself. For every physical attribute, the very act of reproduction endangers the continuance of that desired attribute. The combination of genes from two animals produces degrees of unpredictable results. The closer genetically and physically, the specimens, the greater the changes that the desired result will occur.