The Pigeon Racing Formula
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Introduction

Welcome to the *Pigeon Racing Formula* we have put great effort in making the Pigeon Racing Formula one of the most complete resources on the planet for the great sport and hobby of pigeon racing. The Pigeon Racing Formula was created to give pigeon fanciers the information needed to excel in this sport. Statistics show that many new flyers quit after just their first few years in the sport due to the frustration caused by the lack of information needed for success in pigeon racing. We hope that the Pigeon Racing Formula will help lower these statistics and keep more fanciers interested and participating in the sport.

The Pigeon Racing Formula is compiled of years of loft and race tested strategies, techniques and information that have been proven time and time again to help the fancier not only get better results, but to make there experience more enjoyable for both them and their pigeons. The Pigeon Racing Formula is meant to be a valuable resource to the fancier, not a step by step guide. Even though the techniques and strategies discussed in the Pigeon Racing Formula have shown to get winning results, we cannot guarantee your success. Your success can only be determined by the effort you put in to this sport and your own loft management skills. However we feel confident that the Pigeon Racing Formula will help save you time, money and frustration as well as helping to influence your success and longevity in this sport.

*Success...What is it?*

Before we begin we just want to clarify what success means to us, because as you read the Pigeon Racing Formula you will see us refer to success a lot. After all that is why the Pigeon Racing Formula was created, to help fanciers become more successful at pigeon racing as a sport, hobby and recreation. So what is success? Many of you might say “winning races”; yes winning races is a sign of success. But to us success isn’t just about winning races it’s so much more like healthy and happy pigeons as well as spending more time with the family, having fun, learning new things, conservation, friendship and preserving and promoting the sport just to name a few. So when you see us mention success we are referring to all of these things not just winning races. Winning races is just a perk; real success is what you take away from your experience.

*Geography and Pigeon Racing*

Pigeon racing is a recreation enjoyed worldwide being extremely popular in Belgium and England and quickly growing in France, Germany, Holland, Italy,
China, United States and Philippines just to name a very select few and because of this; depending on your geographical location you may notice some discrepancies in the Pigeon Racing System in regards to dates and times and other recommendations such as feed rations and ingredients. The reason being is that geography dictates what is going on in our lofts and what is immediately available to us. You see; what may be accurate to fanciers in the United States could vary greatly to fanciers in Belgium or the Philippines and vice versa. What your friends are doing in other parts of the country will be different from what you need to do with your birds now.

For example in the southern part of the United States there may still be a few weeks of racing left however in the northern part racing has already ended but in Belgium the fanciers there could be doing something completely different. Or, corn may be plentiful in some parts of the world but scarce in other parts of the world and because of these discrepancies we suggest taking the recommendations within this book and customizing them to fit your own loft, location and lifestyle.

**Getting the Most Out of The Pigeon Racing Formula**

In order to get the best results possible we suggest using the techniques and strategies discussed in the Pigeon Racing Formula as well as fellow fancier’s real life experiences and your own personal experience to help you succeed in this sport. After all there is no substitute for experience, so get out there and put these techniques and strategies to use. Pigeon racing is just like anything else, the more you work at it the better you will become.

We also suggest joining a local pigeon racing club in your area, they are a really great place to meet fellow fanciers, swap strategies and techniques they also give you a good idea of what is happening in your area like weather and race conditions, pigeon predator population etc. More importantly pigeon clubs give you a place to race your pigeons and get experience. We also highly recommend visiting some of the great pigeon racing associations and organizations out there. They deliver extremely valuable information, resources and content geared toward helping you succeed in this sport and hobby. We have listed a few for your reference below:

**Pigeon Elite**
Pigeon Elite was created to help educate and guide pigeon fanciers worldwide with an emphasis on preserving, promoting and developing the pigeon racing fancy.
http://www.pigeonelite.com

**American Racing Pigeon Union (ARPU)**
One of the best known and largest organizations for pigeon racing, The ARPU has over 90 years of experience in pigeon racing. As well as over 10,000 members and growing.

http://www.pigeon.org

International Federation, American Homing Pigeon Fanciers Inc. (IF)
The mission of this organization is to promote pigeon breeding, training, racing and exhibition, to Instruct and assist novices, organize districts or clubs and impart info.
http://www.ifpigeon.com

Pigeon Racing Formula Overview

The Pigeon Racing Formula is composed of seven fundamentals that we feel are vital to every pigeon fancier’s success, and everything involved in pigeon racing falls under one or more of these categories. The seven fundamentals of pigeon racing are The Loft, Foundation Stock, Feeding & Nutrition, Breeding, Training and Conditioning, Racing and Health. These fundamentals of pigeon racing are not listed in any type of order, each one is just as important as the others and truly successful fanciers will master all seven. Let’s briefly discuss each step,

- The Loft
- Foundation Stock
- Feeding and Nutrition
- Breeding and Mating
- Training and Conditioning
- Healthcare
Chapter 1 the Loft

The Loft

The loft is an important part in determining your success, not only is it the place where your birds call home but it is also in many circumstances the finish line in a race. The loft should be built strong, effective in keeping out predators and the elements, and also be peaceful and relaxing. It is also essential that the loft be properly designed, constructed and managed. After all the loft has a big influence on the other essential elements of a successful race team like feeding, health, breeding, conditioning most everything is done in or around the loft.

Your loft does not have to be big an extravagant to be effective how much you spend on constructing you loft has no effect on your success. As long as the loft keeps your birds safe, clean, dry, calm, nourished and well rested it has done its job and your pigeons will be happy. Like we said before happy pigeons equal successful flyers.

You should also try to make your loft as appealing as possible so it fits well within your community and surrounding area. Many people know very little or in most cases know nothing at all about pigeon racing so the “curb appeal” of your loft will go along way with both keeping the image of pigeon racing in good standings with your community and even helping to promoting the sport. Your loft may inspire others in your community to be interested in pigeon racing so keep your loft presentable at all times both inside and out.

Planning For Loft Construction

You should properly plan and brainstorm before the construction of your loft begins, proper planning will save you time and money and will help reduce problems and pitfalls later on. Here are some things you should think about prior to building your loft,

Expense
You can easily spend a ton of money building a loft; the key though is building your loft according to your budget. Nothing takes the fun and excitement out of pigeon racing like spending a ton of money before even getting your first bird. Spending more than you could afford is an easy way to get yourself frustrated. You can easily build an attractive functional loft for little money, remember neither the size of the loft or its surroundings guarantee success so plan your expenses prior to building and stay within your comfort zone.
**Location**
The location of your loft is usually determined by the space you have, hopefully you have enough space to provide you with some options when determining the location of the loft. You should try to face the major openings of the loft away from the general direction of bad weather, also try to place your loft in open areas away from buildings, trees and power lines that may tempt your birds to land on and most importantly keep the pigeons approach as clear as possible. When it is time for the pigeon to come in and trap the approach to the trap should be clear from any obstacles, if a bird has to circle several times before coming in valuable time will be lost. Your loft should be built in a quiet, relaxing and sunny spot; this will help with the temperament of your birds. Sunlight is a very important part to positioning your loft, a good example would be to observe pigeons during sunny days, they are more alert, awake and active and even seem to be happier, now let’s look at birds during cloudy, overcast days they are quite, sluggish and even look to be depressed. Sunlight not only helps with the temperament of your birds it also provides vitamin D and helps with their metabolism and immune system. When determining the position of your loft, face your loft where it can get the most sunlight during the day.

**Authority**
Be sure to check with your local authority to find out about any local zoning and building laws and codes, be sure to check your area and acquire any permits that you may need to have before building. Also check with the Department of health as they may have some rules and regulations that may apply to your loft as well.

**Size**
The size of your loft is usually determined by the three factors listed above; expense, location and authority as well as how many birds you want to keep. A good rule of thumb is, you should allow about 8 to 10 cubic feet of airspace per bird, also the interior of the loft should not be too wide, and having too much room in the loft will help to promote wild birds. The space in between the walls in the pens should be around 4 feet; this makes it easier to pick birds up and to exercise control. The birds tend to be tamer and easier to handle in close quarters.

**Types of Lofts**

The possibilities are endless when it comes to building pigeon lofts but there are four main categories that a loft can fit into; proper planning prior to building will give you a good idea of what loft type will best fit your lifestyle.

**Converts**
Converts are basically any structure that has been converted into a loft. Converts
are very popular with beginners as well as fanciers with very limited space and funds, because of their inexpensiveness and ease. Some of the most common converts are attics, garages, sheds, prefab sheds from your local home improvement store and even children’s playhouses have been used for lofts. You can easily convert these structures into comfortable lofts by adding a few walls and some inner fixtures like nest boxes and perches.

Pre-Fab lofts
Pre-fab pigeon lofts are becoming more readily available these days. The good thing about them is they can be custom made for you and they are usually designed very well. However pre-fab lofts can be very expensive and difficult to have shipped.

Common Loft
The common loft is most always built by the fancier themselves; they are totally customizable because the fancier builds them from the ground up to his/her specs. Popular sizes of these lofts are usually 6 to 8 ft wide, 10 or 12 feet long and from 6-8 feet high.

Large Lofts
These lofts are usually adopted by experienced or wealthy fanciers. They are built in many sizes and with many types of media like wood, brick etc. These large structures commonly consist of 2 levels or floors and can house many birds. These structures are usually expensive and because of their size may need building permits prior to being built.

Elements of a Loft

Lofts are actually very simple structures and only need to consist of a few main elements to be effective like a floor, walls, roof, aviarie and some internal and external fixtures. Pigeons are very resilient animals and are quiet content living in any structure as long as it keeps them safe, clean, dry, calm and out of the elements. The lofts design is actually not so much for the pigeon but more for the fancier. The design of the loft helps the fancier organize and manage the loft more efficiently without adding stress to the bird’s lives. The design of the loft also helps with training and race day procedures, helping them be more effective and to help shave precious seconds off the clock. Let’s discuss some of the essential elements of a well designed loft and see how they help the pigeons and aid the fancier.

Main Elements

Floor, Walls and Roof
The floor wall and roof are pretty much just like any other structure, but there are a few things that should be adapted for use in a pigeon loft.

Floor
The floor should be built 1 to 2 feet off the ground this helps air flow underneath the loft to help keep it dry and ventilated; it also helps to keep rodents and other animals out of the loft and living under it.

Walls
The walls are pretty standard but they should be tall enough so that you are able to stand erect in the loft. Your going to be doing a lot of things in the loft so being able to stand in it will help save your back and make it more comfortable for you to work in.

Roof
The Roof can either be peaked or sloping, the most common type of roof on pigeon lofts is the sloping roof. It should slop from the front to back or from most used areas to less used areas to allow for water runoff. The roof should extend over the walls 12 to 18 inches on all sides. This way water doesn’t collect on the landing board or in the loft itself. Also many fanciers attach picket fences to the roof; this deters the birds from not landing on the roof when flying, which is extremely costly during a race.

External Elements

Aviary
Aviaries are wire enclosures attached to the loft; they allow the pigeons to bask in the sun and to get some fresh air without letting them out. Aviaries are an essential element to any loft.

Landing Board
The landing board is a large flat surface placed in front of the trap that the pigeons land on before entering the trap and loft.

Trap
A trap is a device that allows the pigeons to enter the loft but does not let them exit. Traps are used during training and conditioning and especially during racing. After the bird is let out to fly or is liberated at the beginning of a race the bird flies back to the loft enters the trap, which allows the handler to catch the bird and clock it or just not have to worry about it getting back out. There are a few different trap types including the open door trap, bob trap, stall trap and sputnik trap.

Types of Traps
• Open Door Trap
An open door trap is simply a hole with a hinged door. This can be locked open, closed, or set open about 4 inches for trapping race birds. Open door traps are used for widowhood racing where once the pigeon enters he flies straight to his nest box where he can be clocked.

• Bob Trap
A Bob Trap is a simple one way trap fixed to the loft which has rods that only swing in one direction that the pigeon pushes against to get into the loft but cannot get out. Bob traps are mainly used for flight birds that do not need to be timed and are not recommended for race birds, because bobs may make race birds hesitate before entering the loft and once in the loft they are free to fly around which cost a lot of time on he clock.

• Stall Trap
A Stall Trap is a type of trap designed with several partitions so that only one racing homer may enter a stall at a time. It has a locking device that keeps the bird in the stall until the countermark is removed. Only after the fancier unlocks the trap can the racing homer enter the loft. This is the ideal trap for pigeon racing.

• Sputnik Trap
Advantages of Sputniks are that they act as a combination aviary, sun porch, release door, landing board, and trap, all in one. Since no bobs are involved, birds are less likely to hesitate entering the loft.

Ventilation
One very important ingredient to having a successful loft is proper loft ventilation. The goal to ventilating the loft is to get the air inside of the loft to be as fresh as the air outside. Proper loft ventilation helps your loft stay dry and your birds stay relaxed, ventilation in the loft also aids with the health of your birds. Good ventilation in the loft will create a cleaner, fresher, dryer and more relaxed atmosphere for your birds. Design your loft to provide a steady flow of air to enter the loft while at the same time letting the warm stale air to escape.

Internal Elements

Perches
Perches are simply elevated places where the pigeons can land and stand on. Perches can be very simply constructed from excess building supplies used for your loft even something as simple as a block of wood fixed to the wall of the loft makes a great perch for the birds. There should be more perches in the loft then there are birds. As long as the birds can land on it and be comfortable, it can be used as a perch.
Nest box
A nest box is a compartment in the loft where a cock and hen build nests and care for their young. Nest boxes are usually clustered together sort of like a pigeon apartment building. The nest box is the pigeon’s apartment within the loft.

Corridor
Corridors in a loft are not necessary and are usually seen in medium to larger size lofts but do help in managing the loft. A corridor is a hallway that runs the length of the loft, so when entering the loft you do not enter directly into the pigeons sections and disturb the birds. Corridors also allow you to walk and observe your pigeons without being inside of their pens. Using a corridor in the loft helps lower stress levels to the birds and helps to manage the loft effectively.

No elements in the loft should be higher then eye level this is especially true for nest boxes and perches. If you have to make an effort and reach for a nest box or perch the birds will sense this effort and will not be confident of your approach and in order to have full control of your loft and be successful you must always have the confidence of your birds.

Loft Management

Because pigeon racing is a hobby enjoyed by individual fanciers, methods of management within the loft vary greatly. Proper loft management does not have to be complex. The most important aspects to good loft management are consistency, contact, organization, cleanliness and record keeping.

Consistency in the Loft

One of the most important requirements to successful loft management is regularity and consistency. Everything in connection with loft management should be regular, smooth, quiet and unobtrusive to the birds. The birds should be pleased to have you among them and they should know your routine as well as you do, the way to accomplish this is by finding a system that suits you, your family, your work and the birds; then stick to it and change the routine only as you see beneficial.

Building Relationships

Only the most successful pigeon fanciers and loft managers know the power of
building a strong relationship and bond with their pigeons. You must keep constant contact with your birds in order for them to build trust in you. Once you have the trust of your birds only then will you have total control over your loft.

Try to handle your birds at least three times a week or more on a regular schedule. This will help to build a healthy relationship between you and your birds as well as help the birds become tamer. Gently pick the bird up, hold it for a few seconds and gently put it back down, repeat this week after week and you should see a big change in your bird’s temperament. Another way to tame your birds and build a healthy relationship with them is by hand feeding. The best time to do this is during the off season replace some of your daily feeding times or even skip entire meals now and again and try feeding your birds by hand, this process may take a while until they begin excepting food from your hand but be patient, the relationship you build with your birds from this technique will be worth it.

**Organization**

Having a well organized loft will allow you to manage your loft more effectively and efficiently, it will also help to decrease frustration. Your lofts layout should be designed for maximize organization. Designate certain areas for supplies, food or medications.

**Cleanliness and Hygiene**

Cleanliness should be a top priority in the loft, having an unclean loft brings forth a whole list of problems, including disease and unfit birds. If you keep your loft dry, clean, properly ventilated and not overcrowded and if you are sanitation conscious, diseases of all sorts will be kept to a minimum and even prevented. Remember the first thing to learn about disease control is prevention. Disease prevention is a result of being both sanitation conscious and from control of parasites both internal and external.

Dryness and proper hygiene in the loft and aviaries are essential to health in the loft. A great ally to dryness and sanitation is the sun, many forms of germs and parasitic life are killed by sunshine this is one of the reasons why it is important for your loft to be positioned to get as much sunshine as possible.

Droppings should be removed from all surfaces at least once a week but preferably every day. Before cleaning all food, grit and water containers need to be removed in order to prevent contamination and all food, grit and water containers should be thoroughly cleaned as well. The birds should be fed in such
a manner that they can not soil their feed.

Record Keeping

Keeping good records will help to keep you organized and successful. You should keep records of feeding schedules, health care regimens, training sessions, race results, breeding and pairing patterns and anything else that will help you and your loft be more successful. Good records will show you what you need to work on and will assist in fine tuning your team.

Here are some examples of records you should be keeping,

**Pedigree**
A pigeon’s pedigree gives the written ancestry and racing record of a racing homer. This is extremely important for any breeder and a must if you are going to sell your birds. The most common type of pedigree is the four generation pedigree which documents back for four generations. This is ideal because it gives the breeder a bunch of information on a bird’s performance and ancestry and if you have a bird that keeps coming up in the pedigrees then you know that these are the ones to breed from.

**Nest Card and Breeding Record**
The nest card and breeding record document all of your breeding efforts. These two documents are pivotal to your breeding success because it is the only way to know which birds are producing the best birds. The nest card and breeding record usually document band numbers, color, parents, grandparents, strain and hatch dates. Nest cards and breeding records usually keep the same information the only difference being that the nest cards are meant to hang on each nest box for quick and easy reference.

**Young Bird Record**
The young bird record is meant for logging all of your young birds located in the young bird section of your loft. This document has room for information such as, band numbers, color and sex, hatch dates, parents and comments.

**Training Session Record**
The training session record documents all of your training sessions and is meant to help you keep track of your training efforts. The training session record records information such as station, miles, number of birds released, losses and notes. This is especially important because you will be able to tweak your training sessions according to the information you collect.

**Race Team Roster**
Your race team roster documents all of the birds you intend to race for the
current racing season. This record holds information such as band numbers, color, sex, parents, strain and distances raced.

Race Record
The race record documents your race results, and records data such as band numbers, miles, race station, number of lofts, number of birds and a wealth of other important race information. Your race records are probably one of the most important pieces of information you can keep because it will show you your actual performance rate. Actual race records are also a must for making pedigrees for your birds and for use at shows.

It is very difficult to breed and race by memory and a loft of good birds can easily be destroyed or lost by fanciers who attempt to race without keeping records. When you keep accurate records you will find it much easier to look back three or four generations and plan your mating strategy for the following season and when you combine all of your records listed above you can easily pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses and fine tune your race team accordingly. Keeping records are probably in our opinion the most important aspect to becoming and staying successful in this sport and hobby. It does not matter how expensive your birds are, how well your loft is designed or what grade of feed you use, if you cannot pinpoint your weaknesses and track your progress your success will be slim to none or at the most short lived.

Because of their importance to your success we have included our loft management record templates explained above with the P2S Pigeon Racing System package. Just print them out and fill them in; we suggest placing them in a binder for easy reference.

Disease Prevention

It is a good idea to use one of the sections of your loft as an infirmary. All newly acquired birds and any birds that come home several days late from a toss or race or any bird that does not exercise freely should be quarantined and observed closely for at least a week. Isolation is recommended for three reasons; firstly if a bird is found to be infected, the bird will not act as a carrier and spread the disease to others in the loft secondly it will get rest and be spared from attack or being pushed about and lastly while the bird is being isolated it can be treated properly. It is easier and more economical to prevent a problem before it happens than to stop one after it has started.

The Culling Period
Most fanciers usually end up with more youngsters then they can carry over for the next season because of this the culling period is when the fancier determines which birds to keep and which to eliminate. The culling period usually takes place around September or early October when the young bird races have commenced.

All birds which showed even flashes of form should be kept for the next year. Other birds which should be kept are the youngsters which displayed signs of consistency and steadiness even though they may never had won a prize. Youngsters from your best breeding stock should also be kept for the following year regardless of their results. If you have three or four youngsters from the same pairs, eliminate the less promising ones and poorest physical specimens until you have brought the loft down to the desired number.

Besides the physical attributes to determining strong pigeons (please see characteristics of a strong racer for more details) there are a few questions you can ask yourself in order to help you determine which birds to carry over to the following year:

Does the bird possess the physical requirements and stamina demanded of an old bird?

Will it be capable of battling with the elements when three hundred, four hundred, five hundred or even a thousand miles from home? Can it take it?

Basically the key to determining which birds to keep for the following season is “survival of the fittest” any birds that for any reason seem doubtful or unsuitable should be eliminated if you hope to succeed.

**Module 1 Overview**

One of the secrets of successful pigeon racing is to create in the birds a love of home and of their owner this all begins in the loft. The Loft is one of the key elements to being successful in this sport. The loft is in most cases the finish line to the race, it is the research and development lab where you can fine tune your race team, it is where your birds are born, bred and grow but most importantly it is there home. So remember to do your research before building your loft, stay within your budget, and keep cleanliness and the well being of your bird’s top priority.
Chapter 2 Stock Selection

The Foundation

In every successful loft one of the main components is starting off with good foundation stock. What is foundation stock? Foundation stock is the breeders in your loft that are the basis or foundation of your entire loft. The key to finding foundation birds is not to just find birds that breed, but to find birds that will breed potential winners. Your foundation birds will determine how successful and competitive your loft can be. There are other factors to being successful in this sport like nutrition, loft management, training etc but starting with good quality birds is a must.

Many new pigeon fanciers hope for immediate success, which is very difficult considering the high cost of building a loft, buying equipment and securing good breeders. Many times new fanciers build expensive lofts and great equipment and get mediocre birds to save money. There are tons of avenues available these days to find good foundation birds, and it has become even easier in the past ten years with the use of the internet.

When choosing birds to some extent you must be guided by the fanciers that you go to, to obtain your birds but when looking for good foundation birds for your loft there are a few things to look for that can help you select the very best birds. However getting good at this will take experience but knowing what to look for can give you a head start.

Long Distance vs. Short Distance

The first thing you will want to look for is which type of racing you will be doing, are you looking for fast sprinters that race short distances, or are you looking for long distance flyers. There is no sense of getting sprinters when the majority of your races are going to be long distance and vice versa.

Short distances are usually up to 200 miles

Middle distance is usually from 200 to 400 miles

And long distance is 400 to 700+ miles

Certain bloodlines will be found to excel at shorter sprints from 50 to 200 miles while others will not start to finish with the leaders until the 200 mile mark is
passed. Other strains will slump badly in the young bird races but come into their own at the yearling or two year old stage. Therefore it is up to the individual fancier to learn the distances at which his various birds perform the best and attempt to get the most out of them by having them in the best possible condition when their time comes.

Generally you can get a good idea of a pigeon’s potentials by looking at their pedigrees and past ancestry. However there are also a few physical signs that you should get familiar with when distinguishing sprinters from distance birds. The long distance bird can usually be distinguished by it’s long keel, fairly tight vent bones, strong squills and chest and in general has a more sturdy and hearty appearance. On the other hand shorter distance homers usually have vent bones that are close together, thin squills on the flight feathers, ribs close together, shorter keel and shorter in the chest.

**What to Look For In a Racing Homer**

**Characteristics of a Strong Racer**

**General Condition**
Physical condition and the state of the plumage are the prime factors to be considered in every specimen when determining good flyers. The bird should be clean and healthy looking and it should fit right into the hand not being too light or heavy and should be well balanced without a tendency to tip forward when holding it in one hand, it should also have a streamline look to it. The body should be wedge shaped, the pigeon should also have a full and well rounded head and the skull bones should be bold and well formed indicating plenty of room for the pigeon’s brain and the beak should be medium sized; not too long and not too short. When in the hand the tail should slightly slope downward and the body feathers should be lying smoothly. All in all the bird should look and feel fit and healthy.

**Plumage**
The pigeon should fit snugly in your two hands and have a good supply of body feathers. The feathers should be smooth, feel slippery and powdery. The legs should also be fully white and powdery.

**Eye, Cere and Wattle**
The eye should be nicely placed in the head and look healthy, sparkling, clear and bright. The eye cere should be average texture and size not being over emphasized or lacking and should be either dark or cream colored. Birds carrying large wattles and heavy eye cere seldom make good racers.

**Keel Bone**
Now you can feel for the keel, the keel is an extension of the sternum and gives
the birds pectoral muscles an anchor to attach to. The keel should be fairly long in comparison to its body length; it should not finish abruptly but should run straight with a gentle sweep upwards towards its finish just before the tail.

**Pectoral Muscles**
The pectoral muscles are found on either side of the keel, these are the muscles that drive the wings. A pigeon with a deep V feeling usually means lack of muscle mass a good sign of weak pectoral muscles is the tail sticking upward.

**The Neck**
The neck should be fairly thick and short, tapering off into a nice curve into the under part of the body and back. Color should also be showing in its neck feathers.

**The Wings**
The primary feathers should not have any gaps between them when the wing is fully opened and the tips of the primaries should be 1-11/2in from the extreme of the tail feathers. The wing muscles should also feel strong a good way to test this is by opening the wing the wing should have a strong resistance when opened and the pigeon should try to pull its wing back.

**The Tail**
The tail feathers should developed in proportion to the pigeon’s general feather condition and size of its body. The tail feathers should be well arranged, the tail feather should be one feather width with the other eleven stacked one on top of the other. The tail should also be thick and well padded.

**Vent Bones**
The vent bones should be fairly close in males and slightly apart in females, they should have a smooth round feeling to them and posses plenty of rigidity also they should be fairly even.

**Characteristics to Avoid**

Extra large birds should be avoided, most of them are cumbersome and slow and although they usually have great power in their wings, staying qualities and unlimited endurance they usually lack speed which is a quality we strive for in our birds.

Crooked breasted racers should also be eliminated as possibilities as breeders. The crooked keel may be hereditary which, is a sure sign of degeneration underway. The malformation may even become more pronounced in the youngsters. The keel should not be too shallow or too deep if it is the bird will not be a good flyer and not have good stamina this also indicates lack of chest space and is usually a sign of poor breeding.
Never obtain pigeons which have suffered from canker, wing boils or similar diseases, these birds have lost their value as flyers. Canker and other diseases are readily transmitted to young even if the bird seems healthy and unless checked in time these diseases will soon sweep the entire loft.

Old birds especially those which have reached more than eight years of age should be carefully watched for signs of declining vitality. If they begin to show the signs of old age for example their feathers loose there luster and become dull and lifeless their usefulness as breeders is nil. Birds will often continue to be good breeders until the ages of nine, ten or even twelve years but much depends on how hard they were flown and worked during their younger years.

**Obtaining Quality Birds**

As you will see there are many places to secure both good breeders and birds that will breed potential winners but also keep in mind that champion racing birds are not always champion breeders. Your foundation stock is the basis of your racing team; if you want strong competitive teams you must get strong competitive birds want a weak team? Then secure lesser quality birds, it's that simple. Let's look at each one a little closer

**Yearlings**
The best bet when obtaining birds would be to purchase yearlings, those born in the previous year and have already completed one seasons moulting. The reason being is that they would mate reasonably quickly and after two or three months of breeding you could easily settle them to your loft. If they cost a lot of money however, it may be smart to keep them as prisoners this way you will not run the risk of loosing them during settling.

When buying yearlings; select birds which have shown a tendency to race consistently even if not actually winning as young birds themselves. In other words choose birds which have regularly been among the early ones back to the loft. Generally there are two rules when purchasing yearlings

- If you intend to race the youngsters you purchase, they should come from proven breeders.

- If you intend to breed the youngsters you purchase, they should come from birds that have raced successfully. Although the best racing birds do not necessarily produce good racers direct, the next generation is once more successful.

**Pot Luck**
The “Pot Luck” method of getting birds is a method that many pigeon fanciers today started with; it is also the same reason why some quit the sport all together. The pot luck method refers to the flyer receiving a bunch of birds given for many different reasons and having to sort through them to find the best ones. Unfortunately it is very difficult for new flyers to find the best birds in the bunch and virtually becomes a coin flip, the pot luck method of acquiring birds is definitely not recommended. The good thing about the “Pot Luck” method is the fact that it will give the new flyer some experience for caring for their birds, but since we’re interested in winning races there are much better ways of getting good foundation birds.

**Late Hatches**
Late hatches are a great way to get good birds from top flyers. A late hatch is a bird that hatches after the racing season. Before purchasing late hatches from breeders do your research by going over the race records and results of the loft you are looking to purchase them from. If the loft fits your race criteria then approach the breeder and ask him if he is willing to sell some late hatches off of his good flyers. You should be able to buy these birds at a reasonable price.

**Old Birds**
Getting old bird is another great way of acquiring good foundation birds. When birds get too old and lose their racing ability many top breeders will sell them, however it doesn’t happen often and it may be pricey. The great thing about these birds especially the good ones is that many will have a great resume and bloodlines, and are good breeders of potential winners. You may have to shop around being that the selections are limited but the end result will be worth it. If purchasing old birds, seek out fanciers who according to their bird’s pedigrees and records have shown themselves to breed pigeons that perform consistently. However also be careful not to buy birds that are too old for these birds may be worn out or on the downgrade and would not be a worthwhile purchase.

**Direct Stock Purchase**
Direct stock is another way of securing top quality foundation stock for your loft. Direct stock purchase is when you contact top lofts and purchase some of their best birds. The very best birds in the loft are almost never for sale and if they are you will pay a fortune for them, you are better off buying the brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles etc of the best birds. Many times these birds are race tested and proven to breed winners.

**Disposal sales**
Disposal sales are sort of like going out of business sales meaning that if a loft decides to leave the sport for any number of reasons they will sell off their stock. The things to look out for when buying from disposal sales is to be among the first to get there, Most of the time the best birds are taken first, which leaves the late corners with a small selection and quality. If it is a very good loft almost all the birds in the loft will be good ones, but these lofts rarely have disposal sales.
only for real morbid reasons like a death.

Advertisements
As the sport of pigeon racing grows you will begin to see more and more advertisements from lofts selling their birds either on the internet or in magazines. This gives yet another option for pigeon fanciers to purchase birds, however the best way to go about purchasing birds from advertisers is to do your homework. Ask others who have already dealt with the loft in question and see what their feedback is. Contact the loft by phone or email and ask them questions, look at race results and pedigrees. The advertisements are only as honest as the sellers so do your research before buying birds this way.

Auctions
Auctions are very popular because you can get great stock low prices, birds are put up for auction for many reasons sometimes after races if they are not bought back they are auctioned off which is good because the birds are already race tested, lofts often put their birds up for auction as a means to build revenue for their loft. Also if you go to a live auction you will be able to handle the birds, which is great because you can look for characteristics of good birds. Like with anything else do your homework before purchasing.

Shows and Conventions
Pigeon shows are not only a good place to get birds but they are a great place to be if you’re a pigeon fancier. They are a great place to go to see new products, meet other fanciers, find birds for sale, and ask questions and so on. Just like live auctions buying birds at shows are great because you can actually handle the birds. Another perk about getting birds at shows is that most of the time the loft managers will be present, so you can ask them questions about the birds and get to know them more, often times they will even answer questions like how should you pair the birds and so on and so forth.

The Internet
The internet is probably the easiest place these days to get great foundation birds for your loft. The internet has made things possible today that were nearly impossible years ago. It has made it possible for the pigeon fancier to buy birds from top lofts from all around the world, there are many online pigeon auctions, you can visit top loft websites and buy birds directly from them. Basically everything mentioned above can be done online. The internet has not only helped the beginning pigeon fancier in many ways it has also helped the sport to grow. Again just like anything else research is a must because you can not physically see the birds, good research done now can save you lots of frustration later on.

Settling Birds to the Loft
Old Birds
You should consider making old birds prisoners in your loft after acquiring them and keeping them penned up in your loft until they have produced several youngsters. You will save yourself a lot of time and frustration by not trying to train the bird to your loft. After all, the main motive to acquiring old birds should be to add new blood to the loft for breeding purposes.

Old birds seem to lose their racing ability when acclimated to a new loft, the reason being that it’s attachment to it’s original home has been robbed from it and cannot be replaced no matter how nice the new loft may be. Although the bird may seem happy and content in its new home something definitely seems to be lacking when it comes to racing time. It would make much more sense to keep these birds home and race it’s young instead of risking losing it.

Late Hatches
Late hatches should not be purchased with the intent of immediately breeding from them. Late hatches although usually less expensive need time to mature before using them for breeding purposes, prepare to allow considerable longer time for the late hatches to settle to their surroundings and to mature, it would in fact be advisable to purchase these birds in September or October of the year that they were born; in this way you might be able to settle them to your loft and have them flying out before you consider mating them.

Yearlings
When purchasing yearlings it is best to do so about the end of January and let them occupy one of the sections of your loft for a couple of weeks before you pair and mate them about mid February. Let them quietly rear their first nest of young without going out; then while they are sitting the second pair of eggs you can attempt to settle them to your loft.

Loft Breaking

The next thing the young birds need to learn is the surroundings of the loft and how to enter it. You can accomplish this by placing your birds in a settling cage and placing it on top of the landing board in front of the trap.

The settling cage serves two functions,

- The settling cage enables your birds to get to know the surrounding area without being able to fly off
- As well as helping your birds to get to know the trap and it’s position.

After about a week or two of using the settling cage; the settling cage should be
removed and the birds should be allowed to come out of the loft unrestricted.

The best time to loft break your birds is 2 hours before sunset on a sunny day when the wind is below 10 MPH. On the morning you decide to loft break your birds you should only feed them half of the usual rations. By loft breaking so close to sunset and feeding the birds less during the day it will make the birds more eager to return to the loft for food and safety.

In the beginning weeks of loft breaking your birds do not chase them out of the loft or let them fly with older more experienced birds. This will cause them to immediately take to the air and because of their inexperience may cause them to get lost. Instead in the beginning it is ok to let them land in trees, on roofs and on other structures until you are positive that your birds know the surrounding area, then you should not allow them to land anywhere but the landing board. The goal here is to get your birds to exercise freely flying as a flock, landing only on the landing board and entering the loft when signaled.

**Module 2 Overview**

Your foundation stock is a very important decision it is the foundation of your entire loft and how successful your loft can be. But remember these are only guidelines and in no way are they set in stone, just because a racing pigeon is pretty doesn’t mean it will be a winning racer. Health and conditioning still play a huge role in the success of your loft but health and condition cannot be used synonymously remember,

“Condition is not possible without health but health is, possible without racing conditioning” –Leslie C. Swanson

This means, a well trained bird needs to be healthy but a healthy bird does not need to be well trained. Just because they look healthy doesn’t mean they’ll win races. The main lesson is to do your research, take your time and get the very best birds your budget can handle; it can save you lots of frustration and time later on.
Chapter 3 Feeding and Nutrition

Nutrition Background

It doesn’t matter which animal or species you are talking about nutrition is one of the most important variables in the overall care and health of that animal. Nutrition, genetics, breeding, health, conditioning and your own loft management skills will determine your lofts performance and without proper nutrition the other five mean nothing. Pigeons are grain and seed eaters and just like any species including humans they perform their best when provided with a balanced diet.

In order to determine the correct diet or feeding rations for any species, professional nutritionists start by identifying their needs and requirements throughout their life cycle. Different stages in a pigeon’s life call for different requirements of nutrition as shown throughout this guide. Unfortunately there has been little scientific study devoted to the nutritional requirements of the pigeon. The reason for this is that there are simply not enough economic incentives for feed companies and universities to devote the necessary resources to an in depth study of pigeon nutritional requirements. Based on some studies from feed companies as well as knowledge from other related species and experience from pigeon fanciers around the world you can be confident that the pigeon feeds sold by reputable manufactures will do an excellent job for your team.

Basic Nutritional Requirements

The basic nutritional requirements of the pigeon are protein, energy (the best sources are fats and carbohydrates) minerals and vitamins. All of these nutrients are found in all of the grains used for pigeon feed but the difference is in the amounts used. The general rules are that pigeons have a higher protein requirement during breeding season; they have a higher energy requirement during work periods such as training or racing. You will find that commercial pigeon feed have a feed tag on the bag. This tag lists the percentages of protein, fat and fiber in that feed, the tag also should list in rank order the major ingredients of that particular mixture. The protein content has become a quick reference for choosing a feed mix, for example a 16% feed refers to one that has a crude protein content of 16%

You will sometimes see references to “heavy” feeds or to “light” feed mixtures. “Heavy generally means that the feed mix is higher in energy, the “light” generally means lower in energy and higher in fiber. Some of the best energy sources are corn, milo, safflower and when used sparingly raw peanuts. For protein various
varieties of peas have been found to be outstanding for use in pigeon feed mixes. Barley is a grain that is moderate in most nutrient levels but is high in fiber making it a great versatile feed ingredient as well as one of the most important grains for conditioning and performance in pigeons.

Fortunately North America has a wide variety of seeds and grains that are suitable for use in pigeon feeds, this is extremely important when it comes to giving your pigeons a balanced diet, a balanced diet is achieved by variety. Even though a mature pigeon could survive on a diet of nothing but wheat for example, it will thrive on a diet of assorted grains. This is extremely important in the high physical demands of training and racing as well as the rearing of young pigeons.

**Breeding Season Nutrition**

As your breeding pairs have been mated and the hatching of eggs comes closer you should have your pigeons on a high nutritional plane. Most experienced pigeon flyers like to feed their breeders a ration of protein in the range of 16-18%. If the mix available to you carries a protein level of 14% lets say then it is recommended to add supplemental peas to the ration. The levels fed would be approximately 1/5 peas and 4/5 mix in this example. The rapidly growing youngsters place huge demands on the breeding pairs so it is important that they be on full feed, meaning they have access to feed at all times during the daylight hours.

When the youngsters reach about 18 to 21 days of age, many pigeon fanciers place small containers of breeding mix in the nest box. This serves as a supplemental feed source for the parents and also eases some of the demand placed on them. Even more important this practice helps the young to learn to eat grain on their own, thus reducing the stress that weaning places on them.

Pellets, which are grain parts that are compressed, are a very popular option with many pigeon fanciers, especially for breeding. Feed manufactures are able to provide a balanced diet right out of the bag. This seems to have a greater payoff in the rapid development of young in the nest. The downside of using pellets is in looser droppings.

Your breeding pairs, as with all pigeons in your loft, must have access at all times to clean, fresh water and fresh grit. Pigeon grit contains additional supplements including calcium, oyster shell, salt and minerals. Pigeon grit also aids in the digestion of feed.

**Moult & Off Season Nutrition**
The fall season is when the pigeon moults or looses its old plumage and trades it in for new. Moulting carries with it the need for a fairly high nutritional plane, but since the birds are not racing or training the energy requirement is reduced. Most pigeon fanciers feed a diet of 16% protein with barley being a significant ingredient in the range of 20-25% of the ration. The same approach to limited feeding, consumption in fifteen minutes and twice a day is preferred by most fanciers.

Training and Racing Nutrition

You will want to have the breeding mix readily available to youngsters in the first few days after weaning; this is not yet the time to limit feed. Also a four week old youngster though almost at its mature size still has some developing and growing to do. As the young birds begin to fly around the loft remember never to feed before they are let out for exercise. As they complete their exercise and you call them in for feed (using whistle, feed can or other sound), put down some feed for them to find when they enter the trap. A good rule of thumb is to only feed the amount that can be consumed in 15 minutes, dump any leftover feed. Exercised and fed mornings and evenings you will see this approach will give you the makings of a healthy, disciplined young bird team.

The young team basic ration is a commercial racing mix or one that runs approximately 14%-15% crude protein. As the youngsters begin to leave the loft for extended periods when exercised, this would be a great time to consider adding supplemental barley to the mix. This “lighter” ration should contain roughly 20% barley. You will find that your birds will eat the barley last, or reluctantly, persevere by adjusting the total amount of feed fed as barley is an excellent ingredient.

During heavy training and racing you should reduce the amount of barley in the feed. Fat pigeons cannot perform well but remember that heavy work burns a ton of energy (calories). In order to perform at peak performance your birds must have adequate reserves to meet the demands of a 200 or 300 mile race. This doesn’t mean to put your birds on full feed but they should continue to feed twice a day and only what they can consume in 15 minutes. Road training is an excellent time to evaluate the body condition of your birds.

Old Bird Nutritional Requirements

If you are comfortable with feeding both your breeding pairs and the youngsters, then you should find the old birds a breeze. The role of nutrition in the performance and health of the old bird team is every bit as important as it is with
the youngsters. Controlled feeding is very important, do not overfeed your old
birds and be sure not to cut them short as well you should adjust the diet to
coincide with the workload.

**Module 3 Overview**

There are a few other things you should practice when it comes to feeding your
team, your feed should be as clean and dust free as possible, make sure rodents
never come in contact with the feed as well. Feed should be taken out of the loft
at night and stored in rodent proof containers if possible. You should never give
feed that is wet, damp or has been wet to your birds, damp feed is just as bad as
a damp loft

Addition of supplemental vitamins and minerals via water has been a common
practice among pigeon fanciers, and can help during times of stress and heavy
demands on your birds, but moderation is recommended don’t over do things.
The pigeon receives most all of what it needs from its diet, remember balance is
key.
Chapter 4 Breeding and Mating

Establishing Goals

Before you begin breeding your birds it is very good practice to take some time to write down what your desired goals are going to be for your loft. It is much easier as well as more effective to follow a detailed plan rather than to plan as you go. Often times the breeders with the plan will experience consistent results rather than hit and misses. During the planning process you will want to establish the goals that you want the youngsters to accomplish. These goals will establish which foundation birds you choose as well as how you will begin pairing the breeders. For example if your flying goals are to be successful at long distance races then you will need to choose birds and pair birds that have been successful in long distances and vice versa.

Foundation Stock

In order to be successful in breeding you must start with good birds. The birds that you build your loft upon are called the foundation stock. This is because the birds you begin with are the foundation of how dominant your team has the potential to be. When beginning in the pigeon racing sport and hobby it is essential to start with the best quality birds that your budget will allow. This will help you build a winning race team as well as saving you much frustration later on down the road.

When acquiring your foundation stock make sure to buy your birds from fanciers who consistently win themselves this is a good sign of a successful bloodline. Once you find a feather merchant with a consistent winning racing record, buy the young of the breeding pairs that have had the most success, or if the merchant will part with them buy the actual birds themselves that have shown success. This is your best shot at getting high quality birds with proven pasts.

Please see Chapter 2 Stock Selection for more information.

Pairing

Once you have acquired the best birds your budget will allow you are ready to begin planning the pairing process. Remember the main goal to breeding is to try to produce the best youngsters possible and this is why the pairing process
becomes so important. When you are actually ready to pair up your birds a good
guideline to follow when deciding mates, is to envision the desired youngster as
being better in physical qualities then either of its parents. But always keep in
mind, even though this technique sounds easy it is also just as easy to end up
with the exact opposite of your vision. The combination of the parents DNA is
extremely unpredictable and can result in both a good or bad result.

However there are a few things to keep in mind that will put the odds of a good
result in your favor, the secret is to improve less than perfect physical
characteristics in the partners.

**Sexing and Courtship**

Successfully determining the sex of your pigeons will take practice and
experience and is a common problem for beginner fanciers, even experienced
fanciers can still make a mistake from time to time when determining the sex of
their pigeons. However, a fancier gets to know his family of pigeons individually
and usually if the fancier is an owner for some years can easily sort out their
sexes. The difficulty comes with sexing birds which the fancier is unaccustomed
to. Sexing birds is difficult because there are no guaranteed characteristics for
determining sexes. Just like most birds there are no visible sex organs and unlike
other types of birds there are no gender specific colors between the sexes, color
differences are only the product of inheritance and not gender.

There are however a few general characteristics that may help you when
determining the sexes of your birds. For example the cock is usually larger then
the hen and the size difference are usually noticeable from the moment of
hatching. Also, a cock bird has a bolder looking head with the crown higher
above eye level; in retrospect the hens head has a less pronounced crown which
makes the eye appear to be set higher in the head. In general the hen's
appearance seems altogether more sweet and attractive while the cock has a
more aggressive look.

Another way of determining sexes is through the courtship acts themselves. By
paying close attention to the courtship rituals of the pigeons that will give you the
best guides to the sexes. Also keep in mind that these gender specific courtship
behaviors are not confined specifically to the mating and breeding season. Even
when birds are parted if they can see each other will display signs of courtship.

The cock bird will blow out his crop and turn round in front of the hen bird whose
attention he wants to attract, the hen will often coo and inflate her neck a little as
well but she will very seldom if ever spin round in a circle like the cock. Hens also
walk slowly and somewhat seductively to lead the cock on while the cock moves
more quickly rather like strutting and bob their heads up and down while turning
in a complete circle. As courtship progresses the pigeons will begin “beaking” or
“billing” as many fanciers call it, this is when the hen puts her beak inside the cocks. They then ring beaks with an action similar to that of regurgitating food to feed their young. When the hen is aroused she will follow the cock around the loft and when the cock is still and resting will stroke the back of his neck. This leads to the final stage in the mating process called “treading” this is when copulation takes place. The hen will crouch down and open her wings slightly and the cock will mount her, this action is very quick. Other cocks will try to prevent copulation if possible and may be successful if the cock is inexperienced or old. Some fanciers will let their breeding pairs out one at a time so that mating can be accomplished.

When to Pair

Old birds are usually mated in the late winter or early spring, one week prior to mating let the cocks choose their nest boxes if they haven’t done so already. When you begin pairing your birds it is good practice to use a mesh divider of sorts in the nest box for one or two days to keep the hen and cock birds separate from one another, this way the hen and cock can meet but will insure that aggressive cocks cannot harm the hens.

The Nest

Although many times it is overlooked the nest is actually an essential part to your breeding success. The nest helps in the incubation process of the eggs, keeping the young warm and contained and also helps in preventing handicaps like “straddle legs”.

The best nesting material can be any type of dry, small diameter sticks, twigs and stems about 6 inches or so in length.

Popular nesting materials include,

Tobacco leaf stems
Alfalfa straw
Tree twigs
Pine needles
Straw
Nest bowls

When adding the nesting material to the loft put a small amount of nesting material in the nest boxes then put plenty on the floor of the loft. A good rule of thumb to remember is there should be enough nesting material in the loft so each breeding pair in the loft are able to build a nest about 3 inches high. This will
ensure that the breeding pairs do not run out of nesting material and will be able to fly back and fourth to collect more material.

**Hatching, Banding and Weaning**

**Hatching**

After the birds have been paired, nest have been made and mating has commenced it is time for the breeding pair to lay their eggs and wait for them to hatch. This is a very exciting time during the breeding period because a new champion may be in the making.

The hen should lay her first egg about 10 days after mating and the 2nd egg about two days after that. The hen will actually wait to sit on the eggs until both eggs have been laid this way both eggs can be cared for equally and will hatch together. The hen and cock will take turns caring for the eggs with the hen taking the largest part; this enables the free partner to get food, water and exercise. About 17 days after the pair began sitting on the eggs the eggs should begin to hatch. While the pair are sitting on the eggs a cream like substance known as “pigeon milk” forms in and adheres to the wall of the crop by both parents this food substance will be used to feed the youngsters for the first three or four days of hatching. Pigeon milk is composed mainly of protein and fat which the youngsters need for their rapid growth.

Once hatched the baby pigeons also known as squeakers will be fed pigeon milk by both of the parents until they are about 10 days old, after which the parents will begin feeding them grains. Newly hatched pigeons do not have any feathers but are covered with a small amount of yellow down. Young pigeons grow very quickly and will double their size at about 5 days old and will soon begin growing their feathers.

When the young are about 14 to 16 days old the hen will usually lay the first egg of her second clutch which again will be followed by the second egg approximately 2 days later. Some fanciers will replace the second clutch eggs with fake ones this way the pigeons will not be subject to the strain of rearing again, this will allow the birds to build up and reserve their strength for racing later on in the year. You may even take the second clutch eggs and pass them on to your stock pigeons to hatch and rear.

**Banding**

Between the ages of 5 to 7 days old the new hatchlings should be banded.
Bands are available through your local club, you can think of the band as the pigeons ID. The Band is used to find the owner if the bird ever gets lost and it is also mandatory in order for the bird to enter any races.

An example of the band information will look something like this,
Example: OR 08 ABC 1234

[OR] The organization that has registered the bird, such as the AU, IF, etc.

[08] The year the bird was hatched and registered.

[ABC] The letters representing the pigeon club the band is registered to.

[1234] the unique identification number of the pigeon wearing the band.

Steps to safely applying the bands to the new hatchlings,

Place the band on the right leg of the pigeon with the band numbers and letters upside down.

Place the three forward toes of the baby pigeon into the band.

Gently pull back the fourth toe so that it is parallel against the leg and slip the band up the leg until the fourth toe is freed.

Keep checking the newly banded pigeons for the first three days after banding to make sure the bands stay in place and did not slip off. Once the new pigeons have been banded they are ready to begin their racing career.

**Weaning**

During day six or seven the young birds will begin to take different food, again with both parents taking part in the feeding. The cock and hen will fill their crops with corn and grain and will regurgitate the food into the young birds. At about 14 days old the young birds will be almost fully feathered and around 20 days old the young birds will begin moving about the nest box, shortly after this the young birds will begin picking up grain themselves if it is available.

Whenever the young birds begin to pick up food on their own they are ready to be weaned from their parents, this usually takes place anywhere from 18 to 28 days of age. Once this happens the young birds are ready to be taken to the next stage of their development; the young bird section.

The earlier a youngster can be weaned the better, there are a few reasons why, for starters the regurgitating of food for the youngsters depletes a great deal of
energy from the parents so the sooner you can relieve this stress the better, for this reason youngsters should not stay with their parents any later than 28 days of age. Early weaning also protects young birds from being injured or even killed by the older birds in the loft. Cocks in particular will harm or even kill young birds that wander into the wrong nest box. Most importantly young birds to tend to make better progress in general when weaned early. However do not rush weaning your young birds from their parents, just keep a close eye on them so you notice when they begin trying to feed from the feed pots themselves, this is the sign when they should be weaned and placed in the young bird section of the loft.

**Breeding Techniques**

There are three basic types of breeding pairings in-breeding, line-breeding and out-crossing, The object to breeding is to intensify the good qualities and fix the flaws of a family of racing pigeons; however breeding could go either way, because of this when breeding it is essential to closely monitor your birds to make sure that the good qualities you are looking for are still there and that no flaws are creeping in. If you do begin to see some flaws in your offspring it may be time to introduce new blood into your breeding program.

Just remember there is no one rule for breeding, each fancier makes his or her own decisions on how to breed and rear their pigeons. In the end performance is all that counts and will reveal itself on race day.

**In Breeding**

This is the closest type of breeding relationship, and is a breeding of direct family members for example brother to sister. This type of breeding could result in either an excellent bird with very few flaws or the total opposite a very flawed bird with few potential good qualities. As with any animal, breeding to closely too often can result in very flawed animals; however some experts recommend occasional inbreeding to bring purity back into the bloodline.

**Line Breeding**

Similar to inbreeding, line breeding also involves pairing related birds however not a closely for example father to daughter or mother to son. This type of breeding has a good history of carrying on positive traits and breeding winning birds.
**Out Crossing**

This is the practice of pairing a winning pigeon with an unrelated winning pigeon. The history of both winning pedigrees can result in a spectacular bird. Unfortunately if you breed the young of the pedigreed birds with non related young of another bird, you’ll loose the qualities that you originally bred for. The solution to this problem is to inbreed the next generation to return the qualities to the bloodline.

**Over Breeding**

Over-breeding is a big problem amongst greedy fanciers and will prove fatal to your longevity in the pigeon racing sport. Over-breeding becomes a problem when fanciers try to get the highest yields possible from their breeding pairs without their breeding pair’s health and well being in mind.

Some problems that occur from over breeding are,

- Low quality youngsters
- Fatigue
- Unhealthy birds
- Birds are more likely to be subject to disease

To help prevent over-breeding here are a few rules of thumb to remember,

- Hens and cocks mate for life or until you change their mate or they are separated.
- The hen will usually lay another round of eggs within 3 weeks after the first round has hatched
- The old birds should not be allowed to raise more than 4 rounds of young birds.
- When you are satisfied with the number of birds raised the hens and cocks should be separated until the next breeding season. This will insure that the hens and cocks moult properly.
- Most fanciers stop raising young birds after June.

**Breeding Records**
To become a master breeder and to produce those sought after champion birds every breeder needs to keep good breeding records. Record keeping allows you to find your best breeders or if you have a stellar breeding season proper record keeping will help you to duplicate it the next season. The only way to test different breeding strategies against each other is with good records from each attempt. Your breeding records are also imperative to making each bird's pedigree.

Please see Chapter 1 Record Keeping for more information

**Module 4 Overview**

As you can see breeding is an integral part to any fancier's future in the pigeon racing sport. Let's just recap some of the important breeding topics that we have covered,

Establish Flying Goals, make a plan for success

Start with the best birds your budget will allow, without a good foundation your success will be mediocre at best.

Envision the future youngsters to help select your breeding pairs.

Old birds are usually mated in the late winter or early spring.

Although many times it is overlooked the nest is actually an essential part to your breeding success.

The hen should lay her first egg about 10 days after mating and the 2nd egg about two days after that.

Between the ages of 5 to 7 days old the new hatchlings should be banded.

Over-breeding can be fatal to your lofts success.

To become a master breeder and to produce those sought after champion birds every breeder needs to keep good breeding records
Chapter 5 Training & Conditioning

Introduction

Training is probably one of the greatest parts to pigeon racing, it is the most interactive element between the fancier and the pigeon and come race day becomes the most rewarding. There is one major thing to remember about training, like everything else that has to do with pigeon racing there are no absolutes when it comes to training. Many different fanciers use many different techniques with the same success so it is near impossible to call one training technique or strategy superior or inferior to the others. If you keep these guidelines and goals in mind when you begin training your bird’s success will surely follow.

The four main goals to get out of training are,

- To get your birds to trust you by building a relationship with them.
- To condition your birds for peak physical performance
- To Build your birds confidence
- To lay a good foundation for the future competition.

Building a Relationship

The first goal to your training regimen is to get your birds to trust you by building a strong, deep relationship with them. The practice of building a relationship with your birds is never ending and starts as soon as the pigeons are born. Once you have the trust of your birds you will have complete control over the loft.

Holding the Pigeon, the Beginning Bond
Properly holding the pigeons is a fantastic and quick way of developing a relationship with your birds. Holding the pigeons correctly helps your birds to build their trust in you as well as helping to lower their stress levels. Also besides helping to build trust and lower stress, properly holding the birds ensures that the pigeons cannot struggle and possibly hurt themselves.

How to properly hold a pigeon,

Hold the bird in the palm of your hand with its head facing toward you. And firmly but gently hold both legs of the pigeon between your index and middle fingers.
Entering the Loft
Even something as simple as just entering the loft will help to dramatically build a relationship and bond with your birds. You should try to enter the loft on a daily basis and become a constant presence in their lives. A good trick to help your birds to quickly identify you is to always wear the same thing when entering the loft, this can be accomplished by using a “loft coat” and wear it every time you are around your birds. The birds will become used to this sighting and associate it with you; it will help to build a stronger bond with your birds and also lower stress levels from entering the loft.
The main goal here is to be able to enter the loft at anytime and pickup any bird without causing stress to it or the other birds in the loft. Once this is accomplished with all of your birds you will have complete control over your loft.

Conditioning

The second goal of training is to condition your birds and to get them into peak physical performance so they will be able to withstand the rigors of racing. Along with conditioning the birds this is also the valuable time when the birds will learn their immediate surrounding area and get a feel for entering the loft.

When to begin conditioning is really up to the fancier but as a general rule when a young bird is fully feathered under its wing it is ready to be placed in with the young birds in the young bird loft.

Signaling
In order to have complete control over your birds training sessions, you will need to train your birds to react to signals. The focus here is to get your birds to associate a signal with an action, for example to train your birds to associate a whistle with being fed. This is accomplished by repetition and simultaneously using the signal with the action wanted.

Here are some signals commonly used by successful fanciers,

- Whistles
- Poles
- Flags
- Feed Rattles

Building Confidence and Foundation for Future Competition

Road Training serves to purposes to help build confidence in your birds and to lay a good foundation for future competition. When you put your birds through training they will begin to get comfortable with the demands and structure of a
race and in turn will build confidence in themselves and be ready for future competitions.

Road training is almost like a mock race, where you release your birds at different distance intervals and they race back to the loft.

Only birds which are physically able to make it home in good time and are behaving well at home should be road trained. We recommend only road training birds that are exercising freely around the loft for 1hr twice a day for at least a month, or at least exercising freely for at least 45 minutes per day. This will ensure that you have strong birds with the right muscular development to withstand road training. If you road train birds too early or road train birds that are not physically ready there is a high percentage that you will loose many of them.

**Choosing the Right Training Schedule**

Before you begin training your birds there are a few things you need to know in order to really maximize your training efforts,

What kind of racing will you be doing?
This is a very important question because it will determine the proper training schedule that you will be putting your birds on. Will you be doing short or long distance racing and will you be racing young birds or old because each one have very different training needs.

**Young Bird Training**

**Tossing**
For the very first toss the young birds should be crated and released right in your yard or very close to the loft. The goal here is to get your birds used to the shipping crate, how it opens and releasing, this way they will not be frightened of it when you begin road training.

Many successful fanciers begin tossing their young birds 6 to 8 weeks prior to the first race. When you begin road training always try to toss your birds in the general direction that the races will be flown this will get your birds used to that same line that will be flown in the races. Only toss your birds in good weather when the sun is shining and by themselves. When you toss your birds by themselves also known as “single toss” or in small groups it makes the birds learn to home on their own instead of relying on or following a group. In order to give your birds an incentive to fly straight home on tosses up to 15 miles, release your birds 1 hr before sundown after your birds have exercised but before they
Some guidelines to follow when you begin road training,

Begin by tossing at 1 to 5 miles
Add 5 miles between tosses until 20 miles is reached
Then add 10 miles between tosses until 60 miles is reached

Keep the birds at each distance until they are homing under 2 minutes per air mile before you begin adding miles to the tosses. For shorter races; 4 to 6 tosses at 50 to 60 miles are essential. Only when your birds begin to fly straight home should you toss them in large groups or with other fancier’s birds.

**Young Bird Team Make-Up**

All of the members of your young bird team should be roughly the same age; this will allow you to train and work with the entire team as a whole. It will also reduce the amount of work on the fancier and help make your results more consistent. But this is often not the case for example if you have one group of youngsters that are 60 days or older then another, you should consider training them separately as two separate teams as well as separating them in the loft.

Mixing of two different age young bird groups can be bad for both groups because each will have certain training needs. For example the younger group will tend to keep the older group from routing and developing as they should and on the other hand the older group may take the younger group too far from the loft to soon and risk getting them lost. However with maturity the two groups can be brought together with success.

**Young Bird Training Schedule**

Here is an example training schedule, you can begin 2 miles away and gradually build up by doubling the miles after every two successful flights.

Days 1 & 2: Release birds from 2 miles
Days 3 & 4: Release birds from 4 miles
Days 5 & 6: Release birds from 8 miles
Days 7 & 8: Release birds from 12 miles
Days 9 & 10: Release birds from 14 miles
Day 11: Release birds from 20 miles
Day 12: No training
Day 13: Release birds from 20 miles
Day 14: No training
Day 15: Release birds from 20 miles
Day 16: No training
Day 17: Release birds from 40 miles
Day 18: No training
Day 19: Release birds from 40 miles
Day 20: No training
Day 21: Release birds from 40 miles
Day 22: No training

Day 23: Release birds from 60 miles
Day 24: No training
Day 25: Release birds from 40 miles
Day 26: No training
Day 27: Release birds from 20 miles
Day 28: Loft release no training (shipping day)
Day 29: Race Day

After the race, training should resume at 40 miles a day, two to three times per week depending on the length of their first race. If the birds are flying more than 50 or 60 miles you may need to continue increasing the training mileage until you know that they can successfully complete the race in a desirable amount of time. Keep in mind that if at any point you have a bad training session and experience losses you should consider backing off of your training schedule and giving a couple of remedial tosses. One good rule of thumb to follow is that your youngsters should get at least twenty total training tosses before being sent to their first 100 mile race.

Old Bird Training

Most of the time old birds are used generally for breeding purposes only, however many fanciers still race their old birds successfully.

Your first training session is the same as it would be for the young birds. For the first two weeks prior to the first training toss your birds will need to be exercised outside of the loft. You can exercise the sexes separately with the hens in the morning when the cocks generally take over sitting duties and the cocks in the late afternoon.

If your old birds are out of shape it is better to begin with 30 minute flights because long flights may cause more harm than good.

You can gradually increase your old birds flights, exercising them a couple of times per week making sure to alternate off days as you would with the young
birds. Because the older birds are more experienced it is not necessary to put them through a rigorous training schedule as you would with young birds. After the old birds first race; two weekly tosses with regular exercise time is sufficient.

**Old Bird Team Make-Up**

The old bird team should consist of a solid veteran group of birds from 2 to 5 years of age. Many times fanciers stop flying quality old birds too early, these veterans should be made up of about half sprinters and half distance birds, this will allow you to cover all the bases during the racing season. The goal here is to diversify because it takes different kinds of birds to be on top in each type of race because of the different conditions encountered, diversifying your old bird team will give you the best chances of doing well in the old bird races.

**Training Systems**

There are many training methods for training racing pigeons which makes it impossible to lay set ground rules on the subject, in this section we are going to give you some solid fundamentals and principles to some of the training systems successful fanciers use. Training can be disastrous and cause much heartache for the fancier if done wrong because a mistake can easily cause the loss of some of their best birds.

Some of these systems were developed to get the birds to fly faster as well as to cut down on “work” on the fanciers part, however just remember that no matter what system you decide to train your pigeons under, time spent with your birds, exercise, cleanliness, regular feeding and fresh water are still the absolute essentials to becoming successful.

**The Natural System**

The most commonly used training system is known as the “Natural System”, the natural system is when the birds are mated, reared and bred as naturally as possible and both cocks and hens are raced.

It is noticeable under the natural system that few, if any, birds begin to show signs of fitness until after getting their first primary flight feathers.

(Please refer back to [Chapter 5 Training](#) for more details on the Natural system)
Widowhood and Double-Widowhood

Another commonly used training system is known as “Widowhood” in widowhood only the cocks are raced. In this system after pairing and rearing of the first nest of youngsters the cocks are separated and only see their mates just prior to or just after returning from a training toss or race. The widowhood system may seem to be complicated to uniformed fanciers but actually many fanciers who successfully practice this training system say the work involved in bringing pigeons to, and keeping them in fit condition for racing, is far less then under the natural system and is as simple and easy as it is successful.

Overview of the widowhood system
In mid or late December the birds are mated, after they have reared their first round of youngsters and have settled down on their second clutch of eggs the hens are taken away, the young birds are weaned and the cocks are left sitting on the eggs which after about two days will neglect. The cocks are exercised regularly for at least an hour each day after which they return to the loft and are feed and given water each in their own nest box. The loft should be completely dark so that the cock birds will be completely at rest and there will be no flying or fighting among them.

When training begins the hen is introduced back into the nest box but on the opposite side of the partition this way the cock can see the hen but not have contact with her. When the cock returns from a training toss the cock is then allowed in the nest box with the hen but only for a short amount of time. Once the cock begins nuzzling and cooing to the hen the hen is quickly removed until the next time the cock is basketed for a training toss or race.

Double widowhood is basically the same as Widowhood but instead of only racing the cocks, you race both the cocks and hens to the same box.

The Celibacy System

The Celibacy system does not involve any sensual or sexual urge and is fairly simple in design. The design of the celibacy system entails parting the cocks and hens after the rearing of the first round of young and keeping them apart for the rest of the racing season. The celibacy system can be used in a normal loft with two or more compartments with the main difference being that the partitions are solid so that the birds cannot contact or see each other through them. Fanciers who practice the celibacy system have said that both sexes exercise and fly well and take less time then the natural system however the drawback is that all the birds are treated as a team and does not allow for individuality in the pigeons.
**The Jealousy System**

The Jealousy system works off of...yup you guessed it, jealously; the basis of the jealousy system is to provide two mates for a cock or hen. For example let’s say you would like to prepare two cocks for racing using the jealousy system; you would need to choose a loving hen and for the first few days allow her in the nest box with the first cock. Then you would remove the first cock and after about an hour or so introduce the second cock into the nest box with the hen.

On basketing day, close the nest box with cock#2 in the box with the hen and let cock#1 back into the loft. Cock#1 will fly straight to the nest box to see his hen and see cock#2 as an intruder and be anxious to get rid of him. At the same time cock#2 will see cock#1 as the intruder and will be just as anxious to oust him. Now remove each cock one at a time to the basket for sending to the race, do not let the two cocks come into contact with each other when basketing you should use two different baskets or a show basket where the birds remain separated. When release on race day the two cocks will race home faster because each believes that the other is still with their mate. If you would like to prepare hens for racing the procedure is reversed using two hens to one cock.

There is however one drawback to the jealousy system, if for instance the two cocks return home at the same time they may decide to settle things themselves and loose valuable racing time as well as causing harm tom each other.

**Young Bird System Variations**

All of the systems we talked about in this section refer to old birds; young birds are highly successful when raced naturally. However there are a few variations to racing young birds. For example some fanciers like to breed young birds in December ring them very early in January and pair them before racing them.

Another system for young birds which has proved to be successful is to keep the genders separated between races and then let them run together right before basketing for a race.

**Conclusion**

Training is the very foundation to the pigeons racing career, just like any athlete; they need to be in top physical shape in order to withstand the rigors of racing. It is important not to get impatient and only train birds when they are ready, willing and able to perform at their best.
You should also keep in mind that no one system will make a bad pigeon a good one but it might make a good pigeon better. It is your job as the fancier to instill in your birds the will, energy and love for home to fly home faster, this is especially important in short and middle distance races. In long races of 500 miles or more the quality of the bird is perhaps more important than the skill of the fancier or the system that he follows.

**Module 5 Overview**

There are no absolutes when it comes to training
The four main goals to training are trust, condition, confidence and foundation
Once you have the trust of your birds you will have complete control over the loft.
Properly holding the pigeons is a fantastic and quick way of developing a relationship with your birds
Even something as simple as just entering the loft will help to dramatically build a relationship and bond with your birds
Condition your birds and to get them into peak physical performance so they will be able to withstand the rigors of racing
The goal to loft breaking is to get your birds to exercise freely flying as a flock, landing only on the landing board and entering the loft when signaled
In order to have complete control over your birds training sessions, you will need to train your birds to react to signals
Road training of your birds serves two purposes both helping to build your birds confidence and by laying a good foundation for future competition