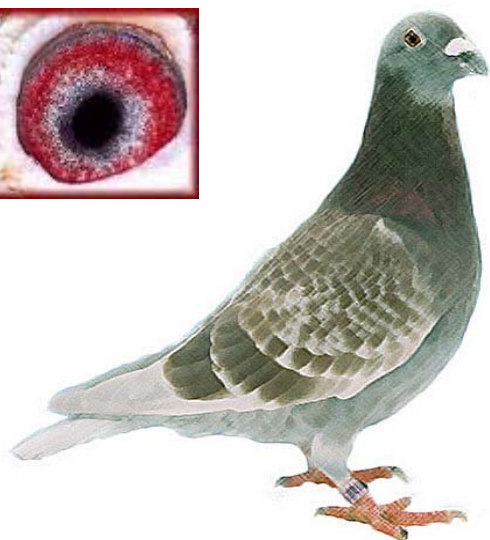
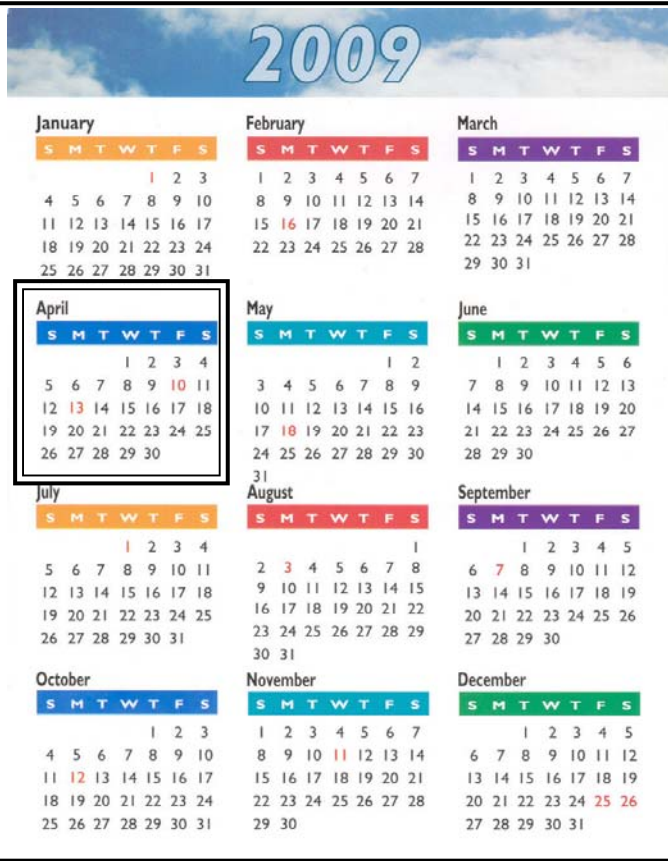


MONTH BY MONTH with Chris



Champion "Tracey's Red" winner of the N.W.C.C. Hall of Fame and over £5,000 in his racing career, for Chris Knowles of Woodley, Stockport.



April -- Aphrodite's month

Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of love and beauty. She is identified with the Roman goddess Venus. Old English *April(is)*, Latin *Aprilis*, *Aprilis* had 30 days, until Numa when it had 29 days, with Julius Caesar it became 30 days long.

April - The month when exercise and feeding become the subjects of focus, following the months where concentration has been on health, feather growth and the rearing of future champions.

Fitness - What do we really mean when we talk about fitness in our pigeons?

I have long thought that is one of the most misleading words in the pigeon game, along with "Form" and "Champion". Most fanciers I think are referring to a physical state which is measured in how long pigeons exercise for or how long they disappear for when let out for exercise or even whether cocks are clapping up and down on a constant basis when out and flying as individuals and not in a bunch.

It is worth looking at Dictionary definitions of the word "Fitness" :- "capability of the body of distributing inhaled oxygen to muscle tissue during increased physical effort". Health is defined as "The general condition of the body or mind with reference to soundness and vigor, good health, poor health". The interesting thing is that we now have some tangibles to look at, such as **distribution of oxygen to muscle** tissue during **increased exercise** and condition of body or **mind**. If you read the works of Ad Schaerlackens, you will know that he refers to "conditioning" pigeons, a reference to the mental state of pigeons and their minds and attitude with regards to trapping etc. I believe that to be successful in the game today you must pay attention to the mental state of your pigeons and that their confidence is just as important as any other factor if you wish to be successful in competition.

The Sun Rise & Sun Set times for April 2009 in my area.

Length Of Day	Day	RiseTime	SetTime
14.141 Hrs	18/4/2009	5.094	19.235
14.593 Hrs	25/4/2009	4.846	19.439
14.906 Hrs	30/4/2009	4.677	19.583

As for the physical side of fitness, I think that it is very important to allow sufficient time prior to road training, to get the birds fit enough for that road work and then again enough time for fitness for racing. My experiences over the years have brought me to a conclusion that it takes around eight weeks at the start of a season, to get the pigeon adequately prepared for racing. Obviously your chosen start date comes into play for your preparation and if you want to start from the first race, then you have to make the best you can of the very changeable weather that we get in February, March and April, let alone the lack of adequate hours of daylight. The start and finish dates of our racing seasons are something that I would change if I could. I have tried over the years by submitting propositions to change race programs but all in vain I am afraid. It would appear that the majority nowadays don't wish to consider the difficulties of the man who has to go out to work or more importantly to me, what is in the best interest of the pigeon. However, in the world of democratic rule, the majority hold sway and so you have to accept it or plan your season to suit yourself. My choice is the latter. Just out of interest, my view is that we should begin Old Bird club racing on the last Saturday of April and that it should continue until last Saturday in August, with the last four races being combined Old and Young bird races. The young bird season would be from end of July to end of September with the final two races from a distance suitable for summer bred youngsters. This would allow fanciers to stop those young birds that have already flown long hard races and need to begin their moult in earnest.

Having digressed slightly, I will get back to the physical preparation track that I follow. I should first make it clear that my thoughts are based on an assumption that the birds have been confined during winter months, as stated in earlier articles, due to the problems we now experience with hawks. The exercise can obviously only begin when the birds are in good health, which must allow some recovery time if they have reared youngsters and may also have become widows/widowers. I begin the exercise periods with once per day for a week or so and then increase to twice per day and in doing so gradually increase the flight times in relation to feed and body weight. This way takes a little longer than what can be achieved but I think it is better for the pigeons and by reaching a fitness level this way you are limiting any unnecessary stress levels. I would like to see some statistics on the number of good pigeons that are injured or lost in the first few weeks of training and racing each season. I know in the past, that I have made such mistakes! My target is to get the birds to a level where they are exercising well for at least forty five minutes twice per day, before I consider training. When I reach this level, I drop my hens back to exercising once per day and a toss at around 20 miles Mon/Tues/Thurs on a communal training facility. The cocks stay at twice per day exercise except on days where I train them myself with tosses up to 40 miles.



This picture, taken of one of my old cocks bathing on the morning of basketing for his first race of the season, is an excellent illustration of one of the most important contributors to health and rest.

The next aspect of management with regards to maintaining health and fitness for racing, can be somewhat controversial, it is that of medication during the racing season. Discussions and in some cases arguments have rolled on over the years with regards to the pros and cons of what and when to give certain things to pigeons when racing. I doubt whether that will ever change in my time and I am not sure that there is a "perfect" answer to the debate. I will share with you, my view and my thoughts and try to explain my logic for what I personally do. Firstly I must say that my views are based on information gathered over many years via what I consider to be top drawer fanciers and top drawer pigeon vets. Over recent years, the Internet has played a big part in my quest for knowledge and information.

I think the first thing to consider is, what risks to health do your pigeons face when confined to race baskets with other pigeons? Secondly, do ALL other fanciers keep their pigeons in the health that you require for yours and if not, is it likely that your pigeons could be adversely affected. With these factors in mind, I take what I consider to be reasonable steps, based on veterinary advice, to provide what I believe to be an adequate program for disinfection. My practice for Old Bird differs slightly from Old Birds to Young Birds, so I will cover the YB one in a later article. The main enemies as far as I am concerned are as follows, canker, bacterial infections and infections of the upper respiratory tract and head. Whilst in the race panniers, our pigeons are not only subjected to other pigeons which may not be 100% healthy but also stress and in some instances environmental conditions such as temperature and humidity which can and do lead to dehydration.

To illustrate my personal approach to my concerns above, I will describe what I do during the week in race season. Starting on a Saturday on return from the race, the birds get a drink of fresh water and a little to eat of something that they like and is easy to digest. In the evening they get electrolytes in their water and a light feed. Sunday they are given either a treatment for canker (over 2 days) or a disinfectant (Virkon) for a day and a half. I alternate these two each week. Every 4 weeks on Wednesday, I give the birds a product to support their gut flora and for this I prefer Flight Path. Every 2 weeks on the day before basketing, I give a cure for URT and Ornithosis. I am careful to watch this during periods of cold and damp weather. Obviously from time to time I may decide to deviate from the above slightly but in combination with lots of hard work, methodical feeding and rest, this is how I prepare my pigeons during racing.



Not just a bath, the first important trigger activity to signal that race day and "REWARD" is due!

As seems to be the seasonal norm. nowadays, the race program has begun with a mixture of East winds and blow homes! Not exactly the ideal conditions for pigeons that you wish to bring into condition for the May and June Nationals but as usual we are faced with the dilemma of take a chance or miss the boat. Well this season I have decided to leave the yearling cocks at home and continue their training until there is some sign of half decent and consistent weather on the horizon. When I think back over the years, one of the best pigeons that I ever raced, was June hatched, never trained as a YB, had three 100 mile races in May as a yearling and went on to win 2 x 1st Section National at 535 miles winning 3rd Open and 12th Open and 5th Section 15th Open National at 428 miles. He was also awarded Europigeon's Ace Pigeon award calculated using a co-efficient from National races over two seasons. This pigeon was "Highview Northern Pride" which was later sold top the late Brian Long and which Brian told me was responsible for some of his best distance performances. So it goes to show, if you don't burn the candle at both ends, the light can burn just that bit brighter!

Balance is the key, getting the mix of exercise, training, rest, mental conditioning and feeding all in proportion to one another and mother nature will provide the sun and oxygen to complete the formula for success. This month and next are the ones where the foundations are laid for those of June and July when all the prestige races occur for old birds. Attention to detail combined with a bit of patience will work wonders. The same level of attention has to also be applied to the Young Birds as it is important that they learn only good habits and good health and exercise whilst only a few months old, are essential for the development of the vital organs on which they will rely for all of their racing lives.

My youngsters are now flying for between one and two hours each exercise period which at the moment is once per day around lunch time. They are just starting to roam a little and are very responsive when called in for their feed. For this time of the season, all seems to be on track but there is a long way to go yet and an eye must be kept firmly on the ball. My goals with them are super health and total control at all times.



Here left you can see how the moult is progressing for this young silver hen from my darkness team . The other pictures show the grilled YB boxes with up and over fronts and the pipo boxes which are used for the longer races when I want the youngsters to go to nest. The floor of this YB section is covered with a horse bedding for warmth, comfort and ease of management. The long grit hopper has fresh grit at all times and is removed each day at darkening time, to prevent it being used as a perch. The aviary cage as you have seen before is a multi purpose and invaluable tool.



Tribute to a friend:

It was with great sadness that along with many other fancier friends, I attended the funeral of my great friend Richie Ryder of Burton, South Wirral earlier this month. Unlike the days of many funerals, the weather was bright sunshine and it illuminated the picturesque village of Burton and a packed to capacity church, as we said our farewells to one of sports true gems. A great administrator with a personality larger than life itself, Richie was always the first to help others or to support a worthy cause. He loved his pigeons as he did his family, with all his heart and he touched the lives of many. His passing leaves a huge hole in the pigeon sport in the North West of England but he will always be remembered by those who knew him as a true gentleman a "one of a kind"! God bless you Richie and thanks for the memories.



The pictures above are left, Rod Adams with Rod Flint and Richie Ryder and the photo on the right is a rare sight indeed, one of the few occasions that Richie was caught actually seated at one of the Lancashire Social Circle gatherings, the organisation of which he so proudly held the post of Secretary and where in 2006 he engineered the club's Centenary celebration, perhaps it's finest hour!

With April drawing to a close, it is time to focus on the weeks to come and to plan or at least consider the best course of action for any target races that you have in mind. I know that it is a very cheesy saying but it is not far from the mark, "If you fail to plan you plan to fail". Now is the time to pay attention to details and watch for the tell tale signs with individual pigeons that let you know that they are coming into the super condition that you require. Things like their condition on return from races, signs of continuous improvement race by race, the progress of their moult and the condition of their breast flesh. The texture of their feathers, their droppings early morning and so on. I learned a very valuable lesson many years ago in business and I can say without question that it never failed me and has also stood true in my pigeon life. It is more practical and achievable to improve 100 things by 1% than it is to improve 1 thing by 100%. Attention to detail and small improvements in a number of key areas will undoubtedly bring their rewards!



These pictures are of two of the yearling cocks that I referred to earlier on in the article and who are being trained but not raced until May arrives when in my opinion, is the best time to start racing the pigeons that you value for the future. They have been to 45 miles on suitable days.



**Good friends are like stars.....
You don't always see them,
But you know they are always there.**

Until next month, Enjoy your pigeons! **Chris K**