

THE MAKE UP OF A CHAMPION !

Not too long ago, in discussion with a Geneticist who, is well recognised worldwide and who is also passionate about pigeons, I asked a very simple but critical question. My objective was to identify the factors that influence the achievement of Champion status by a living creature which, in this instance is a racing pigeon and to establish what can be done by the fancier to assist the process. The answer to my question was also simple, the factors of influence are GENETICS and ENVIRONMENT. The genetics are the genes inherited from it's sire and dam and those passed down via these parents from it's ancestors. The environment is quite wide reaching and begins inside the egg and continues throughout the growth of the bird through to mature racing status. With the above in mind I have tried within this article to look at some of the things that I think are worth thinking about and addressing within your management process and also having a brief look at the horse racing side of breeding and how it may help us to think a bit more laterally about how we go about breeding our future racers.



Sea The Stars

A picture of "Sea The Stars" doing what he did best, winning! Recently retired from the race track to take up his place at stud, this horse is being quoted as one of the best ever. What better example to use, to have a look at breeding facts. The first fact of note, is that the 2009 winner of the Prix de L'Arc De Triomphe, is a direct son of the mare Urban Sea, herself a winner of the same prestigious race in 1993. Ironically Sea The Stars was her only foal by Cape Cross and sadly she died in March this year following foaling complications giving birth to what was her last foal at the age of 20. The foal by Invincible spirit was accepted by a foster mare. When you look at the Sire's side of Sea The Stars, you find that his sire, Cape Cross, is a G.G.Son of Northern Dancer, one of the most famous stallions of all time. This is no surprise and when you look at other foals by Urban Sea, you will find Galileo, another English Derby winner and no surprise to find that he is by Saddlers Wells who in turn is by Northern Dancer. The significance of the part played by Northern Dancer in this equation, I believe to be most significant as it often happens in a very similar way with pigeons. I do not believe that the presence of special individuals as far back in the pedigree as three generations, to be too distant which, many fanciers do feel. A perfect example is the super cock "Nationaal 11" who is currently at the BIFS with Dr. Ferdy Van Dersanden. This cock, winner

of 1st National in Belgium, is sire of 1st National in Holland with over 74,000 birds competing. When you trace his pedigree back, you come to "Nationaal 1" raced by K. Schellens and this cock went on to become possibly the most influential pigeon of recent years. He is responsible for many National winners not least have Geert and Clara Phillips who won 1st National with a G. Son which in turn was Sire to 1st National. You really have to examine the pedigrees and take note of the significant pigeons in a line or so called family or strain, if you wish to understand where the winning influences come from. One thing is for sure, it is coming from somewhere and if you simply rely on luck, you are limiting your chances. It is very interesting to note, that in the breeding of the very best horses, it is not common to see an individual animal repeated within a 5 generation pedigree. Performance and genetics are the name of the game but if you make a straight comparison to breeding racing pigeons, you would have to accept that they are all what we call "CROSSES". The other thing to note is that nearly all the great horses have made their name at stud, have done so after a race career! The horse racing world would never dream of sticking something away in a stable (stock loft) just because it is "bred right" as the fancy would say. Let alone expect it to breed a Derby winner. I certainly don't wish to suggest that inbreeding and line breeding are the wrong directions to take in breeding champion pigeons but you have to ask yourself why would you do it. The acceptable answer is to fix a trait, characteristic or factor but is it acceptable to do this and breed pigeons which then subsequently do not get race tested and for all the owner knows, do not possess any actual racing qualities. The geneticists will tell you that when you inbreed, it is essential to road/race test the progeny and only use the the progeny with the best racing qualities, to continue the breeding line.



Urban Sea the mother of Sea The Stars & Galileo



Galileo

ENVIRONMENT: From the egg to the basket, it all plays it's part in the making of "The Champion". An obvious factor to look at is the health and preparation of the breeder pigeons. If one thing is a certainty, it is the fact that captive stock pigeons, that only receive a dry seed diet, will never produce the best possible eggs and subsequently youngsters! There are many pigeon vets today offering sound professional advice via the web (for free) on the care and needs of racing pigeons. It is more than worth while to take time out and to read such articles, if you have not already done so. Hormones for reproduction are heavily influenced by light and calcium is critical for egg production. These are just two basic essentials if you wish to get the whole equation balanced and correct. A hen will utilise as much as twice her normal requirement

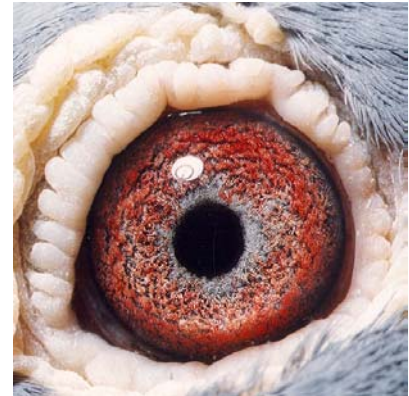
"Nationaal I"

- 1986: le - 449 d. st.Quentin
- le - 452 d. Noyon
- 55 - 29297 d. Bourges Nat.
- 1987: le - 388 d. Dourdan
- le - 889 d. Orleans
- le - 4301 d. Orleans Prov.
- le - 629 d. Bourges
- le - 1434 d. Bourges Prov.
- le - 7927 d. Bourges Nat.



K.Schellens

B.86-6260314



"Nationaal II"
6182211-01

- 1. Nat. Limoges 12.743 p. 648 km '04
- 1. Nat. B. Limoges 2.787 p. 648 km. '03
- 34. Nat. Limoges 16.504 p. 648 km. '03
- 1. Prov. Blois 491 p. 476 km. '03
- 6. S. Nat. Chateauroux 12.422 p. 537 km. '04
- 6. S. Nat. Montlucon 9.300 p. 560 km. '04
- 1. Chateauroux 174 p. 537 km. '03
- 11. Prov. Chateauroux 765 p. 537 km. '03
- 15. Prov. Vierzon 3.240 p. 485 km. '04
- 4 race in 2004: 0,76 coeff



"Nationaal 11" is bred 3 generations down from a daughter of Nationaal 1 when paired to a son of a 1st National Ace pigeon.



BLAUWE FERDY
B06-5088338
1e Nationaal Blois 2007
Snelste van 71.500 duiven
COMB. GEENEN-PETERS
Walburg 49
6225 CP Maastricht
Tel. 043-3637314



Blue Ferddy 1st National 74,000 b
"Daughter of Nationaal 11"

**"NAPAN"
4516090-95**

Eourges 27-7-1996:
1 - 113 d.
1 - 711 d.
1 - 2.550 d. Prov.
1 - 15.131 d. Nat.
Snelste van 66.533 duiven
Vliegt 17 m/m los!!
Vliegt tevens Bourges 26-5-1996:
2 - 2.288 d. Prov.
23 - 10.049 d. Nat.
"Napan" is grootvader van "Sanex III"
1^o Nat. Bourges 11.348 d. en
snelste van 57.004 duiven



Foto: Fred La Brijn

Geert & Clara Philips,
Sint Margrietstraat 7,
B 9200 Grembergen -
Deledernonde.
Tel/Fax: 0032 52 21 99 56



1 Bourges 30/7/00 11.348 p.
fused of 57.004 p.
1 Bourges 27/5/00 516 p.

Grandson
"NAPAN"

"Sanex III" 4436008-99

"Napan" a first National winner, being a G. Son of "Nationaal 1" and "Sanex 111" another winner of 1st National, himself a G. Son of "Napan". Another winning pigeon worthy of note from the "Nationaal 1" dynasty is a chequer pied cock known as "Double Victory" who won 1st Nat. NPO from St.Ghislain beating 15,744 birds and again he was bred from a G. Son of "Nationaal 1".

of calcium in the process of producing a perfect clutch of eggs. The nutritional provision for the embryo whilst in the egg, will be governed by the health and condition of the hen. The nutritional breakdown provided within the egg has been scientifically established as being very similar to that of the crop milk which both parents feed to their youngsters over the weeks following the hatch. Unlike other species, with the exception of doves and some parrots, pigeons feed crop milk and as such can pass on necessary antibodies this way where other birds have to do so via the egg. The composition of crop milk has been researched and studies have shown it is manufactured in the crop and the process beings while the parents are brooding the eggs. Soon after sitting the eggs the cell division of the crop increases about 600 percent. After about a week the process increases at a higher rate.

When analysed the milk is found to contain about 70% water. The other 30% contains, 38% fat, 58% is protein and 98% of this protein, is true protein. There are also small amounts of ash, calcium, phosphorus sodium, potassium, lecithin, and all of the known B vitamins. One teaspoon also contained as much vitamin A as a drop of cod-liver oil. The above ingredients are those that are essential for the correct growth of a healthy youngster as dictated by mother nature. The question we need to ask ourselves as fanciers therefore, is simple. When we wean our youngsters, does the diet that we provide, contain the essential ingredients? If we have produced the correct genetic combinations, then to become champions, everything in the equation has to be correct from egg to basket.

It is an old saying that "Many roads lead to Rome" but one thing is for sure, you can't cut corners if you wish to fulfil a dream and become the breeder/racer of a true champion! Perhaps the biggest problem for fanciers in the UK by comparison to the rest of Europe, is that most fanciers over here, expect pigeons to win from 60 miles to 500 miles and in any conditions. Whereas in Europe there is much more specialisation in distance categories like sprint, middle, long and extreme. With this comes customised training and feeding methods to match the planned program. What this means is that the goals set for the pigeon are more achievable and therefore more likely to come to fruition. In addition the method of identifying champion pigeons and fanciers are much more objective, for example the use of a coefficient which takes into account the number of birds competing and the position achieved in that race. The calculation is usually over a defined series of races and therefore competitors are able to plan for their campaign. In the UK we tend to have for example meritorious awards which have to be applied for (claimed) and are judged by an elected panel of RPRA officials from another region. Within this process claims can be made for pigeons that have achieved a result or results at any level of competition be it club, Fed. Combine or National etc. as long as it is within a specified distance band. It appears in many cases that birdage plays the biggest part in awards that are made and I personally do not believe the process to be fair or adequate. However, that is a personal view and no doubt others may disagree. Perhaps what swayed me to feel this way, was following an experience back in 1993 and 1994. In 1993 having won 1st Section L 3rd Open N.F.C. from Saintes 535 miles with a red cock named "Highview Northern Pride", I received an R.P.R.A. Meritorious award from the North West Region. In 1994 with the same pigeon, I won 5th NW Section 15th Open M.N.F.C. from Nantes 428 miles and 1st NW Section 12th Open M.N.F.C.

Saintes 535 miles and flying 20 miles further than any other pigeon timed on the winning day. This pigeon was entered for the R.P.R.A. dual award and did not win recognition. Just out of interest, for his performance in the NFC in 1993 and the two performances of 1994 he was the Ace pigeon of the UK based on three National performances over those two years, calculated by coefficient and awarded by the Euro pigeon as produced by John Clements. I know that I was biased in my view at the time but as I look back as an older and far more knowledgeable and experienced fancier now, I still believe that our recognition system for champions, that has changed very little to this day, is still inadequate! I was very tempted to use much stronger descriptive terms but no matter what happened over the meritorious award, I have always known that that pigeon was a true champion! He was later bought by the late Brian Long at public auction and Brian later informed me that he became responsible for numerous top performers at BICC and National level. Interestingly his grandchildren were more successful on the road than his direct children. "Highview Northern Pride" was bred from a very good racing cock, himself a winner of 9 x 1st and his dam was a daughter of a cock that won 1st Section L NFC Bordeaux at 598 miles, along with numerous other top prizes in races from 400 to 600 miles. This cock was known as "Highview Solitaire" and was full brother to the famous sprint pigeon purchased by Louella Stud and known as "Triple Crown". Interestingly here, we have two pigeons bred from the same stock pair, both fit to be called champions and yet at opposite ends of the distance scale.

What can logically be concluded from the above! Well it is my belief as I have proved on more than one occasion, that the environmental background and associated methods on which a pigeon is raced, will to the greater degree influence the type of racing in which it can be successful.



Fail to Plan and Plan to Fail!!!! At the end of my young bird race season, Karen and I decided to take a weekend break and so we drove up to Cumbria where we stayed with friends and then the following morning, the four of us set off early to meet up with an old school friend who owns a country pub in Hunton in Bedale, Yorkshire, where he also owns a race horse that is in training with one of the trainers at Middleham. Above you can see the beautiful setting of the Upper Moor 7 furlong gallops used by a number of different racehorse trainers, a super facility lovingly wrapped in a setting that only mother nature could provide. As well as having a very pleasant weekend, I had chance to reflect on my pigeon racing of 2009 and my goals for 2010. Being amongst enthusiasts of horse racing makes you realise that the forward

Planning aspect of a future race program and it's associated preparation, are very important and that the higher the level of competition that you are aiming at, the more important that the planning and preparation become. It may be a somewhat corny saying but truer words were never spoken, "Fail to plan and you plan to fail".



With a 7 furlong workout completed, the horses are walked back as part of their warm down on return to the stables, whilst jockeys enjoy the superb views and fresh clean morning air.

The key point to note for me, watching racehorses being exercised was that not all the horses were Group 1 race class and yet everyone was treated with equal care and attention and as an individual in it's own right. Back in the stable yard, certain horses were not working out on this glorious Saturday morning in September because they had recently raced and REST was a key ingredient in their recovery and preparation towards their next race. My observations in being around the stables and watching the work outs, confirmed what I already believe about the sport of racing animals or birds and that is that like humans, they are all individuals and as such their needs can differ. I agree that it is not practical when you have a colony of pigeons, to treat every one differently in every way but I am sure that you know what I mean when I say treat them as individuals when you assess their needs and their abilities. If you do, you will get the best out of them and if it is in there, you may just help to bring out what makes a **Champion**.

Enjoy your pigeons!

Chris Knowles