



# DRUGS, PIGEONS & THE RPRA

**'There are more questions than answers.'**

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**By Mike Lakin**

No doubt the majority of readers will remember the old song titled 'There are more questions than answers' even if the singer's name probably eludes most people. Well I can tell you that it was Johnny Nash.

What though has an old pop song got to do with pigeons and the drugs issue? Well for me this is the way I feel about the whole situation and just as Mr Nash sings in one line of the song 'that the more I find out the less I know'. No doubt a number of RPRA Councillors will think that I am just trying to muddy the water with this article. When the truth is I am trying to actually encourage our governing body to clear the waters so that the ordinary fancier can be made aware of the do's and don'ts of performance enhancing stimulants etc.

I wish to make it 100% clear at this point that I am totally against anyone **knowingly** administering illegal substances and performance enhancing drugs. This though is the nub of the matter. Having read the RPRA's directive in the rulebook all I see is big words and medical terms which ordinary people will have very little knowledge of or about. Surely the governing body which after all is every

member's advisory service, should offer and give guidance on all of the actual substances which must be avoided like the plague and also the list of products that contain these substances.

Let's be completely open on this one and say that every pigeon fancier is looking for a legal product to give their birds 'the edge' over their fellow competitors. Many in fact use medication to treat against various diseases or infections that pigeons are prone to. So aren't these medications in truth performance enhancing substances? It is also worth remembering that many of these products aren't in fact even licenced for the treatment of racing pigeons. Surely we are dealing with fine lines here and all pigeon fanciers deserve the RPRA's help. I personally don't buy into the belief that if fanciers were to be informed about the products that contain banned products it would provide an A-Z of what to acquire and how to use illegal products. Believe me anyone who is wilfully using any banned substances knows exactly what and where to use. I prefer to think instead that it would in fact make things crystal clear to the honest and unsuspecting fanciers on the products that must be avoided at all

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costs. If these actions came into force then nobody would have any excuse if their birds were to be tested as positive and their owners suspended in the future.

For the advice offered by our governing body at the present time that fanciers should seek guidance from either a pharmacist or Veterinary is both unrealistic and impractical because it is very doubtful that they would appreciate offering free advice or in fact would indeed know what is permitted or otherwise in the pigeon sport. This once again emphasises the need for a clear directive from the sport's governing body.

Furthermore to announce a disclaimer in the rulebook with regard to products that can be purchased through the fancy press or at the various shows as being of no excuse or absolves fanciers if they are found to contain illegal substances in their makeup. Quite frankly if this statement wasn't so serious it would be laughable. So it's alright for the papers to sell advertising space for possible outlawed products but not for fanciers to buy or to use them. **Absolutely ridiculous.** Surely it wouldn't be a big problem for all prospective advertisers to sign a disclaimer stating that their products are totally safe to use. This would then put the onus on the manufacturers to ensure that their products are safe to use. Failure to complete this procedure would mean the product cannot be either advertised or offered for sale.

Another thing which concerns me and a lot of other people greatly is the fact that under the present uncertainty which prevails is the sleepless nights that even completely innocent fanciers have to endure whilst awaiting results of samples taken from their birds. Also fanciers

shouldn't think that just because a sample may be found to have tested as positive at the present time that it isn't necessarily an indication of guilt. I say that because many fanciers purchase products from the various shows and pigeon publications and would you consider them as guilty of drug abuse if this leads to a positive result? I'm sure that we should remember the old saying of 'innocent until proven guilty' and so with this in mind the high cost of a £325 appeal fee which is non-refundable should be both lowered and a full refund made in the case of the appellant winning their appeal. Remember that £325 is a large sum for many of our members especially OAPs and youngsters to find and I'm sure that a percentage of them would be so disillusioned about it that they wouldn't bother to appeal due to the high cost of the appeal and then they will be lost to the sport.

The RPRA must make things more clear and transparent about exactly what is allowed or otherwise which would minimise the chances of anyone in the future who is innocent being found guilty and being labelled a 'drugs cheat' by their peers and, equally, if these guidelines were to be put in place then there is also less likelihood of a guilty person walking away scot free because of the vagaries of our rulebook. I believe that at the present time anyone who seeks legal advice would be able to 'drive a bus' through the existing rules.

As I wrote at the start of this piece I am totally against the deliberate use of illegal products and fully support the drug testing programme but don't want to persecute people who are completely unaware of any wrong doings. So let's all hope that the situation can be resolved in the future in a more sensible manner, as I think it is far

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better to prevent and dissuade people from using any banned substances rather than branding and suspending them as drug abusers.



