

Preparation for Racing by Geoff Kirkland.

At the present moment the "Widowers" and the widowhood racing hens all have big youngsters, we are now at the end of March. As soon as the cocks start looking at the hens again and have just starting driving the hens, I take away the hens and place them in their aviary. This in practice takes about 10 days as not all the pairs are at the same stage of rearing and I only take away the hens when the youngsters are big enough.

I have three separate lofts, in two of these both cocks and hens race, the brick loft you see in the picture houses only "Widowers" and just the cocks race. With having three separate teams and due to all the different National races we race in I can do different things in the lofts without disturbing all the other racers.



Racing Loft. The other small loft is further to the left.

Now back to the cocks. I have always done it this way and never have moved the youngsters away with the hens as some do. The cocks, when free of the worry of preparing for another nest finish the youngsters off well and another advantage of this is if they do not see the hens lay her second nest they will not drop the first flight too soon ensuring they have a good wing for races later in the year when we are going to the long distance nationals.

When the cocks have finished off all the youngsters we take them to the young bird section which is already on darkness.



A Group of 2009 hopefuls on weaning day.

There is a lot of rubbish talked about the darkness system, re when to do it and how long. In a nutshell, put them on the darkness half way through March and take them off on the longest day of the year. As long as the night time is longer than the day, then this is fine. Shut them up and open them up to suit your own time available but make sure that the ventilation is adequate.

All my champions for many years have been raced on the darkness and it does them no harm as long as it is done right and the youngsters are not trained and raced to death as youngsters. In other words do not abuse them and always feed them well.



“Redy” - 1st Sect Tours National M.N.F.C 2006
(The occasional Red or Mealy in my pigeons come from this line).

The cocks are now on their own and the racing hens are in the aviaries. This is the time for the big pre race clean out, all the grids are lifted and cleaned out and the floor is gone over well with the Hoover to get rid of all the dust. The nest boxes are also thoroughly cleaned and we are ready to start our routine. The widowhood cocks are not very pleased with life after this time but they will soon forget and stop sulking after a day or two.

We now settle down to our exercise regime. All the cocks go out together from 7:00am to 8:00am and 5:00pm to 6:00pm. I like to stick to these times fairly rigidly as the cocks especially do not like change and it's this regularity which helps to bring them into form. The hens go out once a day at about 3:00pm until about 4:00pm. With the hens, you do not have to be so fussy, as they don't suffer from stress in the same way as the cocks but they do need to be raced every week and kept busy otherwise they will pair up.

Here goes another well quoted myth. You will hear it said many times that if two hens pair up and they lay then the game is over. I have never found this to be the case, just throw away the eggs and carry on as usual.

If the hens race every week and have a toss on a Wednesday, when they stay with the cocks for about an hour you will not have much trouble with pairing up.

The double widowhood for cocks and hens is a bit of a compromise for the cocks and the hens will very often fly the best. This is why I have a team of cocks on pure widowhood. But at the end of the day it does not really matter if it is cocks or hens who come first, as long as it wins.

We now come to feeding, I make up our racing mix from three different brands with plenty of variety and at least three different kinds of maize. I never use any depurative mixes as we are only interested in middle to long distance national racing but even though they are fed with as much as they want, they still win plenty of short preparation races. I do use diet mix with plenty of small seed as a treat and when they return on race days.

We are almost ready for racing now. We have them flying well round home, the race corn is ready and the last thing now is to get them tested to see if we any underlying problems before we start. I do this by taking several cocks from each section and getting a good loft profile. The hens I never bother with as I have found over the years that they have a much greater resistance than cocks. This is not hear say but has been proven with the microscope. If we do have any problem this is dealt with and we are ready for the off.