

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART ONE

After a great deal of soul searching I finally arrived at the conclusion that the greatest mountain that I could possibly climb would be taking all novices to the peak of Everest and the prize table. If you are happy with your performances then read no further because nobody can teach you anything, but if you are not and have ambition then this is the column for you, provided that you faithfully promise to follow the guidance to the letter.

It is my intention to take every novice to the top with their existing team of birds provided that they are healthy without any further introductions or expense.

One thing that is necessary for understanding is knowledge of all things living [click here for helpful books](#)

Firstly you must take the vow : "I novice pigeon fancier do faithfully swear to follow the teachings of Spinksy!" Good that is first painless step. If you have been racing pigeons without winning your luck is about to change, but first you must dispatch all other books and systems into the darkest cupboard or corner of your mind. They haven't worked for you so far, so it is doubtful that they will work in the future! You and I together are about to rewrite the record books in simple easy to follow stages and become the envy of fancier friends? You know who I mean; those good pals that tell you that you have to make your own mistakes! Well in my book nobody needs to make mistakes because pigeon racing is the simplest common sense thing upon God's earth. We are going to start with your present loft, sufficiently large enough for ten pairs of pigeons. I would suggest 16 feet x 6 feet to be adequate. With two identical sections separated by a solid partition and ten nest boxes in each section. It must be dry and airy inside and so constructed that the birds in section A do not have sight of the pigeons in section B. It should, where possible have its back to the prevailing wind for speed of trapping; forget about facing south, that's useless if the birds approach is too fast for a first time landing. Trapping may be whatever system suits you best, open door, sputnik or stall trap, but it is essential that the different sexes can be exercised without catching sight of pigeons in the opposite section; the reason for this will be explained later.

Now the pigeons that you already own should have been vaccinated by end of Nov. if not then do so immediately it is no good waiting until racing is upon you. It is time to do some soul searching and hardening of the heart, because there is only room for ten pairs and even less at this juncture. Any old pigeon that has not been first bird to your own loft in the past season has overstayed its welcome; if there are only four then so be it, because pigeons that cannot beat their own loft mates, sure as heck won't beat any others. Remember you've taken the vow and I'm not carrying passengers to the top of Everest! These birds are most likely the product of all your years of labour and expense and yet up till this point you have been unable to get the best performance out of them and probably blamed the original supplier. Well you are now about to learn that the problem was yourself and I am going to prove it to you by taking you up the ladder. You will surprise yourself, win friends and influence people as you learn the tricks of the trade and motivation of pigeons. Keep this article to yourself, don't let the experts read it, because they are out to beat you if they can, but they won't and that is guaranteed or my name isn't Napoleon!

You think that I'm joking, but I am deadly serious because we are going straight to the top in easy stages. Right son, selection is completed, these should be well balanced birds, supple muscles, none too deep, bright eyed, well feathered and healthy. Preferably they will be less than four years of age. The eyes will be rich in colour, the iris will be pebbled like a Cornish beach, there should be soot spots and dust evident without any eye - glass. Hopefully there will be a well defined but serrated circle of correlation around the pupil. Within the iris there should be a black line that appears as if someone has stroked a brush of black paint from the centre outwards between two and three o'clock. Failing this there could be a single large black spot, but if there isn't don't worry

as your family improves these signs will appear! Iris colour does not matter, they could all be the same or different, but they must appear pebbled and bright. Now is the time to arrange your pairings: Throw away all paper pedigrees for the time being, because you are about to create a winning family of your own. If you have kept performance records of each bird as you should have done, for this first season they will be paired best to best down the line in order of preference. Do not keep an extra bird just to make up a pair, if one is without a mate it can be raced celibate without any bother. Your birds are healthy, exercised as often as possible and are not in need of treatment of any kind, it is pointless to treat pigeons that are not ailing and detrimental to their future condition.

All birds should be paired in one section of the loft only around February 14th for this first winning season and where possible two youngsters in each nest; because these will be the only young birds bred. Dispose of any chalky or malformed eggs, dispose of any backward looking squabs, in particular those with soft pulpy rear ends or dirty vents and infected umbilical. It is better to do this now, than once they are full grown, poor youngsters rarely if ever make winning adults, and it is too easy to make excuses. The feeding of your rearing birds is important if their condition is to be maintained and healthy strong youngsters develop. Where possible it is preferable to feed three times daily, but twice will do if time is limited. The parents must have access to fresh minerals; pink, black and pick stones of the clay variety. They must also have limestone and shell grit, this must be clean and dry at all times, because if left for several days it may be contaminated from atmospheric and dust etc. So serve it in sufficient amounts daily! Add Cytaccon B12 to the drinker one day per week and make up the following supplement to be fed after each meal in small quantities i.e. one egg cup full between ten pigeons.

The supplement is as follows : 1 lb. of pinhead oatmeal, one teaspoon of Ascorbic acid (Vitamin C obtainable from any chemist) 1 oz. of powdered fortified calcium (obtainable at chemist or corn merchant 'Old Hand' product) 2 whole eggs. Mix and leave to dry overnight; this is sufficient to last for one week. The birds must be fed as follows upon hatching young : week one - morning 100% maple peas; just sufficient to pump the youngsters with soft food; midday - repeat; evening maple peas until the birds stop eating and have fully fed the squeakers, then return and top up with a good standard mixture. Don't forget the supplement and don't leave any food lying about. Week two : morning Maples; midday 50% maples 50% mixture, just enough to fully feed the squeakers; evening repeat then check that all young are satisfied and have full crops, then top up the old birds with their full requirement of mixture. Week three repeat this pattern until weaning, when you should have sound and healthy youngsters plus sturdy, healthy unstressed old birds ready to condition for racing. In the next chapter I shall go through the racing and training of the old bird team and you are already on your way to the prize table. Any problems then give me a call because I promise to take you to the summit. Step by step, week by week all tricks for motivation etc. will be yours along with a successful winning system that will allow you to compete throughout the programme and prove that what you already have in your loft is good enough. After which I shall tell you how to create and maintain a winning family of your very own without further expense! But you must promise to keep your vow and follow this to letter, because that is the real secret

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PART TWO

Now then son, if you have been perfectly honest with yourself and only kept and bred from pigeons that were first to your loft in the previous season; then you should be anything but overcrowded. Before we can even start to prepare the old birds for racing one or two checks need to be made (1) is the loft exposed to excessive light at night time ie. street lights or bright moonlight? If this is the case; then some form of darkening system via curtains or blinds will need to be employed. Without this the pigeons could be active throughout the night or disturbed by cats etc.

(2) is the loft after breeding completely free of lice, ticks & mite? Even after the best of husbandry, now that the weather is warming these little beasts will be more active as they come out of the dormant stage, so thoroughly spray the loft at the first opportunity of a sunny day. A good tip is to always have a hand spray filled with a proprietary pigeon insecticide and spray the nestboxes with a fine mist at daily cleaning throughout the summer months.

(3) have you got the correct corn mixtures? These should be kept separately in bins that are raised from the concrete floor on bricks to ensure an all round airflow.

This seems elementary doesn't it? But it is quite amazing how many fanciers suffer from feed deterioration and subsequent loss of condition in their birds due to neglect of this simple common sense practice! The feed mixtures are standard and may be purchased at any corn dealers and are as follows : equal parts of dog tooth maize, old beans (not new crop as these contain excessive tannin) and maple peas.

This is a standard racing mixture! Mixture two is any standard high carbohydrate widowhood mix. Mixture three is prepared by yourself : 7 pounds of Safflower seed, 2 pounds of Hemp seed and 1 pound of Linseed. This is better if kept inside your house if possible away from any condensation to avoid deterioration and this amount is sufficient for the racing season. The next task is to worm the pigeons by the use of garlic which will not reduce the birds condition in any way and is perfectly natural. Take one whole garlic bulb, press and bruise this then boil in one pint of water; continue to boil until the liquid is reduced by half. This will release all of the garlic oil to lubricate the pigeons intestines making it impossible for worms to keep a hold. Once this mixture has been strained and cooled it may be placed in a four pint drinker and topped up with clean water. This is the only use for boiled garlic, it will serve no other medical purpose! At all other times garlic should be used fresh daily, by adding a single crushed clove to the drinker. It is imperative that garlic be renewed daily, being of the onion family it will quickly sour and cause mild but possibly unnoticeable fever. In particular it must never be administered in galvanised containers where acids can cause adverse chemical reaction!

These are only simple things but often overlooked; equally do not fill drinkers by the use of a hose pipe which could have harmful bacteria or algae building up inside the core. Simple but common sense! Now you are going to climb Everest, but an ascent of this nature can only be achieved in stages, firstly there must be the base camp; which if you have followed me so far should now be set up and established.

Next we have to reach the first plateau; assuming that your pigeons have been enjoying reasonable free flight during the breeding cycle; it is now time to prepare for the climb. Once again, if you have been perfectly honest with yourself, although having ten nest boxes, you will not have ten pairs of birds, and this is your ultimate aim, prize winners in every box. By this stage of the season, you should have only your best old birds plus a nest of youngsters reaching the weaning stage, hopefully two in each nest, but don't worry if you haven't, quality will beat quantity in the end. At 19 -21 days all hens are removed to the other identical spotless section and placed in the corresponding nest box along with one of her youngsters and a clean nest bowl. The cock will be also given a clean nest bowl and left to finish rearing the other youngster unless of course there was only one in the nest. Should this be the case don't worry! As near as you can determine, place cock young birds with their mothers, leaving hen young birds with their fathers. You might think this strange, but don't argue son, I can't stand partners that argue and all will be revealed in due course. I shouldn't really be telling anybody these things because am going to have to race against them, however I am a kind hearted soul!

O.K. so far you have been unable to master either the widowhood system, the natural system or both. So I am going to teach you how to get pigeons super fit, win prizes and compete from the distance better than you have ever done before. This system will teach you both at one and the same time, you might never want to change from it, because you will be racing both sexes with equal success. Now that you have moved the young birds and hens, vaccinate the youngsters at this time! (now) Don't argue; do it! STOPPED HERE

Preparing for breeding and pre racing.

Once that you have selected your pairs, they must be quickly settled to their own boxes. The easiest way to do this is by allowing only a couple of pairs their freedom at any single time and all birds must be fed and watered in their own boxes. This serves a two fold purpose, the birds develop a love for the box and they become tame as they line up like soldiers awaiting your attention. The hen soon learns to follow the cock to the correct box without any fighting and this is where they will be fed for the remainder of the season. Once settled all birds may be let out for regular exercise and fly of their own free will until the eggs are laid and are fed on standard racing mixture. The quantity being as much as they require then all excess removed after half an hour. This continues until hatching, at which time you will revert to the feeding system mentioned in part one. Once the eggs are laid around 26 - 28th February the exercise routine and build up must begin. The cock birds can be exercised for 1 hour at first light each morning with the hens being exercised for 1 hour early evening. Once the hens are back upon the nest the cocks may be allowed another fly un- flagged. Early form must not be forced but allowed to arrive naturally, it is possible to have pigeons too fit too soon and they will go off the boil after only a couple of races. All training must be done at this time, taking cocks - hens on alternative days after their evening exercise to a distance of no more than 15 miles. If you can only take them five miles don't worry, the pigeon doesn't know the distance, but take them and single up if time allows. Feed after training and encourage fast trapping, do not use any seeds at this stage because seed produces false form! Once the eggs hatch continue in this manner but be sure to avoid East winds or dull days and on particularly cold days keep the pigeons confined to the loft. You are building them up, not knocking them down and this will still apply during the racing season; don't exercise pigeons in cold East winds. No you are not molly coddling them, you are reserving energy for the time they meet problems in earnest!

A fit pigeon will fly better in an East wind on race day than one that has the stuffing knocked out mid week! The training at this time will be the only training that your pigeons will require. When racing commences the daily exercise routine will condition them adequately and your birds will fly with zest, the problem will not be too little exercise, the problem will be that they might take too much; believe me. Now as this system progresses you will experience certain problems that beset most systems. I would deal with them as natural course through experience; but you might find them perplexing; so I shall try to anticipate them before they occur and explain the course of action. At this point it's a good idea to make a set of twelve square perches from 2" x 1" timber to hang on brackets in the hen & young bird section later. It is also a good idea to set yourself a realistic performance expectancy target; some of you could go straight to the top whilst others only gain a few prizes in this first learning season. Much of the outcome will be dependant upon local competition, but whatever you will certainly do better than any of your previous seasons. If you are a sensible novice you will be keeping these articles each week for reference, you should also be keeping a comprehensive stud book and diary for noting all particulars and pigeon responses. These are available from the B.H.W. and will provide reference for future years as you progress.

KEEP THIS DOCUMENT HANDY AT ALL TIMES THROUGHOUT THE SEASON AND USE BLANK PAGES FOR YOUR NOTES AND RECORDS OF BOTH BREEDING AND RACING - IT WILL PROVE TO BE VERY VALUABLE AT SEASONS END

THE CROSTON BOTTLE (ferrous sulphate tonic) 1 ounce of iron sulphate, 1 ounce of Epsom Salts. 1 ounce of Glauber salts. two drops of medical creosote (order from Vet-Medic Co. in B.H.W.) Boil 1 pint of water and add the above, then leave to cool and bottle. Give two large spoons full in 4 pint drinker no more than twice per week. Preferably Sunday and Tuesday- if you prefer to purchase ready made tonics - then use Johnsons Tonic.

Think for yourself and don't keep asking me daft questions - I've got articles to write and web sites to maintain - my day starts 05-00a.m. and finishes somewhere around 11-00pm with an hour for dinner, no booze and I'm a miserable cuss, all work no play and all for the sake of the British Racing Pigeon Fancy Free of charge- if I'm not crazy then my name is King Tut (that's for the bloke who typed it into the search box) - the Sphynx is a very strange creature!

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PART THREE

Meat Safe System

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I will begin!

Now that you have separated the birds into sections, old cocks - young hens; old hens - young cocks to the best of your ability and don't worry if your judgement is slightly out, it won't make any difference to the system. Several things will happen

- (1) the majority of old birds will bond very strongly with the single young bird and box.
- (2) the youngster will be feeding itself from the pots and guarding the box entrance proudly with its parent.
- (3) the cock birds without youngsters will either (1a) become very jealous and possessive of its box; or (2a) make a nuisance of itself in other boxes.

The latter is not a bad thing, because this bird is an ideal candidate for the "Meat Safe System" which I shall explain later. Two or three pigeons on this system can prove to be devastating in races up to 200 miles. Within the hen - young cock section things will also happen

- (1) The hen and youngster will also become extremely possessive of both box and each other so much so, even when reintroduced to old cock birds they will chase him from the box.
- (2) they will show no inclination to pair to other hens, but become doting mothers, sitting and preening the youngster constantly.

Alternatively the celibate hen or hens will either (1a) attempt to attract a youngster to their box, (2a) strut and coo to all and sundry including the fancier and may be teased with affection on his part or -- (3a) they may be reintroduced to a cock upon basketing night and -- (4a) they may pair to another hen and be raced for several weeks sitting infertile eggs; these may also be motivated by the "Meat Safe System" for hens; once again explained later.

Now the greatest problem for novice fanciers is getting their pigeons to exercise for one hour at each session and I have often had it said that fifteen minutes is the maximum without basket work. This of course is a myth; pigeons will fly at speed for one hour around home provided that the fancier feeds and mentally conditions them accordingly. Racing pigeons are creatures of habit; whatever is instilled into them, good or bad, then so they will perform! I do not believe in flagging; but having said that some form of flag flying is required initially to provide the correct reaction from the birds. Construct a simple flag from a six foot garden cane and a plastic dustbin liner, this is not to wave about like a demented lunatic, but simply a signal of your control. The pigeons are released for a fly and left to do so at leisure until they display signs of landing. At this point the loft doors should remain closed; the flag is simply and slowly waved in front of the flock. They will circle the loft a couple of times, attempting to defy you, but then they will race off out of sight and return racing back from a different direction after several minutes. This course of action is repeated until the hour is completed; put down the flag and open the loft doors. The birds will dive into the cabin before you can clear out of the way, spinning and cooing and looking for feed which they must receive forthwith in their boxes! Within one week of this imprinting, the pigeons will measure the hour to the second and the flag should not be needed again until later in the season. In highly built up areas, sometimes the birds might land upon a neighbouring roof top. In this instance the flag is not used immediately; allow the pigeons to come down onto the loft for a few minutes, then gently raise the flag in front of them and up they go for several minutes more and repeat until one hours flying time has been achieved. This is not a scaring tactic but it is an educational imprinting aid. Should the birds go back to the roof then take a handkerchief with a small stone knotted into one corner, throw this into the air allowing it to parachute down. The white tail of the handkerchief gently fluttering down is usually sufficient to get them airborne and off your neighbours roof. Simple but effective without creating nervous birds or annoying your

neighbours.

Does this work? Yes it does if you put in the effort; alternatively use a wet cloth inside a carrier bag. A few years ago I went to a fanciers loft where he insisted that pigeons wouldn't fly for more than fifteen minutes, he challenged me to prove him wrong. Within one week his birds were flying for one hour twice daily for the whole season, racing only three pigeons weekly in a competitive Wednesday club, that fancier won his first prizes in twenty years of trying; one of which was first. Now that is nothing spectacular apart from the fact that both he and his fellow competitors considered his pigeons to be rubbish! To save him embarrassment I shan't name him, but he didn't have problems afterwards! so what do we do with the youngster's at this stage when all the books advise weaning into a separate section?

There are several facts with young birds (1) they don't need to be in a separate section. (2) Youngsters have carry over immunity to illness from their parents until approximately six weeks of age; the period is extended by remaining in the same loft. (3) due to reduced stress caused by weaning, they are less likely to succumb to illness, learning to eat and drink by parental observation and are generally happier and precocious. This is borne out by the fact that they quickly commence to defend the family home as you will observe. Now remember this information is for the long term novice, that hasn't won so far, either on widowhood or natural. It is a learning process, intended to hone his powers of observation and skill before progressing to full blown power systems. Limited accommodation calls for quality in both the fancier and his birds, but often the quality is there to begin with, he just hasn't recognised the fact!

The youngsters must have sight of the loft and surroundings at the earliest opportunity, they must also be conditioned in response to your management. To this end they may be placed in a clean straw filled basket in front of the loft whilst the old birds are exercising. A drinker must be available at all times and this is filled whilst the squeakers are safely settled inside. The gentle splashing will soon attract them and through natural inquisitiveness they learn to drink from the trough. As the old birds are trapping, the youngsters are released in the loft doorway and replaced in the respective boxes to feed with their parent. This is no more work than carrying widowhood hens to and fro, in fact it is less and the youngsters soon learn the routine. As they become stronger, they may be allowed onto the loft front, by which time the old birds will be exercising freely without flagging. Eventually the youngsters will be airborne and flying with the kit, which has the dual effect of keeping the old birds in flight. They do not get carried off too far, because the parent spins and dives with them, bringing them back into the flock and appearing totally happy. At this time racing should be underway for old birds; they must be well fed at all times, mornings approximately $\sim 1/2$ oz of feed per bird; evenings they receive as much as they can eat, removing the food pots after 5 minutes until the 120 miles stage is reached. After this time the pots are not removed until 1 hour later.

On race marking day, the birds only receive the morning feed, but are given « oz per bird allowed to drink and then the shutters are pulled down until basketing time. Monday till Thursday the feeding is widowhood mixture in the morning, strong race mixture in the evening. Friday they receive widowhood mixture plus a little seed and peanuts. Saturday post racing, feed widowhood mixture and add pure honey (2 tablespoons) to the drinker. When returning from the clubhouse allow the pigeons open hole all birds together and let them have a playful and relaxing bath. Feed in and separate once again into respective sections giving 1 oz per bird. If your loft is cat proof, you may allow open hole after timing arrivals but exercise caution. Spend as much time as you possibly can with them whilst they enjoy their freedom from routine and note any that are stressed or coming into form or acting with individual personalities (this should be done at every exercise period). The birds can be exercised twice daily until the 200 miles stage, but after this they will be less inclined to fly on Sundays, so at this point allow freedom with the loft doors shut until they show signs of wishing to enter.

Monday 'til Thursday it might be necessary to reintroduce the flag and coerce them gently, but usually the rest is sufficient and the youngsters will keep them airborne! Do not reintroduce the training basket, tired birds will only be made more tired, it is better to give longer loft

confinement until Monday. Once fully recuperated the birds will fly with zest! By now you should have seen just how motivated pigeons are when racing to the box and loving youngster, but there are ways to increase this motivation to even greater effect. In the next chapter I shall explain the "Meat Safe System", which is particularly effective with celibate or nuisance pigeons. These can be motivated beyond belief with a little work and yet far simpler than widowhood. It is a system that can be used to effect on natural pigeons, widowers, roundabout and celibate birds, but must not be overused on any individual for more than three races.

Until the next article, do as you are told son, we're going for the big climb and rewriting the record book or my name isn't Josephine! Keep your bowels open and your brain active - read up on your subject!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART FOUR

Now then sonny; before I explain the "Meat Safe System" there are a few things that I fully realise; one being that few of you will have been brave enough in selection. There will always be a dozen excuses for keeping the "Old Cock" or the "Belgian Hen", as you mutter "How does Spinksy expect me to compete with a handful of birds?" Well without that kind of bravery, you will be beaten before you start and will never climb Everest. The preparation at the base camp, determines the overall success of the mission, no climber overloads himself with poor and unnecessary equipment; it would only weigh him down. The beginning is the hardest part, after which barring any unforeseen accidents, the journey is undertaken in short easy steps and it becomes easier as time progresses.

So without further ado, I shall tell you a true story : my first loft was constructed during 1953 and as a child I helped a variety of local fanciers with loft chores. During 1957 I was sending pigeons of my own to races, with my experience I knew it all and it was only a matter of course for me to win races! What a rude awakening, I had the best teachers, I had their stock, I had a nice loft and my birds appeared to be fit as fiddles and were often complimented upon their condition. True I did win a young bird race and I did manage the occasional minor prize, but they didn't win as old birds and they didn't come home from France! What could possibly be wrong when in my mind I was doing everything right? I could manage a friends loft in his absence and I could win but he had several more birds, so was that the difference? Only a few but not enough to make any great difference! The difference was a man named Littlefair, who would call regularly at Dennis's loft and perform the task of selection for breeding and racing. What did this man know that we didn't? Well I can tell you that I intended to find out and almost dragged him round to my own loft. There were thirty pigeons but he only passed four as worthy for breeding. I asked him to dispose of the remainder, but due to my young age and fear of reprisal from my mother, he refused. After he had left, my pal Dennis called round; "Believe you've had Tommy round" he said "Yup"; I replied "An' all them he didn't like have gone!" Dennis thought that I had gone completely mad, but those four pigeons flew France three times each that year and founded a winning family for the future!

Now I'm coming to the "Meat Safe System"; with another true story. Twenty years later I used to call regularly at another pals loft to select and cull for him. One year he had a beautiful blue youngster bred from Fred Livesey's "Bright Eyes"; this pigeon never returned home on the day, not even from a five mile toss. Keith asked me to dispose of it and I refused; telling him that it was the best bird in his loft and would be a prize winner and would also breed prize winners. Each season, this pigeon would never return on the day from anywhere and finally at four years of age Keith told me "If you think so much of that cock; then you take him because he is useless and a waste of corn!" I had a winning team of my own and didn't need any strangers; but I coerced our baby sitter into allowing her young son to keep it in their outhouse. I gave Adrian a hen to pair to the old blue and Adrian became a club member. I put that cock on the "Meat Safe System" and racing this single pigeon Adrian timed at every inland race within the top half of the result. The old blue cock went to three cross channel events, timed on the day at each and won 4th Avaranche, 4th Rennes and was runner up for the champion old bird points that season. A gay pied son off him won 1st Blackpool Amal. Dover for Keith that same year! We then gave the old blue cock back to Keith with my point well and truly proven. The following season Keith put him on the road and he returned to homing second day from anywhere! Is it the man; the bird; the system; or you? I never told anybody, not even young Adrian, just what I was doing during the day with that Blue Cock and I'm not going to tell you, because some things one just has to learn for oneself, just like survival on the mountain - however I will tell you that part of it was the meatsafe.

So dear novice, I sympathise with your reluctance to be totally severe in selection, because there is always the off chance that a failure may come good, but it is far easier in the long term to start with only the finest of beginnings. That means keeping only the minimal number of your own best performers and as your performances from these grow; so will the number in your team, giving you strength in depth. Eventually you will only be selecting from prize winning birds and that is the hardest task or my name isn't Mark Anthony!

"THE MEAT SAFE SYSTEM"By Steve Spinks

I called it by that name because an old galvanised **meat safe** with a gauze front was the only thing available to me in the early days; where I could segregate individual pigeons. This came in useful for motivating the nuisance cock, the celibate pigeons and even some naturals. Today the **meat safe** would take the form of individual boxes away from the loft section to which the birds are racing, and distinct from any isolation boxes where the occasional sick pigeon should be kept. The nuisance cock that invades other boxes in the loft is the best candidate for this system. He needs controlling for the sake of law and order in the cabin. If left to his own devices he will create havoc, tiring himself and any other bird that he confronts and top form will never result in an unhappy loft. Some fanciers would dispose of this bird as too much trouble, but in truth he is a dominant character and his performances marred by constant activity. The secret is to make that dominant personality into a controlled explosive athlete and the "Meat Safe System" brings this out to best effect.

The pigeon is removed from the loft and box to another area where he is confined with only water available and his usual box is locked to prevent any other birds from entering. At each exercise period, the nuisance is made to fly with the flock, on trapping his normal box is opened and he is

fed in the usual manner. Once satisfied that he has eaten sufficient, then the bird is immediately removed to the **meat safe** and his box locked up. This is done for the whole week prior to his first race on this system. Ten to one you may pool that bird, because only hell and high water, a funny day or line will stop him from getting to that box! The whole week confinement method can be used until the cock quietens down. After this he may be confined for only a couple of days pre racing, eventually he will go off the boil, you can only kid pigeons for so long, but once he quietens and becomes a civilised member of society you may use the widowhood system or natural on him. It always pays to have a mixed selection on this system, hens may be motivated in the same way although it is better not to confine them for more than a couple of days. In the natural loft, keen sitting birds (one from the nest only) can be placed in the **meat safe** on the day prior to basketing with good effect. It is essential that they always receive the usual exercise periods and are only fed in their normal box. It is also essential that the box is kept closed at all other times to prevent invasion from other loft inmates.

The nuisance cock as he learns that you are playing with his emotions and settles to the system becomes less motivated. To rekindle his fervour it is advisable to allow him sight of a squatter inside his box, just prior to basketing, but don't overdo this and over frustrate him or he will fret and rapidly lose form. For that reason the system is only used for a maximum of three races on any individual bird, although in the case of the Old Blue mentioned earlier, it was used all season and several squatters were placed in the loft at once; but the Old Blue was a very placid pigeon and not easily upset. That is why you need a notebook and good powers of observation to note each individual personality trait and response. With the loft organised as I have outlined, it is possible to race on all systems, natural, roundabout, widowhood, celibacy, with twenty birds or less. The numbers are immaterial, but the quality should be there to build upon and the prizes will come eventually. You don't have the problem of fetching and carrying widowhood hens, rises and falls in form, peaks and troughs with total natural racing, separate young bird exercise and necessary extra loft etc. What you do have is one exercise period for cocks and young each morning, leaving plenty of time to get ready for work. You have two exercise periods each evening, one for cocks and young - and latterly one for hens and young. The hens with young cocks only require a single exercise period; the hens are easily conditioned, whilst the young cocks will form the basis of your future and only require the minimum of racing during their first year. The bulk of young bird racing will be done with young hens and selected young cocks with an eye to the future! This is most important and you should plan accordingly and turn a deaf ear to all that recommend that every youngster should go to the end of the line! Your next seasons yearlings are going to be the pigeons that make your club mates take notice or my name isn't Cleopatra!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART FOUR

Hello son; so you are back again! I only thought to myself after you left me last week, that perhaps I had forgotten to mention something. When a man gets to my age, after suffering the trials and tribulations of parenthood and a stressful working life; the grey cells don't always work as they should. A few pints of ale and a packet of fags soon puts things back in working order; so next time bring a few supplements to jog my memory into gear!

Right laddie; what did I forget? Common sense and if you have it, then you will have done it without mention; it is quite simply this! Whenever basketing pigeons for a race, be sure to close their boxes until they arrive home again; you wouldn't want to go off to battle then return to find another body in your bed and neither does a pigeon! Another thing is to make sure you water the pigeons in the basket whilst waiting for them to be race marked; don't rush to have them into race panniers until they have taken a drink! Now that you have reached the 200 mile stage, several things will or should have become apparent and you will have noted them in your B.H.W. Stud Book & Diary. Certain pigeons will have performed better than others on a consistent basis, whilst others have been steady plodders. Some will have made the odd mistake and homed a little late; well

don't worry these have learned and were amongst your best during the previous season; otherwise they wouldn't be in your team this year.

So now we have to forward plan; top pigeon fanciers are the finest forward planners in the world; captains of industry and the government could learn a great deal from them. They are also the best man managers and opportunists in getting results from observed peaks and troughs in performance, then making them work to advantage. These are the skills that you must now develop and forward plan for next year as you establish a reliable and workable team of pigeons to found a family of your own. It is wise to reserve the best yearling cocks at this stage (200 miles) and check their relationship to each other. It is possible that they might have common parents or close ancestors and a family line establishing itself. The same can be done with 2 y.o cocks that are performing well to the middle distance; 3 y.o. and over may be stopped in stages up to 500 miles. It is not necessary to race every bird out to the distance in this first learning year!

Yearling hens may be raced to 400 miles; older birds can go the distance! Once again check for common ancestry, there could be a pre potent line evolving. Even if these pigeons are not remotely related, you must still follow this plan, missing the longest race if necessary. There will have been a certain amount of natural wastage through losses, the sexes appearing in uneven numbers; well don't mourn the dead; just remember them with affection. Don't stop the birds because of diminishing numbers; stop the birds because they are your best candidates for the following year! When fanciers are established then they can afford to take more chances; but you are forward planning towards that aim; therefore caution and softlee- softlee he catchee monkey! Or my name isn't Confucius!

Now Sonny Jim, let's take a further look at motivation; people won't work without it and neither will pigeons. Motivation is all about attaining the right state of mind and this varies in all individuals. In the work place, some individuals require a little praise to repeat their performance; some will swing the lead when praised; so need a slight rebuke; then they perform on adrenaline just to prove me wrong! It's man management and psychology worked upon individuals without them even knowing just what has been done!

Pigeons are no different in this respect; they are individuals and should be respected and treated as such; but a manager with uncaring attitude or erratic temperament will never get the best performance from either. Motivation begins with yourself! Too many people set out with the highest aspirations and when these don't immediately materialise they become deflated. Pigeon fanciers usually last approximately three races; wanting to win from the word go. A few poor results and hey presto, the corn is wrong, the weather was wrong, the pigeons are rubbish and the bloke that sold them to him is a rogue! Not true; the pigeons were O.K., the corn was sound, the weather was the same for the winner and other fanciers are winning with pigeons from the same source. The problem is self analysis and self motivation, nothing more, nothing less, the fancier would never make a good manager until he comprehends that fact! The difference is that he has to praise himself, scold himself, motivate himself and set an attainable target that with effort and application; he can beat! First beat oneself, after which the others come easy!

Top fanciers always blame themselves; then reason out a solution; rectifying whatever they felt was wrong until trial and error takes them upwards once again. This does not mean a sudden change of system, but it could mean a little more - less exercise; frequency of competition for individuals or food ration. It could mean a little more time spent observing the birds or gently talking to them. Perhaps a cat or hawk could have disturbed them and they need their confidence rebuilding. Perhaps the pigeons weren't fully fit when asked to compete in a cold East wind. It could even be that his own movements around the loft were too erratic or noisy after an argument at work. Just as you should never take domestic problems to the workplace; you should never bring working or private problems to the pigeon loft. If your feelings towards the pigeons are anything less than 100% happy and confident; then this will show in their performance! In a nutshell you yourself must have confidence and motivation at all times and only you can carry this off!

You've done well to reach the 200 mile stage and climbed the result sheet to a consistently better than previous position. O.K. so you haven't yet taken the world by storm, nonetheless you are

improving and taking an occasional prize and pools. Give yourself a pat on the back, you deserve it!

Now you want to know how to time a good bird from the longer race points which have always eluded you? No problemo Mario; it isn't as difficult as some would have you believe; but the first thing to do is to forget about averages. The birds must be adequately prepared for the job in hand, starting with selection of candidates for earmarked races. From the records kept in your B.H.W. Stud book; there will be noted consistent pigeons; not your yearling cocks or fastest two year olds, they are next years prospects. Your race entries will come from older cocks and all hens, selecting the fittest only for the following weeks of competition You must maintain a little flexibility in your selection, sometimes a bird can hit form overnight, whilst your main candidate could be on the wane. This is where your observation comes into practice and last minute substitution could pay off, but if no birds are fully fit; wait for another time. Don't send just for the sake of competing! So lets prepare these gladiators of the sky; the most important thing is previous time on the wing in reasonable conditions and the recovery rate of the pigeon concerned. If the pigeon had an easy passage during its races up to 200 miles, it can safely compete from 300 miles the following week. The ideal flying time would be 4-5 hrs for 200 miles depending upon conditions prevailing that day. If the pigeon experienced a harder flight of anything over 6 hrs. then it should miss racing for at least one week. The birds competing from 300 miles should complete the journey in 6-8 hrs. given reasonable conditions then rested for two weeks. The recovery rate will vary from bird to bird, so once again it is a question of observation and flexibility; some might come into super form after 10 - 12 hrs. of flight, whilst others could be finished for the season. These must be questionable for future years unless there was a legitimate excuse or the birds first mistake. Once a pigeon has successfully completed a 200 mile race in reasonable time and shown good recovery, flying for the duration of exercise periods after a Sunday of rest, then that pigeon should also be capable of a large jump. It is not necessary for it to race each week, the rest and jump will bring better results. It is during this race resting period that the training basket comes back into play, but not on a daily basis. The bird requires "Springing" or "Peaking" to use athletic terms, the training from a distance of 30 miles maximum during the week prior to competition on three consecutive days, will do the job. Race marking Wednesday - rest and home exercise Tuesday - rest and home exercise Monday - home exercise and 30 miles Sunday - home exercise and 30 mls. Saturday - home exercise and 30 miles Friday! Sunday to Wednesday the birds require the seed mixture after every evening feed, plus 4-5 peanuts, approximately one level soup spoon each. If you can't train from 30 miles, don't worry, 10 - 15 will do; the purpose of the training is only to liven up the brain, not tire the body! The training tosses are not even the equivalent of 1 hour of home exercise, they serve no other purpose other than to revive the birds confidence. Once it is basketed for the longer race it won't fret, but will be quite surprised when 30 miles takes 14 hours, believe me or my name isn't Eskimo If you have any questions then phone me, please don't write because I don't have time to answer. But I promised to take you to the top of Everest and that is exactly where I intend to see you within three seasons with a gradually changing system to take on all comers and a family of your own. I can't come to every loft and do it for you, so have you got the bottle to make the climb? Actually that is a silly question because I know from years of experience that by now the bulk of you will have been talking to Tom, ****, and Harry. They will have told you that this system will never work. You have listened and already started to doubt yourself and your mentor - some of you would perish on the mountain because you are incapable of pure thought and dedication - you need to hold mummy's hand at every turn. Well I'm not your mummy and I don't care if you cry - I DON'T CARE IF YOU DIE on the mountain, I only cherish survivors who are capable of making their own minds up and total dedication to the task in hand. Tom, **** and Harry have probably tried every system, read every book and visited every loft, constantly changing their own methods and have more likely than not - NEVER WON A DECENT LONG DISTANCE PIGEON RACE IN THEIR LIVES! More than likely, they have rarely risen to any occasion - I've met them all in 50 years. They know it all - but they just don't seem to be able to put it into practice. Now believe this ---- They talk to you today; but by the end of the first couple of seasons of following Spinksy: they will shun you like the

plague, I know because I have been there, before my 21st birthday. They will shun you because you beat them every week - such is life lad, and if you can take the stick that goes in the hand of success, then you may call to see me again. if you haven't got what it takes, then join Tom, **** and Harry for a darned good cry on race day! Don't call me - I'll call you!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART FIVE

Right then, Sunshine, so you want to know about magic bottles and secrets that induce condition or increased speed and form? Falling into the eternal novices trap are we? The only secret is good health, obtained through correct husbandry - cleanliness and routine management coupled with "The Fanciers Eye"! True there are things that will boost health and improve condition in any living being but, they will not make the mediocre into champions. The best pigeons have natural vitality, quite simply, they never get sick, even when others around them are well under par. The dangers with boosts is the fact that they can create false form and a mistaken feeling of well being. When this situation arises, the creature or human in a state of euphoria might push itself beyond its natural capability and severely damage nerve and tissue. This problem, I have experienced personally; pain killers, providing temporary relief and giving false confidence in my own physical ability. Once they wear off I pay the price with interest! It is no good telling a man to take life easy, when he feels fine, his pride won't allow him to lie down and further damage is done. Now the man knows that he is foolish, he knows the theory but, a pigeon doesn't and might push itself beyond its natural limitations, to be ruined forever!

Yes there are boosters and I will tell you about them, when and why; cause and effect but you must not adopt them as routine because, there is no substitute for natural form. It is natural form that you must attempt to achieve and recognise. If you have been faithfully following my system so far, then you are already using the finest health specifics - Honey; antiseptic properties, high vitamin value, carbohydrates and natural probiotic. Garlic; boiled as a wormer (it doesn't kill worms but aids expulsion from body) raw and crushed in drinker daily - reduces cocci count, acts as an expectorant to keep the respiratory organs in form. Calcium Concentrate; contains several essential elements to aid growth, metabolism, feathers etc. Cytacon B12; absolutely essential because the B12 vitamin is not found in cereals or pulses (beans, peas) It is only found in animal matter, wild birds obtain this from insects, slugs, snails, worms, which are problematic for the racing bird. Brewers Yeast; provides a full range of B Complex vitamins, but must not be overdone for two reasons - (1) the body will expel all excess, (it can interact with certain medicines adversely) (2) it can increase fungus disorders e.g. Thrush, Aspergillosis, Chlamidia. Personally I always preferred to administer in tablet form : one per pigeon on Wednesday only when racing, this gives a controlled dose. More than this can produce false condition; that is to say that the pigeon blooms like a show bird, fooling the fancier into thinking that full fitness has arrived.

Excessive use of seed mixtures also provide this false form effect, they should only be used for fat & carbohydrate loading as the race approaches, sparingly. Vitamin C (ascorbic acid); essential but not to be used in excess unless you like mopping out the loft! I will break with my usual non recommendation of commercial products and add one more Entrodex (Vydex Ltd.); This I tested myself on the Captains pigeons; his comment was that he had never sent fitter pigeons to Pau. I then recommended it to two friends (no names, no pack drill); they both now swear by its good effect in aiding pigeon recovery, digestion and improved condition. This was administered on Saturdays and Sundays after racing and is perfectly compatible with the honey. Now aren't you a lucky novice? Not only do you get the benefit of my experience, you are about to receive the benefit of the experience of my champion friends and all for the meagre price of of a book! Hands up; how many of you are trying this out, how many think me crackers, how many of you think you know better? When I made Adrian a partner at 15 yrs. of age, he was telling me how to race

pigeons before his 16th birthday; so don't worry I have the patience of Jove! Sit up, shut up and take notice laddie; because you can bet your bottom dollar, the widowhood men will all be using the **meat safe** system on their birds this year! Thirty years too late! O.K. that's enough patronising, you want to know how to recognise condition and that elusive form. Now these days I rarely handle a pigeon until basketing night because I can see all that I require. For you I would recommend that you handle them daily and that you get yourself the job of race ringer at the club, because you will learn more at this time than any other. Mentally note and develop a feel for the subtle differences in feather, buoyancy, skin condition along the keel of competitors birds. Try to pick the winner before the race, then check your feelings against the race result. See if any of your fancied birds actually made the result sheet, either as a winner or that fanciers first timer, once you can score above 30% correct, then you are on your way. Look for this condition in your own birds that show a variety of signs which are quite easily recognisable.

Red pigeons: do the markings stand out distinctly? Have the feathers taken on a darker hue? Is the feathering beginning to resemble a cheese grater (a sure sign of coming form)?

Blue & chequered: As above, do the wing bars or markings jump off the bird and smack you in the eye? Do they shine light and dark?

Dark & velvets: have they suddenly become darker like coal? Do the feet appear redder in comparison to the overall look? Can you see a frosty coat of bloom?

Grizzles: a combination of all above; does the grizzling appear more frosty?

Whites: are their feathers beginning to flute or crinkle on their wing covers? Are they immaculately clean, when others appear dull? Do they look like virgin snow?

All colours: has the eye become the centre of your focus, standing like a jewel above all else? Do the wattles and ceres appear larger, more distinct and pinkie blood vessels showing through? Don't think that they should be white, cere colours vary in families. Are the feathers tightening and appearing as if a single entity (other than the reds & whites that flute)? Are the feet warm & clean, but still carrying natural scale? Is the flesh on the breast de-scaling and becoming transparent, glowing with health? This point requires watching, some birds are fittest whilst de-scaling, others are fitter whilst in the process so, note it in your diary! Are they making audible clicking or purring sounds as they walk around your feet (don't confuse with respiratory rattling or wheezing) this is a very distinct sound for those who trouble to listen. Just like Doctor Dolittle, I talk to animals and so should you; listen and look then note what they are saying! Has the timid individual suddenly taken on an arrogant stance? Has the bird grown suddenly larger, yet lighter in weight? Has one started to fly higher than the flock whilst ranging the sky alone? Do they lift off the floor or trap with a single clap of their wings, airborne in an instant? Is one still flying at exercise long after the others have trapped (stick him in the **meatsafe** Thursday then pool him up on Friday night)? Now it appears that I am doing all of your work for you, so get out your garden chair and stud book, look, see what you are looking at and note it down!

One day a friend came to me with a pigeon that had a greasy white lump on its keel about the size of one of the wife's glass headed pins. He was worried to death, thinking the bird was ailing or possibly contracted the dreaded pox. I laughed and told him that I wished every bird in my loft was so afflicted and told him to pool it. Some of you just don't know what you are looking at, he won the race that week, putting twice as much money on the bird for its next race. The pimple had gone and so had his money; now aren't pigeons fun?

I am giving you all this information well in advance of racing because this is forward planning, it would be of no use after the event. Come the end of young bird racing, together we shall be planning the following seasons matings and be ready for upgrading the system whilst commencing to produce a reliable family. That is the task that I have been set after which it is up to yourself, because like Adrian you will have swallowed the book. So on with the text; years ago, living only fifty yards from the seashore at my parents guest house there were several things available to me which proved to be useful. Egg shells from guests breakfasts, dried in the oven and crushed, seaweed; hung on the yard wall to dry then powder; oyster shells etc.; these made grit and provided a valuable natural source of iodine, calcium and trace elements. Being a bit of a

schoolboy athlete, Halibut oil capsules featured in my diet, they also found their way into my pigeons (what a good job my mother didn't find out), these are dynamite and far better than soaking grain in cod liver oil; two per week did the trick. I think they even increased my fertility and didn't do the old stock cock any harm either! However, don't overdo it, they create false form and can fool you. The corn chandler at the end of the street sold 'Charphos' grit, this can no longer be purchased in Blackpool to the best of my knowledge. 'Charphos' was ordinary limestone grit but contained pieces of charcoal so necessary for good digestion, perhaps someone might revive it. We also made up the "Croston Bottle", to keep pigeons clear of dry colds and aid respiration. scribes have reproduced the recipe upon several occasions so you should all have that by now, it works and numerous top fanciers use it. A dry cold can be the scourge of many lofts during summer months, often fanciers resort to antibiotics when there is no need, a simple natural cheap remedy does the trick! Well I feel that this is enough for you to take in at one go, so will finish this page at this point. Once again, any problems then phone me and I'm sure that goes for any other B.H.W. writer, we are all here to help if we can. If we can't then we will find a friend who can! Till next time, keep your mind active and your bowels open! That is possibly the best bit of advice all day - because I have known many a fancier be caught on the toilet when their pigeons had arrived - my brother was an ace at being caught in that position. It was a funny sight, but not a very pretty sight and for that I can vouch - or my name isn't Matilda! Don't forget to read the books - which cover all aspects of bird, animal and human life -----then you will be as wise! Nobody learns without study and application!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART SIX

So you are here again my old currant bun and I'm pleased to see you, It's a lonely life sat writing all day. I think for the moment we are well ahead of events, so perhaps this is a good time to discuss some of the myths and frustrations that you have encountered in previous years. Every time you pick up the paper or enter into conversation at the clubhouse, you get the impression that pigeon racing is some mystical secret known only to a few. Try as you might to emulate your peers, nothing ever goes to plan. For instance, you pair up your pigeons and expect to see every pair with a clutch on the evening of the tenth day. Peek-aboo, not one single pair has laid, some haven't even started to build a nest, horror of horrors, Tom, **** & Harry must surely be masters at the game!

Well I've got news for you; after over forty years of involvement with pigeon breeding, I have never known in my own loft nor any champion friends loft, a year when every pair had eggs on the tenth day! In a ten pair loft the norm would be 10-16 days depending upon the weather and the individual pigeons inclination. Should any cock be driving without success beyond that time, you would be advised to separate the pair, because he will wear himself out and be ruined for the season. Even if he were to be your best racing cock, forget about youngsters from him until the latebred stage after racing. Sometimes it pays to make small sacrifices! Tom, **** & Harry all have early bred youngsters, so in previous years you have done the same and then you reared another round just for good measure to equal their mob. Well my old currant bun; it takes more stuffing out of a pigeon rearing two consecutive nests, than flying two 500 mile races back to back, but you would never dream of doing that, now would you? There are special attentions required for January rung youngsters which we shall cover at a later date. At this point softlee-softlee-catchee-monkey, patience is the name of the game and your March rung youngsters will hold their own once we go through their training. It is not the intention to be top prize winner for a season, the target is getting to the top then staying there with a family to be proud of.

Previous to this season, your pigeons wouldn't exercise for more than 30 minutes, Tom, **** & Harry were training every day, so you followed suit. By the ecky thump, now your pigeons wouldn't fly at all, your car needed a new set of tyres, clutch, water pump, etc., etc., etc. What Tom, **** & Harry didn't tell you was that they didn't train every pigeon every day, but only selected birds that were

rested or so far hadn't been in the basket previously! When they said that they trained from 30 miles, they forgot to say that sometimes they only went ten because of the wind chill factor or lack of good light! Tom, **** & Harry had thirty training tosses before the first race which they won, but neglected to say that 30% of yearlings were lost before that day, and where were they once the races went beyond five hours? They told you stories about the old cock, topping the combine with this treatment, but neglected to say that this was its only prize ever won. Nobody was more surprised than them and now they have a loft full of children, still hoping for another fluke! Now Tom, **** & Harry will tell you that a pigeon is worthless if it can't stay on the wing for 12-14 hrs. in a nose - ender, they have built their lofts around such birds. However I will tell you this---- there has hardly ever been a racing pigeon born that will continue to make home after 8-30 p.m. Those that do, were super fit and super motivated on that day after missing the bad weather that brought faster pigeons down, rarely repeating the performance again.

The majority of pigeons will roost around 8-00 p.m. coming on early next day and it doesn't matter at what time of day they were tossed at the distance. So if your bird came on next day and recovered quickly, don't condemn it, next time it could be a winner and win again in future years. Now don't get me wrong, every prize won is a prize worth having and given equal opportunity the best bird won on its day but one swallow doth not a summer make. Sitting on your perch is "Dream Boy", the pride of your life, he won a young bird prize five years ago and has never raced again. Since that time has become the patriarch of your loft, his illustrious genes flow through the majority of your birds, do you take my point?

Tom feeds 100% beans, therefore so will you, but what Tom neglected to tell you was that; he feeds 20 ozs. to 20 pigeons daily, then as the distance increases and four have gone by the wayside he still feeds 20 ozs. per day, plus a seed ration and a percentage of maize! **** feeds widowhood mixture so you decide to do the same, but **** didn't tell you about the bag of peas he uses to beef it up a little! Harry hopper feeds peas, so in your frustration you give it a whirl but, Harry didn't tell you that he supplemented this with a light mixture every night before the birds were put to bed! Now it isn't so much what is done, but the way in which it is done, you probably changed your feeding and system as often as the weather. lpyl Bodies react to change, a man who eats three meals per day would perform below par on one, the man used to a single meal would be sluggish if forced to eat three. A vegetarian suddenly forced to consume **meat**, soon becomes nauseous until his body adjusts. The **meat** eater would be tired if fed a vegetarian diet until once again his body adjusts; the rotating shift worker has trouble sleeping, it upsets his biorhythm, metabolism and digestion. Yet you have done this very same thing with your pigeons in the past!

So I am giving you a balanced way and an opportunity to observe your birds actions and interactions, cause and effect, it does not matter what system used, provided that it is regular and only modified according to need! Now Sonny Jim, you are wondering why I told you to keep only your first arrivals from the previous season, when one swallow doth not a summer make? The simple reason is that every Everest climber has to establish a base camp and in your case this was the best place to start. Next season will be different (flexibility & forward planning) you will have a record of every pigeons individual performance and response. Certain common denominators will evolve i.e. parentage, relationship to others, breeding success with this years young birds, consistency etc. You will have a base from which to form a reasonable analysis and forward projection after a fair assessment of each and every individual, without fad or favour! You will begin to find strength in depth within your team, but better still you will be discovering your own inner depth, passing your confidence to your birds. You are going to plant your banner on the peak for all the world to see and you must not waver from that single minded aim. Be there rain, hail, snow or avalanche be prepared to beat adversity through determination and modest pride.

I know you can do it, the only person who needs convincing is yourself! What I am attempting to do : produce winners by proxy; is possibly the hardest task that I personally have ever attempted but, I don't THINK that I can do it, I KNOW THAT I CAN ! That is the attitude that I expect from you, walk

tall in the world and hang the devil.

O.K. when the season started and daylight was limited, you exercised your pigeons at first reasonable light; since that time you should have been getting progressively earlier. Working backwards to 6-00 a.m. as mornings grow warmer and longer, the evenings are also extending, working outwards to 8-00 p.m. before the sudden drop in air temperature. This is late enough and little can be gained by flying them in cold air after this time for the reason outlined previously. Of course they can be made to fly until dusk, but for what reason when a 6-00 a.m. liberation at 500 miles would see 98% roosting at this time! Cold air eats up energy, whether exercising, racing or sitting on a perch, don't do it! Having said that 98% of entries will go down between 8 p.m. - 8-30 p.m., those with the motivation and love of home will still come on to home. If the bird was worth entering, then it deserves your loyalty and confidence until the day is done and all light gone, don't let it down in this respect! You will soon recover from your disappointment, the pigeon might not and many a fancier has spoiled a good bird by going to the pub! You wouldn't want to return home from a fourteen hour day, only to find the house in darkness and all of the locks changed; well neither does a pigeon, it breaks it's heart!

So there you go sunshine, just a few little things to ponder over, a little psychology of man and pigeon, a little self awareness and analysis. Have you found the spots and lines in the iris yet? What about picking the best entries from your club mates birds? Did you find the pimple and how did the bird perform? How are the colours changing with fitness or feathers tightening up? Do the birds seem larger and yet feel lighter in weight? Was the wing up on its second, third, fourth primary? Was it full winged, one primary dropped, one new quill about to burst or was it still just a needle shaft? Was it sitting, celibate, widowhood, racing to its youngster or returning after a spell in the **meat safe**? Are some of the reds displaying fluted feathers on their backs? Are they all a quiver and purring at your feet, are they talking to you and are you listening to what they say? Have some decided to fly on their own or developed personalities that stand out? Have you looked and seen what you are looking at, or did you just chuck them corn and go to watch Coronation Street? These little things should all be noted in your B.H.W. stud book so that you can repeat the birds winning condition. Individual birds, individual traits, individual responses, individual levels of response to varying motivation! No Sonny Jim, there are no secrets, but there are pigeon fanciers and pigeon racers, or my name isn't "Rumplestiltskin".

One last observation from the silly old git 'Spinksy' ---- so many people in this world LOOK but very few ever SEE!

The secret is in seeing that which one is looking at and registering it in ones mind! Go back three paces and read

'Ethology and the Pigeon Fancier' -- it wasn't written to simply pass the time!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART SEVEN

Hello there Champ's; back for another session of ear bashing are we? Congratulations upon climbing the result sheet, now you are really on your way up Everest. I'm sorry for over simplifying long distance preparation but this was designed to test your mettle for survival and make you think for yourself. So let's examine this in a little more detail. By now certain patterns should be establishing themselves within your loft, you will be learning and recognising individual traits. The system so far has allowed you scope to test pigeons on natural, celibacy and semi widowhood, this has established a pattern and suitability of your birds to each of these. You have learned a few motivational tricks and experimented with a few of your own i.e. Naturals : sitting 5-10-14 days; chipping eggs, 7-14-21-24 days old youngsters, calling to nest. Egg stacking in the nest bowl 2-4-6; maggot inside a dummy egg etc. The pair nesting on the floor have been motivated by moving the

water fountain nearer each day; see how protective they become?

Like a good student you have noted it all down and discovered your niche with natural pigeons?

Celibate : these have been highly protective of the roost and sensibly all naturals have been basketed for the race ten minutes previously to these. You have seen how lively they become as they go on a tour of investigation or have a stranger in the closed section of the box. You kept one in the meat safe then allowed him a few minutes in his box, now at long last you are starting to think like a pigeon! You have noted the affection displayed for the youngster that has been allowed to grow up and share its box. These are now more precocious and further motivating the bird; eventually they will be pairing together and can be persuaded to sit dummy eggs. Now you are learning that there is no such thing as totally natural racing; he who knows most tricks wins most races, or my name isn't Beetle-Geuse!

The semi widowers are flying with zest around home, trapping like bolts from the blue, eating well in competition with the others and have become highly protective of their property without the slightest sexual motivation until the final moments pre basket time. What a little miracle worker you are becoming whilst discovering both your pigeons and own best forte, all done without the aid of anaesthetic within the confines of one small practical working loft! So now that you have grown in self awareness you are ready to try a couple at the distance. As previously stated; these needed hours on the wing with steady performance and sensible management upon your part. These birds will have raced most weeks up to 200 miles at which point you have divided your team into three. The best yearling cocks have been saved for the future forming team No. 1, the remainder will have earmarked races in which to compete if fit. Each bird should be capable given reasonable chance of competing in 2-3 races beyond this point every second week up to 400 miles. Beyond that point they will require adequate rest and this will be dependant upon the individual bird, as a rough guide 21 days from competition 'til basketing.

During this lay off period these pigeons will still be exercised under the normal routine but building the evening period up to 1hr 15mins., this will take work upon your part, absolutely no slacking at this time! You are building towards an athletic peak and this is the time to really make those pigeons talk to you. You haven't heard them talk so far but now you will and this will light up your life. This is the time to not only get them race fit but mentally fit as well, these birds are going to bust their guts for you so you owe them the special attention. So far they have been members of a team, now they are to become the single most important thing in your life. Each exercise period upon trapping and after feeding you will talk to those birds, you will tickle their chins, you will gently fight and caress them. You will make them feel unafraid kings of the world; teasing them with tit bits; you will give a little hemp seed and they will start to purr like kittens. At last you have heard them talk and you will go to sleep that night and dream about them!

These pigeons will be bouncing with pleasure and fitness, believing that racing has finished, the world is their oyster. Given a few short easy tosses as previously outlined one week prior to racing you complete their fitness taper and spring them into peak condition. Come race day you won't be watching jockeys on your television, cricket will have no interest; you won't casually trundle down to the loft at some time in the day, just half heartedly hoping for an arrival. No sirree; you will have been up early, mentally flying every yard with those feathered wonders as they cross fields, mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes and ocean. You will sit in silent contemplation and let no man disturb your thoughts as your psyche reaches out to bring them safely home! Do this and you are starting to become a pigeon racer distinct from pigeon keepers! If your birds can perform for you then so can you do likewise for them! Be pleased to see them home in turn and your winning will be a bonus, whatever they have earned their winter perch!

Can they be carbohydrate loaded for this marathon effort? Well yes they can; fat and energy fuel is needed to burn instead of muscle. Pigeons may be carbohydrate loaded with the seed mixture of safflower, hemp and linseed; peanuts in moderation, glucose and honey. Carbohydrate loading must only be used as the event draws near, if used too early the pigeon will cease to eat adequate food and reach its peak too soon. Never overcook the metabolism or the engine will race before blowing up at the end of the street! There are also commercial products upon the market to

achieve this aim, several companies advertise them in the pages of the B.H.W., their use is down to individual fanciers whim. None of these will harm the pigeon but I cannot recommend one above another and wonder sometimes if the expense equates with results when similar effect can be produced by intelligent feeding.

What other things should you be looking for? One important factor will be the stage of the moult, each pigeon might be advanced to a different level, particularly in a kit of mixed families. From a Feb. 14th mating this could be anything between 3rd - 5th primaries with 1st secondary dropped or about to drop. Experienced fanciers do not worry unduly but novices need to take a little care and be certain that the gaps are not too large. It is wise to hold the bird a further week if the flight is "Pinning" and not yet bursting from the sheath. Sometimes a very fit pigeon can drop two primaries in short succession or together, this is not an ideal situation for a 500 mile race. Often it is caused by previous exertion, the pigeon holding the flight until condition returns then catching up in the moult. Experience will teach you to anticipate this happening but even the best fancier can be caught out and when this coincides with the loss of a secondary the pigeon might have a problem. Ideally if there is such a thing, you should be hoping for two primaries fully grown, with the third slightly less than half grown. At the half grown stage the pigeon could drop a flight in the basket, which is not too great a problem unless it happens to be the fifth. The secondaries start to moult at this stage; some fanciers don't mind this, regarding the additional gap as better aerodynamics. Comparing this to a larger step in the wing and less exerting on the upward stroke; there is some truth in this but the condition is better monitored by individuals that know their own family and individual bird. For you the novice I would recommend that you err on the side of caution by attempting to enter competitors that only have the fullest of wings. It would be a shame to lose a good bird or spoil its performance overall just for the sake of a few days patience. Once again be sure to note the wing condition in your stud book so that it may be prepared for and repeated in future seasons to equal or better the result.

This actually brings me back to carbohydrate loading and why it should only be used close to competition. Small heating seeds can effectively increase the speed of moulting, their withholding can help control. By judicious use it is possible to manipulate the situation ever so slightly, the use of preparations could have this same effect so use only in moderation as and when required. Once again I shall repeat : always take a drink trough with you on race marking night and leave it in place until the last moment possible. Make your final feed before lunch time and transport the pigeons inside your car and not inside the boot, you don't want them throwing up food in the baskets. Common sense but oft neglected! On hot days be sure to stand your entries in a shady place, not where they might dehydrate, in other words think on your feet and think like a pigeon. Now then champ's, I'm going to refer back to the first couple of chapters because some of you aren't thinking clearly, judging by the 'phone calls. I told you how to feed whilst rearing; then somebody (a few) have experienced problems with pigeons selecting grain and scattering the remainder from generously filled ever available pots? ****!!! Now where in Sarah's name did I tell you to do that? Is not a permanent pot a hopper under a different name??? Does mixture in any way resemble maple peas??? The feeding method that I outlined was the way the birds themselves choose their feed, there should have been no wastage if only fed sufficient two to three times daily. Pump up the squeaker (1) Pump up the squeaker (2) Pump up the squeaker then feed the old birds!***! Get it? Got it? Good!!! Maples - Maples - Maples & Mixture!

The next thing, what has happened to the perches that were for hanging in the loft to be used at a later date? Are they still in your garage and forgotten? You split your young bird sexes as near as you could determine and placed one in the hen section and one with the cocks. Now a few weeks later, some young hens have started to show themselves as cocks. Well put those perches in the hen section and also the extra young cocks, then you won't have any awkward incidents. There will only be born survivors climbing Everest; I don't expect to have to tell you when to tick and when to tock but I will if possible guide your steps. Not even Spinksy can make a silk purse out of a sows ear, but I can make a winner out of a stockman or my name isn't Beelzebub!

Meat Safe System by Steve Spinks

PART EIGHT

Well this week it's time for a little problem solving, because no doubt one or two of you will have met some along the way. It isn't easy racing to a small loft and with that everyone will agree. Larger teams offer more scope as do a range of separate lofts and sections but, a small set up also has its advantages. These are : more individual attention to the pigeons, lower costs and less wasted time cleaning out. This should produce a greater affinity between fancier and bird, more control through tameness and better quality stock in preference to quantity. Provided that one has attended to all fine details in preparation, one should have been able to gain a few prizes. Of course immediately some novices met with problems, they will have once again blamed the system and the birds, immediately making drastic changes whilst seeking Tom, **** and Harry's advice once again.

The first problem was because they only half heartedly followed it in the first place, failing to realise that control only comes via common sense. Having a smaller set up doesn't mean less attention, quite the contrary it means more disposable time towards greater attention. It does not mean lack of patience with inquisitive young birds that tend to sit out that little bit longer, it means common sense applied to make them perform as required. It doesn't mean allowing natural pigeons to rear consecutive rounds of youngsters whilst racing, to replace losses off the roof because of impatience for young birds to fly. Now I realise that some of you have done this because I have trodden this road so many times before. Fool that I am, I shall continue to tread this rocky path in the hope for a single wise novice appearing upon the horizon and that makes it all worthwhile!

PROBLEMS SOLVED?

These are the most common :

Once the pigeons were separated I lost control of the youngsters:- The control was lost because you were feeding communally and not in the boxes as recommended, afraid that the youngsters would go hungry, each was fed the same regardless of trapping performance. In some cases the old birds continued to feed their young, so you became afraid that the parents would be hungry, giving them more and more. Now here is a strange thing with pigeons, unlike human beings they are very fast learners, particularly when it comes to food and survival. The parent bird will soon stop feeding the five week old youngster and make it fend for itself. By regulating the ration within common sense bounds, the youngster quickly learns the facts of life, the slower it enters the loft, the fewer sweeties it will get. Within a couple of days and a little patience upon your part, the youngsters become imprinted and will trap faster than their parents. It is not the system at fault but the lack of understanding and application. Personally I never have this problem but obviously that is down to years of experience and past mistakes of misplaced overdone kindness.

The next most common problem is :

Some of the youngsters have become nuisances in other boxes in the cock's section:- This is to be expected when you have fed them communally on the loft floor. My instructions were to feed the parent and young within their individual boxes, thus making it their own personal territory which they will love and protect. Common sense dictates then that, the persistent nuisance be removed to the more placid hens section which are only flown out once daily. The once daily exercise also dictates once daily feed and this can be done communally because some of the young will have taken to perches of their own. Others will have bonded and share a box with their mother, returning there to dominate their position. The extra available time with a small team does not mean less work it means more time to observe and rectify problems through common sense.

A further common problem :

The youngsters are a fine kit but they won't go up for a fly! What on earth do you want them to fly for? When they want to fly, make no mistake about it, they will fly! It is preferable that the

youngsters see as much of their surroundings as is possible before this event, then you can be sure that they know where they live. The old birds will be exercising freely, sooner or later the youngsters will wish to do the same, joining them in little flips. They will be all over the sky at first until they find their wings, eventually they will kit with the old birds and fly with relish. Later you will worry because the old birds have returned without them as they go ranging inquisitively for miles. Once their wanderlust is satisfied it will be routine flying exercise only and good trapping the order of the day. This would happen even if the youngsters were kept in a loft of their own, it is a natural course of events. Don't be in a hurry with young birds, impatience can cause heavy losses! Old bird problems:

Some of my hens are pairing together and laying eggs! So what if they are, does it really matter? In the widowhood loft it could matter because these hens sole purpose is to motivate their mate. It also matters to some degree in the roundabout loft although as I have explained through the "Meatsafe System" that territory is the greatest motivator and the hen is often but, not always a mere trinket to show ones friends. Much the same as old worn out men with "Dolly" escorts. Ask any of those silly old men which they preferred to keep at time of need and I could guarantee their answer! So with the natural trick flying system, hens that lay are only incidental to the general scheme. At some time in the future I will explain sex reversal in birds through scientific studies carried out on various species. Birds are capable of sex reversal and this is very distinct from homosexuality in humans, birds can switch it on and off in the female.

More on that at a later date, for now don't worry but use the situation to your advantage. Of course if you were to feed these hens in individual boxes, only allowing freedom for exercise, they can be used on roundabout, widowhood and the "Meat safe System". Once again, think on your feet and learn to think like a pigeon, getting the maximum from a tiny team! Next problem: Some of your hens are now overweight! This happens! Hens require less food to put on weight than cocks, the weight must be controlled either by regulated feeding or increased exercise and training. The hens can be fed in their boxes, whilst the young cocks that share the section may be fed by hand. By feeding moderately until Wednesday then increased Thursday, this brings them rapidly up to racing weight. Fat pigeons won't fly, excessively hungry birds won't fly; properly fed they will and if amorous will exercise freely whilst displaying to the young cocks. The fine tuned hen will be a better motivator in the widowhood, roundabout and natural trick flying loft.

By having only a two section 12' x 6' cabin, with maximum 20 birds of quality it is possible to win your share of prizes. The system isn't designed to allow more time for television, it was evolved to make you understand your birds in the first of a three season plan. Eventually I hope to have you racing ten cocks upon widowhood or roundabout if you prefer, but you will do neither successfully until first becoming stock conscious. Of all the top widowhood fanciers that I have had the pleasure of meeting, ninety nine per cent of them were masters at natural racing previously. They understand their pigeons inside out and that is what the novice must first learn to do. Widowhood and roundabout are the fastest methods known to man, once mastered they are simple but, in the beginning these systems can be disastrous for the new convert.

Once the novice has learned how to make pigeons eat as and when required. How to build strength and condition or how to recognise form and motivation; then the transition should be easier! There would have been little point in me starting these articles with power systems, the majority would have failed before the very first race. Now hopefully some will have a far greater understanding of their birds and this column was not undertaken lightly. This system works, it works well for anyone with limited space or income. Though, like any other system it requires dedication, patience and perseverance coupled to common sense, or my name isn't Elvis.

At the end of old bird racing the team will consist of good yearling cocks flown 200 miles, two years old cocks and older flown 500 miles. There will be some fully tested hens with only the best remaining, the loft will be anything but crowded. The next articles will deal with young bird training and the steps required to form the 1997 racing team. It is hoped that strength in depth will show itself within that team, with little to choose between any bird. For some of you, young bird racing could be your preference; one day there will be fanciers who only specialise in these events,

disregarding all other competition. That day is not too far in the future and this will mean even greater competition with an even greater degree of dedication and skill to win. The young bird management system that I shall relate is fully endorsed by the top young bird racer in my own area. It is tried and tested with success, I cannot speak for every area, but it works here in hot competition. Once again, even armed with this, one cannot make a silk purse from a sow's ear. One must use common sense, forward planning plus a little flexibility with the foresight to produce a powerful team of yearlings for future competition.

So far I have had a mixed bag of responses success wise from novices. Some have done well with cock birds in various stages of motivation, others have experienced problems with overweight hens. A couple of good results have been reported via the "Meat safe System" or a modified version. Some went awry within a couple of weeks, but this wasn't the fault of the system, it was the fault of the fanciers concerned. I believe that I might really have to carry some to the peak of Everest upon my shoulders but it will be worth it in the end!

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PART NINE

Happy New Year Sunshine - perhaps you think that to be a strange opening gambit and that I have my dates mixed up or I'm suffering from premature dementia. Actually in pigeon terms it is new year today, because this is the start of the new seasons preparation. Some of the wise amongst you have been following the teachings of this system religiously and judging by the favourable telephone calls have met with success. I should like to congratulate Les Mathews of Coventry upon his eleven prizes to date 1996 including a hat trick of 1st prizes in his last three races, culminating in 1st, 2nd, 4th club when using the "Meat Safe System". Also the gentleman in Nottingham who phoned to say that racing twenty four birds, he has never had a season like it, competing against fanciers who send fifty widowhood cocks per week. This gentleman has so far had eleven prizes in first four but unfortunately not yet taken the red card although fellow fanciers are now starting to ask his times on race day! There have been several others to get off the mark for the first time in years of trying so, the project of taking novices to the peak of Everest is proving to be worthwhile. At my age and circumstance it is rewarding to discover that no matter what captains of industry might think, life doesn't end passed fifty! Les kindly afforded the credit for his success to me but, in truth I played only a minor part. Les bred them, Les fed them, trained them and raced them, he now admits to seeing that at which he had previously only looked. The pigeons now talk to him and he can understand that which they are saying; the characters are appearing, first one, then another, eventually his mind met them all. Les will be a first class pigeon man and we can't call him novice any more. Welcome aboard Les Mathews.

Those who fell by the wayside and disregarded common sense, please don't apply for further interviews! Now on to New Year - this commences with post old bird racing selection and rejection, young bird racing selection and rejection, moulting selection and rejection. New Year really does begin today or my name isn't Rappunzel! Whatever the outcome of last years O.B's, there is a young team following on and the best of these must be accommodated for next season. All selection of old birds should be done now and not after the moult when they all look like champions once again. If you have kept individual records and been fair in your assessment allowing for degree of difficulty in racing as previously instructed then the wastrels should be self evident. The aspiring fancier should be looking for youth and vigour, where at least 50% of the seasons team will be yearlings. If he has followed the plan, these will only be birds that were bred from his utmost best; based purely upon performance either racing or producing. Remember: this is a ten pairs loft:- space for stock birds is none existent or at a premium and the quest is for winners that breed winners, not a rest home for blue blooded posers. Obviously the strict selection could possibly

mean the elimination of a poor racer with the "Golden Genes" but what you don't know till later hardly matters. What is important is that the team as a whole produce their share of winning birds, giving strength in depth for seasons to come. As time goes by champion stock birds will emerge amongst the best performance birds, these are the ones to retire and concentrate the gene pool of your family; one cannot keep every bird in hope! Do your selection now and do it fairly to both yourself and bird.

YOUNG BIRD TRAINING & RACING.

Not my greatest forte, I don't enjoy racing young birds, though I do believe in plenty of individual education. However; you wish to race youngsters and succeed and I am in the fortunate position of being able to relate the methods of the finest young bird racers that I know. We commenced our assault upon Everest too late for the "Darkness System", this will be covered later in preparation for the climb of K2 next year. What we shall cover at this point is the method of preparing March-April weaned babies for the coming programme. By now these should be exercising freely and under reasonable control for trapping twice daily. Some of you will have been operating the system of young hens - old cocks; or old hens -young cocks; others a totally communal system, whilst some are fortunate enough to possess a separate young bird section or partitioned young bird loft. Whichever of these methods used, it doesn't really matter, the basics remain the same; young birds require education and that education must be the best possible. I will not patronise you by saying that all youngsters should have been basket trained to eat and drink, nor will I say that in your anxiety to get them homing, the youngsters will have received a few 2 mile flips! If I had to tell you that, then you are thick and shouldn't be coming to my loft but I can tell you what to do from here on. The team will need twice daily regular exercise of at least 40 minutes per session, early morning pre 07-00 hrs and early evening. Once regular training begins the young birds will be less inclined to fly at evening exercise, for the working chap this is the time to train them. The pigeons must be under control without being excessively hungry and to achieve this aim it is necessary to ration the feed. Your youngsters should be receiving the same grits, minerals, garlic, honey, Cytaccon etc. as your old birds throughout the season. There is no benefit derived from any other expensive and needless potions, just stick to your normal routine. Feeding has to be modified somewhat, we seek control whilst at the same time we require sturdy growth for the future. After morning exercise the birds must trap immediately, this quick trapping is easily instilled into them. Upon the first evening the birds are fed with a depurative or similar light feed of 1 oz. per bird, this is sufficient, it is just enough to quickly digest and make them keen next morning. Now then thick head, this doesn't mean feed 1 oz per bird from here on in, it is the first day of commencing the system and the FIRST DAY ONLY! We don't want Mrs. Bysterbotch coming from the R.S.P.C.A. claiming that pigeon fanciers starve their birds to win races, now do we? Now get this into your head, fat pigeons won't fly, hungry pigeons won't fly, tired pigeons won't fly, only fit healthy birds will do this and they will do it for fun! So the first evening after exercise they are fed as described, the following morning after exercise and immediate trap they are fed «oz of the same light mixture. First to trap eats most, last to trap eats least but traps the quickest next time! Pigeons are very fast learners and soon get the hang of things, this light morning feed is continued throughout the season. This is the only time that I personally would feed communally and not in individual pots, it creates competition with reward. After the evening exercise of 40 minutes minimum duration the youngsters are sufficiently hungry and keen to trap, this is rewarded with a tit bit, either the seed mixture recommended for old birds, Red Band, Hormoform or such commercial products, plus 3-4 peanuts. The pigeons are then basketed for a training spin. If it is at all possible to enlist help, either in taking the birds or in trapping at the home end then so much the better. The youngsters must be taught to trap immediately upon arrival and are fed in with 1 oz per bird of your normal high protein racing mixture. If there is no chance of assistance then leave the feed in a tray where it can be seen when the youngsters arrive; don't forget to rattle the tin and allow the pigeons to see you putting down the evening feed.

Training should be given Monday till Thursday; Friday - morning exercise only, fed in with a titbit plus normal racing mixture of 1 oz in total once racing. Saturday evening post racing, the birds are

fed 50% light mixture 50% racing mixture, then proceed in normal fashion. Sunday is rest day, if at all possible allow open hole and bath, this allows full recuperation so that the birds will fly with zest on Monday. Young pigeons so treated become strong and fit, their bodies begin to feel like buoyant balloons. They should all be quivering, bright eyed and active. As the racing distance increases beyond 120 miles cease to ration the feed and allow the birds as much as they can eat at the evening meal with no skimping or their condition will suffer. Some may start to pair, this may be encouraged but it is preferable that they are kidded into sitting pot eggs without being allowed to lay. This is done simply by placing one egg in the bowl at dusk, next morning the cock will think that the hen has laid and sit the egg. The hen seeing him sitting will follow suit, after which a second egg may be left in place and young birds will sit these far longer than old birds through inexperience. As the longer races approach the eggs may be substituted for a single hatchling. To avoid excess strain through rearing:- where possible, replace the 10 day nestling with one of younger age approx. 7 days old, this can give two good races without losing condition. Be sure to give adequate extra feed to any rearing youngsters otherwise the condition will quickly go down hill as the surrogate parent deprives itself!

TRAINING SCHEDULE.

It is often said that the shortest route between two points is a straight line; unfortunately in pigeon racing this isn't true! Wind, drag and topography of land will often dictate the true line of flight. It is no use training in a straight line if the pigeons cannot possibly race that way:- for many the line of flight could be a dogleg, Scottish, Welsh and Irish birds have hills and valleys to negotiate, the Cumbrian and Northumbrian pigeons have similar problems. Even the flatter regions have prevailing winds and breaking points, the route taken is more of an arc, dependant upon wind or drag. First identify your potential line of flight, then train accordingly commencing at ten miles. This should be repeated until the youngsters are leaving the basket directly for home. Then repeat this process from a point easterly, then again from a point westerly; (these points are just off line of flight and not due East/West) once the birds are fully familiar with these routes move on and repeat from twenty miles, completing initial training at 30 miles line of flight only. Most races are won on decimals, the crucial part is the final ten miles, instil this into the youngsters and they will romp home. Once racing begins, it is too much to ask of young birds to exercise for set periods, train 50 miles daily and race on weekends. Somewhere along the line something has to give and this is usually home exercise. If one embarks upon long training flights then one must continue to do so, the pigeons will not fly at home. It is expensive, pointless, time consuming and the best way to upset the wife that anyone ever devised, plus the added hazards placed in front of your team. Once racing begins, a quick ten miles is all that is required Monday - line of flight, Tuesday - Easterly, Wednesday - Westerly, Thursday - line of flight. By this time the youngsters should know the route backwards, it is confidence building and this may be further built with single tossing. The independent pigeon is a winning pigeon, it doesn't require a flock to bring it home and there is no excuse for not attending to this detail. If time is short:- place your main candidates into a smaller basket, liberate the main batch after five minutes sight of sun (this applies at every training session) then allow ten minutes to clear completely (they should be almost home). Then release your prospective pool birds at five minute intervals all done within 30 minutes waiting, the whole task within 90 minutes. A well cliched phrase "you only get out that which you put in"; one and one half hour per evening is hardly killing yourself with work! Including evening exercise one still has time to go to the pub for a gallon! There you have the basics of a proven winning method, the rest is up to yourself. Congratulations to Les Mathews once again and also to the other gentlemen who reported success. One chappie phoned to say that he was using the depurative system and couldn't understand why his pigeons were one hour late each race. He was feeding it 100% at every meal and was bewildered by not being able to win ***!!!??? Well unfortunately you never will Matey; please don't phone again, it's all down in writing for you to study and use. With you on my back, Everest will kill us both; or my name isn't Humperdink!

PART TEN

Well now - each of you mountaineers have had two seasons ie young birds in your first year, with

old birds & young birds the following year. If you have followed my plan so far; then a marked improvement should be evident within your loft and team. Forward planning should always be the byword for a pigeon fancier; in my own case I like to forward plan well in advance and I am as keen at this time of the year as any other. Once moulted the birds take on a look of beauty and this can be very deceiving; some birds grow rapidly after moulting, whilst others have the physique from childhood and grow very little into maturity. It is because of this that some excel as youngsters and yet may never repeat their young bird form and this is where knowing ones family comes in very useful. It could be that the smaller type youngster distinguishes itself due to requiring less training or has less weight to carry by young muscles or feather. On the other hand it could be the bigger and stronger bird; earlier bred and more advanced in feather condition or nest incentive. Because of these things; it may sometimes be difficult to judge accurately any future value as a breeder or racer; so that is where family history comes in useful and also well kept records of performances. Handsome is as handsome does in old bird racing and very often it is the ugly duckling that turns out to be the swan!

So many new starters kick off with success racing young birds and proceed to get their hearts broken in the following old bird programme - the two seasons are as chalk and cheese. The old experienced fanciers know this only too well and smile to themselves when a novice comes to the fore in the young bird season. The success is mainly down to keenness and that is very difficult to maintain long term; particularly should one put ones all into specialised old bird racing. The steady approach pays the highest dividend; coupled to forward planning the ongoing study of the pigeons; the family and the family traits required for consistent repeat performances each year. These articles should have helped the new starter to establish the base camp required before any assault upon the mountain of pigeon racing success. Each of you should now have a thorough knowledge of your own pigeons - the best breeders, the best racers and the type to suit your locality; loft environment and system employed with due regard to available time or finance. You should now be well on the way towards discovering that the man plays an equal part with the pigeon. In actual fact the man plays the greater part - he has to breed them, feed them, condition and mentally prepare them. Should he fail then no matter how well bred the pigeon; it will be doomed to failure! From the breeding point of view, this to my mind is the greatest part that the fancier can play; there is little room for chance in the successful loft; breeding must be planned.

Having said that; occasionally luck may play a part via an unplanned love mating - it has happened in my own loft; but was a very rare exception. Best to best, or most physically suited to the most physically suited is usually the better method and breeding for performance and balance is the best recommendation. In my own loft; which after selection now houses some thirty pigeons, twenty four of which are yearlings, very few will be bred from. In fact I shall breed the bulk of my youngsters from two pairs only; another two pairs will provide the remaining requirement; plus a single youngster from selected yearlings. All other pigeons will have to undergo strict testing before being bred from. They must survive the programme through to the longest earmarked race and only when having proven themselves worthy. That is the yardstick for any small loft ie proven breeders only, or proven racers! Now is the time to make these "breeder" decisions which may be planned and altered several times until the final decision is made in advance of pairing. One thing that I abhor is "Pedigree Pairing" in racing pigeons and this you might find to be a strange statement; knowing that I advocate the creation and maintaining of a "Family". To explain - pedigree in the pigeon world has tended to follow the teachings of the "Kennel Club". There are millions of pedigree dogs; bringing high returns of revenue to breeders, even though they may never be more than high priced snobbish household pets. Very few of these aristocratic animals would ever win in a local show; let alone Crufts and the majority are nothing more than ordinary; regarding future breeding potential.

Pigeons must make their own pedigree; but I prefer to call it "Performance Potential" based upon a family tree. I will give an example of a "modern day pedigree" and also an "old time "performance potential family tree". For the modern example the names are fictitious although typical, but should not be taken to mean that the birds exist in some stud or breeders loft!

PART ELEVEN

So lads, you are back at the old sages loft for a few more words of wisdom and feeling pleased as punch with yourselves after reaching the first ridge on Everest. Those of you that had neither the intellect nor stamina to get beyond base camp can clear off now, because you are wasting my time. I said that there was no room for passengers and that is exactly what I meant.

Now here is a funny thing about climbing mountains - one looks up and sees a peak, one then proceeds to climb. Upon reaching this peak, low and behold there is another one above it, so off you go and climb. Blow me down and call me Susan, no sooner done and there appears another to dampen one's spirits. Then it takes courage and fortitude to carry on, the peaks seem never ending but eventually one reaches the summit. The feeling is exhilarating and the sense of achievement overwhelming; that is, until one looks down and realises that without care one has an awful long way to fall!

Now pigeon racing is like that and one false step can bring about a mighty tumble, it calls for skill and planning if one is to remain King of the Mountain. You lads have done well so far, in reaching the first peak but, much of this has been achieved through someone else's skill. The man who supplied your equipment (stock) without which you could not have undertaken the journey. The good mountaineer will respect this equipment and maintain it in first class order. A better mountaineer will make certain practical adjustments of his own, improving the standard with experienced and observed needed modification. The poor mountaineer will treat his equipment with disregard, inevitably falling to his death once that equipment is old and worn! So - inwardly digest that lads because I have seen the rise of many a winning pigeon racer, who fell to his death once his original stock became old and worn. They were unable to reproduce for themselves the equipment that someone else had supplied.

There are many good racers of pigeons with deep pockets, constantly replacing stock. There are very very few who can produce their own year in, year out, with repetitious consistency; these are the true mountaineers, the others are Sunday afternoon fell walkers and only imagine that they can climb mountains! Any lad of mine will be a true mountaineer and years from now he will remember the old man of the mountain with a knowing smile. So listen up and do as you are told because nobody upon God's earth is ever going to tell it to you straighter!

As I said, there is always another peak to climb and 2001 really does begin today. If you have taken my advice the old bird stock is already serviced, with the worn and useless discarded, new ropes for old. The backpack isn't large enough to carry equipment that only has a 'maybe' tag, dead weight drags one down! The selected equipment requires constant attention and must be inspected for possible improvement, which will come in due course. The new stock (young birds) should also be constantly viewed for strength and consistency. Now I fully realise that some of you can't wait to test these against the mountain and that some of you will gain a modicum of success; but at what cost to the future for which you should be preparing?

The team should be divided, one bad race can cost too dearly, where smashes take no account of quality. The finest mountaineer has no control upon avalanche, he disappears into the glacier forever! We are then left with the problem of assessing young bird intellect and often it is said that only the best return. Not so; many a dull minded youngster has won such a day, many a dull minded old bird also and might never win again! The key is consistency and this is what you seek! Should the youngster be up with the pack each week and score then obviously it could have a bright future but, there are other things to take into consideration. Why was the youngster up, was it racing underfed on easy days? Was it racing to the nest whilst others were perching? Was it smaller-larger than its loftmates? Was it earlier bred or better in the moult? Young bird performances may come through any number of slight advantages but it does not necessarily prove quality for later years. Consistency is the key, and any youngster that is consistent as the season progresses through moulting cycle and varied incentive is the bird to respect and keep. Not some one hit wonder, even if it were to be your only winner - be honest and unbiased in your assessment.

Now for the true mountaineers approach - he will be assessing daily depending upon his aspirations. A certain instinct will tell him that some birds are worth reserving once that they have negotiated

150 miles racing. These will have been in the first few to the loft each week or never far behind. No matter how much temptation presents itself, these strong ropes will not be used for practice, they are saved for the mountain lest they become worn. The lesser quality equipment can be used in practice, climbing a wall is hardly likely to end in disaster!

Right thick head, you haven't understood one word of this, so clear off and don't come back until you learn to pay attention and think! Sure as eggs are eggs, you will fall off the mountain and never climb again or my name isn't Wendy! Right lads, now that he's cleared off we'll get on with young bird training and motivation, it's always good to test my class for staying power. These races are there to be won and no honest man enters purely for enjoyment, if that were so he wouldn't be in a competitive sport. Everybody wants to win and that is a fact! If I don't want to win, then I don't enter and neither would he but I wouldn't risk my best young birds beyond 150 miles. So how do we get performances out of the others? A very good question, firstly some of the others may produce pleasant surprises, the selected best may not be as good as pre supposed. That is by the way and no consequence when building a team, we do not wish to be flown out and restarting each year. There has to be some kind of yardstick to which we stick initially, afterwards, more chances can be taken and fewer birds stopped from racing. The prize could be ten or fifty pounds but the future is worth far more.

Some of the ways in which the second team may be motivated have been mentioned above eg.: flying to feed; this method has many pitfalls should the race be over difficult and definitely not recommended beyond eighty miles. Racing to the nest - a standard practice but preferable if the young hen doesn't lay eggs and is persuaded to sit upon dummies. Segregating sexes until the eve of the race; young cocks pairing with old hens, young hens with old cocks. Young hens pairing to the fancier himself and these can be motivated each race. Young cocks that dominate a territory can be fired up by placing them in a pen on the floor whilst others occupy his box or perch. Removal of mates upon the evening preceding the race, extending their sitting time; in the case of two young birds paired each is motivated, one through absence of mate, the other through absence from nest! The Meatsafe System but don't overdo it. Energy may be conserved by darkening the loft after morning feed on basketting day. Their favourite grain fed only after trapping from training or racing (peanuts, hemp) not at every meal. Youngsters are soon imprinted with this signal and hunger isn't necessary!

You see lads, there are many and varied ways to have birds in different stages of motivation without putting all of one's eggs in one basket!

How important is training? In this neck of the woods it would be impossible to win with young birds consistently without it! Personally I have never had the time available at this part of the season and for that reason abstain from young bird racing. Training for me has to be as and whenever, even if that means extending into late autumn - winter but, training is essential in the majority of cases. Young birds learn very quickly, good, bad or indifferent experiences. They also forget very quickly! Young birds should not need training to get them fit but they do need to be kept alert mentally. This means leaving the basket, then flying directly for home and instantly trapping upon return. The actual distance is immaterial, pigeons do not measure distance, only direction. The quicker they can orientate direction the better and regular training from ten - fifteen miles is sufficient, better still if this is daily. Should pigeons experience a bad toss, release from a lesser point the next few times. This not only restores their confidence, it removes the previous bad line memory. Always allow them to have a home exercise period before training, this then removes any inclination to range the landscape whilst returning from the training spin and they will head straight for home. Basket the birds, then allow them to see the feed trough, remind them with a shake of the tin and a whistle, give the same whistle at the release point and off they go out of sight, directly home. Believe me, anybody could trap them at the home end, strange loft coat, bright red jumper, clown make-up, it won't matter, they will stop for nothing! Some fanciers make too much out of loftcoats and everything in its place, pigeons get used to anything, motorbikes, kids screaming; anything if they are allowed to. More pigeons are spoiled from trapping by faddy protectionism than anything else or my name isn't Peter Pan! My pigeons never see me in the same clothes twice, so they aren't

frightened by strangers, they recognise my aura, (perhaps I should bathe more often). Right lads, away you go and enjoy yourselves but remember 2001 starts now and every pigeon will eventually have one race too many. If you send them often enough one day even a champion mountaineer will meet the avalanche. You are preparing for the future so don't take any silly chances in pursuit of young bird prizes this season, you will have plenty of opportunity later and your peers will be seeking your advice! SPINKSY

PART TWELFTH

Hello again lads, well it's going to be difficult to call some of you "Novices" anymore and congratulations for your success. Now you see that climbing Everest isn't really so difficult with the old man of the mountain as your guide. Over the years I have watched so many people over complicate matters until they reach the point of auto-brainwashing. It is so easy to follow complicated systems, over medication, fancy names or strains etc. and lose sight of the simple route. For the mountaineer, it is not the designer label on his boots that aids his ascent; it is the serviceability of those boots, no matter make or market value. It is the same with pigeons, particular fashionable strains do not guarantee your trip to the prize table. Pigeons of all families will prove serviceable provided that, they are well maintained and regularly tested for weakness or wear and tear. Better still to have a family of ones own where common denominators viz family traits in performance and management response may more easily be monitored. It is far easier to race a 20 bird team of similar type, intelligence and ability than 20 individuals of variable unknown characteristics.

This is known as "Strength in Depth" and it is this, that every aspiring racing fancier should aim to produce. This might mean the production of horses for courses and specialisation according to the fanciers particular penchant but, the rules will always remain the same. Consanguinity is not a dirty word though it is a word that needs some understanding. Unfortunately pigeon fanciers have become philatelists', they collect many and varied strains in similar manner to none specialist stamp collectors. These collections never attain great value because there are always stamps missing from the set, the album may look pretty but without correct grouping it is worthless as an heirloom! Winning genes and consanguinity are sets of stamps with fantastic value when correctly grouped and mainly attain increasing value as time goes on! If you wish to be a pigeon racer and not a pigeon keeper, then forget about Tom, **** or Harry's mixed collection and specialise in producing stamps that comprise a valuable set. In other words - "Become the master ropemaker upon whom all mountaineers can depend!" As the season progresses, we shall go through this step by step, nobody to my knowledge has ever attempted to do this before ie. completely simplify pigeon racing and produce winning fanciers from the ranks of novice by proxy!

Now to be perfectly honest, I don't care if you accept my guidance or not but if you don't then you deserve to fall off the mountain and I will leave you to perish in the cold. That is my way; no prisoners, no passengers, no favouritism, no pets, only dedicated mountaineers and survivors who ask or give no quarter. There are a lot of knocks along the route but, no excuse for failure save only self blame through self analysis and awareness! On the mountain we fail because of our own mistakes and nobody else's, we don't expect anyone to pick us up when we fall! Now if you haven't understood any of that clear off now, there is no room at my loft for the dull minded but, if you have then read on, because you have got potential. The "Novices Social Circle" is growing daily and suddenly because of your success the B.H.W. is receiving requests for back copies from fanciers who are only just catching on. Amazingly many of the phone calls that I receive are from fanciers who did not realise that the author of this analogous series was also the scribe for Blackpool Notes. Week in, week out information for fanciers lost within a local write up and yet through the Social Circle the spirit of the mountaineer is engulfing them all.

Now I have promised to take the "Worthy" to the summit and step by step this will be done or my name isn't Horatio. Firstly I wish to congratulate the children of Burn Foot School in Hawick, Scotland and their mentor Danny Finnegan for their success so far (3 x 1st). Also Vince Wade, Ballymena N.I., 2nd, 2 x 1st, 1st Sect, 5,000 birds N.I.P.A. The children of Burn Foot school raced youngsters for the first time this year (1996) and are using the Novices Social Circle as their

guideline project. Vince Wade telephones regularly as well as using the system outlined; he commenced racing two seasons ago in a club that sends 800 plus birds weekly without previous success. His results to date are now making experienced fanciers aware of his presence. This was also the case with "Tiger Tensing" Les Mathews, who started last season with gift pigeons and brief particulars. Les won in excess of twenty prizes with old birds and is likely to be top prize winner O.B's this season 1997. Congratulations also go to Dennis Wilkins, who had never raced a pigeon in his life until the final two old bird races, both of which he won.

There is a little story to Dennis' success, it is also a little sad. His son Tony had been following the novices column and saved the pages in a folder. Tony had been gaining some success but unfortunately died from cancer during the racing season. The members of Hull Premiere F.C. allowed Dennis to complete the season in Tony's name if he so wished. Dennis phoned for advice because, in his own words he didn't know one end of a pigeon from the other and had never been in the loft. A few weeks later he phoned again to inform me that he had followed the advice to the letter and had attained the above results. That very same day a lady fancier phoned upon behalf of the husband & wife partnership of Mr & Mrs Fielding racing with the Bristol & Avon R.P.C. Mrs. Fielding called to thank me for help with young birds and inform me that when advice was applied they have since taken several prizes including 1st West of England N.R.Combine. There have been numerous others who have all improved their performances in various degrees depending upon their personal targets set. Perhaps the best of all was the performance achieved by Paul Harris & Tom Walsh, Barry, S.Glamorgan, Wales, who phoned to say that by following the Novices Social Circle, The Blackpool Notes, Joe Murphy Column and the advice of Welsh colleague "Dixie" had enabled them to win 1st W.G.N.F.C. Thurso. This loft will be featured in the B.H.W. Year Book 1997.

When this project was first started colleague "Skarathi" commented that he enjoyed the first edition and looked forward to the future with interest! Well I wonder what he thinks of it so far? So enough bouquets lads, let's get on with problem solving and preparing for 2001. The difficulty in writing this column lays in continuity because so many of you appear to require different help, mainly in matters concerning health. So I am intending to prepare an abbreviated concise dictionary upon the recognition of various pigeon ailments. This is only to be intended as a guideline; veterinary diagnosis should always be sought for individual cases and medical treatment. Having said that; I am aware that non specialist veterinarians can sometimes demonstrate a lack of concern for pigeons and treatments are sometimes incorrect and extremely variable in costs. This concerns me but, there are specialists that advertise within the press and their charges are both reasonable and in parity with each other. So the advice is - when in need of veterinary advice; use one of the specialists!

There is also another concern - this comes under the umbrella of legality. In the United Kingdom we have the licensing of drugs prescribed for pigeon usage only. Without the specific licence the drug is illegal and this could have repercussions under the ruling relating to doping. Even the use of herbs could fall into this category as many herbs contain illegal substances that may enhance performance. Another problem is that many of these antibiotic drugs are freely available over the counter or by mail order ie Terramycin, Aureomycin, Baytril, Gallimycin, Tylan etc. plus numerous others that do not carry the necessary British licence for pigeon use. In effect some of these drugs would be deemed illegal by British law and possibly illegal under pigeon racing regulation. Any drug, passed fancier to fancier, without inspection and prescription by a veterinary officer would also constitute an illegal act where prescription only medicines are concerned. It is for this reason that I refuse to name any P.O.M.cure even though having the reasonable amount of knowledge to do so. I would ask any and every reader to ignore the advice of Tom, **** or Harry however well meaning they may be. Correct diagnosis is difficult enough in laboratory conditions where many ailments display similar features and yet require different or differing levels of medication. Having said that - there are many ailments contracted by pigeons that may be overcome by none medical treatment via antibiotics and this is where I hope the dictionary to be of use. This will come as future articles because as you may imagine it takes time to prepare and write. I shall

expect you to keep these articles for future reference because "Spinsky" only ever tells anybody anything ONCE, nobody will tell you straighter! After which it is entirely up to yourself; I will have done my job, the remainder is up to yourself! Before commencing these articles it is necessary to finalise the year, which ends immediately the last young bird race has been flown. All selection within your old bird loft should have been completed at the end of their season. Had you followed my advice, only the best racers and breeders should now remain and these would be apparent by their performances. The wise amongst you will have kept the fastest yearlings to within 250 miles race points. There is good reason for this because pigeons fly at a pace comfortable to themselves. Headwind or tailwind that pace will remain constant, the additional velocity only being provided by the wind factor. Give these birds additional distance under difficult conditions and their pace will inevitably slow down. This slowing of pace is a natural cause of events with age and that is when to send them further. In the meantime the speed of youth should be maintained. The slower paced birds should have been sent on; their slower maintainable pace would see them through the distance and more difficult races. Some of these will eventually slow down further and that is the time to retire them from active duty or test them from the extreme distance!

Young birds are a completely different matter and far more difficult to assess. Many young bird winners are one hit wonders and prizes won may not be a true guideline to future performance, some may win again, the majority will not. Winning young bird races usually conforms to moulting - peak condition which is variable in individual birds and families of birds (perhaps now one might appreciate the need for moulded family characteristics if any reliable forecast is to be made) Age of young birds dictates moult and peaks or troughs in youngsters, so one loft of three sections containing one family of different age groups can prove devastating in young bird racing specialist hands. The small Novices Social Circle loft could not, nor should not expect to excel but it can win a reasonable percentage in races to which the inmates are suited. Even so, winning, no matter how pleasurable must not be allowed to cloud analytical perspective; each bird must only be judged upon consistent performance and necessity towards future planning.

At this point I will tell you a true story - during 1966 I had the good fortune to come by a pigeon NU.66.D.27226 known by his latter numbers as "Twenty Six" This ugly duckling of a cock, was hump backed, a wriggler, pearl eyed, long legged, swan necked, completely out of balance, too strong to handle for anything but the briefest of time and never got a second look in the showpen. His father was Gilbert Cobham's "Z Cock", his dam was Dr. Riggs Combine winner (cica 1962-3). Twenty six nighted out in his first two young bird races, he then began to arrive 3rd or 4th to the loft. This was until the last two races, when he nighted out again. My pal Dennis black marked him and told me to cull as my loft was so small but, I had belief in the pigeon and its breeder. As a yearling it was exactly the same story and my yardstick was never to breed from any bird that hadn't won 1st prizes (plural). This is still the best yardstick in any small loft; however there are always exceptions to rules as we sometimes realise too late. Dennis once again advised that I cull 26 but, I still had faith and commencing at 2yrs of age he repaid it! 'Twenty Six' took 2nd Hereford, 1st Bath, 2nd Avaranches, 1st Nantes that year. During the following six years, Twenty Six won several prizes annually, in all he won over thirty cards, he won a 1st prize from every racepoint flown by Blackpool Amal. He won to three different addresses for me due to house removal, taking 3 x 1st from Nantes, 2 x 1st Rennes and 2 x 1st Avaranches plus numerous Amal cards. However his story only started there; my loft was a 12ft x 6ft backyard affair, housing 20 old birds and 12 youngsters. Obviously not many were ever bred for myself from Twenty Six. His children went instead to my friend Harry Hughes and others to my other friend John McGillivray. These children gifted to Harry and raced to an even smaller loft than my own practically devastated Blackpool Amal during the short time that Harry lived. One of these was "Hurry Up" with 10 x 1st and father to numerous others. I gifted "Twenty Six" now ten years of age to another friend and he in turn bred 1st Lancashire Combine for one of his workmates to whom he promptly sold "Twenty Six" for £50 (a lot of money in those days) Anyway, that pigeon, that could have been culled as a youngster was responsible for countless winners at club, Amal, Combine & National level and had never been bred from until 3 years old.

The problem was that in those days I owned ten cocks of my own family that were all equally as good. When I broke up that team, I vowed that I would never race pigeons again and believe me I had good reason for making that vow. Once a pigeon fancier, always a pigeon fancier, it didn't take long to break that vow but, I have to admit that racing will never mean as much to me again. However there are plenty of fanciers to benefit from my experience and that in some small measure is adequate compensation. I will take my novices to the peak of Everest, they climb the South Face, whilst I shall attempt the North Face alone. What many of you don't realise is that this is the Spirit of Pigeons Past and this might be the Old Man of the Mountains final ascent. It must be the hardest route possible before he can rest but the mountain will be conquered or my name isn't Lazarus! So to finalise for today - don't judge young birds upon prizes won - judge only upon consistency and background knowledge. With old birds - judge only upon performance, either as racers or producers - if after three seasons they haven't attained their potential, don't cry for me Argentina or my name isn't Evita!

PART THIRTEEN

Welcome back lads and lassies and I hope you all had a good moult over the winter period. Now that spring is rapidly approaching all attentions will be turned towards leaving the interim camp and beginning our assault upon the peak. There are routes that have been previously accomplished with success but all have common factors - dedication of the climber, fortitude of character, the single minded will to succeed and the right equipment to complete the task without undue wear! If you have been following the outline plan of the previous climbs from base camp to our present position on the mountain, several things should have become apparent - (1) there is no such thing as natural racing (2) he who knows most tricks survives the avalanche and takes most prizes (3) a small team of quality climbers can easily beat a mob of Sunday fell walkers (4) you now have belief in both your teams ability and that of yourself! If you have not discovered this by now, then once again - clear off and don't pester me because the only mountain that you are likely to conquer will be a molehill or my name isn't Loubie Lou!

The best amongst you will already by now be mentally tuned for the coming season, you have heard your pigeons talk, you have learned to read the signs of fitness and you now only have the cream of the previous seasons racing or breeding within your loft. Ideally the 1997 team should consist of at least 60% yearlings, 30% two years old and the remaining 10 % being only proven older winners or breeders of winners. Unfortunately the face of Everest is unrelenting in its toll of unsuited candidates - only the young, strong or previously proven may remain to make this climb. Remember Sunshine, I am leading a small team from a 18' x 6', two compartment bivouac so absolutely no room for passengers or part-timers! For the small team youth is given priority over age and varying experience is included to cover eventualities! A small team fancier cannot afford to carry any old age pensioners, so always select from the top downwards without fear nor favour. It is a hard thing to do I know but, it is the only way if one wishes to succeed upon a regular basis. Last season several of you found success with the two section semi widowhood system, others continued naturally but using some of the motivational tricks, others found success for the very first time racing young birds and I congratulate each of you. However; one swallow doth not a summer make - your success has now to be repeated and don't think for one moment that it gets easier from here on in, because it most certainly doesn't!

Tom, **** & Harry have been watching you and now they want some of the action. Being astute fanciers they also are making preparations and have no intentions of letting you beat them this year. I promised to gently ease you over to the Widowhood System and those of you who followed the "Two section **Meat Safe** System" should find the transition easy. This need not necessarily exclude those of you who stuck to natural ways but, you have missed the opportunity of being able to assess the best widowhood candidates. The two section system would have placed them before your very eyes and the transition would have been easy. Widowhood can be simple or it can be extremely

frustrating as any top exponent will tell you - not all pigeons will take to the system. Several strange things occur, pigeons may come rapidly into form and just as rapidly go off form. Some pigeons will be over excitable, over active, fretful or just will not eat sufficient to maintain racing weight. Some may arrive at break neck speed in early races and yet be lost, never to return from less than 200 miles and these could be previously good performers and a loss of strength to the loft. It takes a little time for the new system to suit both birds and fanciers until the system evolves into a suitable regular routine. Once this occurs then widowhood is the easiest and best method known to man and may be used right through the programme until the penultimate or final race.

There are several decisions that the small team fancier has to make (1) the distances at which one wishes to compete (2) the number of young one wishes to breed (3) what to do with the hen pigeons (4) when to exercise (5) when to train (6) how often to race (7) when to adjust the feeding (very important if one wishes to compete from the farthest points) Those of you who were brave enough and intelligent enough to have followed the two section system will have realised the point of it by now. Feeding is important - the heavy feeding allowed you to race birds upon natural, round about and semi widowhood simultaneously within the confines of a small loft housing twenty old pigeons whilst learning their best characteristics. The transition to young bird feeding gave you the base for widowhood, whilst the pairing of young to old and motivational tricks provided the basis of the widowhood system where both cocks and hens may be raced without wasting half of your team! The old man of the mountain isn't quite as senile as some would have you think and yes we are going to conquer Everest by racing all of our birds, both sexes! The only difference in the system this year will be in the treatment of the cock pigeons, some of the cute amongst you will have figured it out for yourselves and done these things without being told. You are my kind of mountaineer and able to survey the horizon at a glance then act accordingly, but others have to be told just when to tick and when to tock, however they too will get there in the end.

All widowhood systems are based around crucial pairing times ie.90 days prior to the first race mid April.This system is not much different in that fact, but, it is geared towards full competition from beginning to end of season.Our 90days is calculated from pairing until competition in races that suit our loft location. There is absolutely no point in trying to win sprint races if ones loft location is not favoured in these; never mind what anybody else tells you; loft position plays a major roll in normal racing weather and may only be altered by the wind. So if you are in a favourable position for sprinting then pair your birds 90 days before the first race, don't read on any further, buy yourself a video and good luck!

Now then lads and lassies we will assume that the main reason for your previous lackof success was because you were attempting to compete in races against the odds and these need to be equalised! We are going to forget about 90 days and pair our birds between the last week in January and mid February, whichever date chosen all birds must be nesting together.The actual timing isn't crucial if one wishes to race the longer distances, it is what we do in between that matters. Each pair may rear a nest of one or two young, if any eggs are clear then allow the birds to rear a surrogate youngster from those pairs with two in the pan. Rearing is necessary, it bonds the birds to the boxes, particularly the yearlings. At 18-20 days of age the nestlings will all be weaned along with their mothers into the other section; the cocks are now on widowhood and will not see the hens again until 2 weeks before racing.We will not be re pairing them and they will be exercised upon the roundabout system - out from one section - in at the other. The hens and young as they grow will exercise in exactly the same manner up until racing and all pigeons young or old will be fed communally whilst being excluded totally from the boxes. The cock pigeons will be fed individually in their boxes with the nesting section closed off and they should line up like soldiers awaiting your attention and displaying domination of personal territory.

The feeding for all birds at this time will consist of depurative after morning exercise; top quality mixture each evening. This could be Bamfords Arrow Mix consisting of popcorn maize, maple, dun, yellow & blue peas, tares, milo, dari, safflower, mung beans, wheat & peanuts, or any similar quality mixture Don't get your fet bogged down into the 'designer name' mixture bull crap - nice looking mixtures are made to catch the fancier - not the pigeon! Don't forget your seed mixture,

tonics, etc. from previous articles, Cytaccon B12 vit Thursday, Croston Bottle Sunday. Winners are raced on every mixture under the sun and just as many are raced upon nothing but beans! So forget the crap that Tom, **** and Hary talk! The cock pigeons should be fed as much as they will eat at every meal and when fed in this manner will exercise freely with zest. The hens and young must be under control half - oz depurative mornings, slightly less than 1oz each evening; enough for young to thrive but maintain your control. Fourteen days before racing commences the cocks must be conditioned mentally into racing to the box. Training begins at this time for ten days, 10, 20, 30 miles in exactly the same manner as described in previous articles for youngsters. Upon arrival home they must find the hen inside their box and quickly learn to trap directly into their boxes. This is all of the training that they should need and are exercised around home for the final four days, seeing their mates upon basket night if required or race arrival only - different motivation keeps them alert and too much sight of hen can make them clap around at home on race day, so play it by ear and observation. Now there are reasons for exercising the hens (1) it keeps them fit and amorous (2) they will also make up the race team. The cocks cannot be kept continually at a high peak week in, week out and benefit from a three weekly rest. This allows the hens to be raced from 100 miles, 160miles and 240miles then prepared for the longer races. Three races is usually sufficient to have hen pigeons fit for big jumps into the distance and may be kept in short training along with the young birds. It also helps to prevent them from pairing with each other, all attention must be centred upon the cock bird and the nestbox.

This is where the boxes used in the two section system come in useful - once the hens show any sign of pairing with each other or young, then they can be confined and watered in their boxes after daily exercise. The young can occupy the additional perches in that section (remember these from last year?) Now I will deal with exercise because I know that you all panic over this - the cocks are given their freedom for one hour at each session with all doors, windows, traps etc closed. Once these are opened the cocks will dive out of the sky to get inside and this becomes their conditioned signal to trap immediately. It is simplicity itself - doors closed for exercise - open signal to trap! Early season the cock birds will fly for the hour with relish, as it progresses this becomes half of an hour, don't worry, keep the doors closed and they will continue to strike up at every passing sparrow or shadow, it will not affect their fitness in anyway as they gradually tighten up with racing activity. Saturday and Sunday post racing feed depurative only as much as they will eat and then as normal until Friday morning. As the distance increases cut out Sunday morning exercise the rest does them good and don't forget to allow them a bath after race return. Many fanciers remove the hen after a couple of minutes post racing, personally I have never found this to be crucial and often leave them longer. Find what best suits you and your individual birds, a communal bath often perks up both sexes! The hens are slightly different, their feeding must be controlled during the shorter races. Hen pigeons soon put on far too much weight and although feeding shouldn't be skimped it can be a problem. This is why I recommend that the hen birds be kept in regular training along with the youngsters because they tend to be keener than cocks in getting to their boxes and do not strike up so often so may require some flag training. However the young birds will encourage them to fly for a certain amount of time. Rather than have the hens bring the youngsters down it is better to let them trap once any inclination to fly has ceased. This is one problem that large loft fanciers do not have to face, but with a little sense the small team owner can overcome it and there are definite benefits from racing hens as well as cocks. On this system they do equally as well and very often better than their male counterpart, particularly from the longer races when they are re-paired for the second time. Now most widowhood systems advise that the pigeons should be re-paired and trained two weeks prior to racing. This is to induce the moult and racing form. By not re-pairing the moult and form comes slightly later (make no mistake, nature dictates that the birds will cast flights, re-paired or not) this later arrival of form is advantageous to those who wish to fly the longer races. The second pairing late season increases motivation in both sexes that have benefited from the relief of any stress and will be in the same or better feather and condition than March paired natural system birds. By racing both sexes it gives a team of twenty pigeons and halves the cost of the equivalent

all male widowhood team. All birds will be suitable candidates for the entire programme; by working the cocks 3 weeks on with 1 week rest rota they don't go stale. The hen pigeons have three weeks off and one week on rota, remaining super fit and will safely do all of the distance required. It sounds simple - it is simple, some fanciers over complicate matters or my name isn't Andy Pandy! Good racing in 2001, let's see a few small team fanciers up amongst the winners. One final word - don't be treating for this or the other your birds will rarely need it!

PART FOURTEEN

Well that's it for a few months lads; racing is out of the way and preparation should be started for 1997 OB's breeding and racing. All selection of future candidates should have been done immediately after the racing seasons end prior to completion of moulting. I will repeat my previous advice because I am certain that very few of you will have had the courage to enforce strict selection and will have found one hundred excuses for keeping that extra bird. If a pigeon could not beat its loftmates' at least once in the season or manage to be within the first loft arrivals upon a consistent basis; then, it is unlikely to ever beat fellow competitors! The greatest mistake that most fanciers make is to assume that they are one cock - one hen short or that they must have every nestbox occupied! The next great mistake is in believing that he or she must then proceed to breed from every pair just in case that elusive champion gene is lurking within the least fancied birds! Although this is possible; it would be easier to win the lottery as like begets like in 99.9% of cases. In the case of expensive stock birds; they must be judged upon progeny produced and if after an absolute maximum of three seasons breeding with different mates they have not produced an above average percentage of loft leading or winning progeny (not an occasional but multiple best) then these breeders are valueless! The

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you must be replaced by the best producers from your racing team or other proven breeders and these should be apparent from your meticulous records.

The moult plays tricks with fanciers; it is a little like toothache in children. Once the offending tooth is replaced with a new shiny molar; the pain is soon forgotten and that is exactly the way with pigeons. When moulted every ugly duckling appears to be a swan and all misdemeanours are soon forgotten! The aspiring racer of pigeons should never be looking for an excuse to keep additional stock, he or she should always be looking for a reason to reduce the number to absolute quality only. Pre - moulting is the first point of selection, post - moulting it should be ongoing until only the best remain within the team. These will be the recorded best producers, two year olds and above that have taken more than one prize each season since being Y.B's; yearlings that have scored or shown potential through consistent ability and likewise with young birds (consistent performers) even better if they were consistent winners. So basically there you have it - always look for a reason to reduce numbers not an excuse to increase them! I do not mean that you must ruthlessly cull; under different management some of these might do better but, they are useless to

your own purposes. Give your clubmates their pick, offer them free to novices as feeders for raising surrogate young; anything at all; but, get them out of your team! Should they do well for the recipient, don't feel foolish, feel proud to have done a little good. Pigeons must suit the man and his management and we each get the best from different lines of breeding, the fancier must find the line that suits his methods until an affinity between man and bird develops. This is the reason why no top fancier can guarantee results to every purchaser of stock. It's the old cliché - one may buy the pigeons but one doesn't buy the man to go with them! Eventually by following my outline each of you will have the responsive family of your own and you will be the man; you won't need nor envy anybody and this is blue chip guaranteed or my name isn't Methuselah!

MOULTING.

Sufficient has been written about this natural course of events in numerous pigeon treatise and yet many fanciers still make basic mistakes. Once pigeons reach the climax of feather replenishment they should be rested; it isn't necessary for them to be flown at exercise each day. As the final two primaries are being cast the bird is less inclined to fly due to being out of balance, these two flights are critical. Force them to fly at this stage and you risk injury or loss! It is sufficient for the pigeons to have freedom upon fine days only with frequent baths' (within the confines of the loft if necessary). Why go to tremendous trouble making certain that your pigeons have wonderful feather and then expose this feather to inclement elements? The feather is required for racing, not for entertaining your friends and neighbours with aerial acrobatics during winter! If I had a penny for every pigeon that I have seen or handled during the racing season that possessed winter worn plumage for a handicap; then I would be a very wealthy man! Feeding should be liberal and of the highest quality, the birds should still be receiving the seed mixture of hemp, safflower and linseed. Vitamin B12 (Cytaccon) Thursdays, the Croston Tonic (see previous articles) Sundays; Vit C on Wednesdays plus a little of the oatmeal boost (described in first few editions) daily. If you didn't read those early editions then "Tough Luck" because I didn't write them for the benefit of my health, I wrote them for the inquisitive mind and dedicated Everest mountaineer. Don't call me; I'll call you! Pour two pints of boiled water onto one pound of maple peas and leave overnight to sprout green shoots; these will provide additional Vit C and may be fed moderately with the normal feed. Purchase 1oz of flowers of sulphur from your local chemist; this is then added to 1pkt (standard size) of pink minerals and left before the birds in normal fashion. This aids both feather production and digestion (make sure that it is clean & dry at all times). Do not feed heavily one day and sparingly the next, keep it constant with as much as the birds will clear without excess selectivity of grains. Underfeeding may cause frets upon sudden cold nights, if allowed to gorge afterwards, the birds may vomit and so go hungry and be stressed. So keep it regular, keep it nutritionally sound and sufficient, above all keep it clean (a true pigeon fancier doesn't slip backwards just because the weather isn't to his suiting and yet so many do)

Now the next bit is of extreme importance - the pigeons have moulted through, they are resting and at the least stressful period of the year Get them vaccinated now! Never mind what Tom, **** or Harry say do as you are told! Any kind of medication creates imbalance and stress, the secret is to administer immunisation when natural stress is at its lowest. This allows the bird to cope completely. P.M.V. Vaccination works upon an efficiency curve - the Titre builds to maximum at around four months, remaining almost level until seven months then diminishes gradually until the tenth month. This allows the pigeons maximum immunity throughout the old bird racing season, continuing but decreasing whilst the young bird season is in progress. During the critical moulting period the birds are almost vaccine free and only in peculiar circumstances (introduction of unvaccinated stock etc) should they be ever be vaccinated whilst moulting. Do not introduce stress at stressful times! It is a mistake to wait until breeding or racing is about to commence, so even if your young birds were vaccinated March, do it again at the end of November - December once moulting is completely finished. Of course stock birds intended for early breeding should have at least one resting month before pairing. I am not about to enter into dialogue about this with either fanciers or vaccine companies; take it as read; the time to vaccinate is when the pigeons are least stressed and able to recover from trauma. Any vaccine whether human or animal can have side

effects in susceptible individuals should that individual be at a low ebb at the time of administration. You know this makes sense so do as you are told, Spinksy has spoken! Right lads, that just about deals with the moult, which although feather is produced from much the same elements as human hair any similarity ends there. The production of hair is not stressful, but, the production of good feather during the moulting climax is! Just as incorrect diet or illness, medication etc may show evidence in human hair, so will it in pigeon feathering but, a bald head will not handicap an athlete, neither will a hairless chest; pigeons are a different matter and any interference will manifest in its feathering. Don't neglect or abuse the most important part of this ariel athletes physiology, poor feathered pigeons won't win races, there will be plenty of opportunity to exercise them to breeding and racing fitness come the turn of the year. Shortly I hope to prepare the Novices Dictionary of Disease Recognition and this will appear as a separate entity. The next articles are intended to deal with breeding a family of your own and also the transition from natural to widowhood without tears. However some of you have done so well upon the system already outlined it might be against your best interest to make any radical changes. As you have already discovered, widowhood is not unbeatable but, it is the fastest and simplest system for managing twelve cocks in consecutive weekly competition where seconds count! I will now leave you with a true story - old age and poverty, plus the constant writing of articles was blamed for my deteriorating eyesight. Nag, nag, nag, go and get your eyes tested said 'er in doors. So off I went to the optician - twenty quid for the eye test and eighty quid for the spec's he quoted! I was dumbfounded and stood in total shock! "Well I'm a busy man, said the optician, are you having these glasses or not?" "Nah! I retorted, I've decided to give up sex, then at least I'm sure that I won't be broke or blind!" Spinksy

PART FIFTEEN

So we've come back for more have we lads' and lassies? I can see from the puzzled looks upon your faces that you have been burning the midnight oil and exercising the old grey matter! Climbing this 'ere mountain is a bit of a magical mystery tour. Well so it should be, because if you need leading by a ring in the nose without ever being made to think for yourselves, there is little chance of survival in this arduous climate of pigeon racing. So now I am going to cast a little further light upon the dark mysteries that have pervaded your sleeping hours and wracked your brains, by pre-empting your undoubted questions. (1) Why exercise the pigeons upon the roundabout. (2) Which section exercises first. (3) How can we train the hens without interfering with the widowhood cocks. (4) Why not just exercise each sex then trap them to their own section. (5) Do we feed the birds in the same manner for all distances? Firstly the most difficult thing to do is provide a system to suit all 18' x 6' lofts as not all will be of the same design but had you followed the outline plan from the very first Novices Social circle your loft should have been set up for this. The trapping system in my own loft consists of a large Sputnik that covers the partition of both sections. The rear of this is closed off with a solid hinged board to each section, this allows me to open or close off the entry - exit as required. The loft itself also has an internal partition door through which the pigeon may be ushered. I have a very good reason for exercising upon roundabout ie "The Meatsafe System" of additional motivation or have you forgotten this so soon? From previous articles it should still be apparent that the hen pigeons and young are only exercised once per day - or have you also forgotten that? Flown at exercise in the evening and then taken immediately for short training (believe me I'm telling you all too much). Morning exercise is for cock birds only and they are released through the half door to the Sputnik and trapped in at the same. Evening exercise the hens and young have first release through their half exit which is then closed off and the cocks are ushered through awaiting their release. Why go to all of this trouble one might ask? Simply because the main motivation for the hens is to return to the cock bird and the first nestbonded section. This is where they are fed with trapping seed and tit-bits ie a few peanuts. Cock pigeons race to territory first and foremost; hen pigeons race to the cock bird and potential nesting opportunity. The hens need constant reminders that this is their foremost home and objective; without this reminder hen pigeons will through their fickle nature accept another mate and conveniently and quickly pair to another of whatever sex!

The cock birds soon become used to the idea that once ushered into this other section, release for exercise is pending and they will rush into that area of the loft, which we can call the holding bay. The young birds which are exercised with the hen pigeons are also trapped to the main racing section along with their mothers. This is education for the future, because one day that section will be their home - theyoung hens with the cocks during young bird racing and the youngcocks later at the yearling stage. The split trap is ideal for this purpose (now think about it) The reason for ushering the cocks into the holding bay for evening release is purely so that the hens can be given sight of their bonded nesting place and increase motivation. Once that the hens have finished their exercise they can be basketed ready for a training spin with the youngsters also, once that they are old enough. This pre training exercise prevents any messing about at the training point and the birds come swiftly home. Once the hens are safely out of sight, then the cocks are released for exercise, trapping to the main section and fed in their boxes. The hen pigeons can then be taken for a short ten mile spin and trapped to the holding bay through the open half -door entry. It is simplicity itself and should not create any problems for the fancier in operation. With this trapping method the possibilities are endless - the old bird racers can be re-paired for the longer races and both age groups flown out separately. For young bird racing the birds can be paired old to young if so desired and a single trap does not create confusion on race arrival - many times when seconds count races are lost as pigeons flit from trap to trap. The boxes in the holding bay provide nesting areas for young birds - segregation areas for flirtatious hens - "The Meat Safe" for motivating cocks! The meatsafe is simply operated : Thursday evening after exercise the cock pigeons are only allowed entry to the holding bay (this can be extended up to three days) Friday morning they may be exercised or given a short training spin; returning to their hen or empty box and nest bowl; lightly fed and immediately removed once again to the meat safe where they are locked up and watered. These cocks that are deprived of their personal territory will break their necks to get home and so to will the hens that are treated in this way prior to their races from 100-160-200 miles. This isn't fiction it is fact provided that all other details are attended to ie the right quality of stock, excellent husbandry etc. it will not make champions from mediocre beginnings but, it will certainly improve normal standard performance. Now that should be sufficient to think about upon the subject of exercise because one thing for certain is that I am not going to come and do it for you and as Captain Mather often told me "Stevie you tell them too much, they won't learn if you do all of the work for them!"

FEEDING -

Now then lads and lassies I said it was important but, only to a certain degree; some of the best seasons that I ever had even on widowhood was when I couldn't afford anything other than beans and trapping seed. The important thing is that you the new starter sticks to the same mixture or whatever and don't make sudden changes. Any changes must be gradual - the standard widowhood mixtures on offer are all composed of good sound grains; the brand names and slight variations are nothing more than ads! If fanciers did not consistently attempt to demand excessive varieties in mixtures then cost of feed would drop overnight, stockist's would not need to carry so many different brands for such massive capital outlay! The various feeding methods that I have outlined are sufficient for most racing purposes - they are not the only methods; most fanciers have their own; but they stick to what they do without chop or change! The mixture that I outlined for widowhood you should have noticed contained Popcorn Maize. This grain is high in energy and yet it is the same grain as any other maize only the harvesting time is different. Popcorn is reaped during mid growth before ripening : at this point it contains more moisture in the form of sugar (or sucrose) and when cooked this expands rapidly; hence the "Pop". In fully ripened grains these sugars (sucrose) have turned to floury starches and carbohydrate - protein. The use of popcorn negates any use of glucose, there is sufficient content within the feed. One of the greatest problems that new exponents of widowhood encounter is pigeons in their pigeons eating insufficient to maintain form. The major cause of this is excess glucose that has changed metabolically to glycogen stored in the muscles and liver. Once these organs are saturated then appetite diminishes; the pigeon eats to its needs but, the pigeon isn't aware that it might be required to fly in a long race or hard

conditions .If pigeons are to fly in races or difficult conditions they must be fed accordingly and this requires adequate proteins.

Protein feeds take longer to fully digest (up to 48hours) by that I mean that food value remains as back up for that period of time; long after the grain itself has passed through the system. It does not mean that it takes 48 hours for a bean to go in at one end and come out of the other - it means exactly what I said, the food value remains for that long! So obviously as race distances increase so proportionately must proteins and the easiest way to achieve this is by adding an extra handful of maple peas to the mixture each week gradually increasing the protein content. The fats and energy fuels are still provided via the mixture grains, seed mixture and peanuts. These increases will not harm the young pigeons that are growing, exercising and training and can be down adjusted as young bird racing gets under way. It is a case of simple observation and common sense or my name isn't Lord Lucan! The only vitamin additives required are those outlined in previous articles plus clear honey in the drinking fountain upon race return, and only a little Brewers Yeast on the depurative one day per week (fit it in to suit your routine) Remember this about vitamins - excess is equally as detrimental as insufficient but, the majority of pigeons will receive adequate from their normal feed!

Recently a top world renowned nutritional scientist stated upon national television that mothers should resist all temptation in giving their children vitamin supplements - excesses cause more problems than they cure; urinary problems, calcification of organs, eye sight problems plus many others - he stated that all requirements are to found in a staple diet of fresh food and vegetables; only people displaying metabolic deficiency require supplementation ie illness or debilitation .I have been telling you that for years! Right lads and lassies, you should have enough to be going on with there, my next part to play is in teaching you how to become the "Seil Meister" or master rope maker. In other words how to create that prepotent family from your inevitable winners and keep you at the head of the game. It's no use getting there if one cannot stay there and Tom, **** or Harry will do everything in their power to knock you off the mountain .Let's go for it and fear no opposition no matter how large their teams may be! I certainly don't but, I'll never lose sight of the fact that pigeon racing is only a hobby and most enjoyable! Let me know when you win and the B.H.W.will be only too pleased to publicise the fact. Also the Novices Dictionary of Disease Recognition has been published on this web site -- make sure you read it upon a regular basis.
Spinksy

PART SEVENTEEN

Right lads and lassies, you want to know how to become the "Seil Meister", the person to whom all mountaineers entrust their lives . Without the right quality rope one can quickly fall to ones doom on the mountain but, if one can produce ones own high quality rope to equal that of the "Meister" then so much the better! You will be asking yourselves - "Why are you waiting until now to tell us when, we have already paired our birds for 2000?" The answer is simple - firstly you must obtain the correct basic materials - the hemp & sisal of 1950 was all very well but, today we are looking for carbon fibre and polyester offering strength and flexibility plus less burdening weight. Or in plain English - the laboratory tested and proven better pigeons that have earned their perch with an honours degree! Some of you after a modicum of success will already think that you have swallowed the book and need no further instruction from anybody - indeed you have become the analogous Mary Baker Cake Mix; or in other words - just add water instant experts!

Now I am sorry if my remarks hurt your feelings but, remember you chose to come on this journey with me; so I set the ground rules and you promised to follow! I have no intentions of climbing Everest with a fool upon my back! The success that you have so far obtained is laudable but, it isn't totally down to yourself and believing that it is - is the greatest fatal mistake that any new mountaineer can make because he has forgotten that his life depended upon the "Seil Meister" (master rope maker). Your successful pigeons were bred or parents supplied by somebody else and

it is to them whom you owe your life! One day those original ropes will wear or be lost and abandoned upon the mountain and unless you can produce your own of equal or better quality then you will fall quicker than you rose. That is of course unless you are wealthy enough to keep going back to the "Seil Meister" and have no further ambition than that!

At this point if you are all sitting comfortably I shall tell you a mountaineers camp fire story - a true story with a very potent moral! Once upon a time there lived a pigeon fancier, he wasn't any old pigeon fancier, he was also a thinker and philosopher. Added to this he had been something of an athlete in his time, not world ranking due to one fateful injury but nonetheless amongst the best of his era in his chosen dangerous sport. He was born to win although foolhardy and must have had a death wish judging by his increasingly risky actions and lack of concern for his trainers fears and warnings. His demise was inevitable but it taught him a lesson never to be forgotten - his previous success was not solely attributable to himself alone. When he raced his pigeons he bore this in mind and became a coach himself. For twenty long years he built a dynasty of top performing pigeons, based upon common ancestry, carrying pre potent genes - until one day he had to disperse the team. These were given to a new starter with certain instructions of how to manage and how to maintain the winning bloodlines. The new starter immediately began to win; every winner bred by the old fancier (not so old - he was only 30 plus years) or bred from the stock supplied and paired under instruction. This team began to win in increasing leaps and bounds until they eventually; within four seasons they became the top team of the area. The more they won then the less attention was paid to his mentor and all advice ignored.

Our new starter had swallowed the book; became a Mary Baker Instant Expert and his mentor washed his hands of him. The original pigeons grew older, continual racing led to eventual losses and new stock was introduced to pollute the bloodlines. Our new starter fell to his death upon the mountain and there was nothing that his mentor could do to save him, because our novice knew it all. It is good to win, it's a wonderful feeling but never lose sight of the fact that so much early success is because of someone else - the rope maker who kept you **safe**! Not until you yourself can equal his skill and knowledge can you truly be proud! Now if none of that has sunk in; then clear off this instant, because I am going through an elimination process far more severe than any might imagine. If it has sunk in then read on because you could have the "Right Stuff" to become a champion and you won't be held back by false ego or hollow pride - you will be an honest fancier and give credit wherever it may be due.

So to explain why I have waited until now, before commencing to help you to build that pre potent team of pigeons and give you strength in depth throughout your loft. In a nutshell; it is forward planning - to build a team of pigeons is not an overnight task. The minimum time in which a reasonable team may be built is three seasons, in the majority of cases it could be five years, nothing regarding pigeons is instantaneous or my name isn't Clark Kent. When learning your pigeons best characteristics, sorting the wheat from the chaff and moulding a team that is responsive to your methods. Pigeons in new lofts, locations, environments and different fanciers management take time to settle to these intangibles. Winning bloodlines do not simply leave one loft to immediately win all before them to another, unless of course a tremendous amount of luck is involved; they have to be road tested and reproduced or suffer the fate of the fancier above. Now I am not going to tell you how to breed a team that will win the National, living in the North of England it would take an act of God to do that. I am going to tell you how to build strength in depth within your team until each pigeon is the equal of its peer and maintain a successful line to compete at your chosen level within your club or Federation; unless of course one moves to Southampton and then the task becomes easy! (don't edit that statement) Okay then lads and lassies, from a start during 1999 we should be looking towards 2002 earliest; the hemp & sisal (old unsuccessful stock) should have been replaced by now with the carbon fibre & polyester (proven newer and younger stock) there is no room for rubbish or dead weight. From the two seasons '99-2000' one or two pigeons within your lofts should be standing out head and shoulders above the remainder. Ideally we are looking for three pairs and these must be either the best performers racing or the most consistent breeders of quality young. The remainder are only make-weights and

no significance whatever, it is far better to use them as feeders only.

Should these pairs also be the mainstay of your team in the races - forget the racing and have a little fun with the remainder amongst which there may be some pleasant surprises. For season 2000 this is a definite pre requisite course of action and a fallow year will reap bountiful crops in the immediate future. The best pigeons are the only pigeons to breed from regardless of relationship and it is from these that a family must be founded. These pigeons have proved that they are suited to your location and methods of management and by careful practice they will supply more of their kind and family improvement -- 2001 will be your third season i.e. young birds '99(1) old birds & young birds '2000 (2) 2001 (3) and any pigeon that has not proved itself by its third season must be eliminated from the team, it is never going to get any better! Keep it as a pet, give it away, don't chase rainbows in corners of your loft. The three pairs are the only pigeons upon which to concentrate; not their brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, in laws or outlaws unless of course they already have multiple prizes, in which case your family is already made and only requires maintaining.

In all breeding of livestock there are certain anomalies or intangibles and if you also read my Blackpool Notes this should be quite apparent. Taking for instance "Champion 147" the Moss Hen which although a supreme racer never bred her like and neither did her parents ever again. However that is a rare one off fluke, the majority of performance pigeons do reproduce their like within certain parameters - some almost as good, some equal and sometimes better as is the case with Mick Barlow's "Morston Magic" & "1065 Morston Crack"; Bert Hession' "Toy boy" and numerous other top performers within his loft; or based upon a "Matriarch" hen such as the late Johnny Brooker's "Dark 14". The common factor amongst each of those is the word FAMILY in capital letters and family means strength in depth where every pigeon is the equal or almost equal of its loft mate. When this situation arises pigeons arrive from races in kits not single file and this quality has mainly been attained in a similar fashion. It isn't new, it isn't secret, it is standard good practice in true champion fanciers hands as opposed to those who regularly purchase success. In my book a fancier is judged by his family of pre potent winners and not by a multitude of unrelated winning birds that may never reproduce their like with any consistency. Believe me there are more of that ilk than of the former! Family is the key word in the equation and it is that; which one must seek to produce for strength in depth!

Pedigree is important but, pigeons should make their own pedigree based upon performance and not upon paper showing fancy names. A pigeons pedigree is its family tree and this should show winners in abundance upon either side. With study it should also demonstrate the most influential pigeons whether they be cocks or hens. Before I go any further into breeding detail I will offer a little advice that may cost you nothing - Spend a day at Louella Pigeon World; study the pedigrees of the top pigeons on show, see how the stock has been produced and note it in your minds eye. There is more to be learned at Louella than within one thousand books; love them or hate them, they are masters at their craft and produce champion blood stock as well as champion livestock. This is attained by selective breeding to proven lines within a proven plan which may be adopted within any closed gene pool owned and raced by the smallest of fanciers. As a word of caution, no matter how impressive the pedigree, it is the pigeon that matters first and foremost not the piece of paper. The paper is only a guide; though it can be a very reliable guide when planning future matings after thorough road testing of the progeny. Now I haven't strayed from the path, this not intended as an advert for anyone and I retain copyright. It is a practical example to aid new starters in their quest for success whilst giving credit where it is due, because that is my way or my name isn't Superman!

So how do we go about replicating these winning genes within a small loft? It is quite simple, in fact it is really simple, providing that one does not fall into the fashion trap! Be happy with what one has, then build upon them by constant progeny testing. Any good fancier worth his salt can reproduce winners from a three pair base until the year 2008, a better fancier may extend this till 2018 and a Seil Meister 2038. It is done by line breeding and judicious crossing of bloodlines. A three pair base can create three family lines within the gene pool; sufficiently distant and yet

suitably related to inter breed. Line breeding or inbreeding in themselves cannot produce better than the original due to the closing of the gene pool. Better is produced by severe selection after progeny testing which must be ongoing each season and only the best go forward each year. Occasionally and that means very occasionally, further improvement may be attained by a judicious cross via another winning family (key word Family). My own team of years gone by were line bred for twenty years, but, each year I brought in two hens from outside. These were bred from and all young were thoroughly tested, then either kept or rejected along with their mothers (the hen is the mother of the egg & father could be anything) Here the key word is Control - control over bloodlines.

Harsh, but imperative to future improvement and in those days I only ever introduced a pigeon for a specific reason, not because somebody offered me one, nor because I felt a need to follow fashion, it was because my sole objective was improvement. If I went to buy a pigeon, then I bought the one that I wanted, not a substitute; if the pigeon that I wanted was not for sale, then I would leave empty handed; which more often than not was the case. That is further advice to you! So we come to our three pairs of top performing pigeons - these must be numbered Cocks 1-2-3 and Hens 1-2-3 respectively in order of merit. From these we breed three rounds of youngsters - Cock 1 & Hen 1 (2) Cock 2 & Hen 2 (2) Cock 3 & Hen 3 (2) Two rounds from each pair - split for 1 week, then pair Cock 1 & Hen 2 (1) Cock 2 & Hen 1 (2) Cock 3 & Hen 3 (these are then used as feeders if required. This provides sixteen youngsters should all hatch and thrive from the main pigeons in the loft, more if the remaining team are used to rear the first round of eggs before racing. Now there are two or three problems that arise (1) having sufficient young birds of racing age - obviously the first two rounds must be produced from an early mating in January. (2) The limited space in a 18' x 6' loft - sixteen to twenty young birds taken from the superior pigeons should be adequate and only the progeny tested survivors are required at seasons end. (3) The system of management will not lend itself to pure widowhood - obviously not but, it will lend itself to modified semi-widowhood and this fallow racing year is for a definite goal and purpose i.e. the upgrading of ones team! In subsequent years it is a simple matter of pairing the best yearling daughters from cocks 1-2-3 to their counterparts i.e. Cock (1) to best daughter of Cock (2) --- Cock (2) to best daughter of Cock (1) --- best son of Hen (2) to Hen (1) --- best son of Hen (2) to Hen (1) and next best to Cock and Hen (3) then so on through the loft best to best of yearlings, extending the breeding schedule of a single round only from the six main pairs.

This then allows a return to widowhood for that racing season and further strict progeny tested selection. It may be apparent that one original cock produces above average young with more than one mate and the same may apply with one of the original hens. In this case they may be re paired to each other; they could be a golden pair and keep you at the top for years to come. There is good reason for mating the older pigeons to yearlings in each subsequent year (unless of course a "Golden" pair has manifested) That is for a couple of reasons - (1) Y-O-U-T-H spells VIGOUR (2) It allows the fancier the opportunity to discover the breeding potential of the younger stock without breeding from every pair - you have the known factor X the potential factor - which in turn can become the proven factor! At the same time the fancier is setting up three distinct lines to which he may use for consanguineous matings within each line and also distant relationship for the purpose of inter-line crossing for hybrid vigour. There are also other factors i.e. no two offspring from any mating are exactly 100% identical in genetic material, not even twins! Offspring in changed seasons often carry seasonal changes - fact not fiction - in a wild state certain genetic patterns arise to combat changes in seasonal weather or environment. These may only be subtle changes i.e. size, coloration, speed of development or mental alertness. So subtle in some cases as to be barely noticed or unnoticeable but those genetic changes exist nonetheless! Which are on the wing quickest - early bred young; spring bred young or late bred young? Which develop at greatest speed? Why do these things happen more rapidly in one season or year compared to another? You think about it! Why were brothers born during 1938-44 smaller than their siblings born during periods 1928-34 or 1947-60? Rationing and living conditions had produced an imitative controlled seasonal change and environment - the genes responded accordingly! I rest my case.

Of course there are cases to disprove the rule but; statistically they prove a status quo. Now the next fallacy for you the new starter to clear from your brain is the statement- "Top Belgian fanciers do not inbreed or line breed but are confirmed out crossers." This is absolute nonsense - the majority of top Belgian fanciers practice all methods of breeding based upon pre-potent lines of winning genes; the most successful lines all have a common consanguineous base i.e. Janssens, Jan Aarden, Stichelbaut etc.; they are not the product of injudicious crossing. There will be occasions when a fancier purports to be a confirmed out- crosser; in fact he is a line breeder using only distant relationship within his programme. The methods used are very similar to those outlined above and all progeny fully tested before being retained! So my dear novice, if you have got this far but, forgotten already that which I said earlier - "Every year I brought in two hens etc." then my writing is over your head and you have just fallen off the mountain - don't call me; I'll call you; - but, if this little parable from the mount has sunk in then together we will conquer Everest, plant our flag and stand proud above the Sunday Fell Walkers or my name isn't Tensing!

The Novices SocialCircle

Originally I promised you all 16 weekly articles - I have now spun them out to 17 and there are more to come. If some of the dates jump it is because they were written over a three years period and actually ran to over 52 articles published every 3 weeks in the BHW. Included in the series was the Dictionary of Disease and also Losses, Possibilities and Probabilities. I am finding more in my database each week amongst many thousands of articles - hopefully these will also be reproduced on the net. During the period of time when these articles were first published I received literally hundreds of telephone calls from fanciers who had gained major success. More surprisingly - some of these fanciers were already established top names. Numerous novices went to the top and the British Homing World still receive requests for photocopies from the paper. Those ran into many hundreds. Spinsky gives it all away for 'Free' and doesn't try to sell you his video, a loft, a book of debatable worth, nor any of the other crap that is purveyed before you in the hope of finding a mug a minute and then retiring to the sun! Spinsky gave all of his pigeons, which were worth many thousands of pounds to charity and you won't find young birds for sale on this site priced at £150 because when Spinsky has them in sufficient numbers - he gives them away and they are far better pigeons than any novice could hope to own! Spinsky is mad. Spinsky has often been used and abused; but do you know what lads and lasses? --- Spinsky couldn't give a ****! Now you go out and follow Spinsky's teaching because, if you do, then you will really kick some ****! Nobody has ever told you straighter and nobody else ever will - that is guaranteed!

I HOPE THIS HAS HELP LIKE THE WAY SPINKY WANTED IT TOOGOOD LUCK AJ