About The Bird

I always have to chuckle when people look at my big, hulking Indian fantails and ask whether or not they are homers. It's not that their question is completely inane. It's just that so many people believe every pigeon is blessed with the remarkable talent, stamina and intelligence to find home. Actually the racing homer is a breed unto itself, a hybrid created over the years through careful crossing. Authorities generally concur that the racing homer is really a conglomerate of several bloodlines including those of the carrier, the dragoon, the smerle, the cumulet and the horseman.

Racing homers are not particularly beautiful if you have your heart set on ornate feathering or spectacular color. Fact is, a blue barred park pigeon bears great similarity to its racing brother. The feral may be somewhat smaller, may have less pronounced beak, eye cere, and wattle. But it wouldn't be a grievous blunder to confuse the two creatures based upon appearance. I've even known ferals to show a definite ability to return to a loft. It's an interesting correlation. Of course the thing that really sets racing homers apart from other pigeon varieties is what many people call an "internal mechanism" which enables the birds to return over and over again to the security of their loft environment, even if it should be located aboard a ship at sea. Pretty miraculous I must admit. And I must at the same time admit that this marvel still remains one of nature's mysteries.

Long before our modern-day racing homer was developed the world was using swift flying pigeons as feathered messengers. Even Hannibal was purported to have had a few in his company when his elephant army crossed the Alps. Of course it was wartime use which made a name for the bird. The pages of history are filled with references to pigeon heroes who were able, despite overwhelming odds, to deliver important military messages, often flying at speeds averaging 45 miles an hour and more.
Then in the late 1800s sportsmen in both Europe and the United States began to discover a wide realm of additional uses for this wartime hero. Pigeon competitions ranged from shooting to showing. But racing emerged as probably the most unique diversion of them all. Wendell Levi mentions a real spurt of interest in racing here in the states in 1878 when $100.00 was offered to the owner of the first pigeon to return from a station located 500 miles away. This was how it all began, a few competitors, a small purse. But things were destined to change. Those early contenders had little way of knowing that today pigeon racing would be heralded the world's third largest hobby.

Training a racing pigeon is time consuming and tough. It absolutely must begin at a tender age if the potential candidates are ever going to perform well in competition. Success or failure depends upon more than the bird's mind. It depends a great deal on the mind of the keeper. Homers are not taken hundreds of miles from home and dumped. They, like any athlete in training, are first given the smallest of challenges. A strong strain in optimum health is part of the requisite. A patient, methodical trainer is the rest of the formula.

Youngsters may start out with a short jaunt. (At first they may be released a mile or two from home.) This gradually becomes a greater distance until the bird has finally reached the stage for which it was best suited. Not every bird will become a long distance flyer. Some will never enter a race of more than 100 miles. Others will meet and beat the challenge of a 700 mile journey. What will be the force, the driving motivation behind their consistent homecoming? The answer is an almost unexpressible need to be with their mate, to rest in the man-made edifice they know as home, and, of course, to satiate their need for nourishment.

From that $100 race in 1878 to our current day, pigeon racing has snowballed. In 1910 the American Racing Pigeon Union was established for all racing enthusiasts. Beyond it sprang forth a myriad of local clubs whose purpose became promotion of the sport and education of the fancier to the intricacies of the hobby.

For those of us who for some reason or another have never owned flying pigeons, there is a tremendous curiosity left unsatisfied. We must live vicariously through those who know firsthand the thrills and challenges of their passion. It simply can't be pulled from the pages of a textbook nor discovered through casual conversation. Flyers may well be disciples in something they equate closely to a religious experience. And that, to any true bird lover, is not difficult to comprehend. For the sight of birds at flight can summon forth the latent poet in all of us. Perhaps it is because we can very nearly sense the flock's joy in their freedom. Perhaps too this is one of the worthiest reasons for people to choose racing homers.

**About the Man**

The beautiful birds you see with this article belong to Darrel Rutter, a man in his thirties who views life as a crapshoot, and himself as a man whom Lady Luck has smiled upon. The reason? Pigeons.

Says Darrel, ‘After chasing the American Dream far too long, and trying to keep up with the Joneses; I’ve simplified my life. I’m more aware of my mortality since Vietnam. That experience made me reappraise. Now I look for significance. I’ve found it in the loft. The birds have improved the quality of my life.’

Darrel is the first to tell you that pigeon racing is not a spectator sport. "It requires a 45 R.P.M. effort. If you think it’s easy, try a slower song because you’ll be disappointed.”

Darrel, who was a football hero at Penn State, strikes you as a man with confidence. In his writing, of which he is prolific, and in his racing, which now has inherited much of the man’s time, there is a spirit of dedication, determination, and, yes, even cockiness. It is a blending of these traits that has earned him the respect of his colleagues in the hobby.

And in the hobby, what are pigeon flyers really all about? Darrel claims God
After exercising, Rutter feeds them by hand. Notice many of the beautiful hybrids.

Birds returning from training flight.

endowed flyers with a sixth sense, with the slyness of a fox, the stubbornness of a mule and the keen eye of an eagle. He also claims they are the nicest people in the entire world.

What would the world be like without the racing homer? What would it be like without men like Darrel Rutter? Let's hope we never find out!

Blue checked hen — one of Rutter's top young birds this year. This bird flew over 2,000 race miles and has won several diplomas.

All birds home to their own perches.

Gallant Lad — foundation cock.
STANLEY CRANES — 1985 hatch. $3000 for pair or $1600 each. Call or write Jerry Jennings, PO Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Phone (818) 684-5476.

AUSTRALIAN PARROTS for sale: Yellow-vented blue bonnets, breeding pair $700. Crimson winged breeding pair $1,000. ’86 and ’87 hatch, young $500 pair. Princess of Wales $400 pair, red capped parrots $700 pair. Stanley rosellas $250 pair, turquoise $150 pair, rock pebbler proven hen $225. Call or write Jerry Jennings, PO Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Phone (818) 684-5476.

BREEDER SELLING OUT! Over 400 top quality cages complete with nest box, feeders and water fountains. Ideal for breeding canaries, lovebirds, parakeets and cockatiels. For further details and description of this proven, unique breeding system. All cages made of PVC material with plastic-covered wire on front. Call Rudi Rudloff, (619) 234-1221, southern California.


HOMEBRED, HANDRAISED — closed banded cockatiels, sun conures, Bourkes’, blue head and daisy perches, Congo greys, Moluccan, umbrella and blue eyed cockatiels. Clara (312) 349-4411, So Calif area.


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TOUCANS — 1986 HATCH. Keel banded, handfed, $1,250 each. Red banded, handfed, $900 each, 1 female toco, handfed, 2 years old, $1,750. Red banded male to trade for female. Call or write Jerry Jennings, PO Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Phone (818) 884-5476.

TOUCANETTES — 1986 HATCH. Spot banded pair $1,000 or $500 each. Crimson rumped pair $700 or $350 each. Emerald pair $900 or $400 each. Green anacans $850 or $425 each. Call or write Jerry Jennings, PO Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Phone (818) 884-5476.


BABY HANDFED CONGO African greys and blue & gold, Catalina macaws hatched in our aviary and handled to assure you a superior pet. John Gibson, Hilltop Aviaries, (503) 825-3230.


96 BLUE & SPLIT blue ringnecks, barnards, phosphates, black swans, S. Dingle, PO Box 340, Norco, CA 92860. Phone (714) 734-7448.

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INDIAN RINGNECKED PARAKEETS s/s handled green male split turquoise blue and lutino $100.00. Green female split turquoise blue $450. Millford Johnson, (504) 272-9319, Louisiana.

GREEN RINGNECKS SPLIT TO BLUE, rosellas - yellow. Stanley, golden mantled, Bourke's normal, yellow and split rosy males, red rumps, many colors and proven pairs. Barnard's, rock peckers, and 192 proven hen. '81 Port Lincoln hen. Most all are '86 birds. Home grown and closed banded. Will ship. Cliff Chamberlin, Oregon, (503) 664-3744.

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SCARLET MACAWS May '86 hatch, handled, tame. Escoctus vosmaneri cheni, lutino ringnecks proven breeders 3 years old, lutino babies all possible split to blue. M. Hufford, PO Box 80052, San Marino, CA 91106. Call (818) 281-6588.

BLUE & GOLD MACAW BABIES handled in our home from one gorgeous pair. Call Nancy, Wichita, KS. (316) 683-7817.


BLUE & GOLD MACAW BABIES handfed babies from 2nd week. X-large Central American parents. Incubator hatched June '86. Other domestics. MAKE OFFERS. Send for more information. Brenda, Sm Valley, phone (805) 526-5859.

MATURE COCKATOOS: rosebreasted, citron, medium sulphur crest pairs, triton male, greater sulphur crest (Galera galera) hen, medium sulphur crest male. Hawk headed parrots, dusky, and blue headed prionus. Blue fronted yellow naped, double yellow headed, spectacle and leucistic Amazons. Channelell and red billed toucans. Mary McDonald, (512) 885-4489, Texas.

WANTED — YELLOW COLLARED MACAWS, MATURE FEMALES. Will buy outright or have males to trade. Also need mature female sun conure. Please send background on birds and prices to: Eugene Kyke, 6515 S.W. 99th Ave., Miami, FL 33173 Call (305) 595-5416.

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BEAUTIFUL DOMESTIC BREED Alexandrines, pennants, Princess, Derbys, ringnecks, rock peckers — babies tame and handled. San Francisco area, (415) 654-8977.
THE FEATHER FARM offers for sale six pairs and spares of: MACAWS: adult pair severe, female male Notis, male blue & gold, female blue & gold, female green wing, male green wing, female Hahn's male scarlet, female scarlet, pair yellow collared, pair Illiger's, male military, Buffon's. PICUON: pair blue headed (male), 2 male blue headed, Maximilian's pair, proven pair bronze wings. ECLECTUS: red, sided, Grand. Solomon Islands, voama. COCKATOOS: Moluccans, citrus, umbrellas, lessors. AMAZONS: hawk headed, pair, double yellow, female double yellow, male yellow naped. CONURES: Aztec, half moon, sun, slender billed, Wagler's, cherry headed, sharp tailed (blue crowned). St. Thomas, green, peach front, brown throat, gold capped, dusky painted, green cheeked, senegans. AFRICAN GREYS: Timneh, Congo. Misting babies of many species now available. All birds sold vet checked. THE FEATHER FARM, 1181 4th Ave., Napa, CA 94558. Send S.A.S.E. for price list or call (707) 25-8833.

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