

2014 Midwest Classic Race

By: Whitney Sabrowsky

Once again, another old bird season is behind us and a new one is around the corner. Even though we are in the midst of the 2015 breeding season, the winners of the 2014 Midwest Classic Race cannot be forgotten. Thank you to all the great guys who took the time to talk with me about their winning pigeons. It is my pleasure to show you this brief highlight of each winning flyer.

The Midwest Classic Race brings together pigeon flyers from across the central US for one of the most competitive races of the old bird season. Birds are tested mentally and physically as they are forced to break in several directions. The Midwest Homing Pigeon Association sponsors this annual tradition that began in 1948. In the early days of the association, there were over 1000 members. Over the years, the Classic race has grown from 2000 birds to as many as 7000 birds and up to 17 states competing. The liberation of 3878 birds flown from 311 lofts was on June 28th from Topeka, Kansas.

200 Mile Section

Mike Youngshan of the Des Moines Racing Pigeon Club won the 200 mile section with a six-year old Persoon hen, 2199 AU 2008 DMI. She also placed 40th overall. Mike has been around the sport off and on his whole life. Mike's first exposure to pigeons was as an eight-year old kid who discovered a fancier on the streets of St. Paul, MN. He thought the birds were neat, but did not acquire any. At the age of 14, Mike shot his BB gun into a flock of pigeons. It just so happened that he wounded a bird in the wing, and it had a band. This sparked an interest that led Mike to find a local fancier and get some birds. He flew for a few years as a teen. Later on, he raced for a number of years as an adult in Denver and most recently has had birds since 2000. He is a dedicated fancier and is committed to a one hour drive just to get to shipping every week.

Mike races on double widowhood. His training schedule is pretty straightforward. The cocks loft fly twice a day, morning and later afternoon. The hens exercise at noon. They fly about an hour each time. When Mike trains down the road, he starts the birds at six miles and continues out to about fifty miles. The birds get around 20 tosses before the season.

The birds are not routinely medicated. Mike will treat for respiratory and canker before the season, but after that, the birds are only medicated if they need it. Less medication not only saves money but also results in healthier pigeons.

Mike had a great Classic race. He flies 243 miles from Topeka. His pigeons swept 9 places in the top 10% of the 200 mile section.

300 Mile Section

Bob Westerhof of Windy Hill Loft earned his 300 mile section win with a yearling hen. In the overall race, she took the 30th position. His hen has quite a bit of variety in her pedigree, including Van Huett, Persoon, and Janssan. Bob races with Moline East Moline racing club.

As a kid, Bob got his start with pigeons when he took an interest in wilds. A Belgian flyer mentored Bob when he was in his early teens. Like many flyers, Bob married and was without pigeons for a while but later returned to the birds.

His pigeons start out the race season racing natural. Following the second or third race, Bob switches to double widowhood. His winning hen, 1036 MEM 2013 AU, was flying on double widowhood. The 2014 season was a successful one for Westerhof as he was first on four of thirteen combine races and won average speed. Bob's advice is to find a system that works for you. He says that what works for one guy does not necessarily work for the next.

400 Mile Section and Overall Winner

Lucky Ali races with the United Racing Pigeon club in the Twin Cities. He not only won the 400 mile section, but also was the 2014 overall Midwest Classic winner. Like many fanciers, Lucky has liked pigeons since he was a kid. Today his childhood fascination has led him to winning one of the biggest races in the Midwest.

His yearling cock bird, 93 LUCK 2013 AU is from the Hollywood family. Ali races on the natural system. He says that the bird has flown very well for him. Lucky notes that he is looking forward to breeding out of his winning cock and trying him with different hens to find the perfect pairing.

Lucky likes long distance races but says, "I don't specialize in a certain race distance because I enjoy participating in all of them. Ever since I started flying pigeons, I look forward to not missing out on any races." Training is pretty straightforward according to Lucky, "I train old birds together with the hen and the cock. Within 15 days of the first race, I start to release them from 20 miles to 60 or 70 miles."

In closing, Lucky mentions, "I plan on keeping this hobby and to pass it down from me to my sons because they also enjoy this sport. It's safe enough to keep them off the streets and avoid trouble. Besides that I have enjoyed all of this, especially when it comes to meeting new people of all kinds and making new friends." How true it is that the people of the sport are just as important as the pigeons themselves!

Lucky's winner flew 1649 yards per minute. I found it interesting to note that Lucky is the first flyer from the 400 mile or greater section to win the overall title since 2007. Since 2007, the overall winners have either been from the 100 or 300 mile sections. Congratulations on a fine race!

500 Mile Section

Les Riley and pigeons go way back. Pigeons have always been a part of his life, even when he was not racing. His lifelong hobby started back in 1959 when he started racing as a junior flyer with his brothers in southern Wisconsin. Les flew in two different clubs, one of which was the Rock River Racers. Life's journey caused Les to fly in three different locations over the years. Today Les Riley flies with the Spooner RPC under the name Goldwing Loft.

The 500 mile section winner flew a great race. Not only did she win the 500 mile section, she also placed 6th overall. 21 SPW 2011 AU was racing to a newly hatched youngster. She clocked in at 1604 ypm. Les had a good race and clocked 40% of his birds on the day. However, his winning hen clocked in three and a half hours ahead of his second day bird. The hen is a Van Riel-Janssen, which is the foundation of his loft. He has had great success with the family. A brother to 21 SPW was his best bird last year. A sister was champion bird of the club a few years back. Les mentioned that the family has also done quite well for other flyers who have tried them.

Old bird training starts slow for Les. He likes to train between 25 and 40 miles three times during the week. His longest toss is about 50 miles. During the season, the longer the races, the shorter the training tosses. Les feels that adequate rest is important for the birds.

600 Mile Section

Pigeons have been an important family tradition for Tom Van Beek. He races from the same young bird loft as his cousin, Doug Johnston. Tom remembers how it all started, "Pigeon racing has been in our family since we were kids. Doug's father, Johnny Johnston and grandfather, Floyd Johnston, were all pigeon flyers as well as Doug's brother, Barney. It was the Johnston's who got my father into racing." Tom followed in the footsteps of his relatives and has been racing off and on since 1986.

The pigeons in the Van Beek loft are what Tom calls a "Heinz 57" strain, with a few exceptions. He keeps and breeds whatever performs well. Tom flies on the natural system. Tom's 600 mile section winner is 6961 GBW 2013 AU. He says that, "6961 comes out of the old family of birds. We've had that family for a very long time. The grandfather won the Topeka 600 class in 2004. A while back we gave Randy Kuske a pair of birds and he put them together which produced excellent flyers (including 6961). We have relatives that fly very well and are consistent at long distances".

The 400 and 500 mile races are what Tom enjoys and does best at. His training consists of 30 mile tosses, two or three times a week. When time permits, he tosses the birds in groups of five; if not, a larger group toss is done. The birds are permitted to loft fly often. Tom prepares for the challenging 600's by removing the grit two days before shipping and also feeding extra so the birds put on some much needed weight as reserves for their intense flight. Since he flies on the natural system, Tom mentioned, "I

try shipping them on 14 day old eggs so that they come home faster to a nest.” His winner was flying to eggs.

Closing Remarks

Congratulations to all of the section winners and especially the 2014 Classic winner, Lucky Ali. This little article gives a bit of recognition for the efforts of the winners. However, no article can truly portray the hours, weeks, and years of work and experience that many flyers put into their hobby. Thank you to all the guys who graciously took time to speak with me.

Keep up to date with the Classic Race and view past results on our website www.midwesthpa.com. The date of the 2015 race is June 27th. Check out the website and click on “information sheet” to learn how to enter the race.

The Midwest Homing Pigeon Association hosts an annual convention every fall. The Chicago Westside Concourse Association is hosting the 2015 Midwest Convention October 15th -17th in Chicago, Illinois. Be sure to reserve your spots in the convention race. Visit www.midwesthpa.com for entry forms and other important information. Until next time, I wish everyone a successful breeding season. You just never know when the next Midwest Classic winner is in the making!