

# **Ashley & Ray Kitching QRPF Champion Flyers for 2010.**

*By Len Vanderlinde Dec 2010*

It was 6.25pm on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010 when Ray turned to his son Ashley to say he was going home before it got too dark. Ray had arrived over at Ashley's house at about 4.30pm that afternoon to discuss the likely arrival times of their pigeons that were competing in an 875 klms race. Sundown was at 6pm and full darkness was fast approaching as Ashley accompanied his Dad out to the car and returned just as a pigeon was entering their loft, he quickly clocked the bird and raced out front as Ray was reversing out the driveway. Dad, Dad don't go he yelled, we got one, and with the car still in the driveway and the motor running Ray and Ashley dashed back to the loft, "look who it is". Ashley said to his Dad, it was a hen they had bred from a new mating that they were trying for the first time this year.

The birds had been released at Quilpie, a small town in outback west Queensland at 6am that morning. Released into a slight SE head wind and clear skies, ideal condition for racing, they were away well. A second release went up at the same place an hour later. These two races had been scheduled for release at Windorah (1060 klms) & Morney (1170), but unfortunately flood waters had cut the roads to these places and the QRPF decided to release both races at Quilpie on the Friday, to race back to their member's lofts situated in the greater Brisbane area. Conditions remained good for the entire day, with little or no wind and a beautiful full moon after the sun went down at 6pm.

Ray & Ashley checked their clock again, yes definitely 6.28pm and slightly faster than they had estimated. Given the good conditions and being one of the shorter markers they had figured the leading birds would take about 13 hours to complete the journey to their loft. They had been following their clock bird closely over the last couple of weeks, her brother had won a shorter race for them and the hen herself was also placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in a shorter race earlier in the season after which she seemed to go off the boil but was noticeably improving as the season wore on. Shortly after at 6.50pm that same night another bird dropped out of the night sky, lit only by the full moon, and onto their loft, followed by a third one at 7.25pm. By this stage they figured many other flyers would also be clocking-in during the evening and a win was by no means assured. At 7.40pm a 4<sup>th</sup> and final bird dropped to their landing board, as Ashley walked it into the trap his face lit-up with joy as he realised this bird was from the second release, now they had a clock-bird from both races!

History will reveal that after clock reading on the following Sunday afternoon, Ray and Ashley had secured a Open Fed winner in both races, with only 4 other flyers clocking birds during the night from the first release and another 9 clocking from the second. They were comfortable winners in both races, in fact their second bird could have won the Fed and all their night birds would have been very well placed in the Open Fed, an exceptional result. As well they had 27 home out of the 30 birds they sent. Two Fed winners at 875 klms on the same day, a dream result and one which gave them enough Fed points to take out the Championship trophy for best flyer of the QRPF for 2010.

All the 30 birds they sent to these two long races had flown Charleville 685 klms three weeks earlier or Quilpie 875 klms four weeks prior to the final races. There were more pigeons in their loft that they could have sent but selected what they thought were the 30 best for the distance. About 20 hens and 10 cocks were sent, 15 in each race and all their birds that homed on that first night were hens. The Open Fed winner had been their 3<sup>rd</sup> bird home from the very hard Charleville race (second day fly) and would have been well placed in Fed three weeks earlier.

The old family have always been able to hold their own at distance racing but it has usually meant playing catch-up in the longer races to make up for less points scored from the shorter ones. Ashley had tasted success at the shorter distance when he won the Young bird Derby with a Staf van Reet he was given by Dave Abel, this and a comment from Jason Payne, who was dominating the Fed scene at the time really prompted Ashley to consider obtaining some of the imported short/middle distance birds. Jason had just won another race with his Houben

Janssen crosses when he turned to Ashley at the club and said “times are a changing, you old fellows need to understand that”. So Ashley purchased a round of youngsters from Jason & Joe Payne to race, the birds were supplied without pedigrees but he selected a couple for stock and raced the rest. He also purchased a number of birds at the Payne’s dispersal sale held in Sydney in 2008. It was these Payne ‘sprint’ birds crossed with their old family that bred the Quilpie Open Fed winner at 6.28pm and that was the reason Ashley had said to his Dad, “look who it is”. The same sort of mating also bred their second bird home that night, which had arrived in time to also win the Fed!

In the lead up to the last two races Ashley gave the birds a toss in morning on the Sunday & Monday from Helidon, a 45 min fly back to the loft. After the Monday morning toss they were given a bath and than open loft all day, after which they were locked down until basketing on the Tuesday evening. The birds were well fed with a mixture of their own making, to which extra maize was added. The birds had plenty of late afternoon tosses during the season to get them use to arriving home just on dusk and to keep on coming just as they did in the last two races.



In 2010 Ray & Ashley won three Open Fed races from Quilpie, their first Quilpie winner was by far their most emotional. Basketing was on the Wednesday evening, but while Ashley was at work that day he received the terrible news that his mother had passed away. As the family gathered at their parents home to comfort one another the last thing Ashley was thinking about was racing Quilpie on the weekend. Jeannette, his wife insisted that he send the birds because it would be what his mother wanted. Reluctantly he agreed, but could not bring himself to enter the basketing centre, so leaving the birds with a friend he quickly left for home. With the funeral set down for the

following Monday they were not really interested in the Saturday race, which turned out to be a hard one with rain on the ranges resulting in no day birds. The second morning they clocked a blue hen at 7.18am, after clocking Jeannette pointed out a big rainbow that had formed in the direction from which the hen had returned. Look, said Jeannette, “that’s Mum”! That hen went on the win the Quilpie Open Fed and has been named “*Jess*” in memory of Ashley’s Mum! The second bird home that morning may also have been in time to win the Fed, which was a sure indicator that the birds were coming into form just in time for the last long races. *Jess* was another of the Payne Houbens crossed with the old blood that had scored at the distance.

Like most top line flyers they had their bad race during the season, theirs happened at the 600 klm mark when they were placed well down the prize list. The following weekend’s race was postponed due to bad weather and they made the decision to use the time to treat the birds. They were wormed and given a cocktail mix for respiratory, the following weekend they were right back up the front with a good 4<sup>th</sup> Open Fed. As stated they won 3 Open Feds and they were placed 9 times in the top 9 Open Fed positions and every one of those birds were still in loft with the exception the 4<sup>th</sup> Fed, she was lost in the hard Charleville National. The race that was postponed put the QRPF season back by one week which may have made the final result so much different. Ashley pointed out that had the last long races been on the weekend prior it would have been a very fast race and not as well suited to their preparation, but that’s pigeon racing!

Ashley started with pigeons when he was just 12 years old, one day he came home from school and asked his Dad if he could get some racing pigeons. Ray was at that time breeding and showing poultry but willingly agreed and both father & son started their racing career in 1967. Ashley left home in 1974 when he got married as a 19 year old and both father and son continued to race their pigeons, but now in separate lofts and under their own names. Their early birds were the old Harrisons and other families that were popular at the time. Ashley won

his first Open Fed race in 1989 from Charleville, a distance of 450 miles with van Cutsem cock, it was a 10 hour fly and just the type of race he was to specialise at in later years. Leading up to the 2010 season Ray was struggling with the work load of training and racing pigeons on his own, so it was decided that they would once again race as a father & son partnership, this time from Ashley's loft. With Ray living just 5 minutes from Ashley's home and still being able to breed a few pairs at his place it has worked out very well for them. Ray has bred at least one of their Open Fed winners and this helps keep him interested in the sport.

Ashley is a panel beater by trade but has for the last 12 years worked as a dogger on a mobile crane at Qld Rail (QR), now called QR National, following its sale by the Qld Government,. His wife Jeanette actively supports him with his pigeons, in fact it was Jeanette who clocked in the winner of the very hard Wilcannia 600 mile Fed a few years ago. It was into the third day when Ashley went out for a paper and came home to find Jeanette clocking in the winner of this very hard race, only 8 birds were clocked in race time.

The distance birds they race today are mainly a mixture of the old Australian families, Balfe Harrisons, Gassmen and van Cutsem, most sourced by Geoff Cowan many years ago on his trips down south seeking the best of the hard day pigeons. Ashley is a very good friend of Joe Caruana and it was through Joe that he was able to get access to these birds. The van Cutsem pids (via Billy & Ray Holden) were later crossed with Joe's 911 blood, the fabulous 911 hen was a superb racer bred by Geoff Cowan but raced by Joe, she took a number of top Open Fed positions before finishing her racing career with a wonderful 1<sup>st</sup> Open Fed from Windorah 660 miles back in 1993 and was rightly named the Bird of the Year in the QRPF. Her progeny crossed with the van Cutsem form the main basis of Ashley & Ray's top distance family today. Given that the 911 hen was also bred from similar lines it was not surprising that they 'clicked' and have bred so well. Joe also gave Ashley the mother of his hard Wilcannia Open 600 mile Fed winner, saying it was about time I gave you a good pigeon as he handed her to Ashley.

A red cock purchased at the Payne sale has been a very good buy, Jason advised Ashley that the breeding of that cock was just what he needed to put together a family for the shorter races. Earlier in the season a young blue bar cock was their first bird home from a 145 klm race, 5 minutes in front of their next race bird, which is not outstanding until you learn that the bird had been released with the trainers 15 minutes after the race birds. That young cock had given the race birds a 15 minute head start and still beat them home by 5 minutes over a 145 klm! It was bred from the good red cock and 1952, a daughter of Payne's No.1 sprint pair and is now also in the stock loft along with another two sons of the red cock. Another good buy was a full sister to the 1900 cock of the Payne's, which was one of the very best they ever raced, the sister's ring number is also 1900 and it was no coincident that Jason had rung her that way prior to the sale. She bred Ashley and Ray 4<sup>th</sup> Open Fed from a hard Charleville 685 klm, clocked on the second morning in dreadful conditions in 2010. When the Payne's heard this, they found it hard to believe that one of their Houben Janssen sprinters could breed a second day bird, but Ashley had crossed them with his hard day birds and that made all the difference.

They readily admit they are still learning how to train and race the sprint type birds but having conquered the long races and now that the old and new blood are crossing so well for them it is just a matter of time before they master it. Although they realise trying to train and feed for both short and long races in the one loft is going to be a challenge!

The Payne Houben blue hen that bred *Jess* was one of the youngsters they had purchased to race in 2009, she was mated with a distance cock in the race loft at the end of last season. Both the hen and her brother were racing again in 2010 but they lost the cock at Morven 605 klm and the hen came home the next day very tired, at first they were sorry they had pushed them so hard, but they had wanted to see what the birds were capable of as 2 year olds, luckily they didn't lose that hen.

Feeding is normally twice per day, although the morning feed during the short days of winter consists of giving them some before sunup and heading off to work. Ashley admits to being a heavy feeder, particularly with the distance racing but they are now looking into perhaps a little lighter to help with the sprint birds that they are now breeding and learning to race with at the

shorter distance. The normal mix contains safflower and black sunflower as well as the normal maize, wheat, peas and also some white rice. Good quality grain is a must and leading up to the last races Ashley was able to obtain what he called a 'good' bag of corn, which no doubt played an important part in preparing the birds for the all day fly that lay ahead of them. The birds also get the usual grit supplied in pots in the lofts and the breeders sometimes get silverbeet when it's available.

Breeding commences in August, which is timed to have the first round of young over in the race loft after basketing for the last race of the season. They like to breed about 120 youngsters and these along with 30 to 40 old birds make-up their race team. The youngsters are not normally given any medication, although they may treat the odd one they prefer to let them gain their natural immunity. Canker is not normally a problem for them, out of 120 or so bred this year only one showed any sign of canker. They vaccinate against pigeon pox after all the young are in the race loft and have in the past cut and pulled the last flight to assist the moult, but do not plan to do this any more as they have not seen any real advantage.

Because of work commitments the birds are exercised once per day in the afternoon and they keep them up until just on dark. As the season progresses and the birds are getting fit they willingly fly for 50 mins to 1 hour and they will stay up and won't come down until the loft lights are turned on. This makes tossing them in the late afternoon much easier because the birds are now used to landing on the loft just on dark.

They start training the race birds from about 12 klms around 4 to 5 weeks from the first race, they like the first couple of tosses to bring the birds in over the town centre. They then jump them to 18 klms as long as the initial tossing is proceeding well. Once racing is underway and the birds are working well, and have some gained some experience they start regular tossing twice per week. They like all their birds to go to a race or a toss on the Saturday, that way they have Sunday free to bath and relax the birds. The mid week toss will be given on a Monday or Tuesday from about 50 klms and timed to have the birds dropping to the loft just on dark, as stated earlier this achieves two objectives for them, firstly the birds soon learn they need to leave for home immediately if they want to reach the loft before dark and it also gets them use to flying into the approaching darkness. This is of course as long as they don't get "hit" on the way home, in which case birds will come home during the night or the next morning and occasionally they will lose a bird or two.

Once Thursday night basketing starts they will medicate the birds a little more often. A treatment against canker or respiratory problems will be given on the Saturday & Sunday so that the birds when returning from the race or toss are thirsty and have a good drink of the medicated water. They use XXX and/or Doxy T for respiratory and Emtryl for canker, but they are careful with what and when they use these products.

Ashley knows what he likes in a good long distance wing but does not follow any theories in this regard. Good winning pigeons will have all the right attributes, you have only to handle the 6 Open Fed winners in the loft to realise that, you won't find anything wrong with them, although they all handle a little different to each other, he said! Their Houbens have quite broad flights but not when crossed with the old blood, this is what they really like; developing their own family of pigeons to suit the way they race them. They have no secrets to their success, just hard work and stick to the basics, good birds in a well ventilated loft and a good management routine. Through their years of experience they know how to get the best from their birds at distance races and now they are looking into breeding and training for the shorter races for a more all-round performance.

They have purchased a Benzing M1 electronic timing system, which they will use for the first time next year and are looking forward to the advantages of electronic timing. No doubt this and the development of their all-round family of race birds can only make them even harder to beat in the years to come!

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