

Code of Practice

Keeping

and

Racing Pigeons

**Queensland Racing
Pigeon Federation Incorporated**

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CODE OF PRACTICE
for
KEEPING AND RACING PIGEONS

Old Racing Pigeon Federation Incorporated

SCOPE

The following is a code of practice for the keeping and racing of pigeons, initiated by the Queensland Racing Pigeon Federation Incorporated, for the guidance of its members and as a basis to help the community and governments, at all levels better understand the needs of those who participate in the sport..

INTRODUCTION:

We live in a time of increasing government regulation, forced upon us by a basic intolerance of neighbours to accept each other's differences. Almost anything these days can be considered to be a nuisance, kids, dogs, cats, swimming pools, trees, washing the car, mowing the lawn, and noise in its many forms can cause conflict between neighbours. Government bodies are often called in to settle these differences by regulating various activities. It is hoped the following will offer guidance to those who race pigeons, and provide a basis to help Government bodies introduce rules which are fair to all parties, and in particular not to discriminate against those who keep racing pigeons.

AN OVERVIEW OF PIGEON RACING IN AUSTRALIA.

Pigeon Racing in Australia commenced last century with the importation of racing pigeons to this country. The first pigeons came primarily from the United Kingdom, but these birds had their origins in the continental countries, particularly Belgium where pigeon racing is a national pastime. The King of Belgium is involved in the sport and has given racing pigeons to the Queen of England. Queen Elizabeth maintains a loft of racing pigeons to this day.

Racing pigeons played a significant role during both world wars as carriers of messages, many soldiers owe their life to the speedy return of a racing pigeon to its home loft with an important message. A number of these birds were awarded the Dicken Medal (the equivalent of the Victoria Cross) for their bravery, and of course thousands of pigeons lost their lives in a vane attempt to reach their home loft during the time of war.

Herein lies one of the pigeons most admired attributes, and that is its love of home. The pigeon's ability to find its way home, and to return from distant points is primarily due to its great love of its home loft. Pound for pound the racing pigeon is one of the toughest and hardest animals on the planet, capable of flying all day without rest, and often into the night in order to reach the home loft.

Being basically a non-spectator sport or hobby, pigeon racing does not enjoy a regular or wide media coverage in this country, and therefore is not widely understood by the general public.

However doctors, dentists, lawyers and people from all walks of life have fallen under the fascination of the sport of pigeon racing, and once involved usually do so for life, often being handed down from generation to generation.

Pigeon Racing in Australia is conducted from Autumn through to Spring to avoid the heat of summer, and to allow the birds to moult and grow new feathers, which, like all birds happens during the hot summer months.

Pigeon Racing is conducted through organised clubs, sections, federations or associations. In the larger cities, many clubs form in specific areas of the city. These clubs are usually controlled by a parent body known as a Federation or Association. Many of the smaller towns throughout Australia have their own racing pigeon club or clubs, and many of these will form associations with other nearby towns in order to better transport and race their pigeons.

An organised programme of races is be drawn up each year. Races usually start around 100 klms from home and gradually extended each fortnight or three weeks to longer race points. This allows the birds to gradually become "race fit" and to familiarise themselves with the route home. A healthy, fit racing pigeons can quite easily fly 800 klms in a day given good weather conditions.

A properly contained and managed team of racing pigeons pose no threat to society and quite rightly deserve their place as a good family backyard sport or hobby.

It is estimated that some 20,000 Australians own and/or breed pigeons in an organised manner, and of these some 50% are competitive pigeon racing enthusiasts.

THE QLD RACING PIGEON FEDERATION

The Qld Racing Pigeon Federation Incorporated is the controlling body for all racing pigeon clubs within the greater Brisbane area. Currently there are 30 clubs affiliated with the QRPF, consisting of some 360 members.

PIGEON KEEPING AND RACING

The principals of this code are to ensure the welfare of the racing pigeon is the prime consideration in all activities associated with the sport.

PART A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RACING

OBLIGATIONS FOR THE KEEPING OF RACING PIGEONS

Members of the Federation or Association are responsible for the well-being and care of their pigeons. It is their fundamental duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of pigeons under their care.

It is an offence under this code for members to ill-treat racing pigeons which are under their care.

Ill-treatment is defined as deliberate wounding, mutilating, physical abuse of any kind, withholding feed or water which causes emaciation or dehydration, and any action which causes unnecessary pain or suffering to the pigeons under their care.

Members offending against this code may be called to show cause as to why their membership should not be cancelled.

INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITIONS

All pigeons entered in competitions are to be inspected by the handlers prior to being placed in the race crates. Pigeons are only to be accepted for competition on the grounds they are of sound health and physically fit to complete the journey set for the event.

Doubtful pigeons are to be referred to Federation or Section Management Committee who will determine the bird's eligibility to compete in the particular race.

The Federation reserves the right, under its by-laws, to refuse entry of any bird into a race under its jurisdiction.

A pigeon will be refused entry in a race, if in the opinion of the committee, it is suffering from neglect, lack of training, sickness or physical injury, including damaged feathers, which may impair or limit its ability to return to its home loft.

Examples of (but not limited to) conditions for refused entry are:

- Sneezing and/or wheezing or any obvious respiratory problem
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Pigeon Pox
- emaciation (extreme loss of weight)
- less than 8½ grown primary wing flights (flights less than half grown are not counted)
- less than 6 tail feathers or tail less than half grown if the tail is at the stage of being regrown
- Open and/or unhealed wounds

Additionally a pigeon can be refused entry if it is likely (in the opinion of the committee) to cause problems for other birds entered in the race, such as harbouring external parasites.

THE CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS

The carriage of racing pigeons for both racing and training is to be within a recognised crate or pannier, allowing adequate ventilation and sufficient room for the comfort of the pigeons.

The **minium** internal height of transport crates is to be **21 centimetres** and is exclusive of wire or false flooring.

The space allowance for each pigeon in a transport crate will be depend on the time the pigeon is expected to be contained in that crate.

Overnight confinement for liberation the following morning an allowance of 210 square centimetres per bird is required.

Example:

Race crate 900mm x 900mm = 8100mm divided by 210 = 38 pigeons maximum

Confinement for longer periods which require the birds to be fed and watered in the crates an allowance of 320 square centimetres is to be made.

Example:

Race crate 900mm x 900mm = 25 pigeons maximum

FEEDING AND WATERING FOR RACING

Racing pigeons basketed in crates on the night, and scheduled for liberation the following morning are to be provided with water, provided there is sufficient daylight before the scheduled release time. No feed is to be given to these birds as it is not required and may be detrimental to their flight home.

Racing pigeons basketed in crates on the night, and scheduled for liberation other then the next day are to be provided with both feed and water.

FEEDING AND WATERING EN-ROUTE

Where transportation of racing pigeons to a scheduled race point is extended past or likely to extend past 1500 hours, the transporters will stop to rest, feed and water the birds as necessary. The transporter must reach the liberation or race point no later than 3 hours before sunset or at least 4 hours prior to release in the case of an overnight basketed race (short race).

LIBERATION AT RACE POINTS

The liberation of racing pigeons at race points will be carried out by an officially paid liberator. The liberator will release the birds at the scheduled time after obtaining permission to release the birds from the appointed liberation committee. It will be the duty of the liberation committee to obtain information regarding the suitability for liberation, taking into consideration the prevailing weather conditions likely to effect the birds return. The liberation time may be delayed or postponed for the day if conditions are not suitable for release. The birds are not to be released in rain or fog.

HOLD OVERS

Should the weather conditions, in the opinion of the liberation committee be unsuitable for the release of the birds they will be held-over until the following day. Release time the day following a hold-over will be as early as possible. Sufficient feed and water will be carried on the transporter to hold the birds for a maximum of 4 days.

PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS

It is an offence to give or administer in any form drugs which are likely to enhance the performance of a racing pigeons.

PART B - PIGEON HUSBANDRY

GENERAL

Racing pigeons need to be housed, fed, exercised and trained correctly in order to reach peak fitness and maintain good health. It is the responsibility of the owner to ensure the well-being of pigeons under their control.

LOFTS

Racing pigeons are housed in lofts, the construction plans for racing pigeon lofts are to take into account local council by-laws regarding building and health regulations. Whilst it is not necessary to house racing pigeons in palatial buildings, lofts should be constructed to good building practices, painted and maintained so as to enhance the image of the sport and not become an eye-sore to the general community.

Lofts are to be well-ventilated and kept clean and free from vermin and unwanted odour.

Loft design can be varied to suit the individual fancier's taste and ideas but must conform to certain size limitations and specifications as follows:

FLOORING

Flooring can be either concrete or timber. A separate steel mesh floor with a concrete sub-floor below is permissible. Bare earth floors are not permitted.

VENTILATION

Ventilation is to be provided to maintain adequate flow of fresh air inside the lofts. Draughts are to be avoided.

INSULATION

Insulation is recommended particularly below the roof to prevent condensation and to maintain an even temperature

LOFT CLEANING

Lofts, including floors are to be cleaned at least once per week. So called deep litter on loft floors is permitted provided it is dry, a maximum of 50mm in depth and raked over once per week. Wet droppings are to be removed.

RACING LOFT

• SIZE AND CAPACITY

It needs to be taken into consideration birds housed in a race loft will gain their freedom on a regular basis to exercise, therefore a race loft can be smaller than a stock loft. Stock birds are generally kept as prisoners due to their increased value and the consequences of losing the bird or it suffering an injury through liberation is too great.

The minimum height for a race loft is to be **165cm** from floor to ceiling.

The minimum space per pigeon is 116,000 cubic centimetres.

Example:

A race loft 180cm x 180cm x 180cm equals 5,832,000 cubic centimetres, divide this by 116,000 cubic centimetres per bird equals 50. Therefore 50 race pigeons could be kept in a loft this size.

- **PERCHES**

Perches can be of various styles to suit the fancier but there must be at least 10% more perches than the number of birds housed in the loft.

Example:

180cm x 180cm x 180cm loft, housing 50 pigeons would need a minimum of 55 perches.

STOCK LOFTS

- **SIZE AND CAPACITY**

Stock birds (kept as prisoners) require more room in their loft than do race birds.

Minimum height of the stock loft is to be 165cm from floor to ceiling.

Minimum space required per bird is to be twice that required for the race loft ie. 116,000cm x 2 per bird.

Example:

A stock loft 180cm x 180cm x 180cm equals 5,832,000 cubic centimetres, divide this by 16,000cm x 2 per bird equals 25. Therefore 25 stock pigeons could be kept in a loft this size.

- **PERCHES AND BREEDING BOXES**

Perches can be various styles to suit the fancier but there must be 10% more perches than pigeons.

Breeding boxes or nest boxes must be of sufficient size to accommodate a breeding pair.

Minimum size is 450 x 450 x 300mm

FEEDING

Grains (maize, wheat, peas, etc) form the basis of the pigeons diet. Feed type and feeding methods may be varied to suit the individual fanciers needs, but must be of adequate quality and quantity to ensure the continued health and condition of the birds. Starvation diets in any form are an offence against this code. Feed must be clean and not contaminated, it needs to be stored in clean, dry, vermin proof containers.

WATER

Clean, cool water is to be provided to the pigeons at all times. Water must be changed at least once per day and be provided in clean vessels. Stainless steel or glass drinking vessels are recommended.

EXERCISE AND TRAINING

Racing pigeons need to be exercised and trained prior to competition. The birds need to be exercised (released from the loft) at least once per day and a maximum of twice per day. Other than these designated exercise periods the birds are to be confined to their home loft. Exercise periods are permissible from dawn until 9am and from 3pm until dark.

It is an offence to have unsupervised pigeons out during the day, and for pigeons to sit on house roofs etc.