

Craig Porter & Kevin Clegg 1st & 2nd in the QRPF Championship 2011

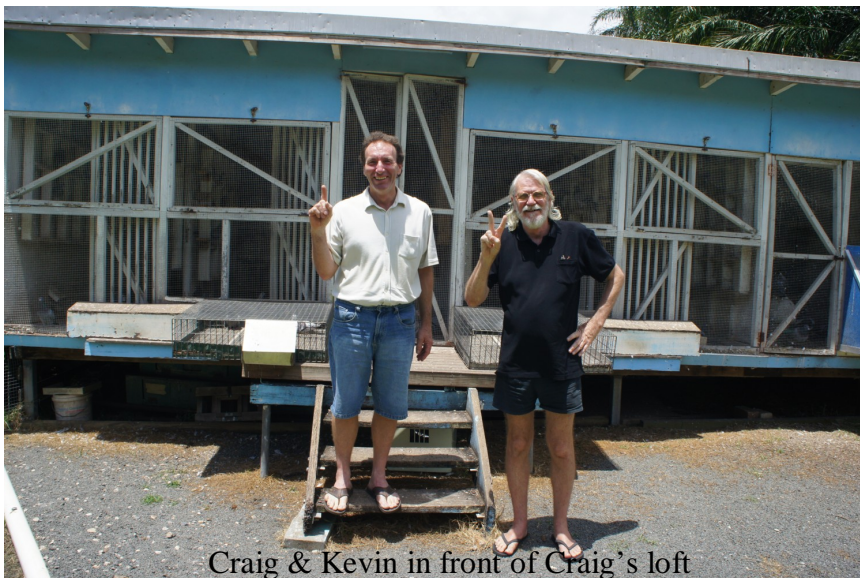
by Len Vanderlinde

Several years ago the Qld Racing Pigeon Federation Inc introduced the concept of multiple fanciers flying from the same loft. The idea was to attract people that might want to race pigeons but for one reason or another were unable to do so from their own backyard. Craig Porter and Kevin Clegg were flying in partnership at the time but decided to fly as separate lofts from Craig's property at Gumdale, a suburb lying approximately 20 klms east of the Brisbane CBD. Kevin lives a couple of suburbs away and he had raced spasmodically for a number of years before joining up with Craig.

They have flown under separate names at the same loft for the last 3 years, but 2011 was to be their best race season by far. With Craig winning 12 club races and Kevin having just two wins but finishing 2nd ten times at club level, usually because they had multiple birds on the drop and when this occurred, it was agreed that Craig would clock first. They finished 1st & 2nd in the strong Cannon Hill Club Championship (2011 QRPF Champion Club), 1st & 2nd QRPF South Section and 1st & 2nd QRPF Open Champions for 2011. In all Craig won two Open Fed races (with Kevin finishing 2nd Open on both occasions) and to top the year off Kevin won the very

hard Noccundra 1040 klms Open Fed race, clocking just after 2pm on the second day. Kevin was also crowned Champion Long Distance flyer for 2011. All in all a wonderful season for these two flyers using the same loft.

Coming into the last two races from 920 and 1040 klms, Craig was leading the Fed averages by 29 points from Kevin. Both clocked in from the 920 klm race, Kevin's first bird was clocked at 4.29pm the second day with a velocity of 710mpm for 11th Fed and picking up 20 points while



Craig & Kevin in front of Craig's loft

Craig clocked the 3rd morning at 6.44am for 15th Fed and 16 points in a very hard race from Thargomindah. This result kept Craig in front by 25 points. The birds from the 1040 klms race were released the same day as the 920 klm race, but at the earlier time of 6.10am. Kevin clocked his first bird from this race at 2.07pm on the second day with a velocity of 804mpm, a second bird, a cock, dropped to the loft at 3pm, also one of Kevin's birds from the 1040 klm race. The cock turned out to be the second of only three birds to home on the second day, with Kevin winning the Open Fed and picking up 30 points to take the lead in the averages. The next day came and went and still Craig was waiting for a pigeon to home and time was fast running out. In all only 6 flyers had clocked in the Open Fed by nightfall of the 3rd day and the race remained opened. Moving into the 4th day since release and chances of getting a bird were diminishing fast, there are not too many birds that keep coming from the long races after the 3rd day. Craig had sent a two year old Blue Hen, 11173 that was needed for stock due to her breeding, she had flown well as a yearling and already won a club race at 216 klms and then taken 2nd club, 3rd Section 5th Open Fed at 830klms this very season, but being short of birds to handle the distance he had sent her and was now really regretting it. He went to work on that Monday with no birds in the clock and none home by lunchtime either. At 3.02 pm on that fateful day Craig returned home from work to find 11173 on the board and into the clock for 9th Open. In all only 11 birds were clocked in the Fed in race time and with the 21 points he gained back

the lead and took out the Champion flyer award for 2011 and just as important he got his good hen home!

The Situation:

Each flyer breeds their own team of race birds; they are housed together in Craig's race loft and trained as a single team. Craig is in charge of the day to day management and training of the race birds, while Kevin is responsible for sourcing the feed for the birds, which they insist must be of the highest standard available. Both flyers use the same clock and each flyer must supply a list of their race birds prior to the start of the race season and these birds cannot be interchanged during the season. With the race rules preventing two race rubbers being lodged in the same bucket a decision is made on which rubber will be placed first in the event of each flyer getting a bird together, which is what happened on numerous occasions this season.



The Birds

Kevin has lofts at his home and breeds from a family of birds that go back to the 1960's, which are mainly the old Brisbane long distance lines, although he is quick to point out that he considers them to be middle distance birds now that he has added Staf van Reets/Mueleman/Janssen crosses into them. Craig pointed out that Kevin's birds

have a strong homing instinct or "will to home", they keep coming, if they are missing birds on the day it is not unusual for Kevin to get most of his home the next day. Kevin clearly remembers purchasing a bird, number 1084 at auction back in 1969 that was down off the O'Toole's champion pair of 1644 x 2002, a well known pair of Brisbane distance stock birds. He also obtained a pied cock from Len Gates in 1957 that was off the champion Randall birds 1556 (Mackay 820klms Open Fed winner) and a cock known as "Champ". This line of birds were dominating the long distance races back in the 60's and 70's and are still found in the breeding of the better long distance Brisbane birds of today. Kevin is quick to point out that his best distance birds today can all be traced back to these two stock birds

Of course other birds have been added to the breeding lines over the years, such as Harrison and Balfe lines, particularly ones with what Kevin calls good "eye sign". He swears by the eye sign as his most important selection tool to keep breeding winners and who can argue with the results he is achieving. In recent years a Bricoux cock given to him as a gift from Craig has bred 2ND Open Fed Bowen 970 klms and 4TH Open Quilpie Fed 820 klms, both clocked during the night. A grizzle from B Haines has also played a big part in the family over the years and the grizzle colour is often found among his good winners to this day. As well, in recent years a Staffy from G & P Duscha crossed with the old blood has also played a big part in his present day birds. A hen from this line is 1104, she is a big hen with a strong pearl eye and she bred 2ND National from a hard Charleville 685 km race in 2010 and 6th National 730 klms this season as well as his first two birds home from Thargomindah 920 klms and is the Grand dam of the Noccundra 1040 klm Fed winner. Clearly a family of quality birds that have carried on breeding good race birds for many years.

Craig on the other hand had sold off his pigeons about 10 years back, all the stock and young ones were sold with the exception of 20 pair of youngsters from the 3rd round that he kept. Of these only 4 pair remain today and he readily admits that it has taken him this long to put a team of stock birds together that he can rely on to breed good race birds. Craig stated "you

need a nucleus of good family related pigeons in your stock loft before you can confidently breed a good team of race birds". Of the birds left from the auction sale, those down off the 1483 cock of Shaun Elliott that featured so strongly in his catalogue and the birds down off his Mackay 820 klm Fed winner 19810, clocked at 9.30pm, to be the only bird home on the day back in 2000 and winning the QRPF Bird of the Year are the main lines that remain today. The dark cheq colour of the Bricoux birds are still prominent in the family to day; a line which the Mackay Fed winner carried.

Craig has added birds to the breeding loft, in particular a red Janssen hen has lifted the performance and speed of his race team, she has been a prolific producer and she bred a 390 klm Fed winner in 2010 at 10 years of age. He quoted that speed is so important these days to stay on top. Years ago he would have got rid of race birds that scored up to 500 klm but struggled after that. These days he puts them aside and breeds the speed back into his family. For example he had a good race cock this season, a grand son of the red Janssen hen, that was very competitive up to 300 klm, the grandson won his first race and was 1st or 2nd bird each week but struggled to home as the distance increased after this point. He mated that cock to his best two distance race hens (11173 & 15652) this year, kept a couple of youngsters for stock and put the cock and two of the young back in the race team for next season. That way the family's speed is increased and their stamina remains.

One of Craig's best birds during the year was 15652, a Blue Cheq hen, she was placed 2nd Fed Walgett 560 klm, 9th Fed Nyngan 730 klm as well she was equal 1st club Inglewood 210 klm, which topped the Fed, equal 6th Fed Moree 390 klm and was his 4th bird from Cobar 830 klm, which was in time to be placed in the top 15 Fed birds, she had a month off and was then one of 11 together to win Walgett 560klm on the 2nd series and was one of 3 together in the hard Cunnamulla National 730 klm when he was placed 6th Fed. 15652 also won the QRPF Section Bird of the Year trophy and she showed a peculiar family trait, in that she is always last to land, whether in a pack of 200 hundred flying around the loft or home with a couple of other race birds she will not land until all the others have done so, hence the reason why she was not clocked more often, only being beaten by her loft mates! Her sire and brother did the same thing, flying to the side of pack on their own and not landing until all the others have. 15652 has a double cross of the red Janssen hen along with the bloodlines of Watson pied, Staf van Reet and old Brisbane blood.

The Routine

Craig is a strong believer in keeping the birds active and out and about as much as possible. With approximately 120 youngsters from each flyer and 30 or so old birds, the loft is admittedly overcrowded to start with and he takes every opportunity to get the birds out and about the loft for about 2 to 3 hours in the afternoon, this not only gives them plenty of fresh air but also keeps them active and fit even if they are only picking around the yard in the off season. Craig starts work at 6am so he gets up at 4.30am turns on the loft lights, has breakfast and then feeds the birds at 5.30 before heading off to work; there is no time to work the birds of a morning.

An incident in mid December 2010 may well have contributed to the very successful season that followed in 2011. Craig came home from work and let the birds out at 3.30pm, storms along the border ranges were a forecast possibility but the afternoon was fine and sunny. After the birds had been out for some time they received a fright and took to the air, while up there Craig thought he heard thunder and looking out to the south he saw large black clouds were building up very quickly. He tried using droppers and calling the birds down but with little success. With 200 plus very green race birds circling above, the storm, with strong winds, heavy rain and light hail hit the birds and they were quickly pushed out of sight. As the storm passed and with darkness quickly approaching a couple of birds returned from here and there but at least 200 were gone. The next day they straggled back, a pack of 10 or so flew over the loft at 6.30am but kept going as they appeared to be disorientated. While at work his son reported another 30

birds landed together at 11am and quite a few more had already returned. That night Craig rang Kevin to let him know what had happened, not wanting to worry him before determining what damage had been done. He also pointed out that they should take the positives from the experience and not dwell on the negatives. He recalled how two years earlier he had a fly away and vividly remembered two hens returning together at 11am the next day and how both of them went on to win Section Federation races. At the final wash-up they only lost a dozen or so birds and this event and the experience the birds gained, as well as the time available to get them over the ordeal may have prepared them so well for the season to come. They were experienced and ready and able to handle anything racing could throw at them right from the start of the season.

Craig pulls the last two flights in each bird's wing in the first week of January and believes anyone in this part of the country not doing this really is behind the eight ball. The birds are not locked up after the flights are pulled like some do, as he prefers that they continue to get out of the loft as much as possible, even if it is only walking around the yard. Many years ago he remembers a bad toss in the early part of the year, where the losses were far worse with the later bred youngsters who were still growing flights and didn't have the "wings" to get home. Pulling the flights in January ensures they have a full wing ready to face the preseason training leading up to racing in the beginning of May, which greatly reduces the stress on the birds at this crucial time.

The young birds are fed all they can eat with a mixture of wheat, milo, maize, peas, safflower and linseed; a couple of handfuls of linseed are in the mix all year round. There will be twice as much wheat to maize in the off season but more maize is given as the season progresses, along with brown rice for the distance races. No mass medication is used on the young birds as he wants them to develop their immunity, he will treat individual youngsters for canker if necessary. The stock birds are not treated for canker during the breeding season either but he will treat them for respiratory before he starts breeding.

Training for the young birds starts at about 6 to 7 weeks before the season commences. The birds are forced into gradually working around the loft for longer periods and are usually ranging well before any training tosses take place. He kicks them off at about 20 klms believing if they can't handle a toss from this distance straight up they are not worth keeping anyway. During the season the birds that are not racing are given a regular Saturday morning toss from about a 100 klms and an afternoon mid-week toss before Federation races. Sometimes he will mid-week toss them at only 20 klms or so and up an hour and half before dark, but when they reach home he keeps them up flying for another 30 minutes with other birds back at the loft just to toughen them up and get them fit.

They are fed in around 6.30pm by hand and given all they want to eat in the off season but reducing the feed until about 20 go to water in the early part of the season, the feed is again increased as the long races approach. All birds, that are fit, go to a toss or race on the Saturday, they are locked out for bath on the Sunday and not fed until after lunch, hence they are not hungry on the Monday, so he finds that hand feeding is important to give them just what they need by closely observing them.

The race birds are treated just prior to the start of the race season for coccidiosis using Carlox; canker using Emtryl for 5 days and respiratory problems using Triple X for 6 days. Medication is continued all during the race season for canker and respiratory every second week for one or two days. The birds are also wormed with Eprinex before the season in January and February. Eprinex is a cattle wormer that a number of flyers have found to be effective and safe to give to pigeons, for both internal and external parasites, even though it is not registered for use with them. Craig will also use Avitrol Plus to clean them out at various stages during the race season, he feels this is important even if he does not get any sign of worms.

The system stays the same in the lead-up to the long races, he likes to see the birds get a 10 to 11 fly before the 900 and 1000 klm races. The QRPF fly a double lap-over series and Craig likes to get all the birds started on the first series with the exception of some of the later bred youngsters. He will send them every week if possible for the first 6 races provided the racing and weather are normal and than put most of them aside for about 4 weeks before starting them again on the second series, this way he feels he gets the experience and condition in the birds that is so important when the longer races come around.

When it comes to these longer races, Craig looks for those birds that home about mid morning of the second day from the 700/800 klm races, the ones looking fit and well are the best candidates for the 900/1000 klm races that follow. As an example the Noccundra Open Fed winner, a Blue Bar Hen *2010 QPF 6244* flew to 560 klms on the first series before spelling and starting again on the second series, where she flew 390 klms, 560 klms and 830 klms, arriving home at 9.50am the second morning from the very hard 830 klm race looking a picture of health, she was primed to handle the gruelling final race of the year and dully delivered by taking out the 1040 Open Fed race three weeks later.

With the quality of the birds these two fanciers have and the experience and guile that Craig has in training and preparing race birds they are sure to figure in the results for years to come.



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