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Rutter at entrance to his first class pigeon loft in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

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Racing Homers— And The Winner Is...

by Jan Parrott-Holden
Vancouver, Washington

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 craps shoot, 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

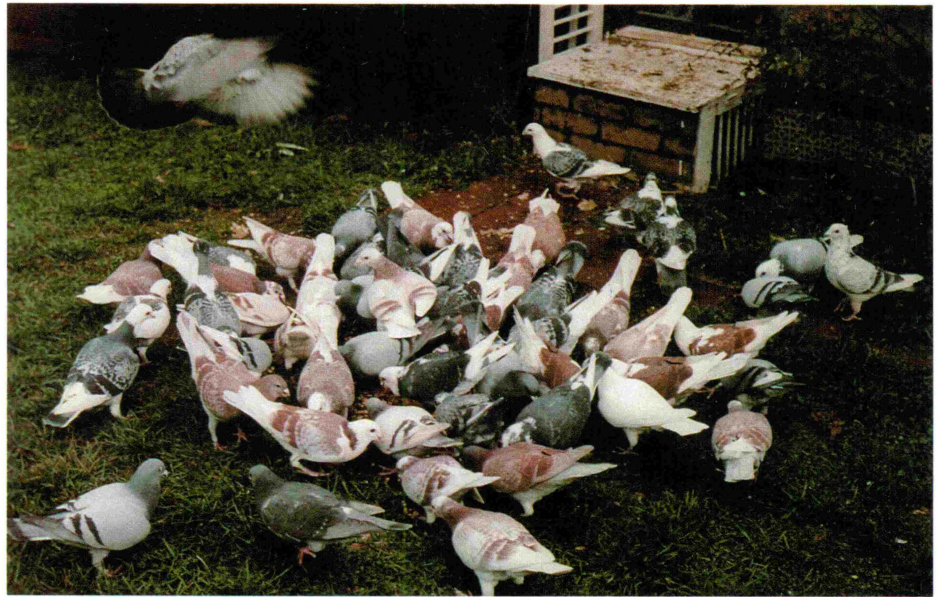


Inside the loft, Rutter inspects his breeding pairs.

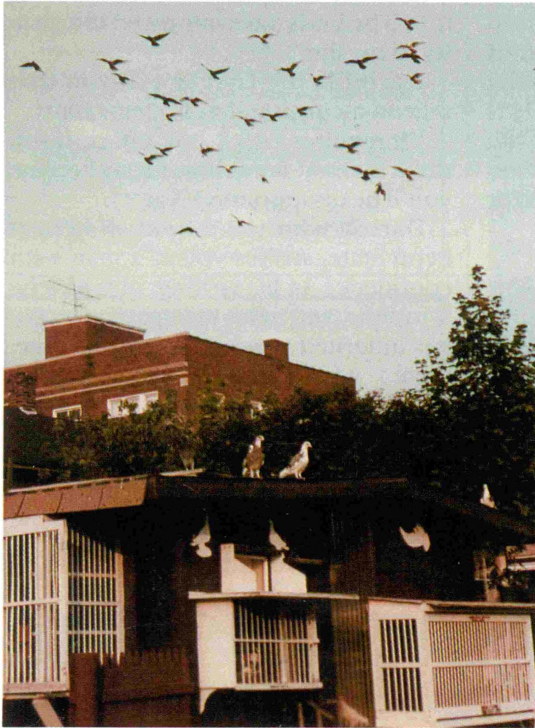
Photos submitted by Darrel Rutter, Altoona, PA.

After exercising, Rutter feeds them by hand. Notice many of the beautiful hybrids.

Birds returning from training flight.



Photos by Darrel Rutter, Altoona, PA.



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! ●

All birds home to their own perches.

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.



Gallant Lad — foundation cock.



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WHOLESALE/RETAIL. COCKATIELS, handfed babies, super tame. Grey, lutino, pied, pearl, cinnamon, pearl-pied, cinnamon-pied, cinnamon-pearl, lutino-pearl, cinnamon-pearl-pied, and breeders. Sun conures, eclectus parrots, lories, African greys, cockatoos, macaws. Will ship. John Goss, Boca Raton, FL. Call (305) 368-6921. Leave message on machine.

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SUPERTAME, domestic, hand-fed babies. Large blue and golds, militarys, green wings and Hahn's macaws. African greys (congos), blue head pionus, Amboina kings and Senegal parrots. Derbyans, moustaches, Alexandrines, crimson wings, and Indian ringneck parakeets (normals, lutinos, blues and split-to-blue). Half-moon conures. Call Al or Char, (602) 973-2852. Arizona.

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AUSTRALIAN BRUSH TURKEYS \$600 pair, emu \$200. Silver, golden, ghigi golden, Reeves', Swinhoe's, Edwards' pheasants \$25 pair and up. India blue, black shouldered, white peafowl \$50 pair and up. White faced piping guans \$375 pair. Clark's Bayou Bird Farm, HC-62, Box 719, Princeton, LA 71067. Phone (318) 949-2294. Please enclose S.A.S.E. when requesting info.

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TAME, LOVING, SPOONFED BABIES: rose-breasted and citron cockatoos. Yellow collared and Noble's macaws. Solomon Island eclectus. Superior quality as pets or future breeding stock. Call to reserve yours now. Jo Hall, 132 Woodland Point, Belton, Texas 76513. Phone (817) 780-1243.

PROVEN BREEDER PAIR of Congo African greys. Also '86 hatchings: Congo African greys, blue & gold macaws, scarlet macaws. Some Sur-Lock portable aviaries available. Call Tony, (805) 969-7782 southern California area.

CANINDE MACAWS — two of these beautiful endangered birds, incubator hatched June '86. Other domestics available, including greenwings, Congo greys and double yellow-headed Amazons. Don, at Arcata Aquarium, (707) 822-6350, California.

SCARLET MACAWS (Ara macao) '86 hatch, handfed babies from 2nd week. X-large Central American parents over 36", \$1800 pre-weaned, \$2000 weaned. Eves. 6-9 pm and all day weekends California time, (213) 665-1760, L.A. area.

BEAUTIFUL DOMESTIC BRED Alexandrines, pennants, Princess, Derbians, ringnecks, rock pebbles — babies tame and handfed. San Francisco area, (415) 654-1977.

THE FEATHER FARM offers for sale s/s pairs and spares of: MACAWS: adult pair severe, female severe, male Noble's, 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. PIONUS: pair blue headed (tame), 2 male blue headed, Maximilian's pair, proven pair bronze wings. ECLECTUS: red sided, grand, Solomon Islands, vosmaeri. COCKATOOS: Moluccans, citrons, umbrellas, lessors. AMAZONS: hawk headed (pair), 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, senegals. AFRICAN GREYS: Timneh, Congo. Mushing 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) 255-8833.

SURGICALLY SEXED mature pairs of Quakers \$60 pr., nandays \$75 pr., maroon bellies \$75 pr., mitreds \$125 pr., Senegals \$85, Meyer's \$150 pr., blue fronts \$450 pr. All birds guaranteed for 14 days. Trade welcome. WANTED: suns, jendays, vasa hens, mini macaws, Alexandrines, lutino ringneck male. We ship. SOUTHERN BIRD FARM, Inc., Sarasota, FL. Phone (813) 957-7838.

HANDFED BABY MACAWS: Catalinas \$1500, blue & golds \$1150. Five year old producing pair black swans \$700. Young black swan \$200. Young mute swan \$225. Tame rainbow lorries \$110. WANTED: young female hyacinth macaw. Contact Sheila Rogers, (714) 734-0578, southern California.

WANTED — MACAW AND PARROT FEATHERS — CASH FOR FEATHERS dropped by your birds when they molt. Macaw tail feathers 25¢ to \$10 each. We are prepared to buy in any quantity. More information and detailed price list on request. Kevin Schneider, 14292 Jennings Vista Way, Lakeside, CA 92040. Phone (619) 561-6303.

ABYSSINIAN LOVEBIRDS. Breeder selling '86 hatched babies. Also breeding pair of plum headed parakeets \$350. Young pair green cheeked conures \$200. Lynn Rasoletti, (312) 784-4018, Chicago area.

RUBBER STAMPS — from Amazon to toucan. Personalized address stamp with bird designs. For brochure, send SASE: One-Stop Bird Shop, P.O. Box 17416, San Diego, CA 92117-0416.

SWEET, LOVABLE BABIES — domestic, handfed Congo greys, double yellow heads, yellow crowns, blue fronts, Mexican red heads, blue & golds, scarlets, militarys, green wings, umbrellas, bare-eyes, citrons, sulfurs, dwarf macaws, sun conures and others. Surgically sexed birds also available. The Parrot Perch, 4241 Veterans Blvd., Metairie, Louisiana 70006. Call (504) 454-BIRD.

WANTED: male parvipes yellow naped Amazon (horn colored beak); female yellow collared macaw; male rose breasted cockatoo (*R. assimilis*). Susan, Colorado. Call (303) 229-2662 weekdays or (303) 223-2452 other.

PROVEN RECIPES for egg food, molting cake, soft food diet, mineral blocks, nesting formula, hand feeding formula, fruit and vegetables nutrition chart, breeding formula. Send \$3.00 and S.A.S.E. to: Tres Brisas Aviaries, P.O. Box 2402, Camp Verde, AZ 86322.

FOR SALE: exceptional hand-fed cockatiels which, at the time of purchase, are certified free of five major diseases: Newcastle's disease, chlamydia, papovavirus, salmonellosis, intestinal nematodes (testing and certification by Greg J. Harrison, DVM, Lake Worth, FL). ASC banded. Will ship. Exotic Feathers, (305) 965-1753.

INCUBATOR HATCHED. Hand raised baby parrots, breeding stock consists of: tritons, Moluccans, umbrellas, rose breasteds, bare eyed, goffins, hyacinths, scarlets, yellow napes, yellow heads, blue fronts, Eclectus and cockatiels. The young are sold at 4 - 6 weeks and weaned (11-16 wks.). Very competitive pricing. FOB-LAX. Avian vet checks and references available. Feather Hollow Ranch, P.O. Box 6391, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Call (818) 340-5086.

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PURE PANAMA AMAZONS. Also, lilac-crowned and green-cheeked amazons. Timneh and Congo greys. Others available. PLUS: SUPER-TALKER AMAZON BABIES. Specially bred from proven supertalking stock. These babies are fantastic. All the above are domestically bred, closed-banded and hand-fed with TLC. We ship. References. White Mt. Bird Farm, P.O. Box 110637, Tacoma, WA 98411. Phone (206) 847-1314 eves.

'86 HATCH — domestic handfed in my aviaries. Blue & golds, scarlets, Moluccans, umbrellas, Congo greys, and other Amazons. Call for prices. ANITA'S BIRD HOUSE, Chattanooga, TN. Phone (615) 344-8901.

BREEDER SALE — 11 pairs producing Eleanoras-Fitzrois, 2 pairs producing umbrellas, 1 pair producing citrons, 1 pair producing lessors, 1 pair producing Moluccans, 1 pair producing citron/Eleanora cross, 3 extra male mediums, 2 extra male Moluccans — all proven. Grays, macaws, yellow napes — all proven or some activity. All birds at least 8 years old. We can negotiate price. Call Ron LeClair, (305) 461-6484, Florida.

PAINTED FINCHES (*Emblema picta*) — specializing in the painted finch, cage bred, delightful, colorful, unrelated pairs available. Jim O'Neill, San Francisco area (415) 821-6337 evenings or (415) 751-0482, leave message.

HOW TO BREED THE GREEN SINGING FINCH - \$6.00, the CORDON BLEU - \$6.00, and WAXBILLS in two volumes - \$10.00 per set. Gretchen Barker, 7837 Gladstone, White City, OR 97503.

AUTOGRAPHED by JOHN and PAT STOODLEY — first time available, very limited quantities, two fine books — Parrot Production, and Pionus Parrots. \$35 each, price includes shipping. California residents add 6 1/2% state sales tax. Dale R. Thompson, 16425 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321.

PARROTS FOR BREEDING PURPOSE — s/s mature birds. Specially selected for breeding stock. Very nice, healthy and good sized birds. All birds are on special low fat diets. Veterinary sexing certificate available. Congo African greys, Amazons, macaws, Vasa's, cockatoos, etc. Visa and MasterCard accepted. Write or call for complete price list. Lin-Deco, 3675 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, FL 33589. Call (813) 938-9009.

MOVING TO NEW LOCATION. MUST SELL the following breeding stock: 10 pairs Australian crimson wings \$525 per pair, also '86 babies. 12 pairs Turquoise \$150 per pair, extra male \$75. 1 pair Adelaide rosellas \$450. 5 pairs citron cockatoos \$1,100 per pair. Will ship. Ralph Lima, call (818) 709-0707, Los Angeles, CA.

RARE FINCHES, Australian, African, Asian. Specializing in painted finches, Gouldians — normal and all mutations. Distributor of Lafeber Products. Grey Cheek Aviary, Brooklyn, NY. Call (718) 256-5298.

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WE SELL ONLY HANDFED BABIES raised on our farm. All are either incubated or removed from the nest at 10 days old. Species available: Alexandrine, moustache, crimson winged and Derbyan parakeets. Sun, maroon bellied, peach fronted and mitred conures. Chattering and dusky lorries. Yellow crown, blue front and double yellow headed Amazons, African grey, napes and grand eclectus parrots. Blue & gold, scarlet, Buffon's military, red front, green winged, hyacinth, severe and yellow collared macaws. Umbrella, citron, sulfur crested and Moluccan cockatoos. DMC FARMS, Rt. 25, Box 6950, Ft. Myers, FL 33921. Call (813) 936-1627.

WHOLESALE — cockatoos, macaws, conures, parrots, Amazons. All types of birds. Call or write for price list. Grant's Enterprises, Route 4, Box 394, Lexington, NC 27292. Call (704) 787-5291.

HANDFED DOMESTIC BABIES — COCKATOOS: triton, Moluccan, medium sulphur, umbrella, Goffin's. Macaws: blue & gold, military, green winged, yellow collared, Hahn's. AMAZONS: blue fronted, yellow headed, red headed. CONURES: all types. Lorries, greys, pionus, Alexandrines, lutino ringnecks, rosellas, cockatiels. Call for price and availability. The Parrot Co., Tucson, Arizona. Call (602) 749-1286.

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