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*A fine Jacobin is displayed by its owner-breeder, Tally Messanatto.*

# the National Pigeon Show

FANCY PIGEONS FOR  
EVERY FANCIER

*by Sharon F. Clause*

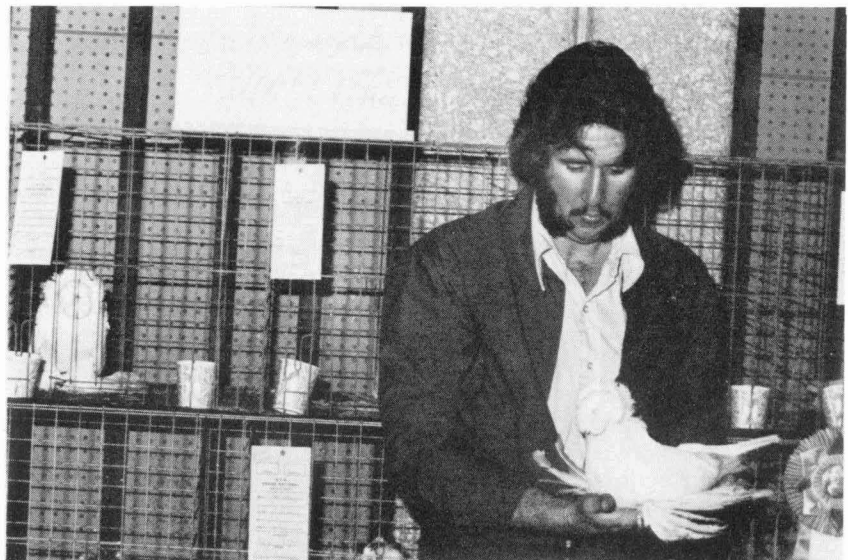
"The National Pigeon Show? You want me to man the AFA booth at the National Pigeon Show? All right, but I doubt there'll be much activity at a pigeon show!"

Was I wrong!

Early Saturday morning, January 21st,

I arrived at Golden Hall, a huge convention center located in downtown San Diego. As I walked in to set up the AFA booth, I detoured through the South Hall. I thought, how long could it take to observe a few pigeons? Since I'd been to Balboa Park to see the pigeon patrol tidy

*Michael Curtis, another enthusiastic breeder, displays one of his favorites – a Bokhara Trumpeter.*



Photos by Steve Clause



A fantastic display of every kind of pigeon presently possible — and some bordering on the impossible.

up, I felt I'd seen them all.

Was I ever wrong!

I've never seen as many pigeons in one place in my life. And what pigeons they were! I later learned there are 591 different types of pigeons, most of them represented at the show.

As the morning wore on, I learned astounding things about this equally astounding bird and its breeders. According to Randy Sriver, each breed's characteristics are recessive traits of the basic everyday pigeon, and they would disappear in one generation if rigorous, selective breeding programs were not followed by pigeon fanciers like Bill Mackey. Such dedication has resulted in

the pigeon being bred into three distinct categories: utility, performer, and fancies.

The utility pigeon represents those breeds raised for food: King, Carneau, Modain, Modena, the Hungarian House Pigeon, and the misnomered Runt. I looked amazed at this birds, most the size of small chickens, and considered the difficult job of judging such fine specimens. The judge can't look for a pigeon with good taste; he has to select a pigeon that tastes good!

The performers include the tumblers (most of which no longer tumble), the rollers (which do), and the racing homers. The rollers soar into the air, and then tumble over and over, some falling more

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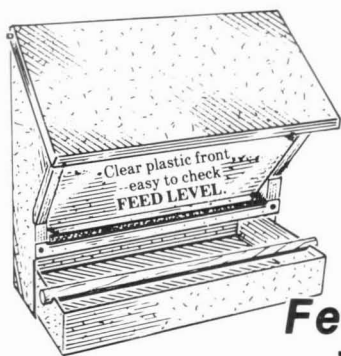
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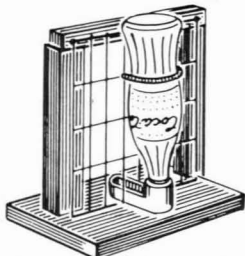
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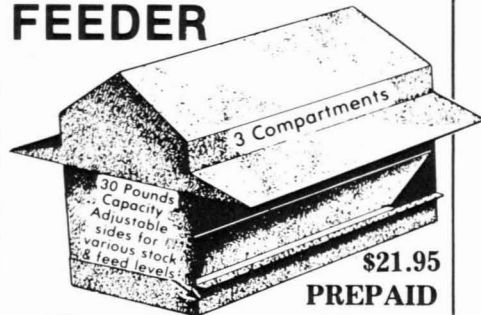
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*Kings and Runts are the giants among pigeons.*



*Some hopeful entrees are ready to go before the judge.*



*A parlor tumbler gives a good performance.*



*Michael Curtis, far right, discusses the fine points of winning show birds with foreign visitors.*

Photos by Steve Clause

than a hundred feet. A kit will often be trained to tumble as a group, following the leader. The racing homer, as its name implies, races home, braving all adversity to reach its destination. The performers display pure pigeon power!

The fancies, bred solely for the pleasure which they afford the fancier, make up the largest category and perhaps the most colorful. Pouters, croppers, and trumpeters — both English and Bokhara — appear on the verge of bursting when they swell their chests in display. The fantail, spreading its tail and expanding its chest until it cannot see over it, resembles a tiny turkey. The lovely frillback sports ruffly feathers. Both the delicate oriental frill and the short-faced tumbler, their short little bills unsuited to feeding babies, must have their offspring fostered out to rollers. This category boasts decorative breeds.

In the afternoon I watched the judging of the parlor roller, that pigeon which, flightless after six months of age, is judged on its ability to turn backward somersaults in a straight line. The parlor roller competition drew a large and appreciative audience — with the exception of one little child. The combination of a flopping, gyrating mass of feathers squawking at her feet and the crowd squawking at her to get out of the way was too much, and she beat a hasty retreat to the sanctuary of her mother's skirts.

Eventually I arrived at that question central to any human endeavor: "Why?" Of what value is such selective breeding of pigeons? I received two excellent answers. As Randy Sriver said, "Although I may not especially care for a particular breed of bird, I value its existence on this earth. That is reason enough for me to appreciate the efforts of fanciers to maintain it." Dick Kodis had this to say: "Being a pigeon fancier is one path to self-improvement. The fancier becomes an aviculturist, learning applied science, diet, and genetics in order to achieve his goals."

As the National Pigeon Show closed, I reflected on these statements and on the day's events. I realized that the "pigeon people" represent a knowledgeable and stimulating branch of aviculture. Like other aviculturists, the pigeon fancier is plagued by problems familiar to us all: Newcastle, hygiene, feeding and breeding programs, disease prevention, and zoning laws. Like other aviculturists, many pigeon fanciers consider themselves caretakers of a precious form of nature. Like other aviculturists, the pigeon fancier willingly shoulders that responsibility, discharging it to the best of his ability.

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