

The Sport that Knows no Bounds

By Paul Gibbs

Back in 2012 I wrote an article titled "The Sport Which Knows No Bounds", well recently I had a phone call from a fellow fancier by the name of Graham Boorer who lives in Sydney who went on to tell me an amazing story that further supports my first article with regards to limitless boundaries and thought I would be interested in following it up.

The information I received from Graham was to set the wheels in motion for me in making several phone calls to clarify and confirm the information I was given. Graham told me that he had a phone call from his sister-in-law in Brisbane to report a ring number of a pigeon that was found on the roof of a 14 storey building where she works by one of the building maintenance staff. It is on the roof of this building where a Peregrine Falcon has taken up residence and where many bird remains have been found (Refer to attached photo).

On talking with the maintenance person he revealed that he had found what he thought was a pigeon life ring along with what remained of a bird that only included feathers and left overs that the Falcon mustn't have found appetising. On recognising that the ring was indeed a pigeon ring and knowing that her brother-in-law Graham kept pigeons quickly contacted him to report it.

Needless to say the only bit left that help identify the pigeon was its life ring. The ring number of this pigeon was NRC-16-373 that belonged at the time to a member of the Queensland North Road Combine. From here the story became more fascinating, at least for me.

Graham told me that he began to make some inquiries to see if he could notify the owner as to what had happened to "373". It took Graham a few phone calls to trace the owner as he first researched the internet to track down the contact details of the NRC Ring Secretary to be told that the owner of the bird was now a member of a "break-away" club, that being the Morten Bay District Invitation Racing Pigeon Club.

The conversation that Graham had with the NRC Ring Secretary was to amaze him when he was told that not only was the owner a female pigeon fancier but that she was 99 years of age and was still competing!

So follow it up I did, thinking that this would be a great story that would capture the interest of all pigeon fanciers.

My next step was to retrace the phone calls and contacts that Graham had made along with contacting his sister-in-law Robyn to see if there was anything else that they could tell me about this remarkable fancier. Along with these phone calls I also "Googled" the web site for the "Moreton Bay District Invitation Racing Pigeon Club" to be surprised to find several photos of this remarkable fancier.

Before I go much further I should introduce you (the reader) to this wonderful lady fancier, her name is Elise Parish, and yes her age is 99, in my opinion the attached photos certainly don't reveal this.



After speaking with club official's telling them that I would like to write a story about Elise for the ARPJ they said they would contact her first before providing me with her contact details to see if it was OK, they probably thought the last thing Elise wanted was for some "strange man" ringing up and asking questions.

As I live about 8 hours south of where Elsie lives I had no option but to interview her over the phone and what I found was a lady that was surprisingly bright and engaging. Elise provided answers to all my questions with no effort at all and her memory of events and what her system is with regards to training and racing her birds would surprise many younger fanciers.

Elise told me that she had always been a bird fancier, having over the years kept parrots, budgies and finches. She can remember as a very young girl that her first bird was Rosella. Elise said that she grew up in the Sydney suburb of Botany before moving to Cabramatta in Sydney's western suburbs prior to relocating to her present address where she has lived for the past 30 years.



I found Elise to be an incredible lady, she told me that she lives on her own, cooks for herself, washes her own cloths and showers herself all with no assistance. Although she did say that she has a cleaning lady come once a week to do some of the house cleaning that she finds too difficult to do. Besides all this work would take time away from that spent with the birds.

Elise told me that she wakes each day at 4:30 am and after making her breakfast, having a cuppa and getting dressed it is down to the pigeon loft to prepare them for their morning exercise. Once it is daylight she lets them out and while they are flying she cleans out their water containers and feed trays in preparation for their entry to the loft.

Elsie was quick to say that she does have a lot of assistance when it comes to managing her involvement in racing her birds and cannot thank her fellow members enough, especially Dave Hazelwood, a fellow fancier who comes round everyday just before the birds complete their morning exercise to mix whatever tonic/additives Elise believes her birds need and fill their water containers (keep in mind what I stated early, Elise has a system and sticks to it where possible). When their work around the loft is complete, around 7:30 am Dave calls them in and feeds them.

Dave will catch and basket them each Wednesday for their mid-week toss along with basketing those that Elise has selected as being fit enough to race on basket night prior to racing. Elsie said that she uses an Electronic Timer to time in her birds on race day but it took her a while to gain confidence in being able to operate it, although now she wonders what all the fuss was about and does not know how she would manage without it.



I asked Elsie was there any particular family of birds that she races and how many does she try and start the season with, her reply was that many years ago, she like many other fanciers all had the “Old Australian Lines”, but as with many over the years found them to be too slow compared to those available today. Elsie said that those she now has are a blend of Van Loons, Busschaertds and Van Cutsens, starting the season with around 100 birds.

Elsie said that until recently she had always played an active part in club activities, having held the position of Ring Secretary for 11 years and having been the “chief cook and bottle washer”, providing many a BBQ sausage sandwich at club events. Though these days she has had to take a backward step and with the help of all her club mates is still able to continue to enjoy racing her beloved pigeons.

The support and assistance from her fellow club members is to be commended. In recent times club members have constructed and installed a hand rail up a ramp in front of the loft to make it not only safe for Elsie to tend to her birds, but to make it more manageable than having to climb steps as her loft is raised off the ground (refer to attached photo).

Club Treasurer, Ron McKiernan recently made Elsie two new small carry baskets (Refer to photo) these should serve Elsie well in coming seasons.

Competing in the North Road Combine for the years 2011 to 2017, in the O/A Combine Point Score Elsie finished in the following positions - 22nd in 2011, 24th in 2012, 30th in 2013, 54th in 2014, 44th in 2015, 44th in 2016 and 26th in 2017.

To date (as of the 29/7/18), Elsie has taken the following positions in the Morton District Invitation Racing Pigeon Club – 5th, 6th, 3rd, 10th, 4th, 8th, and 5th and is currently running 6th O/A in the point score and it’s worthwhile noting that Elsie didn’t compete in the first race of the season as she believed her birds were not ready. Not bad for a 99 year old lady fancier.

As a point of interest, Elise at different times has not competed each week and in recent times spent 3 and a ½ months in hospital after having a fall and breaking her elbow. They certainly bred them tough back then. I feel sure all pigeon fanciers wish her continued health and success.

I shall look with interest on their web site over the coming weeks to follow Elsie progress and wish her all the best for the future.

Inclosing I would like to quote "The Pigeon Whisperer" curtsey of the MDIRPC Facebook page who wrote – ***"Elsie Parish, a wonderful person and a great ambassador for our sport of pigeon racing. She is an inspiration to everyone and much loved by all her friends"***.