

Campbell Strange:

The Final Chapter Is Written

by Gene Yoes

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The name Campbell Strange is one of the most widely known names in not only the American pigeon sport, but the world pigeon sport. Renowned as the purchaser of world class pigeons and breeder of exceptional pigeons, the Irish-born Campbell Strange recently decided to leave the sport, sending shock waves around the globe. After the shock subsided, many saw an opportunity of a lifetime to select and purchase birds from a collection of a lifetime.

The Auction

Campbell was immensely proud of the results of the auction, a report card on a lifetime's work. And why shouldn't he be? As he had predicted, all of the key birds stayed in the US, and only five went out of the country (Australia [1], Taiwan [1] and Canada [3]). Several fanciers had come from Europe, yet took no birds home, even though they had bid up to \$20,000 for one key bird.

Within days, Campbell was getting phone call interviews from European Pigeon journalists, who were astounded by the results of the auction. The questions could be summarized as follows:

Considering the fact that the US, in total numbers of pigeon flyers, is little more than a blip on the worldwide pigeon population, why did Campbell's auction surpass any auction in the world, in terms of interest and prices?

The truth of the matter, explains Campbell, is that in Europe, you can't make a dime racing pigeons. If you win a race there's just a few bucks. The only way you can make money is if you have a really super record bird and can sell that bird. But in the US, although we have a dwindling pigeon flying population, there are more and more futurities and the money is getting bigger every year. That is only really happening in the US. So Americans will pay the biggest prices at the auction, knowing that there is a possibility of recouping their investment.

In just the last thirty days, we received notice that birds closely associated with birds in the auction, have scored in several futurities: 1st 1999 Bay Area Classic (Breeder Mick Stevenson); 1st 1999 Motor City Detroit 1173 birds (Breeder Bobby Gonzalez); 3rd 1999 AU Convention race (Tom LaDuke, Two Toms Loft); 4th 1999 New England Open 169 lofts 1,826 birds (bred by Terry Yates and raced by Dick La Croix); FVC Club, 1999 YB Series; 1st 1999 FVC Premier Futurity (3 races) (bred by David Laux, Wisc.) (100% OHF); and 1st San Diego Classic (bred by Brad Hogan with Hekkenklak blood); six of the top twelve Snowbirds in 1999 were closely related to the birds auctioned in Chicago and three of the top twelve were of the Super 73 line and 100% from Oak Haven Farm stock.

And I really venture to say that no one in the US has had better results in futurities from birds from their bloodline than I have. That's why 70% of the birds bought at the auction went to my former customers. They bought in the past and found that they were able to enjoy success which gave them a return on their capital outlay. It was very satisfying to see that it was my own customers from over decades who most prized my birds at the auction.

Campbell could not say enough good about the Illinois Club that handled the big auction.

In my 50 years in the pigeon sport, I have never seen an organization as proficient as the Rock River Valley Club in Illinois. They are a complete model for what all good pigeon organizations should be, in the way that they conduct their business and in the way they can manage to work out their differences and get along and always seem to do the right thing no matter how difficult the circumstances. They are nothing but class and magnificence. That's the way they are.

I saw it in my dealings with them in the last two years in the smaller auctions I did with them. Even though my dealings were only over the phone, after giving long and careful thought as to how I would do auctions and make a disposal, I didn't have a doubt in my mind that going to Chicago and dealing with these guys would be the best way possible. My really high expectations were actually exceeded by the performance of these people. They are truly a model for the pigeon sport. It is really and truly an amazing group. As a matter of fact, I wondered for the first time

this morning if the North Texas Concourse and the related clubs had been able to function in a similar manner, I think the possibility exists that I would still be racing birds today, offered Campbell.

Tony Melucci and former AU President, Ed Schmidt, served as auctioneers. Campbell particularly sought out Melucci, a long time friend. Tony Melucci added class and dignity to the thing all the way through. Tony has done all my big auctions from the beginning, has worked on all my big auctions. Hes always really been the class act of anybody in the US, he said.

Campbell, with a smile you could see through the telephone, got complete and total satisfaction with the way this thing closed down. And in this article he shares his experiences and observations, from visits of famous fanciers to what champion pigeons have in common.

In November in San Diego and then in a grand finale on December 4th in Chicago, Strange and his Oak Haven Farms disposed of the vast bulk of his birds, setting world records in the process.

In San Diego twenty-nine birds, with no key birds, brought \$68,000. Unfortunately, seven birds, including Sissy (one of the two best daughters of Super 2778, a son of Super 73), were lost when the postal box was damaged in transit, as reflected by a postal sticker on the bottom of the box. Some speculated theft, but Campbell is convinced that unless it was an inside job, it was just a weird accident, something that has never happened to him before, but not impossible. Sissys nestmate brought close to \$18,000 in the Chicago auction.

In Chicago, hundreds of individuals from seven countries attended, most forking over a \$50 fee just to handle the aces. Each buyer received a \$100 credit on the first purchase, with the extra \$50 being donated to Hope Farms Boys Club in Ft. Worth and to the Rock River Valley Sport Promotion Fund. The 118 birds brought around \$504,000 and an overtime auction of youngbirds brought that total to \$552,000. The total for the two auctions of 147 birds - \$620,000, an average of \$4,218.00 per bird. The high price bird was Senna, which went for \$30,000 to Al Cunningham of California.

Why Hes Retired

Everyone wants to know the real reason Campbell decided to hang it up, as if there is some deep, dark driving force. If there was, it was the force within.

One of the reasons is that our most valuable asset is time and how we spend it. We enjoy traveling a lot, but I have to always be back here within 7-10 days to take care of the birds and make sure that the people who work for me are doing the right thing. By not having the pigeons, we can travel at will. I can be gone 90 days if I want to. I turned 60 years old this year and I want to spend the rest of my good years, where I can get still get around, traveling and enjoying the things I want to do, answers Campbell.

Of equal importance is the fact that Campbell could not take the Texas heat, which regularly hits the one hundred degree mark in the summer.

But in talking to him, he candidly admitted that he is a Type A personality, who is basically an obsessive, who strives to be No. 1. And it has taken its toll.

Campbell started working for others, then decided to start his own contract carpet company. Though he thought it was just going to be a small company, the competitive urge to be No. 1 resulted in a multi-million dollar operation. He started with pigeons as a young kid and ended up being one of the No. 1 studs in the world. He briefly entered the sport of greyhounds, and had the No. 1 stud dog in America for a time. He even had the champion mens softball team two years in a row.

When I had the carpet company, we sponsored a mens major league slow pitch softball team. This came about through one of the employees who played on a small time team, and came to me looking for a sponsor. I put myself through the same thing with the softball team. It was 24 hours a day recruiting players, babying the wives along and doing all the things that had to be done to put a winner on the field. Nothing else mattered but the end result of winning. And we got all of that done. Within a matter of three years I went from that small time team to recruiting a big time team from all over the country and traveling all over the country and winning the National Championship

two years in a row Mens Major which is the biggest slow pitch competition there was. So, I did all of that in a three-four year period of time. I just had to go all out its just the way I am.

During my lifetime, when I had a new challenge, I'd take it up, and I did it and I moved on. I have learned to manage it a little bit better than I did when I was younger and I try not to get myself into those kind of situations, now. I am a Type A personality and I know it. The big fight is to keep it under control and don't get involved in something where its going to take off like that again. The thing you have to try to do is relax and keep it under control and don't throw those big challenges out in front of it.

I've probably had 30, 40 or 50 people make the comment, Oh, you'll be back! My answer is always, No, I won't. That surprises everybody. But the reason is very simple. The reason is I understand my own personality which has driven me in my carpet business and my real estate ventures, in the pigeon game, when I had the big time softball team, if I do something I have to be the tops or it will mentally kill me, he offers.

So I know that I will never fly pigeons again because I am not going to drive myself like that. I can't do it any other way. I can't help it. I'm not going to devote the kind of time that's necessary to fly birds competitively and do what I have to do. I'm just not going to devote the time to it, he concludes.

Reaction to his Retirement

Campbell was absolutely bewildered when news of his retirement leaked out.

When we announced a few weeks ago that we were going to pack it in and get out of the sport, I had a very surprising reaction. I've had really scores of telephone calls and faxes and letters and cards, many of which come from people that I don't even know and had never met, all saying the same thing what a big loss, and this is terrible for the sport. It really surprised me, Campbell reflects.

But, what really surprised me about it is the fact that I have never done anything more than what was easy for me to do. I immediately think back to a time around 1963 when I moved over to the Martinez club in California. I was a 23 year old, newly married guy and hot to fly pigeons in a hot location. I moved across the Bay into the Martinez area the minute that I got married and was going to fly with the big boys. That club was known to be probably the most competitive in the state for many years, and probably is still the same way.

And when I moved over to that club they were meeting because their lease was ready to expire. I can remember it like it was yesterday. Hank Vernazza stood up and said, Look guys, we've heard about a piece of land that's available that the city has. They will allow us to build on it. We would never own the land, but we can build a clubhouse and probably use it for years and years. We don't have much money in here, but if everybody will do what they can do, we can go ahead and get this done and it won't be any big deal.

He looked around the room at everybody and there was maybe 25-30 guys in the room and he said, Perk McAlvey is a painting contractor, he can paint the building. Old Man Cheadle here is a retired carpenter, he can be the superintendent and help the rest of you guys do the carpentry work. George Haas is a concrete man and he can pour the foundation. Campbell Strange is a floor guy and he can get the floors all done for us. He says, Doc Arnold and myself don't have the ability to work with our hands, but we can kick in a few bucks to buy material. If everybody will do whatever little bit they can do, it won't be a burden on any of us and we can have a real good clubhouse.

Campbell boasts, We went ahead and we built the building. That was 1964, and that building has served the sport all these years been a terrific building. There's been all kinds of functions.

So, it really surprised me when so many people made a big deal about all the things that I've done because I never really did anything that wasn't easy enough for me to do. Think about the people who are the race secretaries who have spent years of their lives working for their clubs and combines, like Bill Thompson in the concourse up here. These guys are on the phone, listening to complaints, putting out race reports. They work all year long and they get no credit for it.

I donated a few birds and I helped a few clubs. Big deal! There have been times when I organized auctions and the sale of birds for causes. But all the things that I did were not so difficult. Those are things that take a little bit of

time, but it wasn't anything that I had to dedicate my life to. It wasn't the kind of time that some of these other people are putting in. What I did was over a period of weeks and months, as opposed to people who've dedicated years?

Time is our most valuable asset. Much more so than money. Look at Brad LaVerne (AU President) right now. He's donated his life to this thing—the latter years of his life he's going from morning to night doing everything he can do to help the sport. There are many, many people who are doing things for which they do not receive any appreciation, or at least not what they deserve.

I'd appreciate people being concerned, but I basically think that the sport has a lot more unsung heroes who are much more deserving. The things that I did, whatever I did, was never the kind of burden on me or on my time. The things that so many other people do far supersede what I have done and we ought to be letting them know, he urged.

Positive Or Negative

The decision was made. Do his years in the pigeon sport leave good or bad memories?

For a week or two before we made the announcement I would lay in bed at night and think a little bit about the last many, many years in the sport—most of my life. I thought about some of the negative things that have happened, but I kept coming back to the fact that the positives far outweighed the negatives.

It has enriched my life way beyond the pleasures of the birds. My new wife is the best thing that has happened to me, other than probably the birth of my children. And I met her through the birds on my trips to Taiwan. So she wouldn't be here if it weren't for pigeons. So, many things that have been very valuable in terms of enrichment to my life have evolved through pigeons.

The number of friends that I made over the years—friendships that will last a lifetime—are surely one of the most important things in life. I will still have those friendships long after my pigeons have gone. I'm not talking about people who were customers necessarily—of course some of them were—but many of them are just other people who I came across. For example, Don Gandy, who was the best man at my wedding. He no longer has pigeons, and I will no longer have pigeons, but we will be lifelong friends. If I had never had pigeons, I would still have friends, but pigeons have multiplied the number manyfold.

There is no point in dwelling on the negatives. Bickering at the club meetings are some of the negatives. Jealousy is a problem. I've already said that the positives far outweighed the negatives and I don't need to spell them out. Everyone knows what they are. In any kind of competitive sport, you are going to have certain negatives. That's the way with horse racing. It's the way with pigeons. It's always going to be the way. People have to learn how to get along, but I really don't want to dwell on the negatives. The positives are much more important, he concludes.

Two-Tiered American Success Story

Many Americans don't know it, but Campbell Strange is a naturalized US citizen. He was born in Northern Ireland, into a family familiar with pigeons. But his father didn't see him as a pigeon man—far from it.

My dad was a poor shoemaker, and had a little business that had been in the family for three generations. It was his goal that I wouldn't have to work with my hands. He used the word slave. He didn't want me to be a slave, working with my hands to make a very meager income. I was the first child and he wanted for me to be better.

Campbell continues, It was his dream that I would be a violinist, and have a nice, clean job that would pay a nice wage in an orchestra. He was a frustrated fiddle player. Well, the truth of the matter is I wasn't much of a fiddle player or a violinist. I didn't like it so much, and I didn't enjoy having to go to the lessons every week. I wasn't doing as well as he expected so he pulled me away from the first teacher after a couple of years and sent me to one that was a little more strong-armed, in a different town.

When I went to this one, it so happened that the pigeon club met at the railroad station on the Friday night as I was catching the train coming home from my violin lessons. I saw all these guys with these birds all ready to go to the race, putting countermarks on, everybody rushing around trying to get the birds ready for the pigeon train that

would be coming in at 8:00 or 9:00. Then the excitement of having an extra clock and knocking it off when everybody else did. It was just something that, as a young boy of 8 or 9 years old, found very exciting.

It so happened that one of my uncles, Alex Campbell was a pigeon flyer in this club. He was like a second uncle or something. He wasn't somebody I knew well. But once I realized who he was, I went over there on my bicycle to see his birds, and he gave me a couple of birds, Campbell remembers.

It was very difficult for my mom and dad to allow me to have pigeons because, one, it was expensive to feed them, and two, we didn't have money to build a pigeon loft. My dad converted a little small hutch we had in the back yard and in that hutch I put these two pigeons, a blue check and a dark chocolate red. I waited patiently for them to have eggs and babies. About a year later, I figured out they were both cocks. Every once in a while I would con my mother into letting me buy another bird at the pet store, or maybe one of these guys would give me a bird, once in a while. Basically, I kept very few birds because there was no room for them.

In the meantime, after watching the birds go out on a Friday night, I would get on my bicycle on Saturday and go visit several guys who I met at the pigeon club. There was one group of them that lived very close together. There was probably five or six lofts within 100 yards of each other. Everybody had rowhouses and they would sit together on one back step maybe six to eight guys and when a bird would come we would never know whose bird it was. Everybody would jump up and run to their own loft, hoping it was their bird. It was tremendous excitement!

Then, when the bird was clocked and everybody would calm down, they would look at the clock to figure out the time. Well, the next thing was I had to get on my bicycle and ride up and down the road a couple of miles in each direction to find out what time everybody else clocked. There were 30-40 lofts in a very small area.

Total population, in this little town probably all had maybe 1000, or 2,000 or 3,000 population. But all of the towns had pigeon clubs that ranged from 25-150 members. Lots and lots of pigeon members and lots of big clubs of around 100 members.

Even today in the national races, it is not unusual to have 40, 50 thousand birds in a race. It's a very big hotbed for pigeon flying. Always has been. There were some famous people there McGugan, who was known for his Stassarts, and a guy called Greer Gallway who was a very famous pigeon man from way back in those days in that area.

They have all kinds of races, from 100 miles all the way up, but the real premier, prestige races would be the Kings Cup and some of the other long distance events, what they call channel races, where the birds have to fly over the English Channel.

Things pretty much stayed unchanged for five or six years, then changed drastically.

I quit high school when I was 15 years old. I didn't have the patience and I wanted to get out and make a little bit of money. So I went to work in the ship yard. It was only when I went to work in the shipyard that I had enough money to build a little loft. I was well on my way to start flying birds at 17 years old when all of a sudden my family decided that they were going to pull up stakes and move to California.

We went to California in December, of 1957. I got a job immediately as an apprentice carpet layer. During the first year when I was out laying carpet in different houses, I came upon a house in San Mateo, CA and saw a lot of old trophies all around the house. They didn't have pigeons on them, but the inscriptions had the letters YPM. So immediately I knew what YPM was yards per minute. So, I asked the lady, Does your husband have racing pigeons?

She said, Oh, yes. He has been racing pigeons all his life. He came from England, originally. That was Bill Jackson. Bob Teachout was one of his proteges and has used Jackson's name all of these years for his Jackson Loft.

Needless to say, that evening I was over there visiting Bill Jackson to see his birds. I didn't even know there was pigeon racing in California. Some of the people I knew of from the old country, he knew about them, and we became fairly good friends. Within no time at all, I was back in pigeons. Then I put a short stint in the Marine Corps Reserves.

That took me away for six months. During the time I was gone, my dad took care of the birds.

I worked for that carpet company for five years, from 58 to about 63, then moved to Martinez, in 64 and worked for a new carpet company from 64 to 68 and by the time 68 rolled around I was really running the whole company, but not making the money I thought I should be making, so I quit. Then, I went to work for my biggest enemy in the carpet business, a guy who we had been battling each other for contracts for a long time.

We didnt care for each other very much. He came to me and made me a deal that I couldnt refuse. So I went there and ran his labor crews, and was an estimator and sort of a manager for five years.

Then, at the end of that five years the stress of working with this guy got to me, even though I was making six figures. I left him to start my own business. It was easy to start my own business because I had ten years of contacts with all the main builders, all the accounts. I knew all the carpet factories. All the key players knew me. It was easy for me to start my business, and it took off.

I took the girl who was my secretary with me. I took the best carpet layer with me. I took the best sheet vinyl mechanic with me, and the four of us were going to go take it easy and make a nice little living and cut out all the problems and all the hassles and just have a nice little company where we could have a nice little life together.

Then, my Type A personality took over. In the first twelve months we did \$880,000 worth of business. The second twelve months we did \$2.2 million. The third twelve months we did \$4.8 million and the fourth twelve months we did almost \$8 million. The staff ballooned up to a point where we had about 160 employees at one point in time, and we were doing well over \$20 million per year. We had five or six locations, including one in Reno, Nevada which is still in operation.

For a poor boy from Ireland, it was like a dream come true. It was sort of an unbelievable happening, like I wasnt living in the real world. We were the largest contract floor covering company in the state of California I think our high year was \$24 million.

When I hear everybody complain about this country, Id like to give them a good kick in the rear! Even today, this is still the best country in the world. This is still the land of milk and honey, with more opportunity than anywhere else in the world. Ive traveled more than most people and I know. Opportunity is still here and unfortunately, too many of us in this country dont appreciate it. But Im not part of that club, Ill guarantee it, he declares.

Meanwhile, back to the pigeons. Campbell was around 20 years old when he started actively competing in California, in 1959. He joined the Peninsula Club, now, San Mateo. It was a pretty good sized club. Maybe 25-30 members. Lots of people that were well known. Jim Garner, Larry Kunihero, John Fechko, Bill Jackson, many people who were quite well known, he remembers.

When I started up, I got birds from just anywhere I could get them from. I was very impulsive and wherever somebody would give me a bird or whatever, it went into the loft. One of the real sources that I had was an old gentleman by the name of Ray King, in the Hayward Club. Ray King was one of the originators of the White King squab pigeons. He was quite an old gentleman at the time, but he had a pigeon selling operation, that was converted from the old pens where the White Kings used to be. He had 10 or 15 different strains of birds and you could go over there and buy Stassarts or Sions or this or that. I bought several different birds from him because it was an easy way to get birds at a reasonable price quickly.

I started racing almost right away. I had some success with them. The big problem that I had was that I lived in the town of Burlingame. And there if you look at the map, the way the birds cross the San Francisco Bay, they come either across the San Mateo bridge, or they come across the Oakland Bay bridge and I was in between. I was in a real bad spot, although in young birds, by being a young guy and getting out and hustling, my young bird results were real good right from the beginning. But I realized at that stage that I needed to get over to Martinez. Thats the people who were dominating the combine, Bay Citys combine. It wasnt until I got married and 23 that I was able to get moved over there.

And the pigeons changed.

Pigeons have always been like womens fashion. It continually changes. There is always something new and it

wasnt any different in those days. The Sions and some of the old Stassarts were becoming very stagnant. The latest thing in the late 50s were the Devriendts, Delbars, and Cattrysse. Of course, everybody wanted to have a son off of this and a daughter off of that, just like it is now, Campbell continues.

These birds were coming in, for the most part through Paul Veegaete of Detroit. He was a Belgian who could speak, read and write the language, and he had lots of friends in Belgium. In those days the Europeans were not on the same economic level as what they are today. Our money was much more valuable than their money, or we could go over there and basically buy whatever we wanted at cheap prices. They were glad to sell them they didnt have a worldwide market at that time. They werent getting big money for birds like they have been in the last 10-20 years.

Veegaete was basically able to bring in quite good birds and sell them for \$50-75 a piece for imports. This is after quarantine costs and everything else. Veegaete performed a great service for the American sport. Veegaete was selling these different families of birds all over the country, and when I got started I immediately started to try to accumulate some of these birds. The ones that I went after were the Devriendts.

The first bird I spent any money for was the 1959 Golden Gate Futurity winner, No 202. At that time the Golden Gate Futurity was one of the biggest, if not the biggest, race in the country. I bought her a few days after the race for the grand sum of \$100. It was a ton of money for me in those days. The blood from that bird is still in my Devriendt family today. She was a terrific hen.

I moved to Martinez and raced there, from 64. Then, I kept adding the Devriendts and started to build that family around that hen. I bought some from Veegaete, one here, and one there. The Devriendts were flying better than the other stuff that I had.

I had won some races and had done well but it was nothing spectacular. My business career was taking an upward turn. I had a young family. I had worked my way up off my knees to where I was now an estimator and helping to run a pretty good-sized company. So a lot of my time was being put into building up my family and getting on a financial footing, so I didnt have lots of time with the birds. In the long races, for example, the Jim Fitzgerald Memorial was the biggest race in the Bay Area at the time.

My best memory of flying in California is winning that big 500. That was the biggest race of the year. There were only four day birds that day. I think I had the winner and Galaxy Loft had one or two of them. Thats the one I remember the most. Other than that, I wasnt driving anybody out of the sport by winning too much lets put it that way! he quips.

But the intensity of his life caught up with him.

The reason I sold the carpet company, in 1983, was because I was having headaches, I was depressed and didnt know it. I had made quite a bit of money and really didnt need to be going there every day, fighting all of those battles. So I went to lunch with Dr. Arnold one day, the same guy who Hank Vernazza mentioned, and explained to him what was happening. He told me I needed to go back to his office so he could check my blood pressure it was 186/120. He says, Man you better do something. Youre going to kill yourself! Your BP is completely out of control.

I came back to the office and sat behind the desk. I made the decision right then that was the end of this. I didnt know how I was going to get out of there, but I was going to find a way. Campbell remembers. So, over the next year, we structured a deal where I sold the company to 11 of the employees and retired at 43 years old. I moved down to Texas to take it easy and get away from the traffic of the Bay area, and get away from the rat race of the carpet company. I just wanted to be far removed from it.

Why Texas?

I already owned some property down in Texas and I also had a greyhound racing operation. When I was a young boy in Ireland, I was exposed to racing greyhounds. I got involved in that for the sport of the thing, but, there again, the Type A personality took off on me. I bought a farm down in Texas, hired my brother, who was very good with dogs, to go down and run it. I bought the best greyhounds in the world that money could buy. I found a partner and founded racing operations in Miami, Memphis and in W. Virginia. We raised all the dogs in Texas to send them to the racing kennels.

We were quite successful, and we wound up with the number one stud dog in the nation for two years, Hondo Monopoly. I started that for the sport of it, but the truth of the matter is that it turned out to be not a very nice business. I didn't enjoy some of the things that went on in the business and it took all of the sport out of it. My brother, after a few years, didn't like working 365 days a year and he and his wife decided to take off to Oregon. When they left, I wound the thing down, and gradually ended it.

Campbell turned his attention more and more to his racing pigeons. He had sold a few birds while living in California, beginning in 64 or 65. Small ads produced sales of 40-50 birds a year, but the Texas effort became, in true Texas fashion, bigger and better than anything else.

This operation was never a planned event, per se, it was something that evolved out of my love for birds and wanting to have the best birds that I could get my hands on. I don't know how it started. It wasn't intentional. I came here and started accumulating a few birds and started to fly, I was making a couple of trips to Europe each year to pick up new birds.

Now I had plenty of time and enough money to go and buy and do what I wanted to do. The minute I started doing it, lots of people wanted to buy youngsters from the birds. I thoroughly enjoyed having visitors and showing the birds off and that gave me a lot of satisfaction, especially if the people appreciated what I had there. So, it fed upon itself. It grew into what it has become the last few years.

More American History

Campbell continued to trace the history of the American sport in his lifetime. He remembered Veegaete. The next individual who had coast to coast impact was Piet de Weerd.

Around 1963, Piet de Weerd first came to the US. In those years there were very few if anybody going from the US to Europe to buy pigeons. There was an odd one, people like Tony Melucci, but for the most part almost nobody was doing that. What complicated matters was that almost no Belgians spoke English back then. So it was very difficult to communicate and do any business.

When Piet de Weerd arrived, around 1963, he could speak English. He arrived as a pigeon grader, but he was more than that. He was a very clever guy, who not only knew how to grade pigeons. He had a terrific knowledge of the Belgian pigeon sport, and who owned the best pigeons, and where he could buy them at very reasonable prices. People would automatically come to him and ask him, Piet, what would it cost me for you to find me a good pair? Since nobody else was in this business or nobody else was doing it, he was the guy who really cut a new path in the American pigeon sport.

In the Bay area, and I think all over the country, within a year or two the sport was revolutionized by Piet de Weerd and particularly with the birds that he sent to Hank Vernazza, opines Campbell

Students of the sport know what de Weerd did was to recognize that basically American birds were long distance, often times tough weather birds that didn't have speed. As soon as he brought in the speed birds, they had an immediate impact.

Campbell continues, When he came here he recognized immediately that all of the birds that had taken over in the late 50s and early 60s were birds that were coming from West Flanders. The meaning of that is in West Flanders all of those people specialized in long-distance racing. In Belgium there were other areas where other birds were much faster than that, particularly in the Antwerp area, where the Janssens were doing so well for many different people.

Now, Piet knew where to go to get the real good Janssens. The place that he wound up more often than not, was at the loft of Albert Van Der Flaes. Van Der Flaes lived only a few miles from the Janssen brothers and they had been friends for many years. Over the years he had obtained the best they had, and had raced them with probably more success than the Janssen brothers. Albert was a very mild-mannered gentleman and a very working class type guy. It made a big difference in his life if he could sell a few birds for what he considered a good price. But in terms of our money, it was peanuts. In the early 60s, birds could be bought for \$25-\$40, and they could be sold over

here for \$200-\$300 with no problem.

Not only did Piet do that, but he did it in a very clever way. Many times when he sold a guy a couple of pair of birds he sent them to him in a way that they had to outcross them. Hed maybe send them two cocks that were one strain and two hens of a different strain and the only way they could mate them automatically theyd have an out cross and they were going to fly the outcrosses right off the bat, and theyd get a bigger kick because of hybrid vigor.

In Hanks original six birds that he got through Piet, all the birds did not come from Van Der Flaes The Red Hen, the foundation bird, came from Van Der Flaes. There were a couple more, but in that group of birds, there were one or two other birds that were totally different. So crosses from these birds immediately made a huge impact. Then they did so well that people continued to buy birds from Piet, and Piet continued to buy them from Van DerFlaes, Van Cauwenberg and from all of the other little guys who were fantastic and had super birds, and who would sell them for very reasonable prices. He knew just where to put his fingers on them.

I dont mean this to be negative, in any way, explains Campbell. Piet did a hell of a service. He brought birds over here that when Hank Vernazza started flying it immediately looked like he was cheating. You couldnt beat him. Everybody who got the birds from Hank the story was the same. Now, here we are, 37 years later and a lot of these birds are still doing very well.

Part 2: European Ventures

The big step. Campbell analyzed what Veegate and de Weerd were doing and decided to eliminate the middle men.

The main birds I had in 67 were the Devriendts. I had already eliminated many of those odds and ends from years earlier. There wasnt anything from all of those other birds that had stuck. Everything was coming down from that old 202 hen and the Devriendts that I had brought in to go with that, continued Campbell.

I was looking for Devriendts and I was looking to learn all I could learn about what was happening with pigeons. In those days we did not have access to information like we do today. Basically, the only thing we knew was what Veegaete had written in some letters and pedigrees. Of course, we would hear the normal gossip stories about this and that. But, who knows how accurate any of that stuff was?

Back in 67 I had enough money, I wasnt a rich man by any means but I had been selling a few birds and saving the money and my job was getting better all the time and I felt it was time for me to venture over to Europe. Nobody else was going. I had been corresponding with the Devriendts. One of the brothers could write in English and I thought I would take the big plunge and head over there, Campbell remembers.

Then Campbell dropped a tidbit of why he was so successful in all of his ventures.

But the key thing I knew was if I was going to do something, I was going to do it on my own. I wasnt going to get on the same path as everybody else. It wasnt that they were not being successful at what they were doing, but I just didnt want to copy everybody else. If you just matched them, you would only match their performance. So, I took a different path.

a) Devriendts

I had come from Europe a few years earlier, so for me, it wasnt a long stretch to take a stab at going to Belgium. I had already made contacts with the Devriendts and they told me about a hotel I could stay at close to their place. I knew that one guy could speak a little bit of English, so I was comfortable enough to take a stab at finding my own way around and really trying to figure out what was going on.

When I arrived in Brussels I got off the plane to discover what I should have known ahead of time, hadnt given it any thought all signs were in Flemish. I couldnt even tell which door to walk out of the airport. Very few people could speak English back then. I would excuse myself with different people and nobody knew what I was talking about. Devriendt had given me quite complicated instructions on how to get to his place, which was way out on the West Coast. I was supposed to take a red bus number 30 and connect to a green bus number 15 and when I got here, I had to do this, that and the other thing. Hell, I couldnt even get out of the airport. So, finally, I found an

information desk and they were able to direct me to the bus stop.

I got on the bus and eventually, after two or three hours, I wind up in the small town of Gistel. Gistel was and still is today a big pigeon center. It was very famous because in the town of Moere, which was just a very tiny little village, was the lofts of Devriendt and Cattrysse. The back yards backed up to each other. So two of the most famous lofts in Belgium were next door neighbors. In the same general vicinity there were many other quite well known people.

So, the plan was that I would stay at the Railroad hotel, which had two or three rooms and a little place to eat. The guy who owned it also owned the only taxi in town and he knew the Devriendts. After lugging a heavy suitcase on the busses and into the train station hotel, and after traveling all day long, I couldnt wait. I had to head out to Devriendts house right away.

It was the Christmas season, maybe mid December, and cold as it could be outside. I arrived at the Devriendt house and knocked on the door. They knew who I was and brought me inside. There were three or four people there and no one could speak a word of English. The taxi driver couldnt speak a word of English either. Here I am sitting in a living room looking at four or five sets of eyeballs staring at me but nobody can say anything. The brother that could speak English was a banker who lived 20-30 km away and they couldnt get him on the phone at the time, and so we were kind of lost.

After a few minutes somebody figured out that a young girl who lived a few houses down was learning to speak English in high school. In any event, this nice young lady came down to the house, shook my hand and immediately spoke very beautiful English. It was like I had just met my Savior.

She sat down and we talked for a long time and immediately I made a deal with her to put her on my limited payroll and go with me all the time. I think she was out of school because of Christmas. She was going to go with us in the taxi and visit all these famous people and be my translator. I had a friendship with her for several years after that. Every single trip that I took, she would go everywhere I went. After a period of time I had her trained to listen to all of the talk that the pigeon guys were saying, and pass the information along to me things that maybe they didnt want me to know.

On that particular trip I learned a lot about what was going on about how Veegate was buying the birds, what kind of birds he was buying, and what the prices were. After that trip I made a trip about every year. Id save all my money every year, sell a few birds and by the time I went back I had plenty of money to spend in terms of their money.

It was a big learning experience. It sort of lead me in new paths and a new direction and each time I went I would meet new people and that in turn would take me in new directions, and this went on for a few years.

The first obvious big difference was the way the birds were housed the lofts. In those days they used a lot of lime and everything was bone dry to the point that it wasnt comfortable in the loft to me, but it made the point just how much importance they put on the dryness of the loft. You didnt see lofts over there with the wind blowing through them like we did everywhere in this country. The lofts were closed up a lot more.

The second big difference was that widowhood was old hat over there, whereas in our country, just a few guys were flying widowhood in the late 50s and early 60s. Everyone was flying widowhood in Belgium. That was a big difference.

Another big difference was they were much more aware of canker and coccidiosis than what a lot of people were in this country. So, these were all some of the things that you could pick up very quickly.

I bought a few birds from Devriendt and bought birds every year after that, says Campbell. One was a 1967 daughter of a bird called Tikkele. It was a fantastic hen. There was a son of the young Karl that was fantastic. Those birds are in my old family of Devriendts. There are people in this country like David Laux, up in Wisconsin who got them from me around 1969 and 1970 and theyre are still doing real well with them today. In fact he recently had the first overall winner in the premier futurity in the FVC, a three race series of 260, 300, and 360 miles, winning \$26,000 with the same Devriendt blood.

My relationship with the Devriendts lasted for many years all the way up to the time that they sold all of their birds. When I first visited in 67 Oscar Devriendt died just a few months earlier and the loft was maintained by his two sons under the name of Devriendt Brothers. Maurice Devriendt was the one who lived at home at the old place who took care of and raced the birds, and Marcel was the banker who could speak English. Unfortunately, both of them were not in the best of health, and they are also now both dead. A year or two before the birds were all sold I bought the Neus, which was, in my opinion, the best bird in the loft and one of a very few super record older breeders that they ever sold. They normally only sold young birds. That bird has been a terrific producer and made a big impact on my Devriendt family.

One time I asked the Devriendts the question when I was in Texas, about 1985, if they didnt have pigeons and were starting up all over again, what family of birds would they go after to start up with again. I was trying to discover some hidden group of birds out there somewhere. The answer surprised me. They said, We would go back to our own family of birds. I asked how they could do that. There isnt anybody who has that family of birds other than themselves. Theyve all been crossed into other birds and are no longer pure. They said, Oh no. Thats not true. Theres an old man who lives quite close to here whos got two or three birds from our father each year going back 20-30 years ago. We would go to him and get them back. So I said, well Id like to visit that guy.

They said its no problem. As a matter of fact he is very old and hes going to have a sale this winter and sell all his birds. The guys name is George Compennolle. So we went to Compennolles house and went through all the birds. There was one bird there that was really a fantastic bird a red cock from 1977. His name was the Goede Rosten. It was really a super bird. The guy had about 70 birds and most of them were Devriendts. I wanted to buy this one cock, but the rules in Belgium at the time were if youre going to have an auction you had to warrant that no birds had left the loft for six months or a year prior to the sale. So, they couldnt cut out the one bird from the loft. To make a long story short, within a few hours, I made a deal and bought the whole loft for not a whole lot more than what I was willing to pay for the red cock.

I bought the Goede Rosten and his father, a bird called the Oudepenne. I brought back 23 of them to the US, selling the rest to Taiwan directly. Out of the 23, some of my good Devriendt friends in the country wound up with 2 or 3 of them and I kept about 6 or 8 here. The Goede Rosten made a big impact on my Devriendt family and, as a matter of fact, is still quite dominant. The whole red line of Devriendts that I came down from those pigeons.

For many years there was a big rivalry between the Cattrysse and the Devriendts. It seemed like the Devriendts for the most part would fly better than Cattrysse, but when the race was a real big one, the Cattrysse would come through and beat them many times. It was an intense rivalry. You could throw a rock from one guys loft to the other. The lofts were up on the roofs. You could see the birds coming.

But it wasnt bitter. They would even trade a bird or youngsters off their best birds. So, they didnt hate each other but it was certainly a very intense rivalry.

b) Janssens

In West Flanders, which is the area that I visited the most the first couple of years, almost everybody was interested in the real long distance racing. It was only after two or three trips that I realized the area of Antwerp and more towards the middle of Belgium there was an entirely different type of racing. Thats where Vernazzas birds had come from. The faster birds were in the other area.

I was flying the Devriendts and by this time I had had them for awhile. They were doing real good for me on the long races, but they couldnt fly on the other races with Hanks birds and the other people that had Hanks birds. But I had too much pride in what I had, so I waited three years before I did anything about it.

By 1969, it was clear that the Devriendts were not fast enough to compete with the other faster birds that had come in later. So, I then decided to start bringing in the other birds. Rather than go and ask to buy birds from Hank de Weerd, I went directly to Albert Van der Flaes.

When I went to Van der Flaes, I was really impressed. He was at the top of his game at that time. He only had

about 25 pairs of stock birds in two different lofts. But they were really magnificent. Over a two or three year period I bought all the key birds out of those stock lofts a little at a time, including the Blauwe Van Lier, a bird called the Old Dikke, the mate to the Blauwe Van Lier, the Jonge Blauwe Van Lier, Dikke Vos, and many of his best-known super birds. Most of those real super birds I was paying \$500 for. At that time \$500 would buy almost anything in the country. There were a couple of \$750 exceptions.

During the next four or five years, I can tell you that you could buy almost any bird in Belgium for \$500, and certainly any bird for \$750. When I bought the Blauwe Van Lier from Albert Van Der Flaes for \$1,000 around 1970, it was almost unheard of. Everybody called it the \$1,000 cock, continues Campbell. The Blue Van Lier was featured in the Janssen Brothers book. Underneath it says Sold to an American, so I didnt have much respect in those days. It was the best bird that Van DerFlaes ever owned. It was a grandfather to the cock of Romeins Golden Pair, the sire to Vale Romein and Rooie Appie.

In the last few years, the generator that has driven the pigeon sport is all the big money races. But do you know what the first really big one was? Well, it was in the fall of 1973, at the California State Convention Race. Only one bird made it home in race time in two days, and won approximately \$50,000, all the money that was in the race pools, prizes, everything. It was approximately a \$50,000 winner because the bird took every dime that was in the race. It was the only bird that made it home in race time.

And that bird, it so happens, was a grandchild of the \$1,000 cock, the Blauwe Van Lier. It was bred by Pete Sparacino from a youngster that he got from me off the \$1,000 cock. He and I both went together and pooled the bird and split the money. So that was the first real big winner.

The Dikke Vos means the thick red one, like a broad-chested bird. The Dikke Vos was a fantastic handling, terrific looking bird that had bred a lot of good pigeons. It was one that he would never let go. I tried to buy him two or three different times and on the second or third attempt I was with a guy named Robert Cromwell from Ireland. We went to the loft and tried to buy the Dikke Vos, but that was one bird he just would not part with.

That evening Van derFlaes was going to take us over the border into Holland to a guy by the name of de Bruijn in Reusel, across the street from De Klak (not William de Bruijn). This guy had quite a good collection of original Janssen Brothers birds, and was a real good flyer in his own right. We went through all the birds but instead of falling in love with some of the birds from the Janssen brothers, he had a Dutch banded hen that was just really magnificent. So, after a lot of talking round and round I paid the price I think it was \$500 for this hen.

There was another guy who was with us on the visit he and Albert were chit chatting in the corner and I didnt understand. So I asked my translator what they were talking about. She whispered to me that Albert knew the hen that I had bought real well. He always wanted that bird, but he could never buy her.

We arrived home to Van der Flaes house and went into the kitchen to drink a beer and talk. So, I told Robert Cromwell to go out to the car and bring in the hen we had bought. He brought the bird into the kitchen and handed it to Albert. I asked Albert what he thought about it. It was obvious by his actions that he really liked this bird. Of course, I already knew that because the girl had told me. I said, Ill tell you what. Ill trade you that bird for the Dikke Vos. And thats how I got the Dikke Vos, bragged Campbell.

And the clincher to the end of the story after this all happened and I bought the Dikke Vos, I lost contact with Van Der Flaes for a number of years while the carpet company was growing When I came to Texas, I contacted him, again. I asked him, in a letter, how are you doing, and how did the hen from de Bruijn do? He wrote back and said, About the hen from de Bruijn, it escaped from my loft the following week and de Bruijn told me she never returned to his loft.

Returning The Favor

Hank Vernazza is one guy who I admire most, of everybody that I ever met in the pigeon sport, because of the tremendous example he set for everybody. He is completely unselfish. I believe that one of the biggest problems we have in the pigeon sport is selfishness. Hank is completely unselfish. He lived by the principle that he would never

sell a pigeon and never did in his lifetime. Many people would take advantage of this. They would ask him to sell me a bird or two. Of course, he would never do that, but sooner or later he would wind up giving them some stock. Some people profited from this a great deal, but it didnt make any difference to Hank. He stuck by his principles. Thats how it was.

Vernazza did a lot for the club. He did a lot for everybody. I had a personal experience with that when I was only in the club, maybe less than a year. I was in an automobile accident and broke 7-8 ribs broke my leg and cut up my face. Within a day or two, he came over to visit me. We were good acquaintances in the club but we were certainly not close friends by any means. He said, Campbell, you are going to be off work for a while. You have a young family. Ive got a few bucks set aside that I really dont need. He told me if I needed any help to let him know and he would be glad to help. He made it clear there would be no hurry in paying him back.

It was something that I never forgot. It was help that I never had to call upon. I was only off work for a little bit of time, but the fact that he took the time to visit with me and offer his help meant a great deal to me. I was just a young guy, only maybe 25 years old at the time, trying to get going. This is the kind of thing Hank did. He did it in a quiet way. People didnt know a lot of the good things that he did and it was really a good example for me, and something I admired a great deal.

Anyhow, he was absolutely ecstatic over the years from 63 68 or 69 over these Janssens that de Weerd was sending him. But the one thing he didnt have was any birds from the Janssen brothers, nor was he able to get his hands on any, because I think the truth of the matter is Pete de Weerd wasnt going to go to the Janssen brothers and pay the prices they were asking. It wasnt economically feasible for de Weerd, in my opinion. This was the one Belgian loft where the prices were always high.

In any event, around 69 or so I started making contacts with the Janssen brothers and I kept it very quiet. I didnt tell anybody. In early 1970, they agreed to sell me 8 birds. The truth of the matter is I couldnt afford 8 birds. But I never forgot what Hank did for me, so I went to Hank and said, Look, I have an opportunity to buy these eight birds from the Janssen Brothers and I cant afford 8, but I always appreciated what you did. If you would like to have two of them, I will buy all eight. He was tickled to death.

When the eight birds came into the Oakland airport, Hank and I couldnt wait to get down there and get the birds and open the box and take a look at these fantastic pigeons. There had been very few birds come to this country from the Janssen brothers prior to that time. It turned out there were six hens and two cocks. Well, we separated the two cocks easy enough no problem. Then I gave him first choice of the hens. Hank, being a pretty good pigeon man like he was, picked the hen that became the grandmother to his famous 180, says Campbell proudly. It was the best of the six hens.

c) Grondelaers

I started buying Grondelaers birds around 1985, remembers Campbell. I was introduced to him by Jan LeCompte, a guy who also flew Grondelaer birds and was very good friends with him. Grondelaers had the reputation of being the best, or one of the best fanciers for 30 years in Belgium. He was a butcher by trade and had been so successful with the birds that he was able to retire from the butchery business and spend all of his time flying pigeons. He didnt have lots of pigeons. He kept a moderate number of birds but yet made a real good living from flying and selling his pigeons.

He was the only guy in Belgium I ever knew who could sell his best birds year after year and still stay on top. He knew when he had special yearlings and two year olds coming along that he could sell off some of the older champions. He did it over and over again and stayed on top right to the end. He was a real special guy and a tremendous fancier that really knew pigeons and knew how to motivate them.

They called him the Old Fox. He was great pigeon flyer and an even better businessman. He and I used to go round and round doing business on a friendly basis. We got to know each other very well. After several of these sessions, on the day I bought Bliksen from him, we were going round and round and there were four or five birds

involved. We were having fun with it but it was serious business, there was lots of money involved.

I said to LeCompte, Tell Jan that I dont come here to buy pigeons. Jan told him in Dutch. Grondelaers was very surprised and he asked, What for? I said, I come here to learn how to sell pigeons. He got a big kick out of that.

To give you a good example, I had a very famous bird called the Newspaper Hen. When I bought the Newspaper Hen it was my very first trip to his house and the hen was only a yearling but I could tell that she was a super bird. So I picked out the hen and wrote down the band number outside. Then there was a youngster coming out of the nest that later turned out to be a bird that we called Rooster coming off of one of the real good pairs. So, he quoted the price for the Newspaper Hen in Belgian Francs. LeCompte translated it to Dutch guilders, and I translated it to American dollars.

Then we went into the dining room to have some coffee and settle up. Hes sitting across the table reading my notepad upside down and I said to LeCompte we have so much money here for the hen, and I write the amount down, and I have so much money here for the youngster and I put a line across it like Im going to add it up.

During this whole time Grondelaers remember hes a real old guy with thick glasses, is reading upside down. He starts shaking his head and waving his arms No, No. Im writing, of course, in American dollars. LeCompte says, Yeah, thats right. Grondelaers says, No, no. Just a minute.

He ran into the living room and came back with that days newspaper financial page. He knew what the Belgian franc was worth that day and had it figured out in his head. There was a difference of about \$22 on a deal that was running into the thousands and he had it figured out to within \$22. Thats how the bird got the name Newspaper Hen.

During the 80s I bought many birds from Europe super birds from different people. One of the groups of birds I bought was all of the stock birds from Jos Van Limpt, known as De Klak. It astounded everybody in Europe and some people in this country, because it was all done very secretly. De Klak wasnt in good health and he was really good friends with Jan Hermans, who happened to be my main guy in Europe who was buying birds for me.

Jan had an inkling of the possibility that De Klak would sell all of his birds racers and breeders and that maybe Jan would have a big auction. I expressed some interest in it and at the last minute what happened was he decided that he only wanted to sell the breeders, that he better keep the flying birds. So he sold the whole breeding loft. We put the deal together and bought all the birds before anybody knew. That was in 1989. Nobody knew they were available, and all of a sudden it was announced that we bought the whole stock loft. It flabbergasted everybody. Anyhow, we bought all 43 of his breeders, Campbell triumphs.

Story of the Super 73

Campbell maintains to this day that the best bird he ever bought was Super 73, 81NL8115173, bred and flown by Gijs Peters. Super 73 was First Ace Pigeon Holland Sprint 84, Limburgh Reisduif, then 1st Overall Ace Pigeon Holland NPO 85, approx. 50,000 lofts

In the summer of 1987, I was driving down the highway in Holland with Jan Hermans, we had an appointment that went belly-up on us, so we had a couple of hours with nothing to do. We were driving down the road with plenty of time to kill until our next appointment. Jan said there was a little guy called Gijs Peters who lived in the next village and he had the Overall Ace Pigeon of Holland two or three years ago. He said he would never sell that bird. He didnt need the money, but he was a real nice guy, and a real good fancier.

We went over to Peters house and sat in the back yard as he had the birds flying around a little bit. Finally, he brought Super 73 out and let me handle the bird. Well the minute I handled this bird, I knew he was a real special bird. He was just phenomenal. He had finished his racing career but was flying out everyday and was in tremendous condition. The muscle on this bird was unbelievable. Jan told me that a year or two earlier the Herbots Brothers and Grondelaers both had tried to buy this bird. Many others had offered up to \$US12,500. That was top money in 84 or 85.

In 1985 he had won 1st Overall Ace Pigeon of Holland, and since he was on the race team, he did not sire many birds each year. Despite this limitation at the end of 87 by age 6, he had sired 12 1st place winners, with 10

different hens.

Anyhow, I didnt make any effort to buy the bird. I listened to the story and looked at the results and heard about all of the children who had already won first prizes, and he had only been in the stock loft a year. The point was he hadnt bred very many and most of them were already first place winners.

I went back to the motel, but I couldnt sleep that night. I thought there had to be a way to buy this bird.

I wrestled for hours thinking about different ways I could do this deal. The next day I called Jan and told him I needed to look at the bird again. We made an appointment the next Saturday morning. There was a race going on so we went outside and watched the birds come in. The birds were clocked and Gijs brought 73 outside for us to handle again. This bird was just like electricity. His muscle was unbelievable. He was just a bird apart from any I had ever seen and I felt that strong about it at the time.

In those days I didnt have a catalog. The Bulletin started coming out with what you now call those yearly editions. I was the first guy to have several pages in color, similar to my own catalog today. I would have the middle ten or twelve pages. So, there were some photographs of the loft in there and photographs of the stud pen with the name of each bird on it, and it really looked impressive.

I knew that Gijs was a guy with whom money wasnt going to be a factor. He didnt need the money. So, what I did was show them the annual yearbook with the pictures of the lofts and all of the top class birds already there. I told him that this bird really belongs in Texas. He was such a fantastic bird and would never get the recognition in Holland that he deserved. He needs to come to Texas where everyone that comes to visit would see him and he will become more famous and get the recognition he deserves. I offered him \$20,000 for the bird and an airplane ticket so that he could come visit the bird anytime, any year. You will always be able to come and see him. The bird would be going to a place where hed be well taken care of. This was very interesting for him. Also \$20,000 in 1987 was a lot of money.

He didnt comment too much on it and we talked about some other things for a little while. Finally he said, Im probably going to let you have the bird. I wont tell you for a few more days. I want to talk to my wife about it. I think you are right, I think the bird will have a good home and if I could go there I would like to do that. Thats the way our friendship was established and thats the way Super 73 was bought.

For what its worth, Super 73 had a brother who was a super bird. He was a little bigger than 73 and Piet de Weerd always insisted he was the better of the two. But history has proven that Pete wasnt right, adds Campbell, vindicated.

Part 3

Champion Observations

If we were to list the top birds that passed through your hands, which would they be?

Super 73 is the best bird I ever bought. But I consider his son, 2778, as good as him. I bred him. I think that 083 was the best hen that I ever owned. 083 bred champions to everything she was ever mated to. If I had mated her to a parrot, all her children would speak ten languages, Im sure of that. She is also the mother of 2778.

There are probably several that fit into a category close to that, but not there. Those birds would include birds like the Olde Schalie, Klak Velo was the best and only real super one in my opinion that came from all of Klaks birds; also the original Wonder Cock. I think of the newer ones Hekkenklack, Verona, and De Senna. Those birds are all very special.

Why did you concentrate on buying such renowned champions?

Campbell answers, I think everything you do about flying racing pigeons has to do with percentages. If you are going to be successful you have to play all the percentages all of the time. Those percentages come into play in many different things that we do.

In buying stock, in breeding from the stock all of these things are a matter of percentages. If I buy a champion

that has a fantastic record, the percentage chance of him producing a good one is much better than the bird that did not have such a record. It doesn't mean that they will always produce, but your percentage chance is much better. There is an old Irish proverb that says: If you breed from an ass, its an ass you'll get.

There are no guarantees, and all of those things have certain fluctuations. Super 73 bred a lot of birds that were not so good. 2778 bred a lot of birds that were not so good and 083 bred some birds that were not so good. But the percentage of good ones that they bred was probably much higher than the majority of birds that ever came through most people's hands.

So, you play percentages. But you have to also recognize that even if it's a youngster off of Super 73, if you breed from the bird for three or four years and mate it to all your best hens, and the youngsters are no good, its time to play the percentages and fill the nest box with a different bird.

Even from the birds that we bred from, we eliminate a big percentage just from those basics. No matter what anybody tells you, there is no bird in the history of the world that has ever bred nothing but champions. I guarantee you that if you want to be specific and there was a way to find out all the results, birds like Super 73 and 2778 and 083 there are no birds that ever came to this country that has progeny that has won as much of those birds have won. I guarantee you, as super as they were, they bred many that were no good, Campbell replied honestly.

When you went over were you just looking for record race birds or birds that were proven breeders?

Both, answered Campbell. Sometimes, I bought both. I would buy the super bird that flew well, plus his father and mother. I did that with the Hekkenklack and I did it with Quick Lady and with others.

If I go to a loft in Europe for a visit, I usually go there because the guy has a super bird. I usually ask the guy to see the super bird. I usually ask to see the father and the mother and the grandparents, if he has them. Typically, the guy will want to show you lots of birds, figuring that you're a big buyer and you're going to buy a lot of birds from them. I limit it strictly to those few, plus I will ask them to show me the best two race birds on the team, if they haven't already been included, and the best two pair of breeders in the stock loft.

And that's it. I don't need to see any others. If after seeing those birds, and it's all very interesting, then I can start looking at some brothers and sisters. But there's no point in going out there and looking at 150 birds when there are only 4, 5 or 6 where he made his fame.

When you did buy a record bird, did you require some indication that it had bred well?

Many record birds never had a chance to breed because they became fantastic racers at an early age. They were bought immediately and never had a chance to breed. So, the answer is no, but if it had bred well, like Super 73, it made it more valuable to me.

Did you buy any young bird champions?

Very few. I only bought two really champion young bird flyers. I always avoided it like the plague, because of the fact that the YB specialists, get so much more out of those YBs that it's not a real good indication of the quality of the bird. Especially a few years ago when there were so many fears about the drugs. There is a big difference in the motivation by the young bird specialists so the results are not a true reflection of the quality of the bird. In old bird racing, everybody's motivating no matter what system; you can evaluate the birds better.

The only two exceptions were Quick Lady, because I knew the whole family and it was part of Super 73 family and I knew the guy racing the bird. The other one was the National, a bird that had two tremendous performances from the 400 two weeks in a row in Belgium. Those are the only two that I ever bought.

How many of the champions you purchased were also champion young bird flyers?

All of the champions showed indications of being good birds as young birds. But remember, a lot depends on the loft they came from. A lot of those guys didn't have a great deal of interest in YB racing. You have to take that into consideration. The YB record of the bird didn't really mean anything at all to me in evaluating the bird. It was a factor I didn't consider very much.

Have you ever bought a super record bird that turned out to be a disappointing breeder?

The answer to that question is yes! There's a real lesson to be learned here. The same thing happens in the

greyhound business and it makes a lot of sense, but no one ever considers it.

There are some people who are such fantastic handlers of animals that they will get more out of them than anybody else ever will. A real good example of that is a bird I bought called Balko. He was a fantastic bird in Germany, a Grondelaers cock that was a terrific producer and racer. He had a real phenomenal record, breeding and racing in the loft of Rudi Kohne I paid a lot of money for him, \$17,000.

Over a period of three or four years this bird bred some good birds, but never produced the way I expected. I bought several birds from Rudi Kohne and the whole group of birds never produced like I thought they would.

What I attribute that whole thing to is that I consider Rudi to be the best pigeon handler that I ever came across. Maybe, the only one better than Grondelaers. This guy was an absolute genius in the loft. He could get more out of birds than any I ever saw.

The same exact thing happened and does happen in the greyhound business. Certain people who raise dogs can have a fourteen month old pup that is running away from the competition by many lengths and a kennel owner will come along and buy this pup figuring that by the time he matures at twenty-four to twenty-eight months that the dog will be a phenom. He doesn't realize that the trainer already has the dog running as fast as he will ever run in his life. He won't get any better. Dogs normally will get a lot better as they get a little bit older.

Birds coming from certain individuals don't get any better. The handler gets more out of him than anybody else ever will. This is something that people need to be careful about when buying birds.

I think you always have to ask yourself the question, Is this guy flying fantastic because of his system and because of his genius, or are his birds really that good? The step further to go is to see who all have bought birds from this guy and are other people winning with them or are they not. Are they doing much better for the original guy than anybody else, or is everybody winning with these birds? That's the question.

What are the percentages of winners? Is it one or two? Is it a little sprinkling or is it happening all over the place? That's the key question. If it's happening all over the place, as it did with VanderFlaes or the Janssen Brother or De Klak, you are dealing with real quality birds. If it's not happening very often and the guy has tons of birds out there and lots of people are saying, Geez, I didn't do very good with those birds, then you better take a long hard look at it.

The pigeons that belonged to the Janssen Brothers were obviously very special. Everybody and their brother did good with those birds. They did well everywhere they went all over the world. So, the genius was not in the handling ability of the Janssen Brothers. The success was in the gene pool and the quality of the birds that they had their hands on and their ability to maintain the family.

Have you ever bought a record bird that was an absolute dud at breeding?

Not an absolute dud. But Balko was way short of expectations. The Ace Van Bommel was another one that had some really good birds out there but the percentages were not as good as they should have been.

Did you ever have a record bird that turned out to be a better grand sire or grand dame than it was as direct sire or dam?

That's what we are finding a little bit with Verona. He has bred many super breeders. There are a few of his children out there that were not such special breeders, but we are hearing more and more that their children are producing real well, that it's coming in the second generation. Having said that, he's got tons of them in the first generation, too. So, what I tell people with that bird is if you don't have luck the first time around with his children, you better try the second generation because a lot of them are doing well.

What is your experience with crosses versus birds that are somewhat of the same strain or related?

My thought is very simple. We are preoccupied in this country with strains and names. But just a little bit of research tells us that in most cases, most of the champion birds are crosses. Grondelaers every year brought in one or two new key birds but after he brought them in they became Grondelaers. Of course he selected them according to what he liked. If you look at the pedigree of Super 73, he is obviously a cross of several different strains. If you look at the pedigree of the Wonder Cock, he is obviously a cross of several different strains. No one can deny the ability of these crosses to produce.

The one thing about them is that many, if not all, of the ancestors in the background were super birds in their own right. This is the key if you are buying a bird that's not an expensive bird and all four grandparents are super birds, you have a real good percentage chance of having a good bird if the specimen you bought has the proper physical characteristics.

If we were then going to list the most reliable breeding selection criteria, would it be record bird or genetic background, i.e. pedigree?

The race record. Perry Como had a brother who couldn't sing a note.

What do the champions have, if anything, in common?

They all had character, a good strong body structure, are reasonably buoyant with good muscle, good feather and they all have a reasonably good eye. It doesn't have to be a fantastic eye, but a reasonably good eye. They have to show something in the eye.

The point is if you stay within good guidelines in terms of what the father did, what the mother did, what the grandparents did if you are in a family that has a history of producing real good birds and the bird in your hand is reasonably good in terms of the things we talked about, then give him a chance. See what happens. We aren't God. We aren't nearly as perfect at figuring these things out as we think we are.

a) Character

Character is the more important quality than all the others, and here's why it's the most difficult one to determine. A bird can be a little bit weak in the back, a bird can maybe not have the best muscle; but if he's got character and a lot of heart, he's going to be tough to beat. So, that's more important than all the other things put together.

Most of the super birds have real good character, explains Campbell. A bird isn't going to fly on the top against 10,000 birds a half a dozen times unless there is something special going on there. It's not all being done on his physique. A lot of that is being done mentally. This bird really wants to do it.

Pigeons are like people in that the personality is very important. If you hire somebody to go to work for you who is what we call a lazy lout, it doesn't matter what you do to motivate this guy he's not going to get it done. The minute you turn your back he's going to goof off and not get it done.

If you hire a guy who's a fireball a guy from a good hard working family who's going to go in there and not watch the clock and get the job done, it is the same thing with pigeons. If we put it in human terms, that person is hyper. Some birds can be motivated very easily. They have the personality. They want to take over their nest box. They want to protect their mate. You get the ones with the real personality like Bliksem birds from good families that work hard. They want to be home quick. You can motivate them and do more with them.

For short and middle distance, it's important that the bird has a certain amount of what I call quick-eyedness. For many years we hated birds that bounced off the walls. We wanted nice, calm and docile birds that would stand there and look at us and let us pet them. But if you're going to fly short and middle distance, you better have some birds that got a little quick-eyedness. These kind of birds, when the basket lid goes down, they are gone. They are not hanging around flying around for fifteen minutes with the rest of the mob trying to figure out what day of the week it is.

These are all good traits but it doesn't mean that a bird has to show all of these to be good. When you see them, these are good traits. There are other birds that are very intelligent and a little more calm. But you can really motivate them. You can get their minds on something and they don't give up until they are home. Those are birds that have character.

What's the best indicator to measure character? Very simple. What did the father do? What did the mother do? What did the four grandparents do? What's in the history of the family? What kind of birds are these? What have they done in the past? That's the best way to measure it. When the bird starts jumping out of your hand and you can see the physical traits of the character, or you can see him defend his nest at all costs. These are the things that you must observe to determine the character of the bird.

b) Body Structure

The body structure can be no good for several reasons. The muscle quality may be no good. The basic structure through the keel bone may be weak. The idea is to handle the birds with your finger tips. Placing your finger tips on the keel bone and moving the keel bone in different directions. Up and down and sideways, you feel the strength of the body structure in the bird.

If you press on the keel bone and raise it in, towards the middle of the bird, and the bird squawks two or three times the body structure is weak. If you move the keel bone around a little bit too much and its moving too easily and moving too much, the bird isnt strong enough.

Same thing with the vent bones. The vent bones can be a little open, but when you put pressure on them and theyre soft and mushy, they are not strong enough. But if theyre reasonably strong, they can be a little bit open. You dont want to put so much pressure on them that you break them but you can feel them gently to know what the strength is back there.

I had two super birds in the loft that are strong in the vent but a little open. If a guy insists on having vents welded together, its easy to show him a couple of birds that have been fantastic, that are not that way. But they are strong in the vents. They are a little bit open, but they must be strong. The distance between the keel and the vent is irrelevant. I have seen this space vary greatly in super birds.

We eliminate birds that many people call weak in the back. If the rump is narrow, causing the tail end to come up and make the bird out of balance, its a cull. We find that the case is not a weakness in the back, but a narrowness in the back. If the bird is buoyant and in balance, then he wont have that narrow back with the tail going up and so on and so forth. He will be out of balance if he is weak or narrow in the back. Either way, its no good and those birds are eliminated. None of the real good ones have that characteristic.

If the bird isnt molting real heavy in the back and you put pressure on the back at that certain point and the tail comes flopping up, thats a pretty good indication the bird is out of balance or weak in the back, whatever way you want to call it. Ive never handled any real super ones that were that way.

But, he cautions, If it has a narrow back and the tail doesnt fly up it could be a long distance bird and be a little bit sway backed. If you put enough pressure on a certain spot, any tails going to come up.

Do you find that the good ones come in all sizes?

Absolutely. Hurricane Harry is arguably the best record bird ever to come to this country and he was a giant like a chicken. The Blue Crack in the single pen next to him was a very tiny little cock that had a fantastic racing record. I kept the two together just to show people that size means nothing. 049 was one of the best hens I ever owned and she was a little peanut. Many years ago there was a fallacy in this country about what a super bird had to handle like. They wanted these little short birds that were very apple bodied where the tail went down and the back went way up. The apple body with the rigid back thats humped, you dont find too many super birds that are built that way. Thats what a lot of people really like. The real super birds have a little more length to them and the back does not need to be humped like that.

Of course, there is a difference between short and middle distance birds and long distance birds. Long distance birds will tend to have a little more length to their bodies and they can be what I call swayback. Whereas the fast or short middle distance birds will be a little bit shorter in length, but they will have much more length than that apple bodied bird.

All of these birds have the same things in common. They were buoyant, they had a very strong body structure all the way through. They had good enough eyes to be good breeders. All of them have those qualities. The difference in the size was enormous.

c) Muscle Quality

You feel the muscle of the birds with your finger tips. Thats where you have feeling on your hand. And thats where you can pick up the real quality of the muscle, whether its there or whether its not there. You have to learn to

put the tips of your fingers underneath those small feathers where the muscle is such that you can actually feel the skin and the muscle.

In just a matter of a few seconds you can determine all that with your finger tips. After youve developed a feel for doing that, you can go through and tell a hundred birds in no time at all and pick out the ones that are obviously bad. Thats what you are trying to do.

A bird with a good muscle, its almost like millions of little strands. First off, if theres no muscle there, if you can shave with the bird because there is little muscle, then youve got a problem of either real poor health or no muscle quality. If the keep bone is sticking out and theres just no muscle there, youve got a problem. If the muscle is sticking out and its real hard like a board, then thats no good, either. It cant be real hard. It must be supple and pliable. I hate to use the term like a rubber ball, but thats a little bit like what its like.

The muscle runs along the length of the bird and you can feel the texture of the muscle in almost like fiber strands underneath. Its not real hard. Its very supple and pliable. When the bird is in condition, hes really buoyant and those muscles will swell up. A bird like Super 73, when you felt the quality of those muscles, and when he relaxed in your hand he would just vibrate.

d) Feather

All super birds have good silky feather quality. You dont find too many of them with a real rough sandpapery feather quality. De Klak and Grondelaers were real feather nuts and they had birds with really terrific feather quality. You can affect feather quality by the way you feed. A little more oil, obviously. A little bit of safflower a little peanut. Those things will put better condition on the feather. But real feather quality is hereditary.

e) The Eye

One thing you can say for sure all super birds have good eyes. Theres absolutely no question about that. The best birds dont necessarily have the best eyes, Campbell cautions. Thats where too many people get into trouble.

You can be too particular about the eye, studying them to such degree that youre really looking too closely at one item. Super 73 had a really good eye, but there were many birds that came through here that had better eyes than him, but he was the best breeder I ever had.

Im not an eyesign guy, but the birds with eyes that are flat and dead are never any good to breed from. Im looking at good, rich color, good depth in the iris, good character in the eye. It doesnt have to be a fantastic eye, but its got to have some showing of decent eyes to be a decent breeder. Im not looking at any circles, in particular.

Of course, Id love to see a bird with a fantastic eye. We all do. But what Im saying is dont get carried away. If the bird has good depth and good character in the eye and the bird is a super bird and the father, mother and grandparents were all super, then go breed from it.

I dont think you should judge a birds flying ability by his eye. I think when you are going to put birds on your flying team all you need to do is take birds from your best breeders. Birds that have good physical characteristics and put them on the flying team and fly them. If his eye is decent, put him on there, give him a chance and see what he can do. Mr. Wonderful is the best bird I ever raced here, but Ive had hundreds of them with better eyes than him. I think that in the long distance birds youll tend to get more orange and dark brown or nut brown than you will the pearl eyes.

There are certain families where the eye is much stronger than other families. You have to know a little about the family of birds youre dealing with. Those things all come into play. Vernazzas old Janssen family had phenomenal eyes, they were really tremendous. But I can remember visiting a loft in Belgium that was one of the best Norbert Norman many years ago you wouldnt have given five cents for most of the eyes in his whole loft.

I have spent countless years and hours arguing eyes with eye nuts. I just know from experience that way too much attention is given to the pigeons eyes. That was more of the case 10 years ago than it is now. Ten years ago it was really bad. Now, I think more people are looking at it for what it really is.

I can tell you that for three years here I used to take five birds and put black electrical tape on their bands. When the eye nut would come through the door with his eye glass and start to preach to me about the eyes, I had them look at five birds. These five birds are all proven to be super birds. One of the five is much better than the other four. If I were to give you one of the five birds, which one would you take home?

In three years, many eye experts took the test and not a single one of them got it right. Every one of them missed Super 73. He was the bird that was much better than all the others. The point is all five birds have terrific eyes. Super 73 probably didnt have the best of the five, but it didnt matter, he concludes.

The Operation

Campbells breeding operation over the years employed two full time loft men and his two daughters. Grant Whitson worked for him 12 years. Frank Robinson started working part time at age 13, and now is 24 and been a full time loft man for years. Daughters Susan and Diane have take turns working for their father handling pedigrees, record keeping and correspondence. And of course their was Campbell, himself. He did his own negotiating, but always had contact people who were on the lookout for exceptional birds that he might be interested in.

The most I ever spent on one bird was Senna, which was \$33,000. I have spent more for a collection of birds, obviously. I bought the Boy Peters collection for \$175,000, he said candidly.

There are always those who complain that the cost of such exceptional stock is killing the sport, making it unaffordable for some to get competitive birds. Your comment, please?

Campbell responds, I think that theres a certain amount of validity to the argument that the cost is getting out of hand for a lot of people and its making it more difficult for some people to compete. Thats one of the reasons that over the years Ive tried to keep a certain amount of pairs, that I call normal pairs, that I can sell birds from for a quite reasonable price. \$300 apiece for grandchildren of all the super birds is something that almost everyone could afford. \$300 or \$400 is a fortune for some people, but I have always thought that it was a reachable goal for most.

But the professional breeders usually spend several tens of thousand dollars for champions, and then make youngsters available to the sport at more reasonable prices. Professional breeders have provided a service and they have raised the standards. But there is a negative side to it that has made it tough for some people.

I still think that if a guy who has a very limited amount of money takes the time to visit and look and select, he can still find good birds that he can afford and be successful with.

Breeding

Do you find any fall off in breeders as they get older?

I think that in the breeding loft, especially with hens, unless the hen was an absolute one percenter thats a bird that was an absolute foundation hen, after they get past eight years old theyre really not of too much value. So I think the more young strong hens that you can keep in your breeding loft the better off you are. For 100% sure.

Campbell made another comment on age.

One other thing is that if you have feeders in your loft, you need to keep your feeders no more than five years old and two, three and four years old is perfect. I think that the younger feeders will do a better job.

Campbell made a practice of getting as much as he could out of his super cocks. The idea was to breed more children from the expensive cocks. Being that I was culling so heavily, if I had 30 youngsters and I could cull them to 20, then my percentages of people getting good results were much better, with the numbers, I was able to cull heavier and send out a better quality bird.

Basically, I did two different things, he explains. With most stud cocks we rotated hens. Very simply, a stud cock would mate to a hen. The two eggs would be removed immediately, the hen would be removed immediately. The eggs would go to a pumper pair and a day later he would get a new, rested hen. That was the main system.

Two additional single pens are set up with four nest boxes in each pen. In these two pens the cock remains free and up to four hens are mated to the cock at the same time. Each hen is released every hour for copulation. On the

evening the hen lays the first egg it is immediately removed, so the cock does not begin to sit. The hen is locked in her box two or three hours before she lays the second egg. For some reason on this system, many times the hens will drop the egg on the floor if she is not locked in the box.

Under the first system it is easily possible to obtain 15 rounds from the cocks. Under the second system, with up to four hens, the production can obviously be much higher.

Part 4

Most Common Mistakes

What are the biggest mistakes the average pigeon guy makes?

The biggest mistakes, and they are very common are: 1) the average guy overmedicates; and 2) the average guy is overcrowded.

Now, on the first one there is a simple solution that very few people in this day and age bother to sort out. If they will buy a microscope almost everybody out there flying pigeons could learn how to check the birds easily for trichomonads, for coccidiosis and for worms.

This is especially important on the race team because over and over I read articles that on Monday they get this concoction and on Tuesday they get this concoction and on Wednesday they get a different one. But if you were to take the time to check the last three birds that came in from the race for coccidiosis and for canker, then you would have a pretty good idea whats going on in the loft, and there wouldnt be any reason to treat for those things if the birds were clean. If there was a problem then they could check some of the other birds and find out how widespread the problem is and treat accordingly.

The microscope is really a godsend because its ridiculous to be continually treating these birds for things when there is no a problem. They are treating for problems that in many cases are nonexistent.

The second big thing is they are pouring medicine into these birds not knowing if the medicine is doing the job. If they used the microscope they would know for sure.

For example, five years ago when we were using ronidazole one teaspoon to the gallon of water was, generally speaking, enough to take care of even severe canker problems. Now, five years later, with this same dosage, it doesnt even begin solve the problem. In other words, its good to use the microscope, not only to find out theres a problem, but secondly, to find out that youve solved the problem.

If you continually treat, birds are going to be immune to the medication and its not going to do any good when you do need it. Medicating pigeons when they dont have a problem taxes their system.

Overcrowding everybody talks about it and everybody agrees that it is bad. What is overcrowding? Thats the question. In this country its one of the biggest problems. One of the differences between here and Europe is the fact that the birds are not as overcrowded as they are here.

I just looked at a video a month back that was done by a quite famous loft a guy who I have a lot of respect for in this country. He stood outside his breeding loft and lectured that the birds shouldnt be overcrowded. Then he walked inside the breeding pen and in a very small pen, maybe 8 x 10 or 9 x 9, he had so many breeding pairs in there that I couldnt believe my eyes. Maybe 10 or 12 pair of birds in this little pen. You could imagine what it was like when the nests were all filled up with youngsters.

When I flew widowhood, I had three twelve foot sections and in each section I had no more than ten cocks. Ten or twelve cocks in those sections is really ideal. An 8 x 8 loft in an 8 x 8 pen for young birds, as far as Im concerned, 15 or 16 birds would be plenty.

If they are overcrowded they wont be healthy. The biggest health problem we have probably is respiratory problems. Thats a direct result of overcrowding. Flying pigeons is not rocket science. There are two or three simple ingredients that youve got to have for success. One of them is real good, healthy birds. Number two, the healthy birds have to be well motivated. Of course, they have to be quality birds.

Those are the key things. I dont think one is more important than the other. Youve got to have all three. If you cover those three, you wont be too far behind. Its real simple.

You can get a microscope. You can buy a cheap kit, which I dont necessarily recommend, but it will get you on the right path. Considering the costs of the medication, its money well spent. And youre no longer guessing.

This is another big mistake that you can throw in with all the other mistakes that I told you people made. They dont pay enough attention to raising good, strong, healthy babies. If you think about the fact that in less then a month this YB will come from an egg and go all the way to almost full size in 25-26 days, the amount of growth is absolutely phenomenal.

That is the most critical time in the birds life. Youve got to get the best growth and the best healthy youngsters you can and you cant do that raising them in tiny nest boxes in overcrowded conditions from parents that are not real healthy and without feeding them the right kind of feed. This is an area not many people pay enough attention to. In the greyhound business, we could look at pups at 7-8 months old and in many cases tell they werent worth five cents if they didnt have the proper growth and the proper development. At 7-8 months old you could tell then they werent going to make it.

I cull any runt in the nest. You can eliminate them right off the bat whether they are halfway grown, or coming out of the nest. If it is a runt, eliminate it. If they come out of the nest and are not healthy or show any signs of not being healthy, then eliminate them. You are playing a game of percentages and you only have so much space you might just well fill it up with good healthy birds. It doesnt make any difference who the father and who the mother was, he offers.

Campbells Race Record

As Campbell explained, he got really serious about pigeon flying after he retired from the carpet business and moved to Texas. His best year series was seven wins in the North Texas Concourse from the South, all from 300 miles on out, against an average of 100 lofts. That was the most that anybody has ever won. The year before he had six wins from the West Course. The Concourse changes courses every year. Mr. Wonderful won the concourse from three directions. Campbell was the only loft ever to win the overall average in the Concourse four years in a row from four different directions.

In those days we had a three bird clocking limit and we had a ten bird shipping limit. I hold the record for the most consecutive 1st, 2nd and 3rds in the concourse on the same race. I did that four consecutive times. I hold the record for the most 1st and 2nd consecutive, 1st and 2nd five races in a row. I hold the record for a bird to win the concourse from different directions. I had one bird win it from three different directions. I had two or three more that did it from two or three directions first, or equal first. That first bird was pure first. I have a couple more that did it if you were considered equal first. Nobody else has ever done that, states a proud Campbell.

Campbell also won a new car one weekend, and then a new truck the next, in the Auto Futurity Race and CTIF, respectively, in 1991.

Flying Career Ended Earlier

Campbell Strange stopped flying pigeons competitively, in 1992. It came at the height of the hysteria concerning allegations of drug usage. Several young bird flyers in the state were having phenomenal results and it was noticed that their young birds were not moulting. Although there can be multiple reasons why young birds moult would be delayed, the two most common methods in Europe at the time were either the darkening system or the use of cortisone drops.

However, in America there were also unsubstantiated claims that stimulants were being used to increase race performances.

This set the stage. Before a large futurity race in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, because of drug concerns, Campbell and the race committee decided to delay the futurity race for 24 hours after the shipping. That decision

proved most controversial and the race was eventually canceled for that weekend and flown three weeks later.

As a consequence of the controversy, Campbell declared in advertisements that he would not return to flying until the necessary investigational research was conducted over the allegations of drug usage in pigeons. He even offered a substantial sum of money to the AU to conduct the research. And he paid up.

Campbell did not want to relive that story, but he also understood that it was really part of his story. I think the only comment I would make is I think it was good that we went through the rough times of getting some kind of testing procedures in place, because that in itself has helped alleviate the problem considerably. I don't think people worry about it today like they did seven or eight years ago and that's got to be good. The unknown factor was the big problem back then. Nobody knew what to expect and every time somebody did good it was suspected they were doing something wrong. I think the point is that in this day and time it is much less of a problem because of the fact that testing procedures are available.

I do know that by doing something and by having some testing procedures in place I don't think the problem is nearly as bad now as it would have been had we not done something, put it that way. Because the guesswork and the question that everybody had, and it was really getting to the point of being ridiculous in 1992 because everybody suspected everybody and everybody was up in arms, and there was a lot of finger pointing and nobody really knew anything about what they were talking about.

So, at least now, there are some testing procedures. I think some people will be more careful what they are doing. Is it going to be a problem? Who knows? I think the potential is there for a problem. Look how many sports it's a problem. To think that it's not potentially a problem is burying your heads in the sand. It's a problem in horses, it's a problem in dog racing, it's a problem in all kinds of sporting events. Look at the Chinese swimmers.

What happened was, when I stopped flying in '92, there were so many problems in the club. I don't really want to get into a lot of this stuff, because it's just negative and something that happened a long time ago and it's not a big part of my life. But at the time it was just too stressful to fight the political battles and to continue flying. So, I thought I would take the year off, or a period of time off, until the climate improved.

When I took that next year off, I started to travel a little bit more and I started to realize that getting up at 5 in the morning to train birds and being a slave to the birds seven days a week was not really what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I was enjoying doing other things. I had already won everything that had ever been won around here. I had already set records in 8 years that have not been broken. I had done it. There really wasn't any point to dedicate my life to it the way that I had before, at least the flying end of it. I was enjoying my time better and the more I thought about it the more I realized that I didn't want to get myself back into that rat race.

Training

Although Campbell did well in young bird racing, and especially futurities, his preference is for old bird racing. But it made for an interesting approach to managing a young bird team to guarantee a good old bird team.

What are your thoughts on the losses that people are having today?

I think the first problem is overcrowding and respiratory problems. Then, I think it has something to do with sun spots something that I don't know enough about to really speak about. It would appear evident that when the activity is high there's a higher degree of losses, so that enters into it.

A third thing that enters into it a lot and I'm only speaking from my experience in this part of the country. In the summer time down here, it's real hot. I think that a lot of fanciers make a big mistake with their young birds. In that, they can't wait to pound them down the road three or four months before the races start. In some cases, they even switch them around north, east, south and west and try to confuse them with the idea of teaching them.

We don't fly until September. In June, July and August the heat is unbelievable. To be out training those birds 100 miles three months before the first race in those kind of conditions, to me is stupid. I would be getting reports from these guys down the road 150 miles in July and sometimes in three or four different directions. I never saw those guys show up and win the big one when it came down to the very end. Never. They were always gone. Of

course, you could never beat them on the first couple of races, but they were never there at the end.

I think this is a huge mistake. Ill tell you the reason why. I consider those YB to be like twelve year old children. I think what you have to do is watch over them every single day and buy as much time as you can, to where you dont throw them away making silly mistakes. If you take them out in the real hot weather and they make a mistake when theyre real young they cant work their way back. It gets too hot and they are too young. Its just not favorable conditions.

I used to wait until maybe four or five weeks before the first race, way behind everybody else. Then start training the birds every day with small increases each day, keeping them right on line to the first race station. Dont vary them away from it.

The idea was that they were a little bit older and I tried to give them as much confidence as I could give them. If they had a bad toss I would let them straggle in and lock them up for two or three days and start them in from a small distance and let them build their confidence up again.

The sprint birds what you have are birds that are very decisive. They take off but will make as many mistakes as other birds but their problem is once they committed to that initial decision, they can get screwed up real fast. The real good fast birds that are super hyper are going to make mistakes quicker than any of them, because theyre not waiting around for anybody theyre gone.

Thats why I think its important not to train them at a real young age. Give them as much time as you can. Of course, your schedule is going to dictate that.

Were you one of these people who take them 20, 40 or 50 miles for their first toss?

No, its nonsense. It proves nothing. Why take a chance like that? The other thing I did was in order to minimize the losses, would let them go in very small groups, maybe 8 or 10 birds. If I could go less than that, I would go less than that. The thinking was if one group made a mistake then I had a bad toss with only one small group. If I let 60 or 70 birds go together and they make a big mistake or go the wrong way, then its a disaster. I always did it that way to minimize the losses. I never had years when I lost tons and tons of birds.

How far do you take them the first time?

Seven miles. Then I go once to 14, once to 21, then 30, 40, 50. 60, up to maybe 75, 75 to 90 and 90 up to the first race point. That would go on a daily basis unless I had a real bad toss that really shook them up. Once I get them up to 50 or 60 miles, then I wouldnt need to go every day. I would cut it back to every other day. The idea would be to get them to the first race point a couple of times before the first race.

So if you had a bad toss. What did you do then?

It would depend on how bad. Lets say that I took 70 or 80 birds up there and only had 50 of them home and they came in all day long. I would lock them up for 24 or 48 hours, get a little weight back on them and then fly them around the loft a couple of days. Then, maybe take them out 15-20 miles that is, if they had been up to 50-60. If they come in real good I would take them to about 40-50 and then work them back up.

Campbell thinks the one big problem with training both young and old birds is that the training is not customized to each pigeon. This is how he did it, rather than assembly line training.

When I hear of somebody chasing 30 or 40 birds into a basket for quick loading to run up the road in the morning, I have to laugh. If you think about it for just a little bit, what about the five birds in there that are too skinny and need rest? What about the 5 birds in there that were too fat that needed to go 50 or 60?

Assembly line training is the worst thing in the world you can do to your pigeons. You must handle your birds and you have got to determine what each bird needs. By doing that you can feed and train accordingly. If a bird is run down and tired, he needs to stay at home and not even exercise. If the bird is fat and way out of shape, needing a lot of work, he needs to go further than the other ones, and it needs to be fed a little differently than the other ones when he comes back.

So, the point is that people need to recognize that each bird is different and each bird needs different training and different feeding. My young bird team was split into groups every day. I could condition the birds according to

where they had been, where they were going to go next and what their condition was that day. The idea being that by the weekend when the team was ready to go to the race, they would all be in the condition they needed to be to go to the race. Had I trained and fed all of them the same, then obviously, that wouldn't have been the case. In other words, if you had ten or twelve birds going to the race, three or four of them may have gotten what they really needed. The rest of them got too much or too little or too much of the wrong thing, or too much training or not enough training. That's what most people are doing.

What I did when I crated them up for training was that I had three sets of birds going out, A, B, and C. If a bird was heavy and needed a lot of work he went in the A basket for the longest toss. If he didn't need quite so much he went in B. If he didn't need quite so much he went in to C. If he didn't need any at all he went in the empty section and stayed at home and didn't go out. O. The A birds might have gone 75 miles, the Bs might have went 50, and the Cs might have gone 30. And as they came in, they would have been fed differently because I was there waiting for them. Of course, I had people helping me but the principle is the same

Each day the birds were reassessed. The next day the birds that were in the A basket yesterday may go to B basket. On a daily basis the idea was to try and give them what they need for the condition they were in on that given day.

On to race day, what were the things you were looking for to see if a bird was in condition to ship to the race on shipping day?

The bird would have to be buoyant plenty of flesh, but not too much weight. Great buoyancy and sort of a blown up condition. Feel like there is a lot of flesh on him, but not a lot of weight. Of course, this is for races where they have to fly for a few hours. Sometimes, if you are flying a 100 mile blow home race, I don't really consider that much of a race. That's a little different story.

What system did you fly them on?

I flew the young birds on what we call a roundabout system. The cocks and the hens were separated. They exercise differently and then towards the end of the week we would turn them together. For the big races I would mate as many up as I could, sometimes with older cocks and sometimes with older hens.

I would do as many different things in the loft to get the birds minds on their business. I would maybe throw in some old cocks that would start breaking up some young pairs. Take a young hen away from a young cock. I would have as many of these kind of things as I could on the big races to try to get those birds motivated. The key thing is to have as many of them mated and down on eggs or on small babies.

For the young birds, flying to the small babies is the best. But I also found that if they were put on a totally different loft and with young hens mated to old cocks and flown on widowhood this also worked real well.

What's the criteria you had when you were flying to bring a YB over to the OB team?

The way that I did that was that after I had trained my YB team out 100-150 miles, I would hand select some birds, never more than ten or twelve, to fill out whatever spots were opened on the old bird team.

The birds would already have been trained 100 miles and normally they would have been given some experience breaking from other lofts on the same toss either on a training truck with different groups of birds so that they had a little experience. They would have been from pairs that I thought were good, and birds that had the physical qualities and the handling qualities that I thought would make good widowhood cocks.

The reason for that was that OB racing was always more important to me. Just in case there was a disaster with the YB team I didn't want to throw these birds away. That was the main reason for it. In other words, whatever happened with the YB later I had my OB team covered.

At the end of the YB season, were any of the young birds that raced ever pulled over to the old bird team?

Yes. The best two, three or four of the birds on the YB team would be brought over.

Old Bird

Did you always fly widowhood?

Always. I never flew natural a day in my life with old birds.

How was your team made up?

Your race team should be set up to handle the schedule you have. In most parts of the country if you have 15 OB races youve only got two or three long races. So, on your race team you should have 70% of that other kind of bird. If you are going to win the short and middle races you had better have a large percentage of those birds that are capable of doing it. You dont need a lot of long distance birds on your team, if you have that old bird schedule.

For me, I prefer old bird flying. I think that old bird flying takes a lot more skill and its a lot more enjoyable. You get to know the birds better, the birds are more honest. Youre not working with a big number of them, but the few that you know, what they are and what they can do. Its just a lot more enjoyable.

Basically, what I would do is the ones that had all the experience work on the early short races whereas the yearlings would be given a little bit more time and a little bit more experience until I really put them in the race. Remember, we had a 10 bird shipping limit.

How was your loft designed?

I had three widowhood sections. One of the sections was dedicated to long distance birds. They were brought into condition later. They were trained differently, and they were fed differently. Everything was different. So the early group came along and flew the races up to the 300s and then any of them I thought could go the long ones would go, but the other ones, basically, came along behind them.

Anything else on loft design?

All three sections of the loft were similar in design, on the inside, so that a cock in section A if he were put in section C the nest layout and everything would be the same, so if he had the top left hand box on nest A and I moved him in section C, he would immediately try to take the top left hand box. You could create motivation all the time on an ongoing basis.

Theres many things you can do. You can take the bird out of the loft for a couple of weeks and put him somewhere different. Then put them back when you want them to go back. Then when he goes back, he might find somebody in the wrong place. Theres no end to the amount of variations that you could use for motivation.

Did you fly crosses or families?

Most of the birds on the race team, generally speaking, were outcrosses. They were bred for that reason. They were crosses within their distances, sprint to sprint. It could be Van Loon and Grondelaer or it could be Janssen and Van Loon. When I say sprint I mean birds up to 300 miles. Im not differentiating from 100 miles to 300 miles. Those were all Van Loons, Grondelaers and Janssens.

On the distance I flew the Imbrechts and the Devriendts straight but on the short distance I had them crossed. I suppose the reason is that I knew that my family of Devriendts was not real closely bred, at that particular time, and I knew that they flew well straight and I didnt need to cross them. The Imbrecht family also was flying good straight, so I just left it that way. If I were to fly again I would cross some of the distance birds, also. I just think its a good idea to cross them.

And other racing comments?

Its my idea that you have to motivate the birds as much as possible and the other thing thats very important is that you need to determine what each bird is capable of. You have to recognize that certain birds are capable of winning a hundred or a two hundred but they will never do anything else for you. There are some birds that can win a five or six hundred and can never do anything else for you. Once you recognize and realize what each bird is capable of, then what you need to do is get those birds ready for the race they are capable of winning.

I had a bird that I called the Elastic Cock. During this particular time, when he was a yearling, I had a lot of real fast pigeons on the team. He was on the short and middle distance team. He always arrived a couple of minutes behind the early clock birds. He could never get there with the real fast ones. He was never really far behind them three or four minutes at the most.

So, by the time he came to the 300, he had flown four or five real good races but he hadnt gotten in the clock (3

bird clocking limit at that time). He was ahead of most of the lofts in the concourse, but he couldn't beat those real quick pigeons, so I put him into the 400. When I put him into the 400 as a yearling, he was fourth in the concourse. He wasn't tired. He had plenty of flesh left, and was fresh as a daisy so he was easy to condition for the following week. He went to the 500 the following week and he was fourth in the 500 in the concourse, again.

Now, after realizing then where this bird could really do some good, the following year he didn't go to those early races, only once or twice, as a matter of conditioning to get him ready for the 400 and 500. The second year he won the 400 in the concourse and he won the 500 in the concourse. It's the only bird ever to do that in the same year. I called him the Elastic Cock because he stretched out beyond the normal distance he was bred for. The bird was Van Loon Grondelaers and he was really bred to be a good 300 mile bird, not a 400 or a 500. It is important to recognize the true capability of each bird.

Don't waste them. There's no point in having a bird fly 8 fairly good races. It's better for him to fly two races and win one or both of them. What I'm saying is your distance birds shouldn't really be burnt out by all those early races. You don't need to pound them to death early in the year. You want to bring them into condition but you should be able to do that by flying them around the loft in normal training. He may need a two hundred or a three hundred.

The point is that you don't take a lot out of them trying to win all those short races that they're not going to win. If you were to take the Boston Marathon winner and put him in the Olympics on the 100 or 200 meter dash, he is not going to win it. You can do whatever you want with them but they are not going to win it. And vice versa. You can put Carl Lewis in the Boston Marathon and he will not win it, either. You can do whatever you want, but he ain't going to win it.

The first thing you have to do is recognize that and always watch your birds to tell you what they are capable of doing. If you have a real tough day and there aren't many birds home and somebody comes in out of turn and he's not in too bad a shape and he bounces back real quick, he's a real good candidate for the long races. It's all common sense. They will all need something different. It's a matter of handling them all the time, right up to the race you got to be handling them every day to know how they're coming along and what they need. That's how you get them ready. You give them what they need at the time they need it.

If you have a bird that's doing well on the short races and that's what he's bred for, don't push it too far. Push him until he gives you a sign that you've stepped over the line. The minute you realize that, don't do it again. But if you have bad weather any bird can fall down in bad weather. I don't mean a tough headwind race to be bad weather.

Because you kept with the hard selection of young birds, we can assume that the young birds that flew only out to 100-150 miles were good old bird racers?

There's always a few that didn't pan out, of course. But the percentage was quite good because there wasn't so many birds on the race team. There was anywhere between 25 and 30 on my whole team, and at some times there was as many as 10, 11 or 12 of those that had won the concourse on the team at the same time. So there weren't a lot of YBs that had been brought over. There would never be more than 10 or 12, and a lot of times there might only be 6 or 8. I can't tell you one out of every three, but it was quite good.

On the eight or ten cocks that were brought over that were never raced, those birds the following year would be put on widowhood and would be trained down the road and they would have been put on the training truck to where they had to break from other birds, and so on. I never put those birds into a race until I thought they were ready and they could win it. I had cases where the very first race that a bird had a counter mark on its leg would be a 300 as a yearling, and it won the concourse. That happened on more than one occasion. He had been on the training truck plenty of times and had been split up with the other birds a lot of times but he had never actually been entered into a race.

The Sport In Europe Today

Has the sport changed in Europe?

One way it's changed a lot is commercially. There's obviously tons more money in Europe now than there was in

the 60s. There are many more professional operations now than what there were at one time people who are flying and selling birds for a living. Thats an obvious change. Medications and the scientific end of it have made amazing strides in the last 20-30 years.

The one thing that was common 30 years ago was to see those lofts loaded with lime. The lofts are clean and dry but there isnt any lime used any more to speak of. I never could figure out how that could be good for the birds 30 years ago. I knew the idea of keeping them dry but I never could figure out that it could be good for them from a respiratory standpoint, thats one thing that certainly changed.

The other thing that has changed, of course, is the darkening system of the YB and the motivation of the YB. That has changed tremendously all over the world. Everybody is doing that now and they have been for a few years, answers Campbell.

Future Of The Sport

What is the future of the sport?

The biggest problem is obvious that in this day and age there are just too many other things for people to do. Young kids coming along today have so many other things that they can do. Its not like 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago when nobody traveled very far and people stayed at home.

They had no money to go anywhere. This was perfect for families and for kids, and a lot of kids followed in their fathers footsteps. In this day and age theres just too many other things for kids to do. They all have money now. To dedicate yourself, and to be successful in pigeon racing you have to dedicate your life to it. Young kids are not willing to do that, anymore. As the older people are dying off, they are not being replaced with sufficient numbers of younger people. I dont know the answer to that. Its just a matter of the times.

Selfishness and pettiness probably the biggest negatives in the sport today. I dont know how to change that. People are too selfish. Selfishness drives more people out of it than anything else. Every year the minute the races are over the phones start ringing and all of the selfish motivations get started for the winter time, again. Change the race course, change the shipping limit, change everything. Who is allowed to fly with us? Who isnt allowed to fly with us? Should we split the club down? Lets draw a new boundary down here.

Its all selfish motivation normally coming from people who arent satisfied with winning whatever theyre winning, laments Campbell. They might be winning 9 out of 13 races and maybe thats not enough. Maybe they are winning none and they are blaming it on everything but themselves. Maybe it will be a good idea instead if clubs have fewer meetings in the winter time the less meetings the better. If pigeon flyers spent as much time preparing their birds as they do preparing for arguments at meetings, theyd fly better.

One of the biggest problems in the sport is the lack of balance between professional, business and blue collar guys in clubs. It seems that if a club has all of one kind, but not the other, it is doomed to failure. Each group must recognize and respect the others abilities and talents, and let them contribute what they do best.

We all have certain abilities. A guy can be a terrific carpenter, but he may not know anything about the economics of running a pigeon concourse, building a new \$15,000 or \$20,000 trailer or running a \$200,000 race. A businessman, lawyer, some other kind of professional is often better suited to go down to city hall when there is a problem and communicate with those people and really get the job done. We all have certain abilities and too many of the professional people in this sport are being run out because of pettiness and nonsense. Sometimes people who arent professionals make such big things out of nothing that they will drive you absolutely crazy. They make big issues out of minute problems. People who handle real problems for a living, just wont put up with making big deals out of little things. They are going to say, Look I dont need this!

Hank Vernazza spelled it out many years ago. The Rock River Valley Club is doing exactly what Hank preached in 1964 many blue collar workers and a handful of business and professional people working together, each adding their own skills. Everyone is contributing their own expertise. It can be fantastic. The principle still works today, unfortunately, we dont seem to have enough of the combinations of people that we had in the Martinez

club 30 years ago and the Rock River Club today.

Identify the talents that you have in your club and let the people who have the talent take care of the things they have talent for and forget about jealousy, he pleads.

Campbells Future

Why Nevada?

First off, when I had the carpet company, I had a place in Lake Tahoe for many years. When my kids were growing up we did a lot of skiing in the mountains up there and it was always one of my favorite places in the world. I love the mountains. I love the lake. I love the winter sports, I love everything about it. Im not a big time gambler, by any means, Im really not. I could walk through the casinos everyday and not spend a nickel. It doesnt tempt me at all. Theres something about the whole excitement. I love the entertainment. We love to go to the shows, I like the good restaurants. Plus the fact that its close to a lot of my old friends. Many of my best lifetime friends are in the Bay area, which is only a two or three hour drive away. So, Im much closer to all of those people. I envision them coming up to visit and staying a couple of days, and all of this kind of stuff. Additionally, my largest commercial property is close to the area, so it is easier to take care of.

Conclusion

Campbell Strange is a man who is leaving the sport much better than he found it. Not only in the quality of birds he introduced into this country, but in his philanthropic endeavors on behalf of pigeon causes and clubs.

His auction was an event. Pigeon enthusiast from other continents coveted pigeons from this remarkable collection of pigeons. Many came simply because they knew this was an historic event, and they were not disappointed.

Three successful high dollar purchasers called the Digest and to a man, they all expressed awe with their purchases. Each expressed complete and total satisfaction with owning a premier animal, a piece of history, a legend. It was akin to the satisfaction that the very rich experience when they purchase a master painting. It is just a privilege to be associated with which such pigeons from this man.

A small boy from Northern Ireland came to a new country, and lived out his wildest dreams by a combination of persistence, ambition and intelligence. It is the greatest country in the world, he shouts, and he knows. He knows firsthand what it is like to have to start with nothing, compete and strive to make it. He knows that obstacles can be surpassed, but will never be surpassed by those who make it their primary focus in life to complain about what everybody else does or has. He knows where there is a will there is always a way, and you dont find the way by spending all of your time fighting and complaining at pigeon meetings. He knows that the advantage goes to he who works and keeps his goals in mind.

Campbells place in history? There is no question that like Veegate and DeWeerd before him, he raised the level of the sport in America through his efforts. In that, he left the sport much better than he found it. He is a credit to America.