

# Family breeding to consolidate a breed's characteristics

Family breeding consolidates characteristics: a fancier uses well developed pigeons for this method, the pigeons he is most happy with. It allows him to maintain his breed or, to be more precise, to have pure bloodlines in their descendents.

Fanciers cross bloodlines to improve their existing breed, by adding new bloodlines or an unknown breed. A crossing of two different bloodlines tends to result in more dynamic youngsters with increased vitality. A motivated fancier will take great care in pairing his pigeons every season because he wants his breed to improve in quality in every breeding season. This process of selecting breeders should not be a game of chance.

Those who manage to (coincidentally) breed a couple of great youngsters without knowing exactly how they did it will usually not be able to repeat that success. If you want sustained success as a fancier you will have to breed youngsters that are better than their parents season after season. If not, your neighbour will probably beat you in two or three years' time, because he has been making progress and you have not. This applies to pigeon fancying as it does to any sport: you have to try and make progress every season.

## **MAKING PROGRESS IS KEY**

A lot of fanciers ask us what we prefer: family breeding or crossing. Well, you can read our opinion in the introduction but honestly, we cannot answer that question: we think it depends from loft to loft; every situation is different. In fact the two different approaches can both give good results, even with the same pigeons. Let's not forget another important factor: at this moment it is simply impossible to make a 100% pure crossing. The racing pigeon as we know it today is in fact one specific breed that consists of more or less different lines. This breed is increasingly losing its diversity: back in the 1950s and '60s there was a greater difference between a pigeon from Liège and a pigeon from Antwerp compared to nowadays.

So basically we are not able to cross different breeds anymore; we can only cross bloodlines. That does not change our view on the two types of breeding. Family breeding is the easiest solution for many pigeon families. The fancier assesses the value of each of his pigeons without having to pay attention to his opponents. He compares his pigeons with each other to find the best pigeons, even if his best pigeons have not yet won a top prize in an important race. The following breed is based on the pigeons that are considered to be the best of the loft by their fancier. He gradually gets rid of the other, weaker birds in his loft. After a few years he ends up with a breed of pigeons that are all very closely related.

We see this happen quite often. This is how many fanciers use the method of family breeding, because they do not really master the technique and because they lack knowledge.

With such an approach the quality of your breed will eventually go down. Even the best pigeon in your loft cannot become better than it is already. There is an 98% chance that the average pigeons in your breeding loft (which are in fact the best pigeons in your loft) will eventually breed pigeons of even lower quality, depending on the number of crossings. The next generation will be weaker than the previous one, which was already fairly average. There is still a chance that the pigeons of the fifth or sixth generation are a lot better compared to their forefathers of the same breed. However, in most cases the following generation will lose some of the qualities of the previous one. That is because a coupling within one and the same family will generally breed youngsters that are less energetic. This simplistic approach of family breeding should not prevent the motivated fancier from using this breeding method in a good way. We would also like to point out that a cock that has lost some of its vitality due to being bred by a crossing of the same family (as we pointed out) is in fact very well suited to being crossed with a different bloodline. This will in fact make him a lot more energetic. Still, you should always avoid a too simplistic approach of family breeding, which is the approach many fanciers use. In a good and healthy pigeon family you should always have at least two or three different bloodlines. You can keep your basic line clean by using family breeding and by adding pigeons from the same breed, which were bred in a different loft. You cross different descendants of that same breed regularly. With this approach, and by adding a few different lines once in a while, there is a good chance that your breed maintains its quality without having too many different bloodlines (with similar origins).

It is always a good idea to make use of the advantages of both systems:

1. Family breeding helps keep the breed pure.
2. You will have a collection of pigeons very well suited for crossbreeding.
3. Make good use of your reinforcements: once in a while you can add bloodlines, which you are already familiar with.
4. You need a thorough knowledge of blood relationships and the possibilities of different bloodlines, although you should not mix too many of them.
5. Aim to improve the breed throughout your career.

In pigeon racing it is vital to have a sound basis. If you keep using pigeons of average quality you can never expect to breed excellent youngsters one day. Basically you cannot breed top class pigeons from an average breed.

A lot of fanciers believe they do not have the possibilities to obtain top class pigeons that should help them to turn the tide. However, many of these fanciers feed and maintain a breed of thirty or forty

pigeons, they train them and they race them without winning a single prize. We wonder why they want to spend money on feeding, maintaining and training these birds if they are never successful. Wouldn't it be better to spend some of that money on two or three pairs that can be used as a good basis, and which would probably bring success?

These were a few thoughts about family breeding. We hope at least some fanciers will follow our advice this time.