



I.F. INTERVIEW REPORT FOR CHAMPION FLYERS

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4th I.F. Champion Loft 26 to 75 Lofts 2008 Young Birds

2008 I.F. Registered Champion Bird IF 04 CCC 1796

By Paul Walsh



1. When did you first start in the sport?

I was born in 1952 in Baltimore, Maryland. My father had birds when he was a young man. And, one day in 1962 a homing pigeon flew into his place of work and he was bitten by the bug again. My father and I raced pigeons as partners from 1962 to 1970. He always liked fishing better than pigeons and lost interest in the birds around 1970. From 1970 to the present I have raced pigeons on my own every year. I have always been affiliated and raced with the Carroll County Pigeon Club (CCC) in Westminster, Md. From 1970 to 1976 CCC and I raced with the old Mason Dixon Combine and the Free State Concourse, both which disbanded around 1976. From 1976 to the present CCC and I have always raced with the United Pigeon Combine (UPC).

2.) Do you have the Family or blood of the birds? What strains do you race?

Most of the birds I have today are performance based pigeons from Mike Ganus. I have taken these

birds and blended them in with birds I've gotten from Steve Crane, a friend of mine in Baltimore, Horst Hackemer and one Houben male from Rick Mardis. The Ganus birds are a mixture of Hofkens, Janssens and Van Loons. The birds from Crane are a blend of long distance performance birds and the birds from Horst are performance Janssens and Meulemans.

3.) What do you look for in pigeons? Can you explain your ideal type?

I like birds that are pear shaped and medium in size. However, size doesn't matter in a racing pigeon only balance. Males should be fairly long in length, I don't like short males. Performance is the most important item when selecting racing pigeons. The individual should have as many winners on the pedigree as possible. Preferably the mother and father should be winners or breeders of winners. Birds with no performance or racing on the pedigree up through the grandparents should avoid being bred.

4.) What championships have you won, in the club, combine or nationally?

I'll be very short here and to the point and let the reader decide the rest. I don't like tooting my own horn. I've had an envious record, especially in old birds, here in the UPC for many many years. In 2007 I won 7 combines out of 19 races and in 2008 I won 6 combines out of 19. I finished **4th Overall North American Grand Champion Lofts** – a Racing Pigeon Digest Award in 2007.

5.) Do you think your position is a good one as far as combine races are concerned? How big is combine? Club?

We have about 10 flyers in the club for old birds and about 20 for young birds. At the combine level we have about 50-60 old bird flyers and about 65-75 young bird flyers. I think I have a fair but not the best position in the combine. We have a wide and deep front here in the UPC – about 75 miles east to west and 75 miles north to south. Last year I flew in the middle section. No matter what combine you are in winds influence where the winners will be for any given day. No one individual has the winds with him every week. Thus, an individual who consistently places in the top ten weekly must work hard and have good birds to place well every week. I think about 75 percent of the time I place in the top ten.

6.) How do you pair your pigeons? Do you believe in Eyesign?

I try to compliment the birds (male and hen) when I mate them to improve the type. Performance is the most important item but I don't think you can lose the desired type or your performance will suffer in the long run. I don't think eye sign has much merit. It **may** have some in selecting breeders but I don't think it carries any merit with racers. The main thing to look for in the eye is that it should be bright, rich and expressive. And, it should project a "smart look". I do believe the more granulation or hills and valleys (like looking at a mountainous topography map) as I call them are very important in eyes. Plain dull eyes should be avoided.



7. Can you give us a little history on your 2008 I.F. Registered Champion bird IF 04 CCC 1796? IF 04 CCC 1796 Blue Male was just registered as a 2008 IF Champion. In his four year racing career he had 8 club firsts, 2 equal club firsts, 1 second club and 5 combine wins. He is a special bird I think. His father was a Houben male bred by Rick Mardis and his mother was Hofken based bird from Mike Ganus. This year I placed him in the breeder. Here are his wins:

Won 2nd club (equal to 1ST club), 5th combine, 41 Lofts, 523 birds, 200 mile 2005 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 1st combine, 55 lofts, 752 birds, 200 mile 2006 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 4th combine, 59 lofts, 1026 birds, 200 mile 2007 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 1st combine, 55 lofts, 772 birds, 250 mile 2007 O.B.
 Won 1st club 5th combine, 52 lofts, 655 birds, 350 mile 2007 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 1st combine, 53 lofts, 710 birds, 200 mile 2007 O.B.
 Won 1st club 4th combine, 50 lofts, 661 birds, 200 mile 2007 O.B.
 Won 2nd club (equal to 1ST club), 12th combine, 53 lofts, 932 birds, 200 mile 2008 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 1st combine, 42 lofts, 566 birds, 350 mile 2008 O.B.
 Won 2nd club, 8th combine, 51 lofts, 681 birds, 200 mile 2008 O.B.
 Won 1st club, 1st combine, 46 lofts, 611 birds, 200 mile 2008 O.B.

8. Do you have any, brothers, sisters of IF 04 CCC 1796 that breed or flew well for you? I have three half brothers that have won combines off the father – the old Houben from Rick. I have two –half

brothers with combine wins off the mother – Ganus Hofken based.

9. When you select birds do you just go to auction or the Internet and buy a bird or do you scout out other champions and obtain birds from them?

The only birds that I have bought the last few have come from Ganus or have Ganus blood in them.

10. How many birds do you fly on s your old bird team and young bird teams?

In old birds I have 30 widowhood males. In young birds the last two years I've had about 30 to 40 darkening birds in my new young bird loft. And, I have about 30 to 40 natural young birds in the old young bird loft. I definitely prefer old birds to young birds. Old birds are where your champions are. A fancier should strive for birds that can win year after year, not just a bird that gets in shape for one year and wins. Seventy-five percent of winning young bird races is the "young bird" systems. And, the other twenty-five percent are good birds. And, luck that your birds don't come down with Adeno plays an important role too.

11. Do you use a system? For young birds? Old birds? Explain how you would prepare a team of birds to go into a 300-mile fut. race? Please do a Sunday-to-Sunday preparation schedule
Explain how you would prepare a team of birds for shipping to a 400 mile O.B. race? Please do a day-by-day preparation Sunday to Sunday.

Old birds: I race single widowhood males. Males are mated 8 weeks before the races start. Prior to widowhood each male raises one youngster. The youngsters, hens and 2nd set of eggs are removed one week before the races start. Training begins about 3 to 4 weeks before the races start. One week before the races start the birds are sent to a 100 miles. This is there last training toss before becoming widowers. My widowers as a rule are not trained during the week. The widowers that do not race on a given weekend are either soap boxed or trained by myself to 100 mile. Hens are shown on Friday night for Saturday races only. No showing occurs for races that are shipped on Thursday night for a Saturday release. Widowers are raced every weekend 100-300 mile or until we ship our first long race.

Young birds: The last two years I've raced on the darkening system. I breed as early as possible and the birds are placed on the darkening system as soon as they are weaned. The birds are darkened from 4:00 P.M. until 8:00 A.M. each day through the last week in June. Towards the end of August when the days start getting shorter lights are placed on the darkening birds to delay the molt. Birds are located immediately. Training begins when the leaves start appearing on the trees and the birds are routing well. The birds are trained out to around 80 miles during the darkening period. After darkening is stopped around the end of June the birds are vaccinated for pox and given 3 weeks off. Then, I start training them again but only on good days. Birds are separated about one week before the races start. The "sliding door method" is used before I ship them. I slide open the doors and let them go together.



12. Describe your loft? Here is an example! My loft is 32 ft by 12 ft. and is divided into 5 compartments 6x8 with a 4-foot hallway. Do you have a separate breeding loft? Is there airflow in loft, fans, etc?

My old bird widowhood loft is 8 X16. My young bird darkening loft is 10 X 10. My old breeding loft is 8 X 32 and one end of it is used for my natural youngsters.

The widowhood loft has a 10 inch ventilation opening under the landing board and is about 6 inches off the floor across most of the front. It also has a 4 inch opening running across the top of the front of the widowhood loft exactly parallel with the bottom opening. I have two large windows (3 foot square) in the front of the loft. And, one window located in the door which is also in the front of the loft. I have a sliding door in the widowhood loft that divides the loft into two sections. The sliding door is to help with the control the birds here, nothing else. During old bird racing my widowhood hens are housed in 30 separate widowhood compartments in another building away from the lofts.

The young bird darkening loft has two windows in the front of the loft along with a door and a window in the door. I do have a ceiling fan to remove the hot and stale air which I use when the loft is darkened and on hot days. The darkening loft is divided into two sections and the "sliding door" method is used for motivation of the youngsters.

My old breeding loft has six sections of which three are small breeding compartments. I like the three smaller breeding sections as it makes for easier re-mating of pairs year to year. I have two young bird sections in the old loft that I locate my later/natural flown youngsters in. I have one other spare section that is used to house hens.

13) What about your loft management?

No matter how good your birds are or where they come from you must have excellent loft management or you are not going to consistently win and finish in the diplomas. Yes, lofts need to be properly ventilated and you must have a good training program, but sound management in your back yard is a must. Birds must be cared for properly every day 365 days a year. The pigeon sport is like anything else life hard work pays off in the long run. Sure, anyone can have one good year but to consistently race well year after year you must work hard every day.

The first thing I do every morning before anything else after getting out of bed is to scrape all the lofts. Then, I feed and grit all the breeders and prisoners. If it is racing season or if I'm locating or exercising birds that occurs next. After they are called in and fed and gritted, then I do little things in the loft depending on what season it is – breeding, racing or the off season. The lofts are scraped again sometime in the late afternoon or early evening. During a wet weather period with little sunshine I will use a Belgium White type dressing on the floor to absorb some of the moisture.

Prior to racing the old bird widowhood boxes, young bird boxes and floors are torched. I think this kills every that may be living on the surfaces where the birds live. You must be very careful not to set the wood on fire. And, I would not recommend doing it when the birds are in a heavy molt. I think there are too many feathers blowing around and risk of an accident is greater.

Fresh water is given every day to the birds. In hot weather the racing lofts water is changed twice a day. I use Klaus water fountains. Once a week and sometimes twice a week in the summer the fountains are disinfected with Clorox bleach. Fountains should always be rinsed out daily with fresh water before adding new water.

How and where your feed is stored is important. You cannot have your feed stored in a place where there are rodents/mice. These critters carry all kind of diseases. If they chew holes in your feed bags and urinate on the feed your chances of getting sick birds or paratyphoid increases greatly. I would recommend, even if you have never seen a mouse, placing some D-Con Mice/Rat poison in the building where your feed bags are. The poison is very inexpensive and you will be thankful in the long run.

Don't over feed and let your birds become heavy. If your racing team is heavy the first time you let them out the hawks are going to have field day. And, the hawks can tell which ones are heavy and will nail them first. Nothing is more heartbreaking then having a three or four year old that you have previously won with killed. Hawks are a menace and to me the most negative aspect of the sport today. However, they are here to stay and we must cope with them. Also, I want to mention that your breeders should be kept in good shape as well. Your fertility rate will go down if your birds are heavy.

All birds should be given a bath weekly weather permitting. If is extremely cold I will sometimes miss a week or so. In hot/warm weather give the birds a bath every week, they like it. Tuesday is bath day here during the racing season. And, add some Pigeon bath salts to the water to kill any bugs that may be on the birds. I also use pest strips in the lofts to keep the bugs off the birds as well.

I guess I've touched on the most important aspects of day to day management with the birds. I could go on and on about the "little things" I do here on a daily basis. However, this is just an interview not a book. Just remember, you must work hard every day if you want to win consistently every year.

14. Describe how you feed? Which mixture do you use? Do you feed once or twice a day and why do you feed this way?

All birds are fed twice a day every day throughout the year. All my grain related feeds are made by Brown's and bought at Wayne Stermer's feed store in Red Lion, Pa. Purina Mills pigeon checkers/pellets are used and bought at a local Purina Mills dealer in Westminster, Md. National Grit is used and bought at Stermer's as well.

The old bird widowers are fed in widowhood cups throughout the year except for a few weeks when I'm settling the new yearlings in the loft. During the off season in warm/hot weather they get 1 tablespoon twice a day. During the off season in extremely cold weather they get an extra tablespoon in the evening. During the racing season the birds are given one tablespoon in their cup in the morning and in the evening they are fed all they want in their cups every day. 50% barley and 50% Brown's International are fed on the day of return and through Tuesday morning if the next shipping date is Friday. If the shipping date is Thursday for a long race the barley mix is only used through Monday morning. For the remainder of the week the birds are fed straight Brown's International. Peanuts are used the night of shipping on long races and are used some the day of return depending on how hard the race was on that given day. Fresh grit is given every day and Byers pick stones are also placed in the loft. A lot of grit is not necessary but some fresh grit should be administered every day. I also add Morton's table salt and Calci-mineral to my grit.

Young birds being raced are fed exactly like the old bird widowers, except they are fed in a feed tray. In the morning they are fed lighter and the evening they are given all they want to eat for about 10 minutes. Grit is administered the same way. Peanuts may be used to expedite recovery.

The breeders during breeding season are fed in cups individually and also in a feed tray on the floor. Purina Mills pigeon pellets are used in the cups in the breeder boxes. In the feed trays 45 percent Brown's International, 45 percent Brown's Rock and 10 percent Purina Mill pigeon pellets are fed. When youngsters are in the nest some feed is kept in front of them all the time. Grit with salt and calci-mineral are administered daily. Byer's pick stones are given to the breeders too. Vitamins with electrolytes are administered one day a week.

During the off season and the non-molt period birds are fed 30 percent Brown's International, 30 percent Brown's Rock mix, 20 percent barley and 20 percent Purina Mills pellets. During the molting season the birds are fed 40 percent Brown's International, 40 percent Brown's Rock and 20 percent Purina Mills pellets.

15. How do you train your birds? How often do u train and at what distances? Or do you just loft fly and

if so how long?

Old Birds/Widowhood males: Once the males are on widowhood they are let out in the morning and evening. They are locked out both times for about 45 -60 minutes. They are free to go on any of the lofts but are not allowed on the ground. They are not flagged. As a rule no training occurs during the week with the widowers. The birds that are not entered in the race on race day are either soap boxed or trained 100 mile the day of the race. Flock release occurs when I train my widowers before or during the race season.

Young birds: Young birds are trained three times a week preferably Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. The distances are 40 miles, 60 miles and 40 miles. Young birds are released in groups of 12 to 15 during training. Young birds not raced on race day are either soap boxed or trained 100 miles.

All birds are timed in with an electronic timer during training tosses.

16. Is there any kind of health program you follow regularly? If so explain it to us. How do you medicate and for what reason?

During the race season the Ganus 1-2-3 medication program is used on both the old and young birds. I've raced on this system for about 4 years now with much success. 10 to 14 day before the races start the birds are administered Baytril or Enrofloxacin for 5 days.

Canker medicine should be given to all the birds three times a year. Use three different kinds of canker medicine during the year. Do not use the same one twice.

Besides Canker medicine and the racing program medicines should be avoided unless a problem arises.

All youngsters should be vaccinated for PMV the day they are weaned. All new purchases or new birds being brought in the loft should be vaccinated for PMV and paratyphoid unless the dealer indicates this has already been done. All my youngsters are vaccinated around the last week in June for pox. However, this can be done earlier if the fancier wishes to do so.

A close eye should be kept on your racing birds during hot and humid weather for respiratory problems. Birds must have clean respiratory tracts in order to win top prizes.

17. How often do you race your champion bird, how about the rest of the team?

Birds should be able to race every week where the last race was less than 7 hours. One of my **general** home rules is that for every hour a bird flies he needs one day of rest. Examples: If a 100 mile race takes two hours give him two days off before you train him or race him again; if a 300 mile race takes 7 hours give the bird a week off. Don't hesitate to race a widowhood bird every week in races that are 300 miles and under. On the longer races, 400 mile and above, birds should be given two weeks rest. I think three long races per year is the limit for a bird. I think they most likely could fly more but I doubt they will score a top prize. If one long race is very hard or a smash type some birds take longer to recover.

18. Do you believe in bird entry limits, do you believe in clocking limits? Have you any advice for new flyers? Have you any advice for advanced Flyers?

We have a 3 bird clocking limit in the United Pigeon Combine. I think it is a good policy because it spreads the winners out more. The only detrimental thing about it is that we are penalized somewhat by the national magazines for clocking limits which reduces your chances for high placement.

I think there should be entry limits. In fact I think most organizations limits are too high. If I had my way we would have a 12 to 15 bird limit, but we have a 20. No fancier and I repeat no fancier has 20 birds in top condition to race every week. With the price of feed skyrocketing I think we will be forced to lower the limits in the near future.

My advice to a new flyer is to go to the best flyer in your area and ask for eggs off individuals from the breeders or widowers. Breed from these youngsters from the eggs next year. And, take pigeon advice from someone that is winning not someone who is not winning. Advanced flyers that are winning don't need my advice. Many different roads lead to winning. There is not one said rule to winning. The advanced flyers that are not winning should take advice from winning fanciers too.

19: Is there a flyer, breeder or book that has helped you become a better pigeon flyer? Do you have any kind of goals in the sport?

There are few fanciers that I would like to take this opportunity to thank. In my youth I had three mentors who taught me some basic skills about birds they were: William Uebel of Baltimore Md., Clayton Burrier of Baltimore Md, and John Keller of Taneytown, Md. Most recently Fred Smeltzer and Ben Housman have been very helpful to me with the new darkening young bird system. Three names come to mind for my good birds over the years: In the late 80's and 90's the Hackemer birds raced well here. I still have some of their descendants. Most recently in this new millennium the Ganus birds have done extremely well. And, last but not least I got a few birds (Dave Gloriso's bloodlines) over the years from Steve Crane that has helped my performances at the longer races.

My favorite book is the Janssen Brothers book by Ad Schaerlaeckens. In my life time so far the Janssen Brothers are by far the greatest fanciers I've ever heard of. Every fancier can learn something by reading this book. It is an excellent pigeon book. They were ordinary people who achieved success by hard work and skillful management.

20. If you had the opportunity to change something in the pigeon game what would it be?

I wish there was more interest and emphasis placed on old bird racing than young bird racing. I think the sport has taken a step backward with young bird racing being so popular.

21. If you have a list of good books or videotape please recommend some.

I already mentioned the Janssen Brothers book. Other books I would recommend are: Practical Widowhood by Mark Gordon, all the History of the Belgian Strain books are excellent historical books, 101 methods (series of 5 books) by Jules Gallez, the two health books by Wim Peters are excellent, and Dr. Schrag's health book is very illustrative. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the IF for the recent IF Registered Champion Award I received for 1796, and the champion loft award program..