

Victoria's Statewide 700 Mile Race

Coongoola 9th of October 2009

By Dr. Colin Walker

This year's Victorian Statewide 700 mile race was conducted on Friday the 9th of October. For those not familiar with the race, it is conducted most years and is open to any flier in Victoria whose loft is more than 500 miles from the release point. This year, with the Victorian federations flying the north line, the race was from Coongoola in southern Queensland. Birds were entered from lofts in Shepparton which is about 580 miles from Coongoola right through to Geelong and Pakenham which are about 740 miles from Coongoola. The race is designed to stimulate interest in long distance racing.

As most fliers would be aware, the largest Victorian feds are based in Melbourne. Because of Melbourne's geographical location on the coast the lines of flight are NW, N and NE. With the prevailing winds into Melbourne being principally north and west this means that we get a lot of high velocity races. At times fliers become frustrated by the large number of wind biased, high velocity, 'blow home' type races where the winning birds are pushed into a particular area. Disappointingly many fanciers breed mainly from the winners of these sort of races which means that with time these are the only sort of races in which they can be competitive. Typically, in an average season 1/3 of Victorian fliers do not race competitively or do not race at all past our 350 mile produce which is only 7 federation races into our 18 federation race program.

Long distance racing identifies the birds that have the stamina, navigational ability, intelligence and genes to home and win even when the going is a bit tough. It also identifies the fanciers who have the ability to develop real fitness and motivation in their birds. It also takes away the 'luck component' determined by loft location, wind direction and 'mob' entries. I believe the identification of the birds able to return and win under these circumstances is vital so that their genes can be used to improve racing generally. Their pedigree is not just a stud or breed name but is based on performance and written in the basket and sky.

This year 45 fliers sent 189 birds. Entry numbers were significantly down on earlier years where the races lowest entry in previous years had been 500 birds. Birds were basketed on Tuesday the 6th of October at the VHA headquarters at Notting Hill, the VHA centre at Diamond Valley, at the WPF headquarters in Sunshine and in Shepparton. Birds from Geelong were transported to the WPF rooms. The birds at Shepparton were collected on the way north by the convoyer on Wednesday morning. Our convoyer this year was one of our veterinary clinic's nurses, Marcia McDonald and her sister, Rae. Wednesday night was spent in Cobarr. The birds reached Coongoola early Thursday afternoon. The Australian Pigeon Company had bought a 2000 bird unit specifically for the race and so the birds had plenty of room. Melbourne water was taken and the birds were fed a race mix supplied by Ian McKay. Marcia is very experienced with pigeons. Frequent stops were made for watering and in addition to trays on the outside of the unit, trays were passed into the tiers to ensure that all birds could eat and drink freely.

Friday morning was a beautiful morning at Coongoola. Clear blue skies, about 25C and no wind. The birds were released at 7.50am, about 15 minutes after the sun had fully cleared the horizon. When I spoke to Marcia after the release she stated that sometimes when she tosses my birds they seem to go round and round before leaving but she explained that these birds had simply gained height very quickly to the point where the sun could just be seen catching their wings and that they were out of sight on the line of flight in under 1 minute. She had time for one photograph.

For the long distance pigeon fancier the uncertainty of the outcome is one of the most intriguing aspects of long distance racing. Each year you breed pigeons that should have the ability to do the job but you never know until these particular birds are put to the test if they are truly capable. Also, in a short distance race, you know pigeons will come, it's really just a matter of when. With long distance racing the hope is that with each passing minute the birds will be heading closer but with them coming from so far, it almost seems like a mini-miracle when one finally sights the folded outline of the returning bird diving for its loft. I have spoken to fanciers who have been racing for 50 years, minutes after clocking a bird from 700 miles and they have the excitement in their voice of a teenager who has just clocked a bird in his very first race.

The returning conveyer reached Cobar after driving 300 miles from Coongoola at 2pm, which is probably about the same time as the birds and reported a very slight easterly drift, no rain and temperatures in the mid 20s. Through the balance of Friday and Saturday morning the weather remained basically the same but with the easterly wind very slightly increasing. Based on the weather conditions it was thought that the birds would arrive around midday on Saturday. Sure enough, this year's winner was clocked by Greg Edwards at 11.50am in Croydon, a north eastern suburb of Melbourne. This was Greg's only entry and is a direct daughter of his Greater Melbourne federation 600 mile fed winner. I remember Greg's remark on basketing night when people commented that he was only sending one bird. He said 'I knew which one to send'. Following this, 5 birds were clocked in Geelong and Werribee (in Melbourne's west) fairly quickly over a half hour period from 12.45pm to 1.15pm. Interestingly 3 of these birds were only separated by 1.5mpm and must have flown side by side for the whole 700 miles. Greg's bird put up an exceptional performance and must have had the confidence to break very early to beat these birds. Throughout the day approximately 40 of the 189 birds were reported home. Of note, long distance guru, Godfrey Stevens, reported 7 of his 11 entries home with the first 4 being in the top 15. Dean Collins of Geelong, a previous winner of the event, clocked an exceptional bird. His RCC was second overall and the only cock in the first 20 birds home. He reports that it is a Goodger/Smeulders cross. Dean said that the bird still looked pretty fresh on arrival and stated that this was probably because it wasn't such a hard race with the bird only flying for 18 hours! It is interesting to note that several of the Geelong birds were actually flying over 730 miles with the birds flying the longest distance in race time belonging to G Matthews of Geelong with his bird flying 740 Miles.

Overall everyone was very happy with the race. A total of \$1463 was paid in prize money with the race costing \$1787 to conduct. As always the Australian Pigeon Company donated \$500 to the race.

I would like to thank Stephen Kearsey for organizing basketing at the Diamond Valley rooms and calculating the velocities, Godfrey Stevens for his expertise and guidance, Tony Sofra for organizing the

Shepparton birds, Eric Branagh for organising the Geelong birds, Graham Wark for supervising basketing at the VHA headquarters, Felix Lia and Rob Saggars for their support and organising the WPF centre and of course all of the competitors without which the race would not be possible. A full set of results is listed below. I look forward to seeing as many Victorian fanciers as possible entering next years event.

Overall Result					
<i>45 Fliers</i>		<i>189 birds</i>			
Place	Name	Club	Clocking Time	Velocity	Bird Description
<i>Saturday 10th Oct</i>					
1	G Edwards	G Melb	11.50am	1049.3	MELB 07 13157 BCH
2	D Collins	Geelong	12.46pm	1041.8	GEEL 08 5918 RCC
3	G Gravett	Geelong	12.51pm	1040.5	GEEL 08 229 BBH
4	P Polidano	WPF	12.09pm	1040.2	WPF 08 7633 BCH
5	G & B Roder	Geelong	01.09pm	1021.2	GEEL 06 1870 BCH
6	G Chapman	Geelong	01.09pm	1019.9	GEEL 07 3728 BCH
7	K Flentjar	G Melb	01.23pm	983.9	MELB 08 20 BCH
8	W Williams	VPU	01.03pm	971.5	VPU 07 11166 BCH
9	T & J Stevens	VHA	01.48pm	942.0	NDIC 07 284 BCWFH
10	G Mountjoy	VHA	02.31pm	923.0	VHA 07 13130 BBH
11	C Tanmahapran	VHA	02.21pm	917.6	VHA 08 11581 BCH
12	Stevens Bros	VHA	02.31pm	909.1	VHA 07 10151 BCH
13	G Gravett	Geelong	03.36pm	908.6	GEEL 07 4104 BCH
14	Stevens Bros	VHA	02.43pm	900.5	VHA 07 9934 BCPH
15	T & J Stevens	VHA	03.31pm	866.9	NDIC 07 101 BCH
16	K Fawcett	WPF	04.59pm	818.6	WPF 08 10269 BBH
17	L Withers	Euroa	03.34pm	776.7	EUR 08 8433 BCH
18	G Chapman	Geelong	07.45pm	760.5	GEEL 07 3789 BBH
19	G Parker	Shepparton	05.02pm	704.5	GVPC 07 266 BBH
<i>Sunday 11th Oct</i>					
20	G Matthews	Geelong	08.08am	702.9	GEEL 07 3328 BBPH
21	R Russell	WPF	08.22am	667.8	WPF 07 4799 BBH
22	P Poniwasz	VHA	08.10am	658.5	GIPPS 06 8665 BCH
23	E Baillie	Pakenham	01.38pm	576.8	MELB 08 2660 BCH
<i>Monday 12th Oct</i>					
24	G Moulday	Benalla	01.07pm	369.3	BENALLA 08 10252 BBH

Section 1: Lofts 500-700 miles from race point					
1	L Withers	Euroa	03.34pm	776.7	EUR 08 8433 BCH
2	G Parker	Shepparton	05.02pm	704.5	GVPC 07 266 BBH
3	G Moulday	Benalla	01.07pm	369.3	BENALLA 08 10252 BBH

\$ 137.40

\$ 91.60

Section 2: Lofts within 50km radius of Melbourne GPO						
1	G Edwards	G Melb	11.50am	1049.3	MELB 07 13157 BCH	\$ 480.00
2	P Polidano	WPF	12.09pm	1040.2	WPF 08 7633 BCH	\$ 200.00
3	K Flentjar	G Melb	01.23pm	983.9	MELB 08 20 BCH	\$ 80.00
4	W Williams	VPU	01.03pm	971.5	VPU 07 11166 BCH	\$ 40.00
5	T & J Stevens	VHA	01.48pm	942.0	NDIC 07 284 BCWFH	
6	G Mountjoy	VHA	02.31pm	923.0	VHA 07 13130 BBH	
7	C Tanmahapran	VHA	02.21pm	917.6	VHA 08 11581 BCH	
8	Stevens Bros	VHA	02.31pm	909.1	VHA 07 10151 BCH	
9	Stevens Bros	VHA	02.43pm	900.5	VHA 07 9934 BCPH	
10	T & J Stevens	VHA	03.31pm	866.9	NDIC 07 101 BCH	
11	K Fawcett	WPF	04.59pm	818.6	WPF 08 10269 BBH	
12	R Russell	WPF	08.22am	667.8	WPF 07 4799 BBH	
13	P Poniwasz	VHA	08.10am	658.5	GIPPS 06 8665 BCH	

Section 3: Lofts situated more than 700 miles from the race point						
1	D Collins	Geelong	12.46pm	1041.8	GEEL 08 5918 RCC	\$ 260.40
2	G Gravett	Geelong	12.51pm	1040.5	GEEL 08 229 BBH	\$ 130.20
3	G & B Roder	Geelong	01.09pm	1021.2	GEEL 06 1870 BCH	\$ 43.40
4	G Chapman	Geelong	01.09pm	1019.9	GEEL 07 3728 BCH	
5	G Gravett	Geelong	03.36pm	908.6	GEEL 07 4104 BCH	
6	G Chapman	Geelong	07.45pm	760.5	GEEL 07 3789 BBH	
7	G Matthews	Geelong	08.08am	702.9	GEEL 07 3328 BBPH	
8	E Baillie	Pakenham	01.38pm	576.8	MELB 08 2660 BCH	

Leading Cock						
1	D Collins	Geelong	12.46pm	1041.8	GEEL 08 5918 RCC	

Clocked bird flying the longest distance to it's loft						
1	G Matthews	Geelong	08.08am	702.9	GEEL 07 3328 BBPH	
<i>Flying distance 740 Miles</i>						

Financial details of race	
Entry fees	\$ 3,250.00
Expenses	1,787.00
Prize money paid	1,463.00

Prize money has been allocated proportionally to each section based on bird entry.
All sections competing for their own prize money.