

BILLY BROOKS

"The Gurnay Specialist" of DENTON

IT GAVE me great pleasure to call on Billy at his Denton abode, there to greet me was his good lady and daughter. Bill's wife related to me some of the embarrassing positions Bill has been caught in when the birds arrived "Nuv Said"!

And after sinking a few scotches 'Most Welcome with the nip in the air' Bill and I got down to business.

Family History

THE BROOKS family has been connected with pigeons for over 120 years! Back in 1840 Bill's grandfather flew carriers and dragoons over short distances, in those days he lived up on the old road at Lyme Gage Disley, and whilst up on the high road he came into contact with the immortal J. W. Logan in a very strange way? Early one morning around 4-30 a.m. he was taking his birds for a 3 mile toss when he met the then young Logan out with a gun, so he politely told him what he would do for him if he had a pop at any of his birds. Logan was as good as his word, and after several meetings he wanted to know more about these birds which in turn lead him into going to see them, finally he went away with two pairs! So this is how the great fancier J. W. Logan began!

Later a great friendship grew and grandfather Brooks eventually went to work for Logan who at that time was in charge of building the first railway line to London, and a great trust and friendship developed between them.

Bill's Start

WAS NO less spectacular back in 1907, and had the pair of pigeons not had eggs down when Bill's father found them, Bill says he might never have been a fancier at all! That year in the family's little quiet part of Denton, everybody thought a maniac had come to live amongst them! He bred dogs, then poultry and finally pigeons, it was no other than Fred Shaw (of Gurnay fame), and both Bill and his father spent many nights to teach Fred how to handle pigeons properly.

Bill relates how with his father's help Fred was well on his way to success in the first year, Bill's father used to pool the birds in that first season, but Fred found that Bill's father was winning as much as himself and so commenced to pool his own after. Bill started to look after Fred's birds cleaning out and taking them for training tosses and in general was never away from Shaw's loft.

By 1913 Bill had started to work for Fred Shaw's father and in 1915 Fred Shaw had joined the pigeon service leaving Bill to look after the birds.

Pigeon Service

IN 1917 Bill joined the pigeon service himself as a mere boy, the first youngster in that service.

Bill finished up at Doughty Street and Horse Guards, with such pigeon men as Sgt. A. Christie (Scottish National Winner), Sgt. Waite of Leeds, Bob Mattocks, London; Jack Clark of Windermere; Percy Appleby, Sam Hoole, not forgetting Old Mother Wakelam.

A SPECIAL REPORT

BY "RED RAMBLER"

By 1920 Bill had come out of the pigeon service and had gone back to work for Fred Shaw and to use Bill's own words, he could not stick Fred Shaw and decided to go to Africa. However, before he could complete the arrangements racing had started and Fred Shaw had moved to the Grange at Hyde. Trade was bad at Shaw's so they went all out with the pigeons; they had to! Fred Shaw was a broken man, the outcome everybody knows, so away they went on six years of racing which was the talk of the country, flying with the Manchester F.C. and Stockport S.C., smashing records and likewise Clubs and pooling stone dead. This six years of racing at the Grange is another story in itself!

The Break with Shaw

IN 1926 Fred Shaw sold up and after doing so he gave Billy 12 latebreds to add to eight cripples he already had (It was Shaw's practice to pass injured birds on to Bill).

So Bill concentrated on these with the idea that some day he would fly the Gurnay system (Widowhood). However, up to the present day he has not had time to practice it, and so he duly decided to win the races, Fred Shaw couldn't! (500 miles and over).

The Gurnays

BILL CLASSES himself as a breeder and gets more fun out of it than racing. 40 years of inbreeding the Gurnays without introducing any outcross whatsoever has proved most interesting and sometimes frustrating! At one time most of Bill's birds were 22 ozs. That great fancier H. J. Longton had 10

youngsters from Bill and promptly killed two as being far too big!

But novices don't panic—Bill's good smokey Blue Hen 3931 (Winner of over £300 racing and never heavily pooled), was 22 ozs. when she won 1st Lancashire two birds Nantes club Vel 1,000 and odd, and every Channel race of 1,000 yds. she was in the Money, also what a breeder. Every bird she bred up to 9 years of age won a prize somewhere!

The Type

DO NOT run away with the idea that all Gurnays are large, there are three distinct types among them. For instance, Bill's Blue Pied Cock, 228, who won 2nd Lancs. two birds Nantes club as a yearling is one of the smallest cocks Bill has ever had, has bred winners each year and has won twice each year himself right from being a youngster. His 2nd Lancashire combine winner Rochfort 1964 is a fair sized hen, and after flying the disastrous Rochfort race 521 miles she did not seem to have lost anything. She has also been in the prizes each year of her life, but there were many good reasons why they wanted a fair sized pigeon to work in the Gurnay system at Shaw's.

Bill's idea of good sound pigeons are those that shine time and again in races of 1,000 yards per minute and less, and he is not interested at all in races of over 1,100 yards per minute. These Gurnays do win 1,500 yard races but Bill says in these races it's just luck not management, and after 40 years of research into the Gurnays Bill doesn't think he has found what he's looking for! But one thing has come to light, Bill has bred throwbacks to every cross Fred Shaw and Gurnay ever used (Incidentally these were few). The birds are mainly smokey blues. Blue checks and Dark cheqs and with all these colours you get peds, and some years Bill gets a good percentage of Gay peds. Bill has only ever bred one Red one this was in 1940 and Bronze are clean out! Bill cannot do any good with them!

Management

AFTER PAIRING up around March 1st Bill's birds have an open loft from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. When they are shut up for the day, they are never forced to fly, training consists of three tosses up to 30 mile and then to the first race 86 miles. Bill says some do tend to get a bit fat and mess themselves up a bit for the year, but eventually find themselves at 521 mile races the following year. They all have to do this distance or else go.

During the racing season breeding is never stopped. "3931" was always down on youngsters for the Channel racing and when "288" won 2nd Lancashire Nantes club he also had two youngsters as big as himself.

Feeding

THE FEED used is 90% beans that are always before them winter and summer. Whilst on the subject of feed, Bill says years ago he used to buy the best, but not so today as he came to the conclusion that 90% of fanciers cannot tell which is good corn!

And for the Oldham Fed. Lads Bill says he knows he's mad, but he can't help it!



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Bill believes there are many, many ways to the top with pigeons.

Conclusion

I HAVE not doted on Billy's performances too much as these would fill this Gazette from cover to cover! Having won practically every honour in the sport, he is one of the most outstanding fanciers in Lancashire. In fact his own club mates rate his consistent performances better than Shaws'. Mind this is not surprising as Bill's birds are the original Gurnays going back to Fred Shaws 'Champion Apollo', 'Champion Picture', 'Beauty Spot', 'Neaty', 'Champion Repeater', 'The Masterpiece' etc. etc. No wonder his birds are hard to beat, they are truly in the hands of a great master, who has devoted a life time to **The Gurnays**.

OLD HAND from page 5

is completely without colour pigmentation and this often leads to lack of pigment colour in the eyes which are then known as 'bull' because the iris is completely transparent. The blackish-looking iris is really the black surface of the retina showing through the iris. The pink eye is known as 'Albino' and I must say that I don't like it one little bit. I would not keep such a pigeon in my loft.

I am very fond of reds (red chequers and reds) which from the plumage point of view possess one great advantage and one great disadvantage.

The advantage is in the silky texture condition of the plumage on most reds. It can happen that a too close adherence to breeding Blue Chequers can, and often does, lead to the coarsening of the feather. When

this condition is noted the fancier should bring in a Red to restore the original silky texture of the feather.

The disadvantage does not apply to Reds in this country. But Reds sent to the tropics often suffer serious feather deterioration to a point where the bird cannot retain enough good feather to fly. Undoubtedly, the hot, humid climate effects the feather texture.

Apart from the above, colour and texture are two things apart which nevertheless need to be studied side-by-side if a fancier is aiming at producing racing-plus-show types.

Let me quote an example. "*Dear Old Hand, In the course of breeding I notice that the feather over the breast-bone is becoming very thin. Why is this?*"

It is because the birds were being raised in a confined loft where the air temperature is too high. A noted fancier once wrote, "Cold for fur, heat for feather." It was a catch phrase which afterwards rang in the ears of too many novices. It certainly captivated the mind of the man who originally coined the expression because he then proceeded to practice what he first imagined and then preached by building for himself an all-glass loft!

His birds suffered horribly in the torrid internal summer heat. So-much-so that he was forced to install hinged windows which were raised to let wind blow into the loft. This action alone saved his pigeons from

complete extinction. While he was thinking again, winter came on and turned his glass loft into a deep freeze. Then he wrote to me and asked for my advice. What did I tell him? I said, "Turn your loft into a greenhouse and grow tomatoes and cucumbers in it because it will never, never bring you any success as a pigeon fancier. And after you have converted the glass loft into a hothouse build yourself a proper loft according to the enclosed sketches."

I know it is nice to fix glass or opaque plastic windows into the roof of the loft and thereby allow some light to enter in. The disadvantage of the roof-light is in its power of filtering sunlight and thereby robbing it of Vitamins, while it also overheats the air inside the loft.

I suggest that roof lights should be set in hinged or sliding frames and that the roof aperture beneath the glass should be covered with wire-mesh. Thus, on sunny days the roof light can be hinged back (or slid away) so that the sun can pour through the wire mesh. At the same time, the wire-meshed opening in the roof adds extra ventilation to compensate for the extra heat generated by sun's light.

There are so many little hints and tips one could pass on to novices. Only lack of space prevents me from really letting myself go. But I am not the lordly purveyor of space in this journal. That prerogative is vested in the Editor who counts column inches as a miser counts his coins. He is the only man I know who really enjoys replying to all requests for space, etc. with a loud, snappy, NO! Therefore, I have

● (Above) Bill Brooks, with his **Champion Hen, 194**, winner of 4th Lancashire Combine Saintes in 1965 and also a winner from every race point. (G.65)

(Continued on page 17)