

## "FLYAWAY"

By

Florante Lim Bunag

The first time I experienced the so called "flyaway" was during my first few months as a beginner in the pigeon sport. It was actually my birthday and George So, my neighbor a block south from my loft was repairing the roof of his house. I let the young birds out to fly before coming over at George's. It was a majestic view of the Pacific ocean as I climbed the roof of their house. I can see my young birds flying and routing. After a few minutes the young birds were routing further away from the loft going north. In an instant they disappeared from the horizon. An hour passed and I was still at the rooftop of George. I can see the young birds coming back from the north. It was a relief, but as I view them, the blue bar white flight was not among them. It was obvious, he was the only blue white flight in the team. He was indeed missing. After 30 minutes I went home, George's roofer needed a new blade for his worm drive saw. Jan Vincent So, his son came with me and handed him my spare saw blade. I hurried to check the young birds in the loft. The blue bar white flight was indeed missing. I felt gloomy. He was one of my favorite in the loft. I had a very high hope for this bird. Why didn't he come back home? I had no clue on what may had happened.

The second incident was when I was settling a gorgeous young blue bar devriendt/delbar hen. George So and I just purchased from the late Tony Mateo of Hayward Club. We would divide the youngsters between us and George usually let me select first. It was always a great trip across the San Mateo Bridge every time we had young birds ready for pick-up. Tony has six individual breeding pens of about 4 x 8 x 7 feet, plus a small aviary in front of those individual breeding pens, a spectacular sight for a pigeon enthusiast beginning in the sport like me. When I got home with the two blue bar young birds, I put them immediately in an empty perch in the young bird loft and was delighted to observe that what George had told me about their excellent stance and intelligent look was in fact true. The next morning, I couldn't wait to let the two blue bar young birds out on the landing board. The two young birds flew to the rooftop in a glance. The hen suddenly took the air and was flying great along side the settled young birds in the loft. The young bird team started their routine ranging and presto, after one hour they were back in the horizon and when they landed and started trapping. I was nervously scanning for the young blue bar hen. She is missing. It was a very long afternoon for me, waiting for the lost young bird. It was all in vain, I never saw a single feather of her.

Flyaways were minimized as I bred my own young birds and through the help of my good friend Ludwig Stephen, I was able to acquire a sputnik trap from a roller fancier down south. He complained that the aluminum bar spaces were too wide for the rollers. They can fly out through the aluminum bars of the sputnik trap even when locked. But as the predators found their way to my garden loft, the percentage of flyways and young birds being eaten by hawks and falcons went up. I even had first hand contact with the cooper hawk when it chased the most gorgeous young dark check daughter of "0751", my verbruggen "overall young bird champion". The cooper's wing tips hit my chest and abdominal area. My presence indeed saved her life, but she did not survive the fourth attempt. Most young birds being settled that were spooked by predators usually made back in 2-3 days, as long as the young birds escaped the attack or escaped the high tension wires which were another deadly opponent of our beloved feathered friends. Birds just learning the mechanics of flying with their squadron, can fatally hit high tension wires. These young birds who were usually in the back of the pack hit these treacherous high tension wires that can frequently shatter their fragile bones. Young birds that made it through will become good racers.

Another good friend of mine, the late Santiago Cruz of San Bruno, California an SFR pigeon flyer, gave me a young red checker cock. I named him "Conan". Three days after I got him, I let

him out on the landing board. Just a few minutes after, I could see the red checker flying well around the loft. As the day progress he continued to fly in wide circles in the vicinity around the loft and at times disappearing in the horizon. The next day I saw him flying and landing on the roof of a neighbor's house, east of the loft. On the third day, just after I cleaned up the loft, the red checker landed on the roof of the loft, and after a big effort of calling him in by shaking the feed can and whispering "come on in" ,"come on in", several times, he finally entered the stall trap. Ate and refreshed himself with a soothing drink of fresh water. This red check cock "Conan" become a good flyer by my standards. At that time that he broke three of is primary flights, the 8th,9th and 10th flights in his left wing, I had no choice but to cut the broken wings through. The cut was about 1 1/2 inches off the wing tips. This did not stop him from being a consistent clock bird from 200 + miles to 420 miles Elko, Nevada, week after week of consecutive racing. I finally lost him in the hard 500 mile Rogerson, Idaho. Two years later a new SFR flyer bought " Conan" for \$10.00 at a pet shop in Hayward, California.

In my own observation, young birds that fly away and come back after 2-3 days, can still become good racers in time. Through the years I have lost young birds in the loft without knowing what became of them. Some young bird I regarded as the best bird I bred that season and still lost the bird in an instant. Like it is there in a minute and in a split second gone forever. Flyaways will always be a part of our agony and unexplained phenomenon. But it can also be our incentive to enhance our handling ability. And at times I firmly believe flyaways are the free spirits of the pigeon world. The stallions of the sky that can't be conquered by man. The ultimate "sky warrior".