

X Factor Continued, Part 2
by

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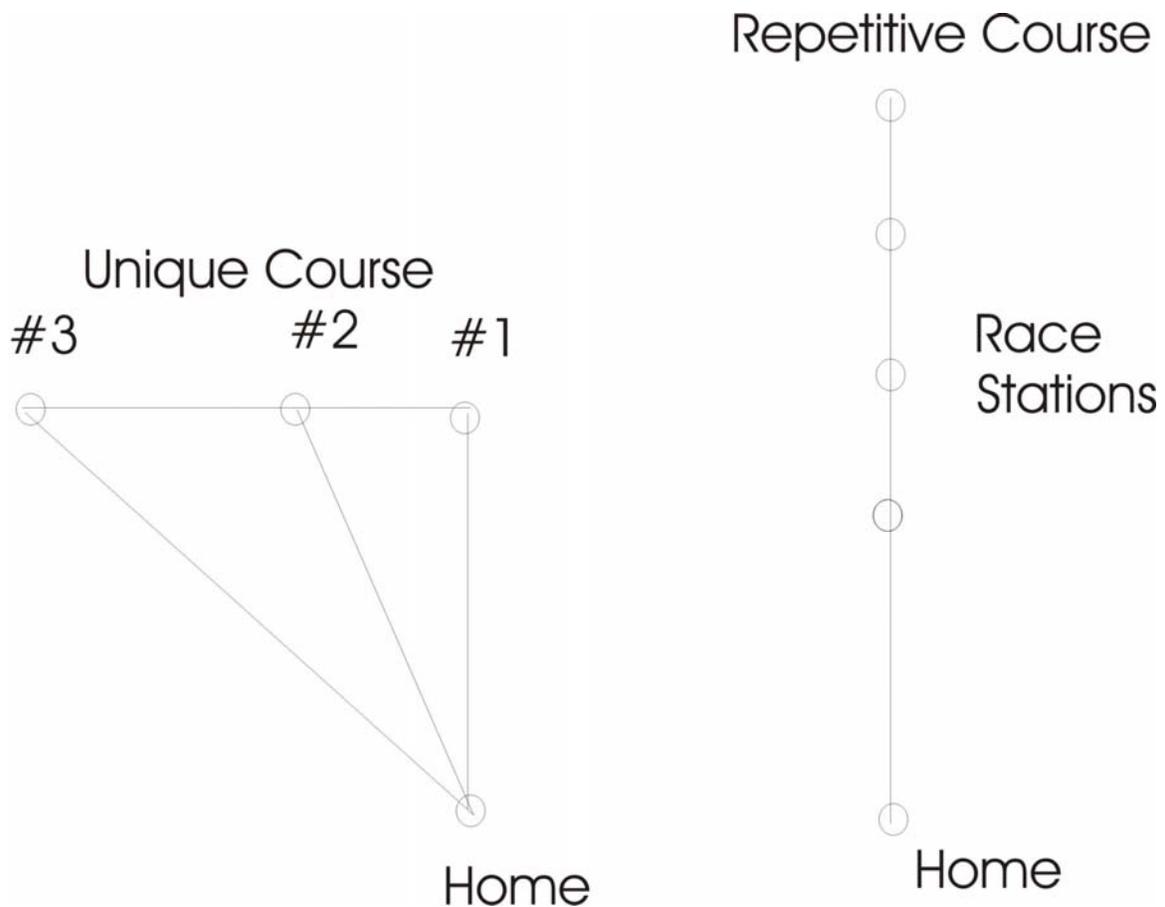
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Some try to relate intelligence to the processing, storing, accessing, and applying formula, and, in more complex situations, there is definitely room for intelligence as a factor. However, there are many people with limited intelligence that have an amazing ability to process, store and access information. For instance, we all know people of average intelligence that have an unusual ability to calculate figures in their head or remember names or spell words. However, when situations become more complex or requires faster decision-making, it is often intelligence that is the deciding factor in the outcome of these situations.

Still, in most situations there is adequate intelligence and then there is overkill. For instance, a pigeon of average intelligence that can quickly and accurately process and access information during flight might actually be better off than a pigeon of greater intelligence that, while performing all of these same functions, is also capable of simultaneously processing the thought, "Why am I doing this every week?" In other words, sometimes you are better off working with intelligence that fits the situation. I once owned a pigeon that was too stupid that it couldn't find the door between sections at feeding time, but was smart enough to be 2nd at the 400, 2nd at the 500, and 3rd at the 600. This pigeon was just smart enough to stay focused on the task at hand and probably not smart enough to realize that quitting was an option.

Generally, when experiencing a situation for the first time, it requires more processing time (thinking) than accessing time (remembering). This is primarily because there is a great deal less to access until you have experienced a situation. For instance, it is generally much more difficult find someone's house the first time than each subsequent time thereafter. This is because the first time requires some processing, and the second time requires accessing the already processed thoughts from memory.

Now that we know some of the differences between processing, storing, and accessing, let me give you an example of how they work. In pigeon racing we generally expose our pigeons to either unique or repetitive courses. On a unique course, pigeons are forced to fly over different terrain each week. On a repetitive course, they fly over much of the same terrain each week.



Because of geographical and transportation constraints, some clubs fly a unique course where the races start out in one direction and then dogleg in another direction. In these situations, the pigeons fly over very little of the same terrain, unless the combine decides to fly several races from the same station. There are several types of unique courses. For instance, Taiwan released the pigeons at sea where there are no geographical references, and, under these circumstances, every race is a “unique” race as there are never any landmarks for the pigeons to recognize and commit to memory. Therefore, under those circumstances, accessing is not nearly as important as processing, and that would do well to consider this fact when buying pigeons. I refer to unique courses as processing courses because they force the pigeon to think quickly. Often times, these courses yield slower speeds and higher losses, but survivors of this type of racing will assuredly have the best homing ability.

On a repetitive course, the races are set up along a straight line, and after the additional increment of each longer race, the pigeons are basically racing over the same terrain each week. Repetitive courses are not only flown over the same terrain, but most often, these courses follow a freeway or a highway, which makes for even easier navigation. I refer to these as access (memory) courses because the pigeons go over the same terrain so many times, so they eventually have the course memorized, and homing ability plays a much smaller role in their returning home. At the same time, when compared with similar environmental and geographical conditions on a unique course, access courses generally produce faster results with fewer losses.

Since the ability to process comes first, the races that require processing tend to quickly eliminate those that have little or no ability to process information. Therefore, by the end of the first series, those that are left probably have processing skills ranging from average to excellent, which is still a pretty large range. As long as the pigeons come home together in groups, it will be difficult to determine the difference between pigeons within this range. Many will say will if they are all coming home, what does it matter? To improve your loft, it is critical that you identify the pigeons with the excellent processing skills because these are the pigeons that are bulletproof when the front flock does get broken up. Those pigeons with average processing skills are far more likely to followers than leaders and they will eventually be put into a position where they have no leaders to follow. I call this “being exposed,” which in turn is caused by “separation of the front flock.”

Where possible, pigeons prefer to fly in flocks. However from the time the pigeons are released at the race station, big flocks separate into smaller flocks until one or several front flocks are established. With the exception of one circumstance that I will describe below, the front flock must contain at least one leader, but not every front flock needs to contain a follower. However, because there are far more followers than leaders, it is common for there to be more followers than leaders.

Because their skill set is not as complete, followers almost always need to rely on the orientation skills of the leaders. However, under normal circumstances, being a member of the front flock is as much about being in condition as having a complete skill set. As long as a follower is in as good or better physical condition than the leader, it will be able to keep pace with the leader. Again, with the exception of one circumstance, followers will not pull away from leaders.

There are times when one or possibly one of several leaders sets a pace that other leaders and followers are unable to maintain. In all situations on a unique course, and under some situations on a repetitive course, this can be a very dangerous position for a follower to be in. Under such circumstances, the follower’s very survival may depend on there being multiple leaders in the front flock. This is because not all leaders will be in the exact same shape on the exact same day; therefore, some of the leaders will not be able to maintain the pace, and they will be forced to fall back. The difference is that when they fall back, leaders still have excellent processing skills to rely on, so they are never “exposed” in the same manner as a follower. When followers fall back on their

own or with other followers, they are completely exposed and likely to be lost unless they happen to link up with another group that contains a leader. However, if a follower happens to be in a front flock that contains multiple leaders, there is still some hope. Again, not all leaders are in the same shape, and if one leader is really pushing, eventually even the other leaders will be forced to fall back. When they do, they provide an opportunity for those followers that can't maintain the pace to fall back from the front flock without being exposed.

Whether they realize it or not, most fanciers have a short-range goal and a long-range goal. The short-range goal is to win races, and the long-range goal is to improve their breeding stock. The problem with the short-range goal is that the races are not a very precise tool for identifying leaders, and the problem with the long-range goal is that we need to identify leaders in order to improve our stock loft. Therefore, we fly races with the hope of identifying leaders and followers through the concepts of separation and exposure. However the reality is that under normal race conditions, there are far more false reads than there are good reads.

In other articles on this same subject, I have explained how, within the last 30 miles, good and bad airlines and environmental conditions, such as cold, heat, wind, and rain, provide many misleading opportunities for a follower to finish ahead of a leader. On the race sheet, no one including the fancier is the wiser. However, since the race sheet defines perceived success (falsely or not), perceived success is what goes into the breeding loft.

With all of this in mind, let's go back and talk a little about repetitive courses and situations where followers can become winners a little further out on the course than the 30 miles mentioned above. On repetitive courses, there is a race going on behind the scenes, and it is occurring primarily amongst the followers. As mentioned earlier, followers lack processing skills; however, they may still have better than average storage, accessing and application skills. For followers, the race is between survival and experience. If a pigeons can survive on a repetitive course long enough to commit the course to memory, and assuming that it has better than average accessing and application skills, it may no longer need the leader.

Think of it this way. Let's say that you are going with a friend from your hotel to a house that you have never been to. In this instance, he knows the way, so he is the leader. Because you are not the one driving, you are not paying very close attention, so while you know generally how to get there, you probably couldn't find it on one trip. However, with each passing trip, you pick up more and more details until you could find your own way. Once you know the way, you no longer need the leader.

Now let's say that on your next visit, you stay at a hotel that is generally on line but 10 miles farther out. Under these circumstances, you will need the leader again because you don't now your way for the first ten miles. However, if he drove you to the old hotel, you could get there on your own. This is exactly how a repetitive course works. Once the pigeon has committed the course to memory, it can find its way home from a familiar

location, and without the help of a leader. However, here again, this is good for the pigeon and in the short-run for the fancier, but regardless of the conditions for the win it is still a follower and therefore misleading to the fancier's long-range goals.

While both processing and accessing are important, I rate processing as the more important of the two. My reasoning here is that when a pigeon can process, it can figure its way out of a situation that it has never seen before. However, a pigeon that is limited to storing and accessing is reliant on having seen the situation before, and sometimes, you don't get a second chance. A pigeon that can process will have a much better chance, on a unique or repetitive course, whereas a pigeons that relies on accessing, only has a chance on a repetitive course. While there are very few places that fly a unique course, pigeons developed on these courses are much more likely to develop a higher percentage of leaders than other course.

I maintain that if you really want to find out the value of your pigeons, you do it early through single tossing before they have committed the course to memory. By going 50 miles in various directions, you will put these young pigeons in a position where there is nothing to access from memory, and, by single tossing them, they will be forced to process.

When it comes to single tossing, I am talking about 10 minutes between releases, so pick a cool day. Also realize that, at least a first you are not going to get the returns that you are used to from these distances, but in the end, you will separate and expose the followers. With the use of an automatic clock, you should be able to track return times and pigeons. I would be looking for pigeons that were released separately, but then came home with another pigeon. It is very likely that the first of the two pigeons released is a follower and I would want to expose and eliminate as many of these as possible.

Until next time!

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