

The Art of the Pedigree

By

Bill "The Book" Richardson

In the following article, I want to give you a feel for my own development -- while I am very lucky to have certain abilities that are conducive to this sport, sometimes they have allowed me to skip steps that I maybe shouldn't have skipped. When you know the answer before you take the test, you are going to blow through the logic and move straight through to the bottom line. Who cares why, this is the way it is.



Preparing to cull the flock

One of my teachers pointed out to me that if I already knew the answer to everything, all I had to do was reverse engineer the problem. I am sure that he was being sarcastic and really meant, "You are 16 and obviously you know everything there is to know, so this should be simple for you." But I blew past that too and took it as a good idea.

Now that I am older, I try to give back to the sport that has been so important to me throughout my life. Even though my teachers are all gone now, these articles are my way of thanking them for their time and what I put each and every one of them through. Since they're gone, I'm always telling my wife how grateful I am to them. As my wife is always hopefully asking, "Isn't there someone else you could tell about this?" (That's how I got to you guys.) She is tough! My good friend Marty Ladin once called her "Mrs. Book." We won't go into how that ended. Anyway, I hope you will enjoy this.

When I first joined the sport in 1970, at 12 years of age, I was very lucky to have an unusual natural ability to be able to pick out super pigeons before they had the chance to

identify themselves as breeders or racers. I had a very small loft and could only keep 12 breeders, 30 young birds, and 15 old birds.

While I am sure there were pedigrees around in those days, I know I never saw one before 1980. It didn't matter though, because I was selecting and breeding well enough without them. In fact, back then, even when we bought pigeons at an auction, they came with diplomas, not pedigrees.

My breeders included two Janssen cocks that bred a number of top ten performers, the 45 hen that eventually bred 10 winners, her son 445 who eventually bred six winners but died young; 657 and 502 who were mated for life and eventually bred 4 winners and many prize-winners. My total investment in these pigeons was the 50 cents I paid to a kid down the block for 657. I really can't tell you much about any of them, only that the brother to the 45 hen was a big winner, and that one day, I discovered that 45 was the mother of 445 because I found it written on the wall of the loft that the fancier had given me. In those days, that was a pedigree.

As I only flew three years before going into the Air Force, these pigeons did not produce all of these winners for me alone. However, they did very, very well for me nonetheless. By 16 years of age, I was at the top of a 200-member concourse.

Back then, I selected pigeons by the way they looked and felt. For the most part, I can tell you that I had no real idea what I was looking at, it was just a feeling I would get when the pigeon hit my hand. I didn't have room in the loft to afford mistakes.

While I have always gone to good lofts to buy pigeons, I have never paid any attention to performance or pedigrees. I don't recall asking a single time about either. If I like the pigeon, it doesn't matter, because down deep, I still rely on that natural feel.

In a more humorous moment, I once had an irate fancier tell me, "You pick out pigeons that a blind man could pick." I asked him, "Why would I want to pick out anything else?" He thought about that for a minute and shrugged and said, "Ok, I'll buy that." My motto is, "Keep the best and forget the rest!"

When I am selecting or grading pigeons, it is kind of like playing golf and addressing the tee. I do the same thing every time. I tell every fancier the same thing, "Please be quiet and hand me pigeons." I don't want to know their opinion because it will interfere with my own opinions. One of my teachers once told me, "You don't need my opinion; you have enough opinions for both of us." I once left a grading session because a fancier brought out his book of pedigrees and started reading it to me.

I think it was around 1985 when I bought my first pigeon that actually came with a pedigree. I was visiting a top fancier who was getting out of the sport, and I asked to select one pigeon from his loft. I selected a young hen that had neither flown nor bred. He was a little taken aback by my choice and asked, "With all of the great pigeons in this

loft, why did you pick that one?" Being younger and a little harder to live with at the time, I answered, "Because it was the best one, don't you think?"

I should mention that she actually only bred me three pigeons, one cock and two hens, before she had to be put down for a strange feather condition. On the bright side, all three were winners. The cock was never out of the top five, won the 250 and the 500 and was twice King Bird. He went on to breed 10 winners in two years including a triple winner and a double winner. One sister won the 300 and the other won the 600. The 600-mile hen bred the HOF hen, which won the 400, 500, and 600 all in the same season.

Upon my return home, the pigeon went into the loft, and the pedigree disappeared into a box somewhere. With all of this, I guess you might be thinking that I don't really care for pedigrees. Well at one time, that was probably the case.

Several years later, I decided that I should take another look at her pedigree, and after a whole lot of searching, I found the pedigree in a box out in the storage room. It was a very descriptive pedigree and, while studying it, I noticed that there were 12 six-hundred-mile winners in her background. It was interesting if for no other reason than this: how many of you have a pedigree with 12 six-hundred-mile winners on it?

As I have mentioned several times, it is family performance, not individual performance, that is important, and while reviewing this pedigree, it came to me that pedigrees might have been more important than I had given them credit for. As I have mentioned before, I don't select pigeons by performance or pedigree. However, in reflecting back on the purchase of the original hen in an effort to be honest with myself, I concluded that I might have handled the situation differently.

What if I had selected the pigeon the same way I always had, and when the fancier handed me the pedigree, I had sat down with him and studied all of the relatives represented. As, he was a very, very good fancier, I am sure he could have told me all of this and more.

In every pedigree there is a key pigeon/pigeons that represent the opportunity for that line to move forward. If the key pigeon on the pedigree is also the key pigeon in the loft, then our chances for success go way up. They will go up still further if that loft is a key loft in its area of competition.

Obviously, it is equally possible for the pedigree to be based around the wrong pigeons as well. I have a friend that has a pigeon from a pair that I just don't like. The cock had an awful wing and the hen was not an internally strong pigeon. I have seen the parents to the pair and liked two of them. They were key pigeons to the family, but the owner was fishing for success when he made the matings. My friend's pigeon was mechanically nice, but like her mother lacked internal strength. The key pigeon in the pedigree was one of the two grandparents that I didn't like. He was the son of a champion and was in the pedigree three different times. This presents a situation where there are three generations of questionable pigeons all in a row.

As I mentioned in the Diamond article, while it is very possible to lock in a set of good genes, it is also very possible to lock in bad ones as well. If the bloodlines are good, and there is one questionable pigeon in the most recent three generations, the line is generally strong enough to survive it. Any more and the chances of producing a good pigeon are really going to go downhill.

My foundation cock, De Welches, was a grandson to van Hove's famous "Great 80." As the name suggests, he was a truly great pigeon, and he was on the pedigree of every great pigeon I ever saw from that loft. Several years back, De Welches bred the best pigeon in America. Once again, in the past, I have mentioned that greatness lies dormant in the genes. Knowing that the Great 80 and the Portugees are in the background of my foundation cock is a comforting thought. Knowing that De Welches, Merckx, Topman and the Bird of Paradise are all in the background of the Super Cock is also a comforting thought. The chances of a great one springing up every several generations in a strong line are significantly higher than waiting around for a great one to spring up from an average line.

There are four primary methods of building a pedigree:

#1. The first method is the "recording" method. We mate our pigeons and then write down the relatives. This is really not a method of building toward the future; it is more recording the past. It is a very common method when the loft is in survival mode. Nothing important is going on genetically, so there isn't much to write about.

#2. The second method is "systematic blending." As I have mentioned several times, I started out with four distinct lines within my family. I have made a conscious effort to blend these together to produce a line that carries roughly four equal parts of the base lines. Now I am in the process of reintroducing them back against the originals.

#3. The third method is based around loading the pedigree with a lot of great pigeons. I call this "blood-building" and it can be very effective. In a great loft, it is very possible for all the great pigeons on the pedigree to come from the same family. The more great pigeons on the pedigree, the better the chance of producing a great pigeon. When I first purchased the Hofkens, I selected the ones I wanted to work with. Then I reviewed every pedigree to determine the number of outstanding pigeons on the pedigree. This is how I narrowed down to my four current lines.

#4. The fourth method is a much more intense method of "stacking" around one pigeon. To do this, you had better pick the right pigeon. If you believe you are on the edge of a diamond and have identified the winner/breeder, this is a very good choice to weave such a pedigree around. The more times you can lock his bloodlines in, the more likely he is to reappear and the faster he is likely to reappear again. There is also another major benefit to this method of breeding. The point of inbreeding is to concentrate the blood. However, many pigeons don't stand up to inbreeding, yet what if all the grandparents were half brothers and sisters from the same cock on one side? What this method of

breeding allows us to do is spread the same genetic weight over a larger number of pigeons. It provides an equally effective method of genetic concentration.

Sometimes there can be a combination of methods. In the following pedigree, methods #2 and #3 were used to produce the father of my top out-cross cock. The pigeon in this pedigree was a super winner. Obviously there are a number of great pigeons in the pedigree, but look at the pedigree more closely and see if you can see a pattern. (See Pedigree)

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NL89-1088083 "TULIP"

won 8 keer 1e prijs

	V: N69-243116 DE "16" PRUT	V: "DEN BOL"
V: N60-668604 DE "B"	M: N76-601908 "HET ORLEANSDUIFKE" 1e Orleans 2492 duiven	M: "DUIF NAND"
V: N88-4137804 De "O4" kiz "019" Gebr Janssen	V: N67-732945 "ZOON JONG KOPPEL"	M: N67-732945 "ZOON JONG KOPPEL"
	M: N67-732945 "ZOON JONG KOPPEL"	M: NKAMP DUIF 73 "DOCHTER OUDE SLENDER"
M: B92-6131981 "DOCHTER 019"	V: B73-6736019 DE "019" WON 18 KEER DE 1E	V: B67-6282031 "MERCXX"
	M: NUIT GEEOGER VAN 74	M: B67-6129245 "SCHONE KWEEKDUIVIN VAN 6"
V: B64-6161034 "LICHT GESCHELPT" GEBR JANSSEN	V: B63-6465988 "BROER 019"	V: B67-6282031 "MERCXX"
	M: B80-6307776 GESCHELPT V.D. JONGE MERCXX	M: B67-6129245 "SCHONE KWEEKDUIVIN VAN 6"
M: N85-1411140 "MOOI BLAUW"	V: B70-6243257 "JONGE MERCXX"	V: B70-6243257 "JONGE MERCXX"
	V: N71-1567301 "ZOON OUDE SLENDER"	V: N65-857832 "OUDE SLENDER"
M: N79-1688379 "DOCHTER 301"	M: N76-429630 "MERCXX DUIFKE"	M: N70-861681 "DOCHTER JONG KOPPEL"
		V: NEENOGER
		M: B75-6743154 "ZUSTER 018"

Let's take a moment to examine how I have used these pedigree methods in my own situation. Initially I owned 40 Hofkens. They were a very solid group to begin with. I didn't do much decision making the first year because I wanted to study the breeding percentages from the different lines. My first move was to eliminate those I felt were responsible for the poor percentages or those that I felt bred out of character (to the bad side.) In all honesty, once I reduced these, my current four lines were very apparent.

My next step was to use methods #2 and #3 to blend top-level lines together. With the exception of the first two base generations, everything I own is a combination of De Welches, Merckx, Bird of Paradise, or Topman. A good example of this is the Super Pair, which has all four in the very near background.

While I will always likely work with a combination of #2 and #3, I am now in the process of moving toward method #4 where I stack around one pigeon. This goes back to an earlier article where I briefly described my "series" breeding program. Thus far, I am very impressed -- extremely impressed -- with the development of one of the grandsons to De Welches. He likely is going to be my first attempt at pedigree stacking.

As with pedigree methods, all of my breeding techniques take a lot of planning. Several years ago, I was grading some pigeons for a group up in Phoenix. I was explaining this whole process and how I plan my breeding program out for five years in advance. An older gentlemen stopped me and said, "I am 74 years old, how many five years do you think I've got left?" Looking around he might have been the youngest guy there. Since then, I have put more planning into my discussions on planning.

What I would like you to take forward from all of this is that I am living proof that pedigrees are not essential. However, I am willing to argue that at the very least, they don't hurt and in my opinion they provide a graphical overview of the state and direction of the breeding program. I have described four common methods of pedigree building: recording, systematic blending, blood-building, and stacking. These methods can be used singularly or together depending on the situation. Pedigrees help give us a feel for where the bloodlines have been and where they are going.

Until next time!

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