

## My Own Little World

By

Bill "The Book" Richardson

Several years back, a unique individual worked for me. Although he could be emotional at times, he was gifted in many ways. He had written for newspapers, magazines, and for me. He was a great photographer and, in fact, there was very little he couldn't do. One day, I came into his office and found him staring at his desk in a rather solemn manner. Sitting on the desk was a single CD case.

Usually, I didn't encourage him when he was in these moods, but eventually I had to ask, "What are you all down about?" Not lifting his head, he gloomily said, "As you know, I hate this place and everyone in it except maybe you, and I am not even real sure about you, and as I have mentioned many times, I am going to leave the first chance I get. When I do, I want to be sure that everything I have ever written is on a CD so that I can take it with me." I said, "And?" In his best Eeyore voice he explained, "Well, I have been coping and coping for the last several months, and I am now depressed to learn that everything I have ever written fits neatly on one CD. My entire existence is nothing more than one CD."

Approximately three years ago, I started helping several fanciers around the world. Ever since then, I have been writing approximately 10 pages a day worth of emails and articles. A month ago, I received 15,000<sup>th</sup> emails about pigeons, and I have sent out just over 20,000. In regard to my articles, my longest one to date is 54 KB and, all totaled, I have written approximately 150 pages for Winning and another 50 pages of pigeon material prior to that. Even including all of my emails, I am not sure that I have reached 200 MB. You think he felt bad? He had approximately 450 MB on his CD. If I am still talking about pigeons by then, help put me out of my misery!

Let me tell you a little follow-up story. It is an easy story to tell because I come out looking better than usual. It seems my neighbors decided to build a pool in their backyard so that they would have an excuse to build a wall that was high enough so they didn't have to see our house. So far this is working like a charm because now we don't have to see their house either, and I didn't have to pay for the wall. (I guess that faded blue school bus can come down off those trash cans in the front yard now that it has served its purpose).

I woke up to the sound of heavy equipment the other morning and looking out the window. I saw a crane with a 15 foot mast in the neighbor's yard. The first thing that popped into my mind was that old dead tree with the branches missing on one side that has so far been hit by lightning and my wife. You might remember that story.

Anyway, I slowly wandered out the front door and over toward the fence to get the worker's attention. I could see that they had the pool all outlined, and it looked pretty big. Out front, I saw two dump trucks, and I was already guessing that they would have to make eight to ten trips each to dump this dirt. I walked real slow and looked down at my shoes like I had just stepped in a fresh pile of dog dung. I didn't look up until the guy finally whistled at me. "Hey mister, want some fresh clean fill," he said. I didn't act too enthused. I turned to where that old dead tree was standing and said, "Well, I would if it wasn't for that old dead tree and all of those surrounding bushes. If they were out of the way, I suppose you could dump all that fill there. Of course, you would have to bring that crane over here and knock all that stuff out of the way and I'm not really sure that crane is big enough for the job." (I threw in that last part sort of like a challenge.)

I could see he was calculating if it was worth bothering with, but I knew I was saving them half a day's driving those dump trucks all over town. "Oh all right, we'll be right over," he said. Pretty soon, I had this giant crane moving right up my driveway and with one swish of the bucket that old tree was in about seven easy-to-manage pieces that my other neighbor agreed to come over to get for firewood. If he had said something about it earlier, I could have had the guy with the crane hit it a little harder and it would have landed in his yard. Yes, another job complete!

Now, I just have to figure out what to do with all that dirt. After my wife drove around the pile of dirt that was partially blocking the driveway things were a little quiet in the house, so I had some time to think ( I think she secretly wanted to finish off that tree herself). Finally, I came up with a great idea. "Dear, I have been thinking that if we leveled some of that dirt out toward the wash, we could build that carport you have been asking about." "Or we could just use it for a burial mound," she replied.

### **Line Breeding Continued**

Several articles back, we left off with a discussion of the Super Merckx (the throwback) and the Super Cock (the future). Toward the end of the article, I mentioned that I had mated the mom of the Super Cock to the Super Merckx. This was an interesting point (to me) that I would like to expand on. Oh come on, it will be fun!

As I have mentioned in the past, I put a lot of effort into creating options and then taking advantage of the best of the options I create. To demonstrate this, I would like to go back two years, to the initial mating of the Super Pair. While I had no doubt that the Super Pair was going to breed, I will be the first to admit that my expectations, though high, were dramatically exceeded! The first year, I bred five youngsters and all five went back into the breeding loft. In my previous 34+ years of breeding, no pair had ever placed more than two youngsters into the breeding loft in a single season. Since pairs like this don't come along very often, I bred them a second year with almost exactly the same results. Unfortunately, their overwhelming individual success was having a negative impact on my breeding program.

Breeding is about options. The more dominant any single pair becomes, the fewer options are available to the loft. Therefore, I could see the potential for developing a significant problem. The mother of the Super Pair also has two brothers and two sisters that are currently in the breeding loft. With seven children from the Super Pair, the Super Pair itself, and four aunts and uncles, I now had 13/39 total breeders that couldn't be mated together. In reality, this wasn't quite as bad as it sounds because some of these were cocks and some were hens. (I don't want to get Mr. Practical going again at any cost). However, it is still probably better to recognize a potential problem before it becomes a permanent one. Obviously, this is a significant reduction in options, and it is therefore taking us in the wrong direction. Think of a line-breeding program in the same terms as painting the porch of your house; you never want to paint yourself into a corner. Most line-breeding programs fail because the family simply runs out of options and the fancier fails to create new ones. By definition, line breeding is about maximizing available options in an ever-shrinking pool of possibilities. If no new blood is added, the family will continue to diverge.

Breeding pigeons is as much about the macro view as the micro view. I am always talking about the big picture. Over time, I have developed some rules to deal with the macro view. They are broader, more general concepts that include things like the percentage of a certain bloodlines within the family, feather color, eye color, loft age, general breeding percentages, general winning percentages, distance, and inbreeding coefficient. I can tell you that I am never anywhere close to my goals on the macro scale; however, these goals were developed to provide direction to my program.

Let me give you a simple example. In my family, I have a number of blue bars. In my personal opinion, I would like to have the following color schemes in my loft: 60% blue check or black check, 30% white flights (three white flights or less per wing), 60% yellow eyes. I can tell you for a fact that although I have been working very hard on improving my numbers in these directions, so far my progress has been more limited in this area than in improvement of the overall quality of the pigeons. I truthfully think that line-bred families get far more set in their ways than we would like to think. Moving them away from genetic recessives is a mathematical game that yields extremely low results (or maybe I am just unlucky).

Let me give you a quick example of why. The Super Pair was made up of a pearl-eyed cock and a yellow-eyed hen. I bred 13 youngsters and produced one yellow-eyed cock! Things don't always work out the way you would like, but you have to keep battling toward your goals or you will get swept away in the opposite direction.

At six straight pearl-eyed youngsters I began to wonder, so I wrote my friend Dave Shewmaker and asked him how far this bad luck was likely to go. He wrote me this answer:

“Book,

If indeed yellow is dominant over pearl, the conclusions are as follows. It is basically

opposite as you suggested, though your PEC when mated to the YEH should at some point produce some yellow-eyed offspring. At this point it as if you have tossed a coin 6 times and come up with 6 heads. Entirely possible, but not the expected outcome. It shouldn't continue at that rate forever. Also, remember we are still operating on the assumption that this is not a sex-linked loci.

Summarizing with the understanding that yellow is dominant over pearl:

The following genotypes would have yellow eyes (where Y represents the yellow gene and y represents the pearl gene):

YY  
Yy  
yY

This genotype would have pearl eyes:

yy

Assuming we are only dealing with these two genes, your YEH is either Yy or YY. The PEC is yy.

The two possibilities for this mating are:

- 1) YY x yy which will produce 100% Yy (yellow eyes)
- 2) Yy x yy which will produce 50% Yy (yellow eye) and 50% yy (yearl eye)

Since you have produced at least one pearl-eyed baby from this mating, that proves the hen is of the genotype Yy. The fact that you have gotten 6 babies (assuming you got two from each round) and they were all pearl is bucking the odds, but as I said above entirely possible.

If you mate this particular yellow-eyed hen (Yy) to any pearl-eyed cock (who will be yy), you should expect the mating to result in yellow-eyed offspring at the theoretical rate of 50%, because it is like mating number two above. The YEH was produced from a third scenario mating of Yy (yellow) x Yy (yellow) which should produce 75% yellow (YY, yY, Yy) and 25% pearl (yy). Remember that other yellow-eyed birds which are of genotype YY when mated to pearl-eyed birds will only produce yellow-eyed offspring.

Breaking down your question:

[Question:] 'My question is once she displays this tendency, is this going to happen with other pearls?'

[Answer:] This particular hen should produce 50% yellow and 50% pearl when mated to any pearl-eyed cock.

[Observation:] 'Most of my pearls come from pearl to pearl as pearl is very common in my loft.'

[Response:] Pearl to pearl should always produce pearl.

[Question:] 'Her brother, when mated to a pearl, produced 50% yellow brown eyes.'

[Answer:] 'This observation shows that eye color is not as simple as one loci, two type of genes. There are undoubtedly several loci involved, some perhaps for color modifiers as well as other color genes. My simplifying assumptions though are still useful in explaining the basic mechanism.'"

Again, I didn't get any yellow-eyed offspring until the 10<sup>th</sup> youngster. At this rate, I will never get anywhere near my goal of 60% yellow. So there you have it. We have established that I am unlucky and there is no way that my good friend Marty Ladin is going to say that I was born with a horseshoe stuck in my posterior.

A significant goal in my breeding program is to create as many half brother/sister matings as possible. Everything is geared toward this single goal! There are two types of half brother/sister matings. One is the double half brother/sister mating. (If after reading this description, someone else has another name for this mating, I am all ears.) This is the product of a cock that is mated to two hens that are not closely related to him, but that are themselves sisters. In my experience, these offspring are outstanding breeders. I have performed this mating scheme approximately a dozen times, and it has worked very well every time. One of my top cocks is currently from a mating of this nature. While this mating can work in the opposite direction with a single hen mated to two brothers, I don't like this mating quite as well. Dave Shewmaker says there is no difference, and I am sure he is right, but I still work the other way around.

The second type of mating is the standard half brother/sister where the hens are not sisters. This mating is not as close, and I have had equal luck with two hens to one cock or two cocks to one hen. This is my choice for racing. Right now, I have both the Super Merckx and the Super Cock mated to their half sisters.

As I have already mentioned, my first move was to reduce the children of the Super Pair from 13 to 7. The second move was to look at possibilities of new matings for the Super Cock. Upon writing this article, I am at approximately the 14-day mark with the youngsters from the first round. I spent the day today carefully evaluating the youngsters in the nest and every pair in question. I am always pleased when I can make it through the first round with less than four changes to my matings. This is about the average.

Going into this season, I realized that by breaking up the Super Pair, I was taking a risk. The pigeons that make up such a pair often don't work as well with others as they do together. So I am very interested in the babies from these parents being mated to other pigeons. At this point, I am more confident with my decision to do so. Each has produced an outstanding hen!

One pair that I am going to have to change with great regret is the yellow-eyed Merckx and the Hollywood hen. He has failed to fertilize the first two sets of eggs and she is too

important to let sit. However, I have an even better De Welches yearling cock sitting in the wings, so out with the old and in with the new. I will continue trying the old cock but with a lesser hen. Now that it is warming up he may yet hit and if he does, I will switch to a better hen.

By mating the Super Merckx to the mother of the Super Cock, my hope is to produce a half sister to the Super Cock. This would create the potential for a half brother/sister mating at the Super Cock level. I could then run their children against the children of the Super Pair. In the meantime the Super Cock is already mated to another half sister from the Merckx line. Their offspring will be mated against the offspring from the Super Pair. As you can see, this has the potential to take care of this year, next year, and the following year (assuming that something works out). Already, the Super Merckx and the mother to the Super Cock have produced an outstanding hen.

As I have stated, with the exception of this most recent daughter, the Super Merckx hasn't been that successful in the breeding loft. Yet his sisters are my highest percentages breeders. However, the Super Merckx, when mated to his grandmother (34), has bred one successful daughter (170), which is now a two-year-old. She is mated to a son of De Welches and a sister of the Super Merckx (168). The youngsters from this pair will have the 34 hen as their grandmother once and their great-great grandmother twice. They will also have the Young Merckx as their great grandfather twice and the foundation hen as their great grandmother twice. I mention these because I am really high on the youngsters. Unfortunately, they are futurity banded so off to the big city they go!

Over time, I have learned a little trick that I often use. When I have made a mating that I think is correct -- but nature disagrees -- I try to back up one generation on one side or the other. For instance, I thought the Super Merckx and his half sister would work really well; however, when they didn't, I had to make a change. Since I am not often far wrong, when I didn't get what I wanted, I just moved back a generation to her mother, which happens to also be a half sister to the Super Merckx. This is the hen (29) that is the mother to my Super Cock.

In making a half brother/sister mating with the (29) hen, I am accomplishing several things. He is yellow-eyed and she is pearl-eyed. He is a blue-white flight and she is a check. In my family, I am always looking to increase the number of blue checks with yellow eyes and white flights. Second, this will create half brother/sister matings throughout the rest of the loft. Third, 29 is the mother of the futuristic cock and the Super Merckx is a throwback. Finally, she has been a "no-miss breeder," which should help his odds.

As a side note, 29, 168, and the Super Hen all have two things in common, they rarely miss and they are all out of the foundation hen that was out of the 34 hen, and now 170 who is a sister to my foundation hen is starting to produce.

My hope in all of this is to create one hen that is good enough to mate to the Super Cock for a half brother/sister mating that will bring the Super Cock and the Super Merckx together. The children from that mating will create a whole range of half brother/sister mating with the children from the super pairs.

I want to point out that I have a brother to the Super Cock and a sister to the Super Hen that I have also mated together. They match up quite well and if they are anywhere near as successful, there could be even more half brother/sister matings floating around. Options, options, options!

In a line-bred family, the highest percentage mating is the half brother/sister mating. Therefore, my simple philosophy is to create as many of these power matings as possible. Power matings are pairings that are set up to win. As I have stated, at any given time about 1/3 of my matings are designed to “muddy the water” (reduce the genetic coefficient), 1/3 are moving toward realignment, and 1/3 are power matings. In turn, power matings are then mated back out to the furthest corner of the family to “re-muddy the water.”

As you can see, I am working very hard to bring these two cocks together on the pedigree. This is the alignment phase. I think they are going to be very big together, so I want to be very sure that when it gets to the point where these bloodlines merge, I have created a position of power.

I realize this can get confusing, but I want to illustrate how much time is spent planning the current breeding program. Now the next five years are already pretty much planned out. From the original generation, I now have two pigeons left in the Old Merckx and the Foundation hen. As I stated in my last article, soon I may be permanently mating several of the base pigeons from the second generation. This will mean that the bulk of the responsibility will be handed off to the generation of the Super Pair and newer.

Until next time!

This article is copyrighted by Bill Richardson. Articles cannot be reproduced without the permission of the author.