

2015 South Africa Million Dollar Pigeon Race Update

The greatest race in the world lived up to expectations even though Mother Nature decided to add some major obstacles along the race course. The Million Dollar Race is the most scrutinized race in addition to being the most secure and transparent one loft race in the world. Only one pigeon race can make you world famous and bring fortune instantaneously...that is the Million Dollar. The Million Dollar Race is followed by the entire sport and remains the gold standard in pigeon racing. Every one loft race should copy the Million Dollar but very few do. This because there are too many security measures in place for the lesser one loft races. Not everyone has the stomach to compete against the best in the world. However, if you do not enter the Million Dollar it looks like you are ducking the competition.

On Saturday January 24th, 2453 pigeons were liberated under clear skies. The pigeons left the liberation point in just seconds heading for Libro Park, the 323 mile end point just outside of Johannesburg. Finally, after a year of exporting, quarantine, settling, training and five Car Races, it was time for the main event. Hundreds waited in anticipation at the function hall in the Hyatt Regency Rosebank in Johannesburg with thousands more watching from their computers around the globe.

Our trip started with a flight to Joburg where we met up with Gary and Judy Berthiaume of California before heading off Kapama Game Reserve at the edge of Krugar National Park. We flew into an airport not much bigger than a fast food restaurant where we were met by our guide. Hospitality in South Africa is second to none. I have been on a few high end safaris over the years but Kapama River Lodge was truly five-star. On our very first game drive we were lucky to have an up close and personal encounter with a large male leopard. The leopard had just finished off an impala and allowed us to view him from 20 feet away. Our guide had only seen one other leopard since November so we felt that maybe the stars were aligning and good fortune would continue right through race weekend.

After a few days of endless gourmet food, great conversation, unlimited game viewing (including all of the "big five") we were off to Libro Park for basketing of the Million Dollar Race Pigeons. Everyone in attendance that assisted with basketing was treated to a barbecue at the racing lofts. The pigeons were crated, then brought across the road to rows of computers, scanners and teams at each basketing line. Every pigeon was removed from the crate, then inspected by a race appointed fancier before the seal was removed that covered the band. The pigeon was handed to one of us and we walked the pigeon through the line. The first stop was the scanner and double checking the band number. Next the wing stamp and then a paper seal was placed over the

band. Any pigeon not deemed fit enough for the race was inspected by the Veterinarian. If the Vet agreed the pigeon was unfit for the race, the owner was refunded and the pigeon was not entered in the race. Only eight pigeons were left behind due to injuries.

The pigeons were watered during basketing before being loaded onto the carriers. They were also fed and watered along the trip and watered before liberation on Saturday.

Basketing featured some of the world's most famous fanciers hoping to be lucky enough to handle one of their own pigeons. Some known fanciers in attendance were Gerard Koopman, Alfons Klaas, Hans Paul Esser, Paul Smith, August and Frank Daelemans, Hardy Krugar, Jan Hooymans, and the PIPA team headed by Thomas Gyselbrecht.

The pigeons were extremely fit for the race...white wattles, full wings, buoyancy and vitality. This was the nicest group condition-wise that I had ever seen in all my trips to the Million Dollar. The trainers were quite pleased even though the pigeons lost nearly one month of training due to heavy rains throughout the season. Next year should go much smoother with the hope of normal South African weather.

I was lucky to see two of my own pigeons, Basta (on the 3rd flight) and Magari (on the 4th flight). Both had full wings and a perfect body molt. The pigeon Basta scored in the prizes. I photographed the pigeons in the baskets so everyone could see their health and sheen.

Friday was a day of meetings with the other international shippers, the Director, organizers and owner of the Million Dollar. Much of the meeting was dedicated to discussing my methods, care and export procedures for the US pigeons. My systems were passed out to all in attendance and the race hopes that the other shippers will copy my systems.

We discussed some changes for 2016 including a renovation with one entrance in the center between both lofts. The lofts will be a giant "U" shape so when the pigeons enter they can go left or right to the loft of their choice. Many surprises are in store for the 20th "Platinum Edition" Year of the Million Dollar. I have been sworn to secrecy until the official announcements are published.

Friday evening featured a sit down dinner with awards presented to the international shippers and team that worked on the race. It was a night of great food and company and we stayed up late into the wee hours of Saturday morning. Not much sleeping went on during race weekend. We laughed and told tales throughout the evening...if you followed the photos on the website you saw the smiles on everyone's face.

Every morning started with a massive endless breakfast buffet with an omelette station, exotic fruits, juice bar and fresh baked breads and pastries. We rolled into the race event with a giant buffet with many choices along with desserts and fruits. Large screens were set up to watch the race while we partied in air conditioning...the anticipation and anxiety for the first pigeons to return was high. Updates were given all day long along with the showing of the liberation and the Car Race videos. 45 cameras were set up to film the liberation and the camera crew was disappointed that the pigeons left liberation so fast.

The pigeons were liberated at 6am. The temperature was 75 degrees Fahrenheit and by 10 am they were flying through 105 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature at the lofts was 89 degrees. The temperature must have been taken in the shade because it felt like an oven outside. Headwinds were consistent along the entire course and about 70 miles from the lofts the pigeons hit a wall of major thunder showers. These were far from ideal conditions for a race but after racing pigeons for over 40 years we rarely have ideal conditions for a race. Winds, weather and heat seem to affect our sport more than any other. January 24th was the scheduled day, the liberation was perfect, heat was not predicted to be so extreme and the thunder showers are always a factor in summer.

We were waiting for the final race with our American friends Gary & Judy Berthiaume and Chad Compton & Ann Marie Houser, along with several South Africans. At 3:02 pm two pigeons were caught on video in the sky south of the pigeon lofts. The two pigeons walked around for two minutes before the winner entered the loft. For this two minute period, every fancier with a blue bar in the race had visions of pigeon immortality, fame and fortune. The prize money is secondary for the winner. Sales of pigeons related to winner will far surpass any prize money. Filip Norman of Belgium was quoted saying that winning the Million Dollar Race was better than winning two Barcelona Internationals. This is how important the Million Dollar Race is to the winner.

Throughout the afternoon we waited and waited. Sadly, when the 3rd pigeon finally arrived, it was not a paid entry and had to forfeit the prize money and the position. By dark only 17 pigeons had arrived with three USA pigeons in the top 11. I will breakdown the results a little later.

Saturday evening we attended the banquet and all the awards were handed out. I was lucky to represent the US and accepted the solid Gold Medallions and trophies. Race Director Michael Holt got up to speak and explained that he expected the pigeons were nearby and should start arriving first thing in the morning.

On Sunday morning there was a steady chain of pigeons arriving at the lofts and the 300 prizes were filled rather quickly. By 9am the Top 100 Auction was set and the pigeons were on display. The pigeons looked remarkably good after such a tough flight.

There had been plenty of water along the course which was evident when many second day arrivals were cooing all around before entering the lofts.

The Top 100 auction had a mix of colors, shapes and sizes. I was actually surprised that many larger type pigeons scored at the top of the results. The winner was a small hen but the second place bird was a handful and the nicer pigeon of the two. His record showed that the 2nd place pigeon with an outstanding record was a gentleman and allowed ladies first.

The auction moved rapidly and the first two pigeons were sold to a phone bidder in Saudi Arabia. The Middle East does not have any restrictions and can easily ship the top two home.

The US was expected to have an impressive performance and I feel that if the pigeons did not hit the wall of thunder showers, many more US pigeons would have graced the top of the race sheet.

In 4th Place and 1st USA was Nanez Family Syndicate. This male pigeon named 'Horse Reliable' had a great performance won many pools in the race. Nanez is no stranger to one loft racing success. Nanez Family decided in 2014 to focus on Million Dollar success and success they had. This medium sized blue relied on his genetics for a big showing. In 10th place and 2nd USA was 'Loretta' bred and owned by Jim Norton of Utah. Loretta a small compact hen really made Jim proud. In 11th place and 3rd USA was 'Penny' bred and owned by Walsh - Peterson. This larger type powerful cock was part of a very successful three pigeon team. Walsh-Peterson won the Three Bird competition on a Car Race and also won 1st Three Bird competition on the Final Race. Who says you need a big entry to succeed in the Million Dollar. Walsh Peterson had three in the final race and Jim Norton had two in the final.

USA had a very successful racing season. Winning numerous Car Race prizes, including two cars, multiple two bird and three bird competition wins with many pigeons at the top of the Grand Averages and Car Race Averages, I also must mention the super Canadian pigeon named 'Canadian' owned by Nasrat Yardam. 'Canadian' had multiple positions in the top 28, winning a Car Race prize and being the 1st Canadian pigeon on the final race. The next two Canadian pigeons in the final were owned by V & W Vahle and MnM Syndicate.

McLaughlin Lofts exported to the Million Dollar Race every single possible prize winner in each Car Race and all the top USA and Canadian pigeons in the Final Race. Of the 68 US pigeons that scored in the prizes, in the final race at the Million Dollar, McLaughlin Lofts shipped 64 or 94%. McLaughlin Lofts shipped 100% of the prize winners leading up to the final race. McLaughlin Lofts certainly gives you the best chance of success. We are very proud of the US sweep on the pigeons shipped by us.

All this hard work and attention to detail was noticed by the Million Dollar Race. The race has encouraged all shippers to follow McLaughlin Lofts systems, principles, care and export procedures for the 2015- 2016 season.

To view a gallery of pictures from Robin and Frank McLaughlin's trip to South Africa, [Click Here](#).

If you plan to enter the Million Dollar Race, McLaughlin Lofts will start accepting pigeons on April 1st and begin shipments to South Africa from the end of May to the end of June. The entry fee is \$1100 for a three bird team plus \$45 per pigeon export fee. \$1235 will cover each three pigeon entry into the race. You have nearly nothing to lose if your pigeons do not make the final race. I guarantee the Million Dollar will be the most exciting one loft race you ever entered. Three months of racing leading up to the most prestigious race our sport has ever known. The website is second to none, every entrant has their own account, live videos, nomination races (pooling) and hundreds of ways to win.

Take a chance at fame, fortune and pigeon immortality!!

Frank McLaughlin