

Antibiotic Free Racing and Breeding at McLaughlin Lofts

Back in the mid 1970's when I started racing pigeons we had very few choices for medication. I remember emtryl for canker and pipezine for worms. There was aureomycin, Sulmet and terrimycin for just about everything else. Once or twice each year we used the emtryl and wormed the pigeons at some point with the useless pipezine. I never had any use for aureomycin although I heard it was good for Paratyphoid (salmonella) and chronic respiratory disease. Sulmet always went unopened on the shelf.

In the mid 70's we all over-crowded the pigeons, fed a grain mix not much different than today, and gave a grit mix that is similar to the USA produced grit mixes that are still on the market. As we proceeded into the 1980's fanciers with connections to Belgium started using products like Ridsol S, Baytil, sulfa spinoffs and Suanovil. These fanciers had success by getting nice antibiotic boosts and clear lungs.

As we moved into the 1990's many felt that "if a little is good, more must be better". Instead of treating the pigeons several times during the year and a couple times during the race season, fanciers treated almost weekly during the race season, mixing all kinds of medication magic potions. The fanciers that had success continued with the medications and more fanciers fell into this way of thinking.

The last 15 years brought about countless antibiotics and combinations of antibiotics that promised amazing benefits. Fanciers reached for a flock treatment at the first sign of illness in one sick pigeon. From the 1900's through the 1970's a pigeon with a weak immune system would not have survived a season and the weak genetics would be eliminated from the population. Now a weakened immune system is not a threat to a breeder or racer because health can be maintained from a bottle or powder in a bag.

Over the last 25 years we have steadily allowed weak pigeon immune systems to survive and breed. We have also continued to propagate some highly resistant strains of bacteria. We have caused the pigeons to get weaker and the bacteria we fight against to get stronger. This evolution has come about because of the heavy and frequent use of antibiotics. Nature is supposed to work in synchronicity with both the ever evolving bacteria/virus and the pigeons' immune system's ability to combat the bacteria and virus. We fanciers have caused the immune systems of our pigeons to lag behind the bacteria or virus attacking them because of excessive antibiotic use.

Another major mistake we have made during the last 25 years is to employ an extensive sanitation program. The weaker the pigeons the more fanciers tend to sanitize and clean. Waterers were soaked daily in bleach, lofts were scraped clean and sanitized constantly, acquired pigeons were quarantined for long periods of time and were rarely mixed. We continued to not only use excessive antibiotics but also failed to challenge the pigeon's immune system because of excessive hygiene. Please see my article "*An Immune System is a Terrible Thing to Waste*". The article addresses how to create and perpetuate a strong immune system and stronger pigeons.

Currently in 2015 we have great racing pigeons with super endurance and speed but with weak constitutions. The slightest thing will throw the pigeons off form or lead to poor health. Some fanciers are leading the charge to change this. Super immune systems can be developed free of antibiotics and

thrive, breed and dominate on the race course. I have been working towards that goal for many years now and feel I am about there. I was quite shocked when I first heard that many of the top racing lofts in Belgium were also competing with all natural products. Antibiotics can lead to a few good races a season. Antibiotic free can lead to season long success.

My suggestions and observations on how to achieve an extremely healthy loft will follow. I have found that if I do find canker or a respiratory problem in the pigeons it is always the new pigeons or children of recently purchased pigeons. In other words, the pigeons that display health problems are pigeons that have lived at McLaughlin Lofts for under one year.

Many fanciers cannot believe that I have old breeding and racing pigeons that have only been vaccinated and wormed in their lifetime. If your breeding pigeons are healthy I feel that the only thing you need to do is vaccinate for PMV, salmonella and treat for worms. Do not forget about external parasites which can easily be eliminated with sprays or regular baths in Ivermectin Sheep Drench.

Fanciers must be adamant to not cause the pigeon added stress because of worms or external parasites. These are easy to remedy but often neglected. Worm infestation and external parasites will lead to the other more serious health problems that we are trying to prevent.

Keep in mind not to panic if you have a sick pigeon or two. No matter how hard you try something will get sick occasionally.

First, vaccinating for both PMV and Salmonella when young and once a year for life is another step in the process of going antibiotic free. Second, buy pigeons from lofts that use very little antibiotics. Pigeons bought from heavy medication users are not going to thrive in your loft. It is tough to figure out who medicates and who does not. Do some homework and get a feel for what the fancier does and how his pigeons perform for others. Third, commit to natural health methods by using apple cider vinegar, oregano products, probiotics, fresh garlic and fructo-ogliosaccharides (prebiotics). Lastly, look at your loft to see if the building and the numbers kept in the building is conducive to natural health.

Pigeons are nearly indestructible if they have space, air, sunlight, dryness and proper nutrition. If you have health problems like respiratory, canker, cocci, etc. and you provide you pigeons with all of the above you are working with weak immune systems. Pigeons will thrive and have excellent health if you provide the basics. There is nothing difficult here. Again, the basics are space, air, sunlight, dryness and proper nutrition. Proper nutrition includes multiple mineral sources.

I once was under the impression you had to treat for canker and respiratory disease during the race season. As the years have gone by I found that you do not need to treat the pigeons during the racing season if you provide the basics (space, air, sunlight, dryness and proper nutrition). Do not forget the minerals which I feel are more important than the grain you feed. To see the minerals we use see my mineral video on my website www.mclaughlinlofts.com. We also use Jovati Minerals which is an all in one mixture sold by www.VitaKingProducts.com If you want to just use one mineral product that covers all the bases use the Jovati.

During the racing season, McLaughlin Lofts provides a few days of total rest if the pigeons look like they are starting to get run down a bit. There is nothing better than rest to put the pigeon's entire system back in order. McLaughlin Lofts has not treated for coccidiosis in more than a decade. Stress, overwork, dampness, overcrowding, etc. will cause the coccidiosis count to go up. Rest, air, sunlight, space and

proper nutrition will cause coccidiosis count to go down. The same applies for wet canker and respiratory issues. McLaughlin Lofts dominated this past old bird season racing some of the best pigeons in the USA without using one drop of antibiotics before or during the race season. The only thing we did before the race season was to vaccinate for salmonella and worm the pigeons. We did worm once during the race season. We will do the same before this coming old bird season and nothing else. Let us see how many years we can have excellent antibiotic free racing. The pigeons were not treated at all in 2014.

There will be the occasional problem child in the group and treating that pigeon individually is the remedy of choice if you decide to treat at all. Do not worry that one sick pigeon is cause to treat the entire race team. Think of children in the classroom. There is always some child with an infection but the other children are perfectly healthy. If we placed every child in the classroom on antibiotics when one child was sick we would be not only be increasing the potency of the bacteria but also weakening the immune system of the children.

At McLaughlin Lofts we will treat a sick pigeon individually if the pigeon is worth saving. Canker tablets, enrofloxin tablets and injectable antibiotics (LA 200) are all that are needed. Rarely should flock treatments be necessary. I cannot remember the last time we flock treated. It is quite difficult to stand by and lose pigeons to sickness. However, if you want to increase resistance to disease in your flock, it may be much better to lose a few weaklings than weaken the masses.

I can guarantee that if you decide to build up your pigeon's immune system in your own loft you should expect to lose more youngsters throughout the season. Survival of the fittest will cause the weak to fall behind and eventually be lost. You can have success with medicated youngsters but you are keeping the high performing weak immune systems which perpetuates generation after generation. The immune system may be weakening with each generation if you continue to medicate year after year.

Pigeons have evolved over millions of years and have done just fine without our help. Notice the health and vitality of many wild pigeons that live under a bridge and eat who knows what. Survival of the fittest. I was watching some feral pigeons acting like top form widowers on cold rainy day by the ocean. How could they look so good on such a miserable day living off whatever they could find? It's likely due to a super immune system. Many have lost a racer only to have the pigeon return after months of living wild. Next time this happens take a closer look at the color intensity in the eyes, the pink still throats and a redness of the feet. These are all signs of super health and this super health was achieved from living wild and having the immune system challenged over and over.

Many champion fanciers claim that they let the basket do the selection. The basket will also do the selection on the weak immune systems should you decide to go antibiotic free.

The sport now is challenged by young bird sicknesses that can nearly devastate our flocks. The weakened immune systems we have created over the last 30 generations have likely led to the big uptick in young bird disease. Perhaps over many more generations our pigeons will have less young bird sickness but we must try to limit antibiotics to achieve this goal.

I am proud to have both racing and breeding pigeons that have never been medicated in their lifetime. One should see my late bred 2014 pigeons that have only been vaccinated and wormed. They are magnificent. They have super health, feather, white wattles buoyancy and are lifetime medication free.

Several years ago I sold a pair of pigeons to a fancier who asked “what have they been treated for”? I confidently and proudly explained they have been vaccinated for PMV and Salmonella plus wormed a few times with moxidectin. He was upset that the pigeons had not been treated for cocci, canker, respiratory and salmonella. I had been so excited to send top immune systems to a fancier and he was unhappy and disappointed.

We must change the mindset that has been perpetuated for decades now. The old timers used to say that you must treat for canker and coccidiosis during the race season and before breeding. More recently, the experts claim that you should treat for respiratory one week and canker the next. The old timers learned from old methods and still say you must treat for canker and coccidiosis and respiratory. Being 54 years old myself (and keeping pigeons for nearly 50 years) I could be considered an old timer but I think like a young timer.

Treating for coccidiosis is a waste of time. As mentioned earlier, I bought a bottle of Baycox in Belgium 14 years ago and never opened it. I cannot remember the last time I treated for cocci and chuckle when I hear people still treat for it. If your loft is dry, spacious and sunny then coccidiosis should not be an issue. My lofts have open flight pens and plenty of dampness during the Spring and Fall. I still never worry about cocci. It seems that the cocci count goes up and down but I can guarantee the count will go down with some rest after a race.

I do not want everyone to think the McLaughlin Lofts never has a sick pigeon. If you own pigeons you have had a sick pigeon. My approach to a sick pigeon is just different to most everyone else. We will treat the sick pigeon individually if the pigeon is worth saving and the pigeon will only get one chance to recover fully. If the pigeon falls ill again it will lose its spot in the loft for good.

One injection of LA 200 will solve any one-eyed cold or respiratory problem within three days. Should an individual pigeon have canker, the metrodonizol (flagyl) tablets will do the trick. For anything more serious we use baytril in a pill or liquid form.

Treating an entire section because of one or two sick pigeons is just foolish. As explained earlier, if I have a sick pigeon it has usually been bred from new pigeons or pigeons that have lived at McLaughlin Lofts for less than a year. It seems to take about one year to get the new pigeon’s immune systems up to par with my existing pigeons. Check out my article “*An Immune System is a Terrible Thing to Waste*” to learn how I boost the immune system over time.

I fell into the antibiotic routine through the 1990’s until about ten years ago when I started to move away from frequent treatments. If your pigeons are healthy there is no need to use a preventative treatment before racing or breeding. It is not beneficial to give antibiotics to healthy pigeons. Do you think that giving your children multiple courses of antibiotics throughout the year will make the child less likely to contact strep throat or an ear infection? The child will be more likely to contract strep throat or an ear infection with indiscriminant antibiotic use. Pigeon keeping is very simple if you remember the basics...space, air, sunlight, dryness and proper nutrition.

