

## USA Wins 2016 South African Million Dollar Race

On race day I was sitting in the ballroom of the Monte Casino Hotel in Johannesburg South Africa with my family and 1000 other pigeon fanciers all with one dream of winning the South African Million Dollar Pigeon Race. A television crew at the pigeon lofts was showing a live feed of the countryside while scanning for the first winged dot to appear on the horizon. Only a handful of international witnesses were actually at the lofts to inspect the winning pigeons for wing stamps and sealed striped adhesive strips that cover the identity band. The witnesses also oversee the immediate drug testing on the top finishing pigeons. I have been a witness in the past and now waited in the comfort of air conditioning instead of baking all afternoon in the dry hot South African sun.

Predictions were being made by the trainers and most agreed that the race would be around nine hours for the winning pigeon. A headwind along the course coupled with heat and a steady possibility of thunder showers led to this nine hour educated guess. I asked one local fancier why it takes the pigeons so long and he said "this is South Africa".

About 2:55 pm the crowd erupted with "pigeon" as a lone blue made a victory lap before landing and sitting on the roof of Loft 2. We waited for 2 minutes as the pigeon looked around and worked its way to the entrance. One thousand people watching large video screens in a ballroom 20 minutes from the pigeon lofts were all coaxing the pigeon in. Using their native language calls and whistles was instinctive to so many fanciers. At 2:57 pm with 8:42 on the wing the pigeon entered the loft. The whistles turned to silence as we waited for the announcement of the 20th South African Million Dollar Race winner.

One week earlier on January 30th I flew with my family to Atlanta to meet our flight to Johannesburg for the South African Million Dollar Pigeon Race. The kids were so excited because each year we tell them next year we'll all go to South Africa for safari and the Million Dollar Race. Finally, 2016 was the year we made it happen. This race is more important to me than any other because everyone around me suffered as I worked around the clock from April through August to export the pigeons to South Africa. Only the ones dearest to me understand my tireless effort for the pigeons to be competing this year. My wife was missing a husband and the children a father for five months so this trip was a big thank you from me to them. My wife Robin puts up with high stress levels during the entire export process.

As we were about to board our flight to Johannesburg the gate attendant asked if we had our children's original birth certificates. We were shocked when they told us that we couldn't

board the flight without the birth certificates. We then had to figure out a solution to salvage the trip. Unknown to us, South Africa had recently implemented a rule that no children would be allowed into/out of the country without their original birth certificate. U.S. passports are not proof enough for entry into South Africa. It shouldn't have surprised me. This is the same government that had decided American pigeons must be returned to the U.S. within 10 days of race completion due to avian influenza concerns. You read it correctly...all the U.S. pigeons will come back to the United States and be auctioned here this spring.

After not being allowed to board the flight to South Africa, we booked a hotel in Atlanta and asked my sister to go to our home and look for the birth certificates. She then had to drive to Logan International Airport and send them by Delta Dash to Atlanta so I could collect them in time for our flight scheduled for the following evening. Needless to say it all worked and we ended up only losing 1 day on our family vacation.

Two days after leaving Boston, we finally arrived in Johannesburg and were immediately driven to Madikwe Game Reserve to stay at the Tau Game Lodge. To say the game lodge was five star was an understatement. We had the best of everything with two adjoining lodges sitting on a large watering hole. We received a 5am wakeup call and proceeded to spend the next 2 ½ days up close and personal encounters with cheetah, leopard, lion, rhino, zebra, giraffe, cape buffalo, etc.

During the daytime we relaxed by the pool and watched crocodiles, elephant, rhino, ostriches and every species of antelope you can imagine come to the water to drink, bath, fight and play. At the Tau Game Lodge we met up with our USA traveling companions Bill and Cathy Rixey from Washington State. This was the Rixey's first time in South Africa so feel free to ask their opinion. I so wish many joined us because the trips to South Africa are amazing and a once in a lifetime experience. You know it's is exciting when my teenage daughter who can sleep 18 hours a day would bounce out of bed at 5 am, camera in hand, to go on the morning game drive. My son Landon wanted nothing more than to see a lion. We had more lion encounters than he could have ever imagined.

On February 4th we left the game lodge and proceeded directly to basketing of the Million Dollar Race pigeons. We arrived with 500 or so pigeons remaining to be basketed. The buzz was that German and American pigeons were pristine for this race. I handled about 15 USA pigeons and every pigeon was perfect, completely molted out and in super condition. My confidence for a USA victory began to rise. I began to think that all the hard work had paid off with pigeon after perfect USA pigeon going into the final flight of their lives.

Many said that USA pigeons had no chance...that they were not in the country long enough, were too far behind the others, and could not catch up. The international fanciers felt that even though the USA pigeons dominated all the early races they would be no match for the powerful German entries. The confidence in Germany permeated everywhere. Many assumed that American pigeons having to fly in the long, hot, headwind of the final race would fail.

What the naysayers did not know was that I had insider information and knew the health and condition of these pigeons when they left Massachusetts for the Million Dollar Race. Not only did these pigeons have superior health they had superior immune systems. I also knew the USA pigeons had superior genetics. The Million Dollar Race is a genetics race. The fanciers in the USA pay more attention to super genetics than just about any place in the sport. No pigeon in the history of the Million Dollar had better genetics than the winner of the 2016 race.

On Saturday February 6th the pigeons were liberated at 6:15 am from 336 miles into a headwind. The liberation was a thing of beauty and the video played throughout the day as we all waited for the first arrivals. The organizers continued to give weather updates along the course with the best guess on where the lead pigeons would be. Videos of the Car Races were shown to pass the time and numerous vendors and an endless buffet were set up in the adjacent room with every clock, grain and pigeon supply imaginable.

The Million Dollar Race draws the biggest names in the sport. In attendance (to name a few) were Gerard Koopman, Alfons Klaas, Henk Jurriens of Eijerkamp, Hardy Kruger, Hans Paul Esser, Norbert DeSchriver, Filip Brantegem, Jan Hooymans, Mark Kitchenbrand, Thomas Gyselbrecht of PIPA, Les Green, Derek Nichols of Premier Stud and Paul Smith. I was on the phone telling a friend who was in attendance when my 9-year old son yelled in the background "don't forget Frank McLaughlin". He thinks his dad is one of the famous guys.

Personally I wanted a USA win so bad I could taste it. The night before I had dreamt of USA winning the race and two weeks ago PIPA predicted a USA victory. Nothing like putting the pressure on the country of Stars and Stripes. A USA victory would be complete and utter satisfaction because against all odds the USA pigeons were competing in the Million Dollar Race. Failure to export the pigeons to South Africa was not an option and failure in the Final Race was also not an option. If I could ever will a victory, now would be the time.

At 2:57 pm the blue pigeon entered the loft and we waited 30 or so seconds for the video announcement to be made. Unless you are in the room you cannot imagine the feeling that maybe just maybe that it was your pigeon that won the race. The roar of the Million Dollar Logo exploded onto the screen followed by the American Flag and Ganus Family Lofts! We jumped from our chairs because we were sitting with Jurie Erwee and family, everyone was hugging and high fiving. Jurie has worked for years with Mike Ganus and myself to export pigeons from South Africa back to the USA. How fitting for Ganus to win the race after setting out five years ago to do just that by purchasing the very top Million Dollar winners each year.

PIPA captured the celebration and placed it on their website. The winning pigeon “Laura is a Big winner Today~!” was bred from the sire of ‘Rubellos’, the 2012 Million Dollar Race winner mated to a direct daughter of ‘Said in Spun Silver’, 2nd Place 2013 and ‘Untamed Desert’, 1st Place 2013. This means that the sire of Laura is a Big Winner Today~! bred both the 2012 Million Dollar Race winner and the 2016 Million Dollar Race winner. I have always said the Million Dollar is a genetics race and this pigeon has the best Million Dollar genetics of any pigeon ever to fly in the race. No pigeon can realistically come close.

USA continued to pound pigeon after pigeon at the top of the race report with 52 USA pigeons in the prizes and a Canadian pigeon at 16th.. As each USA pigeon clocked my satisfaction grew. The Miracle at McLaughlin Lofts to export the USA pigeons has paid off and USA has had perhaps their greatest Million Dollar Race ever. I did not think the race could get any better until at 15th place the McLaughlin pigeon “Cool Dude Michael” entered the loft and was announced to the audience via the big screen. Cool Dude Michael was racing to raise funds for the charity Autism Speaks.

I have not told this story but if it was not for the months of dedicated work from our USDA “angel” we would have never succeeded in exporting the pigeons to South Africa. I spent endless hours on the phone with this USDA agent, planning, strategizing and working to please the South African Department of Agriculture. Occasionally we would get off topic and have personal life conversations. During one of our conversations “Dr. Angel” as I will call her, told me that she works closely with Autism Speaks. Her nephew Michael is autistic so autism is dear to her heart.

After the pigeons were exported to S. Africa in August, many of you will remember that I ran a fundraiser for Autism Speaks. I also entered a team in the Million Dollar Race splitting any winnings with Autism Speaks. “Dr. Angel” thought this to be the nicest possible thank you anyone had ever given her.

It was a complete full circle and beyond satisfying to have “Cool Dude Michael”, the pigeon named after Dr. Angel’s autistic nephew, score 15th in the final race. The 20th Million Dollar Race could not have gone any better. This was like a storyline from a movie and this fact was much better than any fiction. I knew the race played out exactly how it was supposed to.

When I called “Dr. Angel” to let her know that USA won the Million Dollar and “Cool Dude Michael” was 15th her jubilation was over the top. She worked so hard for me, this Massachusetts stranger who called her for help in April 2015. We took this plea to export pigeons to a gentleman the reports directly to the President of the United States. My export made it to the agenda for billion dollar trade agreements between South Africa and the U.S. In the years prior it seemed that I was always fighting against the USDA. To have them in my corner for the biggest most intense fight of all was dynamite!

Some are wondering about the 2016 export to the Million Dollar. We are not expecting any problems. The first shipment is scheduled for May 15th and last shipment on July 7th. The South African Government has implemented protocols from my efforts last year that will be used for other countries with avian influenza issues. Now that the South African Government is satisfied with my bio-security, records, management and health of the pigeons we will have smooth exports to the Million Dollar Race this year.

I assure everyone that I will work my magic and send your pigeons to South Africa with the best possible preparation and greatest chance to win this race. I will also not give away my secrets of nearly 100 % health here at McLaughlin Lofts and nearly 100% health as the pigeons pass through the quarantine at the racing lofts in South Africa.

I am also so proud of my McLaughlin pigeons with five making the final race. We scored 15th, 158th (Racing under Abington JL) and 179th. Three of five in the money. I am much more proud of the USA pigeons with 52 in the final race prizes, two Car Winners, 1st Hot Spot Car Race Average and numerous prizes leading up the final. A wire to wire domination by the USA. To view all the results, average speeds and prize winners see: [www.samdpr.com](http://www.samdpr.com)

There are some big changes coming for next year. New lofts are being built alongside a golf course with an adjacent resort and casino for Million Dollar guests to enjoy during race weekend. The loft will be a massive V shape with many surprise options that I cannot discuss at

this point. The new loft will be ready April 1st. The organizers/trainers feel the location will lead to fewer losses in both settling and training. The entire race weekend will take place a 25 meter boat ride from the pigeon lofts. A Million Dollar Race Golf Tournament may follow.

To view the Entire Race Season Results and the Final Race Results visit [www.samdpr.com](http://www.samdpr.com).

For more information contact Frank McLaughlin [www.McLaughlinLofts.com](http://www.McLaughlinLofts.com) or [Frank@McLaughlinLofts.com](mailto:Frank@McLaughlinLofts.com)

Win or lose I know the entrants enjoy the roller coaster ride known as the South African Million Dollar Race. I guarantee this is the most fun you can have racing pigeons.

Hope the USA sends a super team to me for export. We need to defend the title and once again win the greatest one loft race out sport has ever known!

Frank McLaughlin