

When One Family Just Isn't Enough, Part 2

by

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In my last article, I spent a fair amount of time discussing subsets, key pigeons, foundation cocks, compatibility, out-crossing, back crossing, and transitioning key pigeons. Since the title of the article is, "When One Family just isn't Enough," I suppose that I should now spend some time discussing my two families. Obviously, one of those families is the Hofkens, and we have discussed these pigeons on numerous occasions. Discussing the second family, the so-called Horemans, is a little bit more complicated, and by the time we have completed this explanation, I am sure that you will be totally confused.

Let me start off by saying that I purchased these pigeons from my good friend Ed Lorenz, who has distinguished himself as one of the top fanciers in American racing pigeon history. While I will explain some of this in more detail later on, let me say that although Ed has maintained a regimented breeding program for many years, writing pedigrees is something that he enjoys doing! This is not because one pigeon might not be out of another pigeon; instead, it really comes down to effort. Ed once told me, "Now if I were to fill out a pedigree for you that would set a precedent, and then soon everyone would want a pedigree and that would require work." By that point, I was already so in love with these pigeons, that I really didn't care if they were out of two mud hens.

Still, there is a lot of inbreeding, out crossing and backcrossing involved in this family of pigeons, so while Ed's explanation was quite complete, it was also quite confusing! Let's start off with an explanation of the so-called Horemans.

That's right, I said, "So-called Horemans," because that is what Ed "thinks" they are. Actually, technically, they are, "So-called Horemans based" pigeons. These words will leave a bad taste in the mouths of the pedigree chasers, but don't look to me for help here, because I am loving it!

Approximately thirty years ago, while working at US steel, Ed Lorenz's brother Pete became friends with a coworker of Belgian descent. It turned out that not only did the coworker visit Belgium several times a year to visit his parents, but his parents apparently lived right across the street from a supposedly great fancier.

On the next trip over to visit his parents, Pete's friend contacted this great fancier, and talked him into sending Pete some eggs. The fancier agreed but only under the condition of anonymity. In fact, all Pete was ever told was that they were Horemans based pigeons.

With this agreement, the friend transported eggs for two summers in a row, and while the transportation went smoothly, only about 1/3 of the eggs hatched.

At the time of Horemans arrival, Ed's Stassarts family was dominating the Southern California area. However, it is difficult to stay on top unless you are willing to try new things, so Ed asked his brother for two Horemans to put on his race team. During this period, Pete was traveling a lot, and, even when he wasn't, he had an extremely long commute to work; therefore, in an effort to test these pigeons, he readily agreed to share a couple of them with Ed. And so it happened that during the next season, while the Stassarts were pounding the Valley, the two Horemans were pounding the Stassarts. In fact, given Pete's work schedule, the Horemans were doing really well for him as well.

Ed has repeatedly said that it was mind boggling that the Horemans could be so much better than their competition, so at the end of the season, Ed went back to Pete for several more of the amazing pigeons. Because there were so few Horemans available, Ed was forced to outcross his foundation cock, 2434, to a Stassart hen, and a Waterhouse Beckert hen, and these pairings produced the top two flying cocks that Ed ever owned (1192, 737, half brothers).

At that time, Ed raced in the prominent San Fernando Valley Club (FVC Club) of Southern California, which was known for its heavy pooling. 1192 and 737 were so consistent that they almost brought pooling to a standstill! As Ed recalls, "They were easy to pool because they were pretty much the first ones home every week. The problem was that while I knew that they were going to be there, so did everyone else, so pooling kind of came to a standstill."

It was about that time that the FVC Club created the Snowbird Race, which was a multi-loft race. Since Ed was the top fancier in the FVC Club, other top fanciers from all over the United States were clamoring to place entries into his loft. Although very few of these pigeons ever amounted to anything, several great pigeons were identified, and he used these pigeons for out crossing. Because it is important to the story, I will also mention that in the early 1990's, the Summer Classic was formed. This race was made up of four races that were flown in the dead of summer. Here again top lofts shipped their pigeons to Ed, and again, several great pigeons identified themselves.

There will be no complaining about whether these pigeons were tested, as all of these pigeons were severely tested in young and old birds, and most of them went to two 400 miles races as a young bird. When the smoke cleared, approximately five of these pigeons ever made it into Ed's breeding program where they were out crossed and backcrossed against the Horemans.

While I had visited Ed in the mid '80's when the Stassarts were still his primary family, I didn't have the opportunity to do so again until I spoke at the Snowbird Convention in 2000. While I knew Ed was the most successful fancier in the San Fernando Valley and one of the very best in the Country, I really didn't keep track of what he was doing, so upon my visit in 2000, I was still expecting to see the Stassarts. However, after handling

several pigeons, they just didn't feel anything like what I had remembered seeing a dozen years earlier. In fact, while the Stassarts were excellent pigeons, these were at a whole different level!

After looking at the pigeons, Ed and I talked at length about a number of subjects related to pigeons, and it was during this conversation that we discovered that both had a great deal in common, and, since that time, our friendship has continued to grow. Although I really liked the Horemans, I never asked about purchasing any of them because I didn't want it to interfere with our friendship. However, several years later when Ed was no longer flying, I mentioned to him that I was thinking about bringing in another family, and he offered to let me purchase some of the Horemans. I assumed that he meant a pigeon or two, but when I got there, he basically said, "What do you want?" and he gave me the pick of the loft! Of course, I don't think that he thought that I would return time after time looking for more of these wonderful pigeons!

In my selection, I focused on the blue family, which, as mentioned earlier, was based around the pearl eyed cock 1192 and the yellow eyed cock 737. It was the influence of the Waterhouse Beckert that gave 737 his yellow eye, and this was very fortunate as there were no other yellow eyes in the blue line! There are two yellow eyes in my six base pigeons and they are both down from 737.



Daughter of Yellow Eyed Base Hen

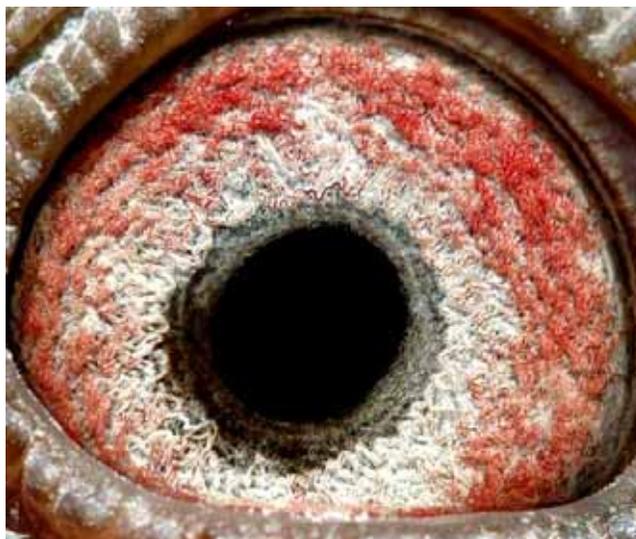
At ten years of age, and after breeding many super cock pigeons, 1192 was sold to a fancier in Taiwan. Over time, all of his sons were sold (I have one of them), with the lone exception of 7730, which has been Ed's top breeding cock for many years.

Ed's very good friend, Dave Hunsicker, also had a brother to 1192 that played prominently in the story. Over the years, Dave has had many great pigeons go through his loft.

It was this Horemans cock from Dave (brother of 1192) and a Hermans/Janssen hen that produced the flying machine 1207 that completely dominated the Summer Classic races of 1993. Although she is 13 years old and no longer laying, she is still an amazing specimen!

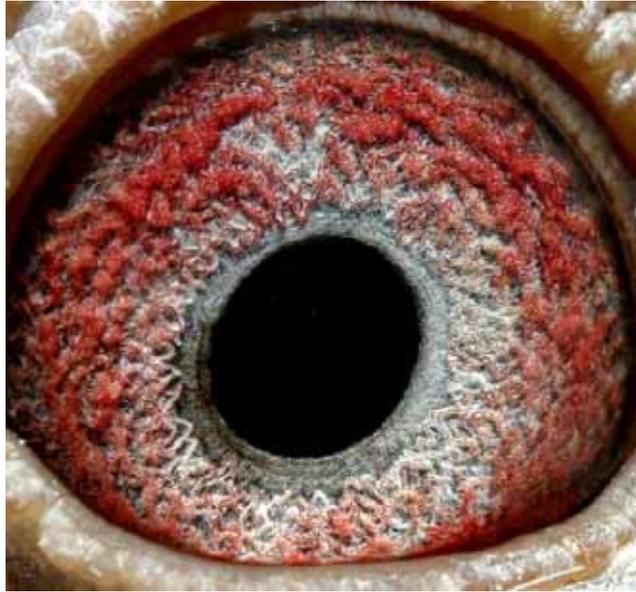
As Dave had imported many super Van Loon's in the early 1980's, it was always assumed that 1207 was a Horemans/Van Loon. However, so I could complete this article, I made a special effort to contact Dave directly and ask for the lineage of this special pigeon. Even Dave was surprised to find out that it wasn't a Van Loon. To be totally honest, I had always wondered because while many of her children have the physical characteristics of the Van Loon's, 1207 just didn't have that feel, at least to me. However, when the word Hermans came up, I could easily make that connection, especially since these were the famous Hermans from Dr. Gregory (he is mentioned in Piet De Weerd's book *Memoirs of Piet De Weerd, Volume I*). While Dr. Gregory had some amazing individual performances, it was Jim Cleary that put the Hermans on the map with one of the two greatest seasons ever flown in the 200 member Mountain Concourse of Southern California. That year, he placed an average of seven pigeons on the from sheet every week, and he placed second overall five straight time and then won the 600 mile race, all with a team of approximately 15 widowhood cocks and with a very average airline! In all the great pigeons that Dave has ever owned, he still says that the Hermans were the best widowhood cocks of all time.

Ed mated 1207 to 1192 to produce 7730, and he has been a breeding machine. In fact, he is the father or grandfather to all of my base pigeons. For that matter, 1207 is also the mother to all of my base pigeons! The following picture is the eye of a double inbred daughter of 1207. This was one of the last two youngsters that 1207 ever bred.



Base Double Inbred Daughter of 1207

Several years back, after handling three sons of 7730 when mated to 1207, I told my long-time friend Ed Shimkowski, “If I owned those three cocks, I would get rid of all of mine.” Today, my foundation cock is one of those three pigeons!

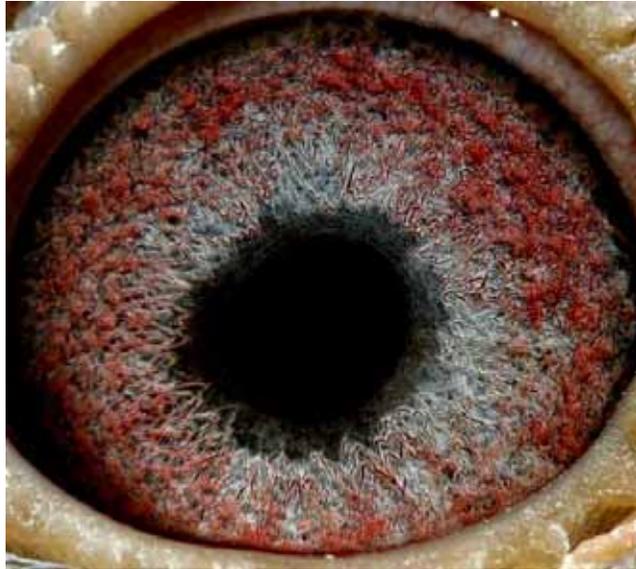


Daughter of the foundation cock – Mr. Ed

The Silver Line – Key pigeons to Support Pigeons

Ed also has what is called the silver line, which has been amazingly successful both in the United States and in Mexico. Interestingly, both the blue and the silver lines are descendents of a single pigeon, 2434; however, the primary difference is in the out crossing. The silvers were founded around the 611 silver cock, and the outcross was a silver Fahmie hen from Tom Fahmie. Early on, the 611 cock was sold to a fancier in Mexico, and while Ed had several children from this great pair, I was only ever interested in two of these pigeons. Ed himself always refers to these two pigeons as “The two perfect pigeons,” but I simply call them the Silver Hen and the Silver Cock.

I obtained the Silver Hen on my second trip to Ed’s loft, and, had it not been for the fact that Ed owns a blue bar sister with a mega race record, I would never have gotten her! This year when mated to the foundation cock, the Silver Hen produced two excellent sons. This is a picture of the eye of one of these cocks. However, realize that the cock is only about three months old at the time of this picture.



Son of the Foundation Cock and the Silver Hen.

Negotiations on the Silver Cock were somewhat more tenuous, because this cock had already bred two 400 mile winners, so when I approached Ed with the idea of a purchase, he said, "Put it down! You already own the sister!" A year later, on the second attempt, he said, "You have to leave me with something! How do you sleep at night?" On the third attempt he said, "He alright, alright, but I want you to know that I feel violated."

The Silver cock and the Silver Hen are without a doubt the key pigeons of their line. However, given that I am not going to add any more pigeons from this line, I am in the process of converting them from a key role in the silver family to a support role to the blue family.

Some would ask that if the silver line is that spectacular, why I didn't build around the silver line. The answer is in the name "Silver Line". I have never been wild about the color silver, and regardless of what they are mated to, this line produces at least twice as many silvers as any other color. Worse yet, the Silver Cock is homozygous, so all he can produce are silvers. Ed refers to this color problem as, "The gift that just keeps on giving." Still, these two pigeons could have an extraordinary impact on the blue line going forward.

The Hofkens

Now let's turn to the Hofkens. When I first realized that the Horemans was going to become the primary family, I deliberated long and hard over the future fate of the Hofkens. As a cock based family, many of the Hofkens were considerably larger pigeons than the Horemans, and this made crossing the two difficult at times.

There have been times when I have considered selling out of the Hofkens, but in talking with Ed, he has mentioned several times that when the Horemans took over as his primary family, he wishes that he had kept at least one line of the Stassarts to outcross

with the Horemans, especially since it worked so well with 2434 back in the beginning of the family. The fact is that it really isn't that easy to get enough related pigeons together to create a family, so giving up on a family deserves some serious consideration, especially if you really like the ones you have.

Back when I first purchased the Hofkens, there was an excellent pigeon within the group that was named the "929 Hen", which were the last three digits on her band (full sister to Topman). Although the shipment that I received was a very fine group of pigeons, she was easily the best pigeon in the group. However, she was the product of a cross, and, from the start, she produced a smaller pigeon that didn't really fit in with the rest of Hofkens family. This isn't to say that they weren't good pigeons, but they just didn't fit in very well at the time, so I sent many of the children to my partner, and eventually I even traded her.

As I have stated before, the Horemans were a much smaller and faster type of pigeon, and they suited the 929 pigeons much better. While I could sit and lament the fact that I didn't keep the 929 hen, the fact is that she was finished as a breeder well before I purchased the first Horemans. At least by trading her, someone else received some benefit. Besides, given that I had parked a number of these pigeons at my partner's loft, the cupboard wasn't exactly bare, so I collected them up and put them to work.

I have a small operation, and I work very hard to keep it that way. Therefore, as the number of Horemans and 929 pigeons continued to grow, something had to give, and that something turned out to be the majority of the rest of the Hofkens. Time will tell if that was a good decision or a bad one. Either way, it is the decision that I made, so I guess that I will have to live with it.

While I have made excellent progress this year, there is still a lot to consider. While the 929 pigeons should transition more quickly, there is still a lot of work to be done before I can call this idea a success. As I have stated before, the Hofkens hens already match up pretty well with the Horemans, and I was quite pleased with the Horemans/Hofkens hybrids that I produced early on this year. Unfortunately, right now, I am forced to produce my hybrids early on in the year and then do my inbreeding when I am finished breeding hybrids. The problem here is that it really limits the amount of time that I have to devote to my inbreeding, and I am currently putting some thought into this as well. All in all, I would say that I am approximately three years away from fully stabilizing this new 929 Hofkens based family.

The Hofkens and Philosophical Issues

Over the last several months, many fanciers have been asking me why I gave up on the Hofkens as the primary family. In fact, several people (most of them owning Hofkens), have pleaded with me not to do so. They point out that the Hofkens have been doing very well in this Country and that there is a good market for these pigeons, both of which are true.

First, so far, I haven't really given up on the Hofkens. Second, while I really liked the Hofkens pigeons, from the start I have had some philosophical problems with them. Up to the point where I purchased the Hofkens, I had never worked with "pure" pedigreed pigeons before. I don't know if it is just different today, or if it is just different amongst the Hofkens owners, but I am really tired of being asked "Are they pure, or do they have a Belgium band."

In fact, Hofkens owners have made it very clear that they simply won't purchase anything but pure Hofkens, and, in my mind, that has become a distinct disadvantage to this family, and one that I am not interested in perpetuating any longer. Even in the very best of the old strains, the master constantly added in new blood whenever he thought it would improve his pigeons. Ed has done a masterful job of inbreeding, out-crossing and back crossing to the Horemans, and, going forward, I intend to do the same!

Until next time!

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