



Racing Pigeons

Sam Brown writes about his hobby and passion



'Now, you don't know me, but I'm a member of the MND Gang and my hobby is racing pigeons. 'Ughhh!' you might say, 'vermin of the sky...!', but to me they are superb athletes, 15 ounces of pure guts and courage. I've had them for 25 years (no, not the same ones!!). I've been Press Officer, Honorary Secretary, Chair Person, Chief Conveyor, and the idiot who takes birds to race points.



Now to the birds: 'bought in' or 'squeakers' (babies to the ill-informed!) All birds have a 'close band' ring put on at 7-10 days' old for registration. They are members of RPRA (Royal Pigeon Racing Association) and without this ring, they can't be raced, shown or sold. My partner and I keep over 100 birds in a loft (or big shed!) in our garden in 3 sections; young birds/babies of that year; racers; and finally stock breeders, for which I have paid £600 plus in the last year alone.



I will start with the babies at 2 months' old. They are all vaccinated against paramyxo virus (foul pest to you!). Gradually, the birds fly until all are flying strongly for about half-an-hour. Basket or crate trained, they go into baskets on the grass to be taught to feed and drink when in transit to race points; that is when problems can start. They are taken 2 miles from the loft, then stood for 20 minutes, which allows them time to settle down and become orientated, before being freed. We then leave the site, go home, see which birds have made it back before us and wait for any stragglers. We feed them, check numbers and identify which birds are missing. The next occasion when the weather is suitable, we basket and carry out the same procedure from the

same spot. Then, weather permitting, we increase the distance by 5 miles each trip, until they are flying about 40 miles back home. We have 2-3 weeks to get it right and prove the youngsters can come home well, before it is race time.

The big day comes and we go down to the club house to hand over our little treasures to the markers and fill out the race sheet with the ring numbers, colour and sex. Into crates they go with other club members' birds, twenty-five to a crate, before being sealed with RPRA seals. All crates are loaded on the lorry to be driven to the race point, overnight. At the race point, they are watered and checked for injured or sick birds. OK, stand by for liberation! While marking takes place, the timing clocks are set with time, name, date and club; we then wait for officials to check whether the flight line is clear. Finally, they are liberated; over two thousand birds in twenty seconds, released into the sky!



Problems start immediately for the little treasures. Weather plays an important part, but where, exactly, is home? What about hawk attack! Morons with guns! Telephone wires and electric pylons! Just fighting to get home! Home at last, they have beaten mist, fog and rain just to reach their familiar perch.

We take the rubber race ring off, putting it into the timing clock which prints out the exact time. Then, back to the club for the check-in to see who is the fastest, the winner! We call it sport, but it's not sport for the birds. It's pure determination and dedication, to get home, to a place of love and understanding; it's my life, our birds.

Photographs courtesy of The Royal Pigeon Racing Association www.rpra.org and British Homing World www.pigeonracing.com

Contributed by Sam Brown, a person living with MND.

SUMMER TEA PARTY



Committee members Joyce Iles and Gill Cheetham at the tea party with carer, Mavis Austin

The Reading Canoe Club on the Thames at Caversham is an ideal place to hold an August Summer Tea Party – so the Committee thought, once again!

And once again, third time unlucky, the sun didn't shine but the rain really rained!

However, inside all was bright, an English afternoon tea served by committee members to all who came. It was pleasing to see all those who chanced the showers, plwMND and their carers, a former carer, and one who was newly diagnosed along with her husband.



Anne Smith with Ken Hunt and, below, John Austin and Roland Lewis



Lots of laughter, exchange of experiences, catching up with each other in a wonderful venue, watching the boats and canoes go by midst the sun and showers.



We'll be there again next summer but will the sun be with us I wonder?

Contributed by Margaret Moss

CHRISTMAS CARD SALES



Following on from our success in selling cards last year (our picture shows Sandie White and Gill Cheetham), a reminder that, if you order cards through the branch for your family and friends, we can claim 20% of the selling price for branch funds. You should find a Christmas Catalogue enclosed in your newsletter. If anything appeals to you, please place an order by phoning Val Pearson on 0118 9789063.

We also hope to be selling cards again this year at both the Pangbourne and Wokingham Christmas Fairs during November (Pangbourne on Sat 4 Nov., Wokingham on Sun 26 Nov.). We have also been invited to be present at Debenhams in Newbury on their Gala Day, through the auspices of Laura Clintworth. Laura's grandfather, Graham Hodgetts, died of MND just over a year ago, but he has most certainly not been forgotten!

You could help us in other ways also: if you know of a venue where we could have a stall, please let us know in good time; if you'd like to help at any of our points of sale, do get in touch with us!

A reminder also that DoK House have their next collection at the Oracle in the week commencing 11 December. Any volunteers contact Gill Cheetham please on **01344 423440**

Contributed by Val Pearson

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

A charity called DIPEX is looking for volunteers who have a diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease to help them develop a new website for people affected by MND and for health professionals.

They also want to increase their understanding of how healthcare and social services are experienced.

DIPEX is a charity based at the University of Oxford. It produces an award-winning website www.dipex.org

The site aims to give information and support to patients, their family and carers and informs health professionals, from the patients' perspective, what it is really like to have an illness.

Taking part would involve being interviewed about your experiences of MND, including what has happened to you, your thoughts and feelings at different stages, how you have got information and your experiences of accessing healthcare and social services. An experienced researcher would come to your home. Interviews can be video or audio recorded. If your speech has been affected, we would welcome written accounts.

To be interviewed or for further information, please contact Carol Dumelow, Senior Researcher, on 01865 226670 or write to DIPEX Research Group, Department of Primary Health Care, University of Oxford, Old Road Campus, Headington, Oxford, OX3 7LF or email: carol.dumelow@dphpc.ox.ac.uk