

I.F. Interview for 2010 Champion Flyer – By Paul Walsh

DEB-RAY TORRES

2010 Old Birds

1st I.F. Champion Loft

150 -300 Lofts



Tell us about yourself when did you start in the sport?

I was born in New York City and an only child for 16 years pets were part of my life. My friends had birds and my dad bought me one (a Modena) I liked her for her colors. I started with the fancies at about 7 years old. I started racing in 1976 when I met Joe Hubschman. Pigeon theft was a common occurrence in NYC. Some local kids tried to sell me some homers and without knowing him, I confiscated the birds sent one home with my name and number on its foot and helped him retrieve his stolen racing birds. He started me on the road to pigeon racing. His gratitude was unending he bred me a small team and even gave me a fairly new clock. He coached me and sponsored my membership to the Bronx Club.

Do you have a family or what strains do you race?

The late Bob Kinney of the Thoroughbred named my family the Torresbreds. He was impressed because regardless of origin their type all felt the same. Strains are a sore subject for me as I don't believe in strains or labels my interest is in the particular performers within a family of multiple producers. I have spent some serious cash chasing strains/labels that when analyzed are nothing more than a blend of the older breeds being recycled with a new label and chased endlessly without even being road tested for generations. Just empty paper being resold and it is discouraging especially to the newer and less experienced fanciers. Don't even get me started on the word purebred. I only put a value on performance both in the air and on paper. I must see top race winners or near winners in the pedigree on both sides of the pedigree. My family started in 1979. I started with Hartogs Janssens via Jankowski & Eurlings success came early with them. In 1989 I added some direct Schoon Donker- Muelemans that Charlie Barbieri and Tom Nettis brought in and a couple of Driebander 075- Hofkens from Beverdam. The 075 was actually bred by Muelemans, see what I mean about lables. By 1992 I had eliminated approximately 75% of those and kept only the absolutely best breeders who produced multiple winners for myself and others.

In April 1994 we had a fire that destroyed both lofts. However, God is Good. I had a habit of placing the absolute best of my old originals in Florida at my friends place for their comfort and safe keeping. I rebuilt the original family from the old ones and a few select young off them but did lose some of the younger Mueleman/Hofkens blood but not all thanks to the kindness of some of my friends. In 1994 I was part of a syndicate to buy birds with my friends Ed Minvielle and John Leone as a result I introduced the Debieves. Again in two years I had eliminated all but three. The first three that I picked without pedigrees, a brother, a sister and a cousin back to a particular bird called the Norman. With these three and my originals and two van loons from Hapyco lofts, I built today's family. No birds were introduced into the family until 2009 when some carefully selected Schellens were introduced. I crossed them onto my Torresbred family, and the results so far are fantastic. This is the makeup of today's Torres family but all based on particular birds with great performance birds not empty pedigrees with a desired label.

Can you explain your type?

I want birds that can do well from 100 to 500 miles. I prefer a medium to small bird and tend to stay away from larger volume birds (even when they are born from my best). A bird must have excellent balance and buoyant with a very flexible feather that feels like silk. The wing must be well ventilated. I don't like heavy wings with large wide flights. I like a bird that can come home and feel almost like when it left. I really don't like a bird that loses too much in the races as this loss is usually



water weight which, in my opinion, is a sign of dehydration. A good racer must not dehydrate. The throat type is also something I watch as I believe like a carburetor on a car it controls the air/oxygen flow to the body.

How do you pair your birds? Do you believe in eye sign?

Breeding is my passion so if you have about 50 pages and a few hours I will explain. My breeders are picked by balance, race performance of the bloodline, body type and quality of throat, feather and muscle in that order. Older and well proven breeders are paired to younger family members and all in individual boxes. It's a lot of work but invaluable. Young pumpers one to three years old are kept and allowed free loft in their section.

I pair according to a goal. I am a very heavy in and line breeder, but they must race very well. However, even within your own family you can lose a successful line if you are not careful. So when I see that the line is one that has been successful, and it seems to be getting harder to find within the loft, I will breed to the line with the goal of increasing its presence in the family. It's a common mistake that many breeders make. They begin to concentrate too heavily towards one bird or another in just a few short years an entire line is lost. It has happened to me, and I learned.

If my goal is for racing, I cannot get too close. I carry three distinct lines within my Torres family. I use them to relieve the blood when it gets too close. As success begins to appear, I breed to the particular line of the birds that are performing and eliminate those that are not working as well although they may be closely bred family members. I have removed from the team many birds that later have turned out to be better breeders than the ones I kept. However, I can't keep or try them, all and my discipline is only successful racers and very close relatives can reproduce. It must be said "that it is better to be lucky than good." Some of my best breeders I didn't even like at first but something made me keep and breed them, and they have gone on to be super breeders. One example is my famous "ROUGE" a foundation cock bred 13 individual winners, and with four generations of winners/champions and counting, I did not like him at all. One of his sons and a gr daughter I almost gave away, and now they rank among the absolute best of the breeder team. Needless to say I have since changed my opinion of him. Luck is definitely part of the equation.

When do you pair? Do you inbreed?

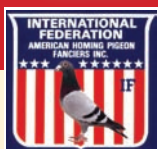
I usually pair in February. I tried breeding earlier and was not happy at all. All I accomplished was in feeding the hawks and losing many of the early hatches. I prefer

March/April Hatches for racing, late May's hatches for breeding purposes. **Inbreeding** is such an abused technique, mostly by pigeon sellers trying to sell paper. I do inbreed and line breed but those inbreds must first prove themselves in the races, and they must turn out physically perfect before they are allowed to breed. Unfortunately inbreeding by some is used as an excuse when they produce a structurally inferior pigeon. It upsets me when I see two and three generations of inbreeding to a particular past champion being used and no evidence of race records to validate the value of the inbreds. When inbreeding you are trying to accentuate the positive homogeneousness of the line but you also can perpetuate the flaws. Inferior inbreds can be raced but never bred and usually must be culled.

Eye sign. I like to look at very bright eyes. I pay attention to the positioning and the movement capability of the eye-ball itself. I like to see an active eye muscle when exposed to the sun. I use the condition of the eye like a window to the bird's health. I really don't pay much attention to the eye sign theory. I am sure there probably is some validity to it. However, I believe it is a hereditary characteristic that gets passed on and cultivated as part of the particular breeder's preference. I have come to one definite conclusion about eyes "a good racer should have two good eyes but a good breeder can do with one."

When you buy birds do you go to auction or the internet or do you scout out champions?

I think we all like the auctions, and it is always interesting to try one or two birds from a reputable loft that suit your body type. Usually they don't last long. Even so, occasionally a cross can be discovered that works well with the family and if more siblings or better yet sire and dam can be acquired. I will do so. In 2007 I was told that my birds were crossing well with the Schellens. I obtained two of the same line and the cross was terrific. So I pursued more I was able to obtain the dam, sire and uncle of the very birds I had already performance proven. You don't chase the label you chase the bird. That is how I introduce new blood usually about every 10 to 15 years. As for the internet, I really prefer to handle what I buy. That does not mean that there are no good ones being traded on the internet, but you can't examine the whole package. Sometimes I will have a person I trust examine and give me an opinion on the bird.



What championships have you won at each level, club, combine, and nationally?

I have enjoyed a good racing record since the late 1980's. The loft has enjoyed success in young and old birds. As for awards that the birds have earned, we have won several. The records can be seen at my website www.debraytorresloft.com or at the websites of the IF, AU and the RP Digest.

Tell me about your champion birds, their origin and strain?

I have bred several IF and AU champions, Hall of fame birds etc. They are a blend of my Torres family that as explained earlier has been cultivated for over 30 years. I know that we all want to hear that they are related to some of today's favorite breed. It's just that for me what is truly important is the ability of the birds to win. If anyone really needs to know more about my champions and their origins they are fully detailed on my web site.

Do you think you are well positioned? How big is your club/combine?

I don't know of any pigeon man that will say his loft is well positioned. My response is it depends on the day. I race in the Paterson and Westside Clubs, and both are members of the Central Jersey Combine (CJC). Our clubs are about 20 members strong and the CJC usually engages about 225 lofts with an average of 2500 to 3000 birds per race. As for the loft position on a club level most of us are equal. In the combine, we have a 125 mile front and about a 60 mile depth. We are on the North end, and we race in an

environment of dominant North West winds, which will favor a more southerly positioned loft. However, we all get our day. The bottom line is when the birds are right we are all well positioned.

Do you prefer Old Birds or Young?

Although we do well in both, I really prefer old birds. It simply is a lot less work, and the birds are really prepared to race. Young birds are put through entirely too much stress at a time in their lives when they are molting and developing. It's no wonder that we have so many Y.B. sicknesses. I noticed that in the same young bird section where the birds are sick there may be a few YB birds and chicos that are not in training, and they are just fine. We put too much stress on Y.B.. Old birds however, are where the really good birds shine, and long lasting champions are discovered. Did you ever hear about birds that were YB champs never did anything as an OB yet those that did nothing as a YB may become champions as Old birds? I believe that it is a matter of condition and maturity. The young bird champs simply had better health and conditioning. As OB all are equal and the quality racer will shine and will probably continue to win for years. When a bird is great in YB and OB this is real quality. Many racers generalize all their YB as a group. They fail to really observe the big difference in birds that are on the same team but were born months apart. It's just not fair to the babies. A bird that was born in January, by October is 10 months old. One born in May is only six months old. The January hatch is much older but asked to do the same job, and we expect equal results. In human terms, it's like asking a 12 year old child to do what a 20 year old man can do. That's just the way I see it.



DEB-RAY TORRES
Breeding Loft



Tell us about You the way you handle train medicate, etc. both young and old birds.

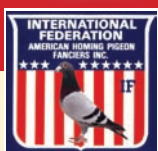
Old birds are simple I am primarily a hen racer. I love the ladies. They are raced separated sexes for three to four weeks, or as long as they remain sharp. Then ½ are put on natural, and the other ½ are allowed to go lesbian and remain that way to the end of the season. Males are also used but their main job is to keep the girls happy. Many of my champion racers are ladies. I have never flown widowhood because I can't give up my females. My OB team is usually 25 hens 15 cocks more or less. I don't medicate very much. I vaccinate and treat for worms and canker once a month and keep a close eye on the respiratory system. I will treat only when I am sure that they are sick and know how to treat them. I don't treat just because they were late in a particular race. When birds are sick they are allowed to rest, and no training, no loft flying just rest. I hate preventative treatments as I believe we are weakening the bird's natural immunity and when we need to medicate good drugs don't work because of abuse. I am a big believer in pro biotic, vitamins and supplements, but I read the labels. Many products carry the same ingredients, and I watch that I am not overdoing it and overdosing the birds. This is a big mistake that many of us make. If one is not careful the water can become a toxic cocktail of overused vitamins and supplements.

Young birds are more problematic, but also I try to simplify. I separate two teams one of about 45 birds and the other of about 25 birds each team by age. The older birds are pushed harder the younger birds are brought along a little slower as condition permits, but they are all raced. I just don't expect as much of the younger ones they are geared more for OB racing or stock purposes. Although I have been surprised many times by the ability of these babies to outshine the others, when this occurs, I am careful not to over race them as they will probably make great OB. I believe too many good YB are not lost. They are thrown away by overuse. My YB's are raced to the perch, and I use 12 to 14 hours of lights on the older team the younger ones may be put on lights but depending on the date of birth, they may be allowed a more natural path. They are trained, handled and treated just like the OB team. When the inevitable YB sicknesses arrive, they are treated as needed. I am not a vet and thus not qualified to advise on the subject. I can offer this "It is cheaper and safer to use a vet for diagnosis than it is to medicate willy nilly with this product and that without really knowing what will work effectively". If I cannot turn the YB team around, I have and will shut the loft down, sick pigeons cannot win races, but they will get lost and I won't throw them away.

Can You tell us about your training and feeding of the birds during racing?

In all these interviews that I read the response is always the same, and I will tell you no different. Most of us have this down pat. The birds are fed twice a day carefully measured so that they are not overfed or overweight. When I start to see about ½ of the birds have finished eating then I look at how much is left in the trough even though others are still eating at that time, and the next time they are fed, they get that much less. They are fed on a light to heavy curve with plenty of water, and electrolytes are offered at least three times a week during the hot weather. Water management I think is more important than feeding methods. You see a bird can walk away from the feed when they have had their fill, but they have no choice in refusing or accepting what is in the water. I pay particular attention to what is offered in the water. During racing, I use electrolytes and tea on the day of return. Mineral supplements are used for the next two days of return. Then just clear water for a day and then pro biotics and vitamins are employed for the balance of the week. Clear water is offered a few times a week so that the liver which processes all they consume can rest.

Clear water is also offered on the day of the race; unless a very hot day is anticipated then some light electrolytes are allowed. I never medicate on the day of return. Many races have medicine instead of nutrients waiting for the birds. I think this is a serious mistake as the thirsty bird will consume much more than was intended by the developers of the drug. Yes water management is very important. **Training** I train the birds as needed. Although I truck train five days a week weather permitting, they may get more or less work depending on the condition of the team. They all get the same work except in young birds where the younger team gets a little less work or shorter tosses so as to allow for the molt and development of the bird. Another difference is in old bird. If I am going in a different direction 20 to 30 miles and the birds need a toss I will take them no matter the direction. Otherwise we all do the same things. I will race and train them week after week as conditioning permits. When they need rest they are given the time they need some need more down time than others. One thing I should note I will race some birds into 4, 5 or 6 years old, if the hawks permit. When the birds are 4 years plus they need more time to recuperate. I will no longer race them week after week especially after a difficult race. Old man Cuba of the Bronx once told me that training birds is like driving a car, give it gas when it is needed and let up on it when it is not needed. The key is learning to tell the difference.



Could you describe your loft?

I have three lofts one racing and two breeder lofts. The racing loft is a three section loft with sliding doors to separate the teams and a two foot corridor that runs the length of the loft. The entire loft is 20 feet long by 8 feet wide. The center section has nest boxes the two side compartments are perches only. The loft is well ventilated with a power attic exhaust fan used in summer. Otherwise it is quite basic. The breeder lofts are more specific for the task at hand. They have two sections each with identical layouts each. Large individual boxes are used, and pairs are allowed out one pair at a time in a revolving sequence as time allows. Ventilation is carefully managed with the use of a ventilator exhaust fan especially when there are young. The population in the breeder loft can double in a hurry but the amount of oxygen remains the same. Therefore, more airflow is necessary in order to maintain health especially during the warmer months. The three lofts are well separated about 10 feet from each other. After the fire, I decided to keep a good distance one from the other. It also helps with the flow of air and lessens dampness around each loft.

Are there any books or tapes or persons that have helped you become a better flyer?

No one achieves success without help. I have read many books and viewed many tapes. I think I have taken a little away from most of them. They are too many books and tapes to mention. As for special people who have assisted my growth, Al Runne is at top of the list. He is one of the best natural pigeon men and my mentor he taught me plenty about breeding. Old man Albert (Cuba) from the Bronx Club also helped me when I was but a kid in the sport.

Brad Laverne and Chic Brooks were paramount in keeping me in the sport after the fire. Most of all my dear friends Larry Davis of Florida and Pete Ciolino who's assistance was invaluable in reconstructing my pigeon family and my wife for her patience to endure this lifestyle that at times can be so demanding.

Do You have any advice for the novice and the more advanced Flyers?

My advice is simple get advice from the more successful racers around. Don't be afraid to ask for help. True sportsmen are always willing to help. Trust what you are told and be patient in achieving the desired results. Furthermore, when seeking birds stay away from fancy pedigrees and high prices. To start go local, get birds from the successful racers in your area. They have the horse for the course. There are no short cuts it takes time to get to the top. My most valued advise that I can give to anybody is don't over crowd and don't over breed. Each bird consumes oxygen manage their environment carefully. Most of all keep it fun.



DEB-RAY TORRES
Race Loft with
Settling Cage



If you had the opportunity to change anything in the sport what would it be?

There are several things that I would like to try. I would not issue a single band on a national level until at least Feb.15. This would put all young birds in somewhat of a more equal footing as far as age is concerned and as a result the small loft fancier, with limited room, could compete on a more level playing field. I would also shorten YB club races to an eight week schedule and no further than 250 miles. And lengthen the OB season to a 12 week season. I believe this would encourage us to put more importance on the pigeon and OB racing. This might reduce YB sickness so less medication would be used, and the bird's development would be improved. It might even put some of the YB futurity money into OB racing. At present, some small lofts quit Old Birds early because they have to make room for the Young Birds. I think this might help OB interest overall. I would also like to see the young bird racing start about Sept 1 (in our area) this would allow for better climate and the birds don't have to contend with the severe heat when training in July and racing in August. I also think average speed contests should be calculated in a nine race out of ten race schedule. I have won the club average speed title against a loft that had a better season and either missed a race or had a bad race. I feel that is just not right. Every loft is entitled to one bad race in their season, and the average speed calculation should allow for it. I know these views are quite controversial, but you asked.

What can be done to improve the sport?

Unfortunately our forefathers should have been more public and politically active in protecting our right to keep and race birds. Now we are facing an increasingly difficult challenge in that area. In our own club alone in just 4 years we have lost 4 fanciers or new fanciers due to ordinance issues. That said there are several ways to improve our sport. A few ideas are

1. Encourage kids to keep birds, not with racing birds but with fancies. Kids love colors and especially tumblers and rollers. They love acrobatics. Kids come to my loft and are amazed by satinettes with color and fancy hairdos. Sponsor some small 2 to 3 pair lofts at summer camps with rollers so that they can see them perform. After all any child that goes to summer camps have parents that appreciate nature. Many of us had our start with fancies. Before you have a tree you must first plant a seed.
2. Women, The best clubs that I have been exposed to have one thing in common. The wives, daughters and ladies are all involved. It just creates a better balanced atmosphere for the family. That is missing in many clubs including my own.

3. The best source of new members is the ethnics. Many are raised with an appreciation for agriculture. In the Paterson club the majority is of Polish decent. Find the ethnic majorities in your area. Sponsor a few that have some interest in the sport and it will cultivate itself.
4. A nationally covered charity event such as a cross country relay race (maximum 200 miles each to ensure good returns) with corporate sponsorship and internet fund raising. Raising funds for causes such as Alzheimer, cancer or animal shelters. The details can be left to those much brighter than me.
5. In order to combat ordinances based on health clauses. Our national organizations and local clubs should put together a roster of sorts with our members highlighting them by years of age, even our deceased members that passed at over 65 years old should be included. This could go a long way in showing that the birds are not a health hazard of any sort.

What about the clubs and national organizations?

In 1960 a DR Freidman of the Paterson Club described a pigeon club as 20% do all the work 80% do all the complaining IN WHAT % ARE YOU? In most organizations of any type and in many clubs that is still true but officers and committees need help and support. Most of the guys look at the officers and workers and watch quietly as things go smoothly and get done. However, let one mistake be made, and you have a chorus of voices pointing at that mistake and chastising the worker usually from those that do very little. To you, I say you will never make a mistake because you do nothing to contribute. The workers and officers of clubs will make mistakes because they do the most! Respect them, support them and ask what you can do to help!

I want to thank my friends at the I.F. for the work, they bring in maintaining this organization, sponsoring these awards and the Lovely trophies they offer, they are quite nice. It is refreshing to know there are still individuals willing to do the hard work to recognize all the deserving sportsmen and all the special birds, which earn those positions. To the I.F. awards committee, your hard work is appreciated.

Website - www.debraytorresloft.com