

DINOKENG LOFTS ARE INDEED THE ULTIMATE PIGEON RACE

Written by Hannes (Jaap) Nel

Introduction. My interview with Banie Deetlefs was one of the most enjoyable ones that I did in a long time. Banie does not beat about the bush and it was easy to detect the honesty and sincerity in what he had to say. I had to take my entries for the 2014 Dinokeng race to the lofts anyway, so I used the opportunity to also speak to him. What we discussed ties in very well with the Dinokeng Lofts value system, namely:

- Honesty and integrity.
- A very high standard of training and care for the pigeons.
- Each individual pigeon is given the best possible chance to achieve success.
- Dinokeng Lofts strive towards becoming the prestige loft in South Africa.
- Regular, open and honest communication is maintained with all pigeon fanciers.

Honesty and integrity. Banie openly admits that they made some mistakes during the last four years. Most importantly, they underestimated the running costs of a single loft and they overestimated the preparedness of pigeon fanciers to enter pigeons in a new race. Pigeon fanciers are notorious for adopting a *wait and see* attitude. Even so, if only 100 more paid pigeons were entered each year, the system would have worked as planned, so they knew that the concept was viable. All that is needed is some fine tuning and the support and trust of the pigeon fraternity.

A very high standard of training of and care for the pigeons. Any pigeon fancier with some experience can testify that young pigeons are completely unpredictable and extremely vulnerable to diseases during the first ninety odd days of their lives. We also know that it is not only poor quality youngsters that are lost during their first couple of training tosses on the road. In fact, some of them are sometimes even lost around the loft. To minimise the risk for such babies, they are, upon arrival, treated against paramixovirus, canker (trichomoniasis), worms and external parasites. New arrivals are “broken in” in three phases. During the first phase, which starts directly after arrival, they are kept in quarantine. During the second phase they are allowed outside the lofts in an area of approximately 250 square meters, covered with fine netting. This allows them to reconnoitre the area around the lofts, to walk on the lawns and to peck at some plants that they are fond of (salt-bush (*Atriplex sp.*), Hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*), etc.) The third phase is where they are allowed outside the lofts.

Because of this the losses, once serious training on the road begins, are extremely low. Of the pigeons that went to the first Super Turbo Race in 2011, 89% also participated in the final race. In 2012 81% were still there for the final race and in 2013 95%.

Each individual pigeon is given the best possible chance to achieve success. Everything possible is done to ensure that each pigeon is properly trained, fed and kept healthy. Pigeon fanciers are informed by telephone if any of their pigeons is sick or perishes and everything possible is done to treat the unfortunate bird. Fanciers are allowed to replace such pigeons if sufficient time is still left.

There are seven different competitions (the Main Race (75 prizes), Two Bird Competition (one prize), Three Bird Competition (one prize), Ace Pigeon (10 prizes),

Super Turbo Races (30 prizes), a Club Competition (3 prizes) and the Grand Averages (3 prizes)).

In addition, there is the Barzalona Race where participants can compete for an additional R180 000.00 (10 prizes). The Barzalona Race is a long distance race (780 km) that takes place approximately three weeks after the final race. Fanciers may enter their pigeons that took part in the Dinokeng races for this one as well.

110 Pigeon fanciers won money during the 2013 racing season.

Dinokeng Lofts strive towards becoming the prestige loft in South Africa.

As I already hinted, Banie admits that they underestimated the costs of running a single loft. Even so, they paid out R6 815 000.00 during the previous three years. Dinokeng Lofts are thinking progressively, which is also why they actually paid out more than what they had left after covering their running costs, especially in 2012.

Regular, open an honest communication is maintained with all pigeon fanciers. Some pigeon fanciers were rather dissatisfied when Dinokeng Lofts had to reduce the prize money at a very late stage during 2011 and 2012. They understood that the prize money was subject to a certain number of paid pigeons participating. However, they felt that they should have been warned in advance, or at least earlier. This, of course, was not advisable because it could well have led to some fanciers not entering or paying for their entries at all. Even so, Dinokeng Lofts realised that they would have to correct the situation from their side; pigeon fanciers will not change their stance.

Banie and Anton van der Merwe visited pigeon fanciers in Durban, Cape Town, Schweizer Reneke and Pretoria after the 2013 final race. They invited the fanciers to share their reservations, misconceptions and grievances about Dinokeng Lofts with them. They also asked them to suggest improvements to the current system. It is based on the inputs that they received from these fanciers that they reviewed the system.

A hint to pigeon fanciers. Dinokeng Lofts did some research, which they would like to share with current and future participants in the Dinokeng Lofts races. Hopefully this will help them prepare their pigeons better so that they will also perform better. Because of lack of space I had to summarise the rather elaborate statistics. In some instances I can only share conclusions with you. You are welcome to phone Banie (082 872 4826) or Anton (082 444 2996) or send them an email (info@dinokenglofst.co.za) or visit their web site if you need further information. Statistics over the last four years have shown that pigeons that were delivered to the lofts in January perform the best, with pigeons delivered in February performing second best and March third best. Then again, the winner of the 2011 race (Jet Rider) was delivered in January; the winner of the 2012 race (Mandy) was delivered in November and the winner of the 2013 race (A1-Shortcut) was delivered in December.

Furthermore, the 2011 Ace Pigeon (Marissa) and the 2012 Ace Pigeon (Wilma P) were both delivered in January, whereas the 2013 Ace Pigeon (Oval Lady) was delivered in December.

Most pigeons that experienced problems with the moulting of their eighth, ninth and tenth primaries were pigeons that were delivered between 15 January and 15 March.

From the above statistics one can arguably conclude that you should start breeding in October of the previous year if you wish to deliver your pigeons to the lofts at the age of approximately 35 days in January of the next year.

The future. Dinokeng Lofts are adamant that they will continue to progress towards becoming the prestige loft that they envisaged from the start. With this in mind they have instituted the following new initiatives:

- Prices are guaranteed. However, the amounts will still be linked to the number of paid entries received. With this in mind a calculator has been added to the web site, which will continuously show how many pigeons have been entered (paid, reserves, free entries, etc.) and what the guaranteed price money is at that particular point in time.
- The winning price of R500 000.00 is guaranteed, regardless of how many entries are received, with 400 paid entries being the break-even point, though.
- The first Ace Pigeon will win a new car.
- The amounts paid to the first ten pigeons in the final race have been increased. In summary, there are 4 prizes of R100 000.00 and more, 5 prizes of R70 000.00 and more, 7 prizes of R50 000.00 and more, 10 prizes of R40 000.00 and more, 13 prizes of R30 000.00 and more and 28 prizes of R20 000.00 and more.