

“ME AND THE MEDIA” BY KEITH MOTT.

This is a small collection of articles that appeared in the fancy press after some of my appearances in the media. I appeared on the TV with the pigeons eight times since the 1980's and close on twenty times on the radio. I hope you enjoy this read and it has helped to promote our sport in the public domain!

'Bird Flu' and the Media!

I've been quite busy in recent weeks, meeting up with the media and trying to educate them to the fact that our racing pigeons are very, very low risk as far as the pending 'bird flu' problem is concerned. I also recently had a phone call from a lady at D.E.F.R.A. and answered a lot of questions on our pigeon imports and sales. I'm always happy to front up to the national media, to tell them what a great hobby pigeon racing is and it's not all Trafalgar Square, dirty street pigeons under the railway arches and pigeon droppings. It seems to me that most times I see pigeons featured in the national media, whether it be Television, Radio or in the Newspapers, it's detrimental publicity for our sport. I've now appeared on national T.V. four times and the radio five times, and once turned down an appearance on national T.V. because I knew it was going to be a 'micky take' and detrimental to pigeon racing. I feel very strongly about this and hate to see anything adverse about pigeon in the national media!

Two local Surrey news papers called me up last week and asked me for a quote on the 'bird flu' and our racing pigeons. The result was very satisfactory, with the head line, 'Bird flu fears "overblown" says

and again I made the point very strongly that our pigeons were very low risk. The reporter at the 'Esher News & Mail' did miss-quote me on a couple of points, but on the whole it was pretty good publicity. Maria Williams at the B.B.C. rang me up and asked if I would go on the David Badeil radio show, and talk about racing pigeons and the affect on our sport with the 'bird flu' problem. The interview was recorded at my loft in Claygate and it turned out to be a good sensible piece. The B.B.C. always sends their reporters down to me on the train, because we are main line from Waterloo and I met a very nice red haired young girl, named Sue Elliott-Nicholls, at Claygate Station. Sue had a nice bubbly personality and has worked for B.B.C. for 18 years, but hastened to tell me she started with them very young. She had worked a lot with the late John Peel on his radio show, 'Home Truths', as well as 'Woman's Hour' and 'Learning Curve'. This busy mother is also an actor and has worked on 'Eastenders', 'Catherine Tate' and 'Green Wing' on B.B.C. television. I must say, it was a great pleasure to meet Sue!

“One Take Keith” on the T.V.

I received a phone call last Friday from T.V. reporter, Alex de Jong, of NCBC Europe television asking me if he could bring a film crew to my loft in Claygate and interview me with the pigeons. The recording is for a five minute sports slot on his 'World Business' programme, to be screened on Sky channel 505 in about three weeks time. The programme is also screened on 18 channels globally and on 20 International airlines. Alex comes from New Zealand and has been a reporter for the T.V. companies since 1993, covering many premier sports events including, 'Euro 2000', the football world cup finals. His camera man, Simon Winter, works free lance and has covered mostly Classic Car and Motor Shows for the past twenty years.

Although I scrape my loft out twice a day and it is kept very clean, I gave the front a wash down on Sunday evening, ready for the camera crew, which were to arrive to start filming 09.00hrs on Monday morning. Early on the Monday morning it was raining, but luckily stopped about half an hour before the lads arrived from their base in London. The interview covered every aspect of our sport including, long distance and sprint racing, and of course I gave a good account of our problems with Hawks and the recent 'bird flu'. I told Alex that the media have nick named me 'One Take Keith' and he said after the filming had finished that he would have to book more editing time, because I talk to much. What could he mean? As I've stated before, I'm always happy to front up to the national media, to tell them what a great hobby pigeon racing is and it's not all Trafalgar Square, dirty street pigeons under the

railway arches and pigeon droppings. It seems to me that most times I see pigeons featured in the national media, whether it be Television, Radio or in the Newspapers, it's detrimental to our sport. I've now appeared on national T.V. five times and once turned down an appearance on national T.V. because I knew it was going to be a 'micky take' and detrimental to pigeon racing. I feel very strongly about this and I hate to see anything adverse about pigeons in the national media! Alex is going to advise me when this 'World Business' programme is going to be screened, so watch this space.

B.B.C. 'Inside Out' London.

The B.B.C. television producer, Ray Hough, recently sent a camera crew to the B.H.W. Blackpool Show to film me judging, which was planned to be linked up with a filming session at my loft in Claygate. The eight minute film, which also features an in depth interview with our good friend Peter Bryant, general manager of the R.P.R.A., is for the popular B.B.C. 1 show 'Inside Out' London. The programme goes out at prime time, 7.30 p.m. on a Friday and features many items of interest from the London and South East of England area.

Ray Hough and I had two meetings at my home in Claygate and Monday, 5th. February was the day set for the film crew to visit and I must say we were very lucky with the weather; it was brilliant, but a bit cold. The programme presenter, Mirander Sawyer, turned up about 30 minutes before the crew, as her taxi had had a good clear run from her home in South London, which was great, as it gave us a chance to have a cup of tea and get acquainted before our days work together. We were soon looking at photos and video of her lovely two year old son on her mobile phone! She originally came from Manchester, moving to London about 15 years ago and is a regular writer for the 'Observer' newspaper. Ray Hough, his assistant, Jane Brookes and the crew knocked on my front door at 9.30 a.m. and my house was very soon full with their equipment. The lighting seemed to fill the back garden, which must have impressed my next door neighbours and I was amazed at the time and effort the lads put into getting the light right for different shots. The cameraman, Mark, was a big lad and he informed me that his shoulder mounted camera cost well over £20,000 and weighed nearly 30lbs. Like all the T.V. cameramen who have visited my garden in the past, big Mark was soon the loft kicking over all the water fountains. I must remember to leave them empty next time!

We knocked off at mid morning, to give Betty's baking a bit of a bashing and when we went in to the house, Peter Bryant had arrived for his inclusion in the film. Peter had made a long journey up the M4 motorway from Gloucestershire and told me he knew my neck of the woods, as he had family living in Surrey. Peter is a keen Bowls player and Ray Hough put two and two together, Bryant, Bowls, and West Country and asked him if he was related to the very famous pipe smoking Bowls champion by the name of Bryant. Peter said he was a close relation, but had never played the 80 year old champion. The crew blocked off the windows in my living and turned it into a studio for Peter's interview, which included talk on the Royal Lofts and Pigeons in the Second World War. Peter answered several questions on the 'hot' topic of bird flu as I had too in my filming at the loft, but really all you can do is stay optimistic and hope there is no more outbreaks before we start racing in April. I watched them film Peter's entire interview and as I've previously stated many times, he is great ambassador for our sport and is really good at putting over our case to D.E.F.R.A. and the media.

My filming lasted all day and was light hearted, being more about the racing and showing side of the sport. Miranda started by asking me about the time I got my first pair of birds in the 1950's and it finished at past 5 o'clock that evening with them filming me photographing pigeons in the 'factory', my spare bedroom where I do all my pigeon work. In those many hours filming we talked about most of what I've done in my 38 years in pigeon racing, writing, pigeon photography, video production, conveying and the normal racing and showing things. Ray wanted to leave out the Band years, Pigeon Lung and the 'rabbit hutch' loft system, as he thought they were big subjects and could not be fitted into the eight minute slot properly, and would keep for another day. I'm really looking forward to seeing the finished programme, when Ray brings the Blackpool Show and Claygate loft films together. It will be great!

Ray Hough is at the very top of his profession and is a great Director, who knows exactly what he wants. I found Ray a very friendly and down to earth guy, but was a perfectionist when it came to his film work. He has been in the industry for many years and has won many Royal Television Society Awards for his films, with one of his most bizarre works being shot in a mental hospital, where he had to stay for three months to complete it. Ray was in directing for 20 years and was film editor for the famous B.B.C. 'Arena' series. When I was talking to him on our first meet he told me he had happy years producing 'Gardeners World' with the late, great Geoff Hamilton and also produced 'Paradise Gardens'. Ray has invited me to go to the studios at Boreham Wood to see them edit some of the programme, which I must say I'm really looking forward too. Ray's assistant, Jane Brookes, has informed me that the programme could be on television within the next couple of weeks, so when I know the date of screening, I will put it in the British Homing World.

"Monday, Monday"

Monday 26th of November started just like every other Monday, I got up at the usual time, but felt a bit rough as I had a bit of a cold and had a bit of eye strain as I had been on the PC all weekend writing articles for the British Homing World, too stock pile for the fast approaching Christmas period. After visiting the Wallakers office in Surbiton to pick up keys for a job, I proceeded to do my first two jobs and at 'The Hermitage', a block of flats in Surbiton, I was tongue lashed by a female dragon, who didn't stop moaning all the time I was fixing her garage doors, that she had knocked off with her desperate driving. That's all you need on your first job on a Monday morning! Third job was in Gander Green Lane, Sutton and that's when it all kicked off. I got out of the van to look at the front entrance door to 'Warner Court', which was hanging off its hinges and on returning to the van for some tools, I found I had a missed call on the mobile. There was a message from Phil Reay-Smith, one of the principal reporters for I.T.V. News, asking if they could come to Claygate to interview me at the loft about the tax pigeon fanciers will have to pay on their lofts. To be perfectly honest I didn't know what he was talking about, but rang him back and agreed to do the shoot at 13.00hrs, as the crew had to come down to Surrey from central London. Time was tight as it was well after 11.00hrs and I had to drive home from Sutton, get the loft ready and have a shower. When I arrived home Betty informed me she had received a second phone call from the B.B.C. TV News asking for the same interview and were a bit put out that the I.T.V. News got in first. I got in to top gear and got the loft ready, and was just getting in the shower, when Southern Counties Radio rang to ask if I would go on a live phone link with their News programme at 17.15hrs. I said yes, as I was pleased to go on the radio live as I could press more important matters, including our plight with the recent 'bird flu' ban.

Phil Reay-Smith and his cameraman, Micky Lawrence, had a good run down from London and rang my front door bell at 12.50hrs. We were soon in the garden doing the business, as the item was to be screened in the I.T.V. National News at 18.30 hrs and then repeated at 22.30hrs. The interview went very well and I did include a big mention of the recent 'bird flu' problem, but as expected, it finished up on the editing room floor. I was set up for a joke by Phil, who on camera asked me what I thought of people who said pigeon fanciers were 'anoraks' and I was hit with this question with no warning or rehearsal, and of course had no answer. I've now been on Television about six or seven times talking about pigeons and the questions to be answered are sorted out off camera. I was hit right between the eyes on camera! This was a deliberate 'Gaff' that should have been left on the editing room floor, but it was left in the interview and I'm glad it was, because it was really funny. The highlight of the whole thing for me was to see Mary Nightingale smiling at my joke, that evening! She always seems a very nice person and in my opinion comes over the best of all the news readers. Mickey Lawrence has been a cameraman for I.T.V. News for 35 years and has travelled the world, including war zones doing his job. Phil Reay-Smith has been a reporter for I.T.V. News for seven years and in 2003 was embedded with the British troops in Iraq, along with Mickey Lawrence. Phil has reported from Pakistan, Kenya, Russia and the U.S.A., and told me entering my pigeon loft was his most challenging assignment yet!

On the Monday evening my grand daughter, Katie, was over, so at 17.00hrs I retreated to the 'factory' for some peace and get ready for the phone call from Southern Counties Radio. At 17.08hrs the phone rang and it was a reporter from the Sun newspaper, asking me for some quotes for an

article to be run on Tuesday morning. I told him we had to be quick, as I was on a live radio link in seven minutes and he was sorted out in double quick time. I went on live radio, which was very enjoyable, as I was able to talk about my involvement with the London & South East Classic Club and put over the problems we have had over the 'bird flu' bans.

Well when I woke up that Monday morning it was just a normal working day and I finished up being on two National News bulletins, appearing on live radio and being interviewed by the Sun Newspaper. It's a funny ol' game!

DEFRA Visits The 'Grass Roots' Of The Pigeon Racing Sport.

Since the outset of the 'Bird Flu' problem in Europe several years ago the sport of pigeon racing and showing has had to suffer several crippling restrictions and temporary 'blanket' bans to its general functioning, in some cases with catastrophic affect. We have seen out breaks of 'Bird Flu' in the UK and Europe, and had major races and shows cancelled at a last minute. Every body has their own opinion if these restrictions are too strict or in some cases even necessary, but the main factor is our government body dealing with the virus, DEFRA, think they are necessary. Peter Bryant, the general manager of the RPRA, has been in constant contact with DEFRA in one form or another since day one and has been our 'champion' on this major problem of restrictions on our sport and in some cases has gained us races we probably would not have had, especially from France. Peter has represented us, the pigeon fancy, brilliantly and the fancy in general must be grateful for his wonderful efforts! All through the 'Bird Flu' campaign, Peter, has been asking DEFRA to make a visit to a pigeon loft, so they could see first hand how we keep our birds and talk to a fancier to gain information on how our sport operates. DEFRA recently decided a loft visit and a chat with a fancier would be a good idea and Peter Bryant emailed me, and asked if I would host the meeting. As always, I was more than happy to help! If I could say or do some thing to get the restriction eased and improve our present state of racing and showing, it would be great. After several emails and phone calls between Peter, DEFRA and my self, the visit was set for Thursday, 8th May.

The day arrived and it was perfect for viewing racing pigeons, being nice and warm, with a blue sky and sunshine. My front door bell rang and on opening the door, I found two lads in their early thirties standing there with smiles on their faces and not the expected suited government types. My first words to them were, 'Hi lads! It nice to see you are human. I fully expected to see two little horns sticking out of the top of your heads'. We had a good laugh and that really broke the ice for the very important loft visit. I have visited thousands of pigeon lofts in my 36 years as a pigeon scribe, but this one must rate as one of the most important of them all! The officers were David Middleton, who corresponds with Peter Bryant over our pigeon restrictions most of the time and Balazs, a DEFRA vet who comes from Hungary. We had a short chat in my back living room, and then the officers got dressed up in grey hooded suits and plastic bags on their feet, for the viewing of the pigeons in the loft. David said this protected clothing was very necessary, as they didn't want to risk bringing any thing in to my loft.

David and Balazs were at my home for just under two hours and I never stopped talking about pigeons for the duration of their stay. I assured them that all the information I gave them would be accurate and I had done nothing special to the loft or pigeons for their visit. Every thing was as normal. I clean my loft out twice every day and it had been scraped that morning, and the birds exercised as usual. We covered every aspect of racing, including the widowhood system for sprint racing and the natural system for the long distance events. We did talk in length about racing from the continent and in particular my experiences as convoyer for the London & South East Classic Club. They asked if all the birds got home on the day from Pau (550 miles) and I told them the 2007 Pau Classic was one the best races in the history of the L&SECC and we had about 100 birds recorded on the day of liberation. I also explained that most of the birds worked home over the next couple of days. They asked me about the feeding and training of the racers, and seemed to enjoy looking at the youngsters in the nest bowls, in the stock loft. They appreciated the performances of one or two of the better racers, in particular my good blue chequer hen, 'Foxwarren Complete', which has scored well four times in Classic races over 550 miles. Balazs asked me about our Paramixo

vaccination programme and told me there had been a recent outbreak of Newcastle's Disease in Germany. In our conversation I kept bringing up the DEFRA seven day rule on pigeons that fly from the continent and told them it was very detrimental to our pigeon racing and clubs were suffering badly with it being in place. Pigeon racing clubs were losing out on their sport and it is affecting them with big financial losses. I told them if it could be reduced, even to six days, it would be a great help to our sport. I also told them about all the activities of the pigeon year, from pairing up in January, racing in the summer, the moult period in October, through to the winter shows in November and December.

We spent a lot of time talking about the winter shows and how they had suffered financially and activity wise. Many major shows have had to be cancelled at the last minute in recent years, including the RPRA Southern Region Show, NEHU South Shields Show and the 'Old Comrades' Show, and the organizers have incurred big financial losses. Last winter I was booked to judge at the two major West Country events, the Duchy Show and the Devon & Cornwall Show Racer Society open show, and both these were cancelled because of the 'Bird Flu' outbreak at the Turkey processing firm in Norfolk. All these societies had booked hotels for the travelling judges and big halls to stage the events and when their shows were called off at the last minute, they incur big financial losses, which they can ill afford. The financial loss is one thing, but the Show Racer lads have a very short season, with only a few Classic events, and miss out on a lot of their sport with these cancellations. On my meeting with the DEFRA lads I reminded them of the many thousands of pounds these winter Classic shows donate to charity every year. I mentioned to David that the situation seemed to be getting better with less 'blanket' bans accruing with the recent 'Bird Flu' outbreaks and more localized zones being set up around the affected areas. He told me the containment procedure for say the Turkey farm in Norfolk and the Swan sanctuary in Dorset are different, with a shed full of Turkeys being easier to handle than Swans flying loose.

After looking at the pigeons and loft we had a nice cup of tea on the patio. I presented David and Balazs with three of my own pigeon DVDs each, so they had additional information on the sport. The first was my London & South East Classic Club 2007 season video which I shot while convoying the Classic pigeons last season. This shows the marking stations and how they function, the French liberation sites, my self tending to the birds on the road and the liberations. The DEFRA lads said they would like to visit a marking station, so I will be sorting this out for later date. The second DVD was the one I made last winter featuring the BHW Blackpool Show, the RPRA Southern Region Charity Show and the Horsham C.H.A.S.E. Charity Show. This disc demonstrates the workings of three major pigeon shows that donate thousands of pounds to charity every year. The third DVD is my favourite, the BBC's 'Inside Out' programme on pigeons, which I think is a brilliant advert for our sport. David took several photos and I supplied him with several others for his information. While we were talking about the pigeon sport in general, my BHW dropped through the letter box and it featured my two page article on the recent 'Lion Brewery' charity cheque presentation. It was the perfect issue for the DEFRA lads to have a look at, so I gave them my copy to take away with them.

They appreciated the skills of racing them out of the short and long distance, and they witnessed the great affinity we have with our birds. I for one would like to applaud DEFRA for their efforts to find out how our sport clicks and familiarize themselves with the 'grass root' of pigeon racing and showing, in an attempt to help us with our 'Bird Flu' restrictions. The two officers, David and Balazs, were really nice people and Betty and my self enjoyed their visit very much. Thanks for coming and I hope it has improved our situation! (Please see photos in the 'Album')

Extraordinary Animals.

I had just returned from France after convoying the London & South East Classic Club birds to Alencon last week and I received a phone call from the Channel 5 TV producer, Aneeta Chana, asking if they could come and film me with the birds for the current running 'Extraordinary Animals' series. Well I'm an ol' boy now and it takes me about a week to get over my convoying trips to France with the Classic birds, but I told Aneeta that I would agree to do it as long as they could make my eyes up to hide the black tiredness rings! Only joking! The lads turned up on the Wednesday for a full

afternoon shoot and I must say, I really enjoyed filming, especially when they dragged my wife, Betty, in for a shot. They asked me questions on the history of the sport, pigeons in the war, record speeds and distances, and we talked in great length about my work with the British Homing World and London & South East Classic Club. Mike Reilly was the Director on the day and he originally comes from Glasgow, although his family comes from Ireland. He has been working in television for 12 years and has been involved in the Generation Game, Fifth Gear, and has worked with Lenny Henry and Ali G. 'Extraordinary Animals' is a new series of ten programmes starting on Channel 5 at 7.30pm on Tuesday 20th May. Mike tells me the pigeon programme will be number eight or nine, but he will let me know the date so it can be published in the BHW. I was talking to the camera man, Luke Atkinson, and he told me his camera costs £25,000 and the super duper lense cost another £25,000. Luke originally comes from Ealing, but now only lives about five miles from me in Molesey and he has been television for 17 years. He is a freelance cameraman and has worked on many premier programmes including the highly successful Bad Girls series. Our sound man for the day was Lisala Dolo and in his nine years in the job has worked on Tonight with Trevor McDonald and Life of Grime. As usual I was busy in between takes with taking my photographs and own personal filming. They were very interested in the pigeons and were very pleased with their footage.

TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT