

Understanding The Problem!

As a new starter and complete novice in keeping and breeding the Modena, I must be honest; my first season has been anything but straight forward! To say I have been frustrated would be an understatement. Having a background of over 50 years involvement with racing pigeons, where I think I can fairly say that I have enjoyed more than my share of success, I did not expect what I have experienced. My whole reason for writing this short article is to share some details of my experiences and of the research that I have carried out in my attempt to **Understand The Problem**. My hope is that it will help other newcomers to Modenas and perhaps a few who are not so new.

At a time when all branches of pigeon keeping, whether it is racing or a breed of fancy pigeons, is struggling to maintain its current membership or seeking to find new members, I believe it is important to help each other. Secretism is not to be applauded in this sport when it comes to health management of our pigeons. Sharing information from a sound scientific source therefore, has to be something we do without hesitation and allow our fellow fanciers to decide for themselves whether it something that would benefit them or not.

Now, to get to the point of my article. Modenas have been birds that I have admired for some time and my interest in genetics (especially colour) has constantly drawn my attention to them. So at the end of 2019 I decided, having visited the National Modena Club website, to contact Roy Nicholson and enquire how I might best make contact with a NMC member and perhaps acquire 1 or 2 pairs of Modenas. To say he was a great help would be an understatement. In December I drove over to Barnsley (from where I live near Stockport) and had a most enjoyable morning in the company of Roy and his friend Martin Coyle. I came away with a pair of Gazzis and a pair of Schiettis. What I didn't realise however, was that some of the advice I was given that morning, would ring oh so true over coming months.



I had no trouble settling and pairing the birds and although a bit slower than I would expect from my racers, both pairs laid O.K. I candled the eggs at 10 days and guess what INFERTILE. I was made well aware by both Roy and Martin when we met that infertility and rearing youngsters would not be as I may expect from racing pigeons. Ah well I thought, they'll be O.K. next round. They laid fine and guess what, yep INFERTILE. Now by this time my frustration was on the rise! I was giving these birds which looked a million dollars, everything that they could need by way of diet and supplement. In my stock loft of racers which had exactly the same treatment, I reared 21 youngsters from 11 pairs of stock in the first round.

It was at this point that I decided to do some serious research and see what I could find out about what I suspected the cause to be "Salmonella" and its threat to Modenas. Now when I say research, even though I like to read the works of successful fanciers, when it comes to anything scientific, I only seek advice of proven professionals. In other words, vets who are recognised avian vets and who specialise in pigeons. The subject of pigeon health (racers) is something that I have spent many hours over many years educating myself about and whilst learning, have made some very good contacts.

When visiting some of the social media "Modena" sites, I get the impression especially from American Modena fanciers that they accept a need to medicate on an annual basis prior to the breeding season. Some of these fanciers attribute their good fertility levels and YB numbers to this process. Not only do they attribute fertility problems to Salmonella but also Respiratory disease and seem to use a comprehensive range of antibiotics as a part of their approach. Now I know from experience that with antibiotics, using the appropriate medication will relieve a pigeon of specific bacterial symptoms. However, it is only short lived and it doesn't give the bird any natural defence against the problem if the problem should return or is still in the loft. For this reason my personal approach has been, to follow advice given by most top pigeon vets which, is a prophylactic approach via the use of proven vaccine. The main reason being that the bird forms its own antibodies which boosts the immune system and provides better protection.

Prophylactic: A preventive measure. The word comes from the Greek for "an advance guard," an apt term for a measure taken to fend off a disease or another unwanted consequence.

The best example I can use to illustrate the information that I believe has helped me "Understand The Problem" is from an information publication by Dr. Colin Walker, B.Sc B.V.Sc M.A.C.V.S.(Avian Health). This information was written about fancy pigeons;

Fancy pigeons:

Salmonella is carried within the bowel of many pigeons without causing disease. A trigger factor is often required (eg. overcrowding, low hygiene, concurrent disease, poor diet etc.) to cause disease. These trigger factors compromise the pigeon's ability to fight infection which in turn enables the Salmonella to penetrate the bowel wall. Once through the bowel wall, Salmonella is carried in the blood stream to a number of target sites in particular the gonads, liver, joints and membranes around the brain. Damage to the gonads leads to infertility. A number of fancy breeds, notably Australian Show Pen Homers, Modenas, Kings and the performing flying breeds such as tipplers, tumblers and doneks have a genetic susceptibility to Salmonella. Young birds should be vaccinated at 6 weeks of age hopefully before the bacteria have had a chance to enter their system.

Before vaccinating adult birds, particularly for the first time, it is a good idea to give a 10-14 days course of an antibiotic that is effective against Salmonella, such as "Sulfa AVS", and vaccinate the birds on the last day of treatment. Although it is not possible to eliminate Salmonella from all carriers this protocol gives us a good chance of clearing the infection from as many birds as possible. The birds can then be vaccinated before they become reinfected. The usual sources of infection are persistent asymptomatic carrier birds and a contaminated loft environment.

Vaccinating young birds each year at 6 weeks of age before these birds become infected means that their gonads are less likely to be damaged by Salmonella during growth thus leading to a lift in fertility in the loft generally. The best time to give annual boosters is after the moult and show season and before breeding ie. July.

As we all know, Dr. Colin Walker is one of the most highly rated vets in the world of pigeons and his words above should be taken note of by any fancier keeping Modenas. He clearly says that Modenas along with certain other fancy breeds "have a genetic susceptibility to Salmonella". The method of vaccination against Salmonella is a subject that I am already well aware of from my racing side and it is important to understand the need to treat the birds with an antibiotic for 10 to 14 days prior to vaccination. My own vet that I use Dr. Vincent Schroeder of Holland advises that I follow this practice of antibiotic first, with both Ybs as well as old birds, when birds are being vaccinated for a first time. I have some articles written by Dr. Schroeder which I have permission for the National Modena Club to publish and one such article has already been utilised by Major Dennis Thornton in his last publication.



Me centre with Dr. Vincent Schroeder(L) and Andy Breemen(R) of Vet Schroeder Tollisan

So as not to drag this article on too long, I will share with you what I did and what followed. I started treatment of my 2 pairs with Para Coli (which I get from my vet.) in the drinking water. In the meantime I obtained 2 more pairs of Modenas from the same source as my originals. These arrived as I reached the 2 weeks treatment point with Para Coli. I decided therefore even though I did not mix the pairs to treat all pairs for a further 14 days. This meant that the originals had 28 days of treatment and the latter 14 days. On completion of the treatment, with the help of my wife Karen, we vaccinated all the Modenas with Salmonella (Paratyphoid) vaccine (again which I get from my vet). The dosage of this particular vaccine is 0.5 ml per bird. All the time that they were on the antibiotic they also had a product called Tolliman Forte (again from my vet) in their water which helps with the stress of antibiotic and vaccination. I also gave this for 7 days after vaccination. This is typical practice for any vaccinations I do for my racing pigeons. In case you are wondering, not one single bird showed any sign of discomfort or stress from the vaccination process.

What followed, even though I did not wait 4 weeks after vaccination to allow them to go to nest again, was all 4 pairs laid as they should and all eggs are fertile. Ideally this article should have been written in a few months' time when I have more data to share but I was asked if I would write something for the NMC website. This I have gladly done in the hope that it will help new starters like me and who knows perhaps encourage new members by bringing traffic to our website. For those who are wondering how you have a vet as I do in Holland, it is as simple as contacting them via email and registering as a customer. There is no cost and they will contact you from there. My carriage is usually about 6 Euros plus a small Paypal fee. There are a number of such vets in Europe but I use the one that I do as I have met them personally and built up an excellent relationship with them over a number of years. Not to mention that their customer care and service is first class.



My first young Modena 2020 – the first of many I hope!

Chris Knowles