

The Tippler Flyer - Fourth Member of the Team

By Luka Kapac

A magnificent fly time posted, close to a record and we all take notice. But there is so much more to the time the kit has just put in than numbers typed on various reports and newsletters. In fact the real story is not the time set by the kit but the time spent with the kit. The results of this great fly may have been determined as far back as a year ago or perhaps even further. What am I going on about? I am talking about the events before the event and the commitment by the Tippler flyer - the fourth member of the team. It is because of his dedication and determination that this time flown is now well known and celebrated. Therefore let us go back, back to when it really mattered.

The feed-up went as well as could be expected with some concern. The weather forecast was changing as often as wind direction. The feed is adjusted daily with the hope of temperatures being ideal come fly day. Wind speed was closely monitored and the lack of sufficient velocity was a concern. The Tippler flyer could do little about that he had other problems. The bigger kit member (blue hen) wanted more feed, but how much more before she overate? The second (grizzle hen) member did not complete all the feed and was under eating, or was it sufficient for her? The third member (print hen) ate all each night and seemed to be perfect, or was she? Maybe she is the real problem and the other two are fine? The blue hen takes one big drink and will not drink again for the night, therefore our Tippler flyer must take special care and not spook her while she dunks half her head into the clean pre boiled and then cooled water. The grizzle hen takes two drinks as routine, and if you stare when she takes the second gulp, she backs off. But if you don't look how will you know if she's taken the second drink? The third hen drinks perfect, or does she? And how is it that she is so perfect and others more difficult? As for the fourth member, well there is little hope for him - he's a mess.

These and other concerns pile and incessantly rotate in the flyers mind throughout night until the alarm clock sounds the bell and wakes up half the neighborhood. The flyer is wired and ready, perhaps more so than his kit of birds. As he crashes down the stairs missing two and sometime three steps at a time one gets the feeling he alone could fly the day. Subtlety or silence is not his concern at this point. The wife will have a different view on the matter as soon as she gets up.

Finally, last check on the birds and the feed-up is over. "None took a drink when offered. They are ready! Hold on...Why did none take a drink? Oh yeah, cause they're ready".

Our flyer returns to a state of temporary sanity, I said temporary.

Liberation time, the final act that shreds any nerve our flyer has left. The fly could be over before it starts if the nervous grizzle decides to bolt for the tree. He noticed her make for that tree in the first spring fly but at the last second turned to the others and off they went. To add to the tension he must now decide whether the kit will be released through the trap or by toss of hand. The kit was trained by both methods. Furthermore, the consideration is to release them at exactly one hour before sunrise. They have never been liberated this early or in this much darkness. He decides an early release by hand will favor the odds of nothing going wrong.

Off they go without a hitch and our flyer collapses onto the grass as he watches the kit head off into darkness. Not a stitch of nerve left and the fly has just started. Nothing more can be done. Perhaps just one more thing should be done...call 911.

Plenty has been done prior ensuring that nothing will go wrong. Nothing go wrong! There is no such guarantee when flying a kit of Tipplers. The Tippler flyer started in early spring with 5 hens. He now shoulders all his hope on the three that are flying just above him. The hurried wing movement and tight formation while circling the loft in total darkness is cause for little concern. He has seen this before and he knows as the darkness lifts so will the kit. It also helps that the team was dark trained.

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This is when the countless hours of night flying come into play. It does nothing however for the all too familiar routine of shaking a tin can of feed while whistling a verse with annoying repetition in an attempt to coax the kit down to the loft at midnight. Don't judge! You may be able to relate. The neighbors must have had a field day with this guy and his three-ring circus for the past few months. Perhaps our man would raise an eyebrow if he only noticed his antics from the other side of the fence. Fortunately or not, he does not have luxury of reason or humiliation at that time of the night. He is too busy bringing in the kit before they settle elsewhere. The house could have been on fire and I doubt our fellow would have noticed unless a Tippler landed on it.

Training started in early March with snow still on the ground. Some days the wind-chill took the temperature to 5 below zero. The two hens that didn't make the cut flew like hell, enough to contemplate surrender, but the thought never entered his mind. The other three gave rise to hope and reason to continue on. Cold winds and freezing rain seemed to be the norm for training, again that did not deter our man from his task. Many a training fly he stood in the rain and cold in the middle of the backyard staring at the sky and keeping an eye. A show of support for the kit more than anything else, letting them know they're in this thing together. He looked for small signals, similar wing movements and birds that wanted to fly. A bird that longs to fly is a special bird. He believed he recognized the three that had this craving. Still, he looked for faults but could find none. Then it was that our Tippler flyer let his thoughts get ahead of himself and the task at hand. He fell into a stupor of grand proportions and record-breaking dreams that nearly ended with nightmare results. A near hit by a falcon quickly brought our man back down to earth from the fluffy clouds he fell asleep in. A minor scrape and the print would be fine. Actually our flyer was more shaken by the ordeal than the hen. He now adored his three beauties even more so. Was it because he knew he had something special or the thought of losing this bunch made him care even more? Or was it just a flyboy fixation and that's all?

Further back we go with our Tippler flyer to when he first put the parents of these three jewels together. He looked for type and set when selecting his pairings, birds that had the right conformation and desired qualities for his breeding ideal. He looked deeper into their pedigrees to avoid too close a mating, too far a stretch or too big a long shot. More importantly he looked over all the notes he made on flying times and breeding accomplishments over the years. These notes and records now became priceless and would kick start a flood of memories and recollection of past achievements. And so with a calm and confident approach the Tippler flyer created a sound and solid breeding program. Chance was never considered nor colors for that matter but emphasis on performance in the air and the nest.

And finally we go back to the absolute beginning, to the genesis of his passion for the Tippler. When our man first caught a glimpse of this little bird and fell into a trance. "*A pigeon that can fly all day*" were the only words he heard. Over and over the times get posted but the stories seldom get told. Behind every good fly there stands a dedicated flyer with a great story. Next time you see numbers posted on a fly report or a Tippler newsletter, think of all the parts that went into that fly and the commitment it took to go that distance. The time flown may be great but the effort and dedication prior is what makes it special.

And so a big thanks goes out to our Tippler flyer - the fourth member of the team. It is he who ascends the sport and the records to new heights and comes away with unforgettable stories.

May he continue to fly long and high and experience many great tales along the way, after all... "*for this reason I do it*"... he would go on to say.

