

Wilf Lovatt and His Loft of Tipplers

First picture shows Wilf Lovatt, Stoke-on-Trent, England, standing at the entrance of his Tippler loft. Second picture shows Robert B. Funk of Hialeah, Fla. (left) and Wilf Lovatt. — Photo by Mrs. Robert B. Funk, Hialeah, Fla.

A Visit With Wilf Lovatt — Flying Tippler Legend

By ROBERT B. FUNK, Hialeah, Fla.

Where does one begin such a story? After considerable thought I find that a fitting beginning could only be through a prefix to the visit.

Wilf Lovatt, 65 Kelvin Ave., Snyder-Green, Stoke-on-Trent, England, in the year 1963, flew a kit of Flying Tipplers for an even 20 hours, placing him as World Record holder. This, without the use of any artificial lighting to drop his kit. It must be pointed out that on the longest days of the year England has only four hours of night, that is in the Potteries section where Mr. Lovatt lives.

It also must be respectfully pointed out that as of this writing, October, 1971, the World's Record holder is Raymond Burrows of Llansmalet Tippler Club (Swansea) with his outstanding fly on June 20, 1971, of 20 hours and 02 minutes, proof positive that records are made to be broken.

I further wish to clarify that this story is in no way intended to belittle Mr. Burrows' World Record, because (1) it is impossible to belittle any man who can fly a kit 20:02. But (2), my plans to visit with Wilf Lovatt began very much earlier than Mr. Burrows' wonderful record fly.

My time schedule was short. My intentions to visit Wilf in May of 1971 were cut off with my daughter's wedding on May 8. Therefore the visit was firmed up to be in September. There just was no way I could possibly have visited any other Tippler men during our tour and Wilf was my first and only consideration while I knew much earlier that the record had changed hands.

I had been given odds and ends of Mr. Lovatt's precise address, but not until I wrote Mr. Loach, Secretary of the NTU, was I able to get through by letter to Wilf. My intention was to see Wilf, purchase as many pairs from him as I could, up to a maximum of four pairs, and bring them back to my home in Hialeah, Florida.

If you have never attempted to import pigeons into the United States from a foreign country then you have absolutely no concept of what it entails. Personally, I have the edge on the most of you since I have been working for 30 years in the airline industry, closely associated with imports and exports. I can act as my own broker. Further, there is direct air service from London to the airport where I work.

On contacting the Port Veterinarian, Import, United States Dept. of Agriculture, I obtained reservations for up to eight birds to be imported between September 16 and 29, 1971, along with an Application for Import Permit to be submitted to their headquarters which is at Hyattsville, Md. I also received word that I might not be able to receive approval. The Miami Port Veterinarian was quite right.

B. D. Ward, Acting Chief Staff Veterinarian, Import Animals, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Animal Health Div. Federal Center Building, Hyattsville, Maryland, 20782, wrote to me regarding my request. In part, due to an outbreak of Newcastle disease, I was advised that pigeons could not be imported from Great Britain, West Germany, East Germany, Russia, The Netherlands, France, Israel, Greece, Iran, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland. As of July 13, 1971, the Department could not determine how long after such outbreaks abate that permits could be considered. That was that.

Regardless, my vacation dates and tour was firmed up and I was going to meet and visit with Wilf Lovatt. My wife Gloria and I did just that.

From 1530 hours Sept. 11 until 0840 hours Sept. 12 (London Time) we were either in the air or in transit from Miami via New York to London. Our Boeing 747 landed at Heathrow Airport on a beautiful morning, how-

ever after the crowded and lengthy government formalities, baggage claiming, bus ride and taxi ride into the Westbury Hotel, we napped. There was no problem at the airport in turning U.S. bucks into English Pounds.

That evening, after a very pleasant dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding the Hotel desk was able to give us all the needed information on when and how to catch the train to Stoke-on-Trent.

September 13, up bright and early and after a typical continental breakfast of hard toast, rolls, butter, jelly and reasonable coffee, we took one of those beautiful little Austin black taxis (which seem to always be available in London) to the Euston Rail Station. For Pounds 18.80 we purchased two round trip first class tickets.

The electric train was excellent and fast. After a few stops and a couple of snapshots out the window, we reached Stoke Station. The time was roughly two hours and the distance somewhere between 150 and 200 miles. Stoke-on-Trent is not a small place, close to 230,000 population and when giving the address of 65 Kelvin Ave., within seconds the taxi driver knew it was in the Snyder-Green section. Within a matter of minutes we pulled up in front of a very old and neat and comfortable looking cottage.

After knocking on the door with no response a very pleasant neighbor lady advised us that Mr. "Love-it" could be found "down in the allotment". It was not until later that I found out that Lovatt is pronounced "Love-it" and that the allotment was a term used in a land grant in the year 1922. Without knowing the details it seems that sometime after World War 1, there being a serious shortage of food, sections of land were granted to people, so long as they produced on that land the needed food for themselves and their families.

As we walked past the cottage down a slightly sloping hillside to the allotment on this beautiful English midday it was easy to see just why this flying location could support a kit for 20 hours. The breeze which is in a constant direction most of the year brushes up the slope of land creating the needed updraft. There were no wires, trees or other structures in the immediate area of any height above the Lovatt Loft. Just small sheds and patches of flower and vegetable gardens. Further down from the loft was a shed that we found out later contained several of the local gentry, including Mr. Lovatt, enjoying a noonday game of cards.

Would you believe, in this flying area, when the wind was coming in to cause a downdraft, Mr. Lovatt flew birds for 17 hours? Beautiful, beautiful location.

Wilf Lovatt is a short stocky very young and agile 76-year-old English gentleman. It was easy for me to catch on to his phaseology, TV training, you know.

I had to bend my 6 ft. 5 inch frame double to enter the door of the very simple but appropriately designed coops. I say coops because the loft

you enter is the fly coop or cage area. There are flat planks on either side to accommodate a couple of dozen birds. To both sides there is a shed, to the left for breeders, to the right for the young and or flying birds. In the upper right hand corner of the fly coop was a small cooped off area cut diagonally across that corner. A trap on the inside permitted the flyers to be placed in this "release" cage, a trap on the outer side permitted the kit to be released. This release area could accommodate a dozen flyers in the few minutes it takes to hand pick the birds you intend to fly.

We first examined the interior of the flyers shed which contained a half dozen beautiful youngsters, each in their own compartment. The compartments are for instance two feet square, or smaller, wood lathed in fronts. There is no wire. There are no lights, and I saw no evidence of electricity. Each compartment has an opening through which the bird may stick his head to eat his given allotment of grain from a small removable wooden feed tray. None of the Lovatt birds had grain, grit or water before them, either the youngsters or the breeders.

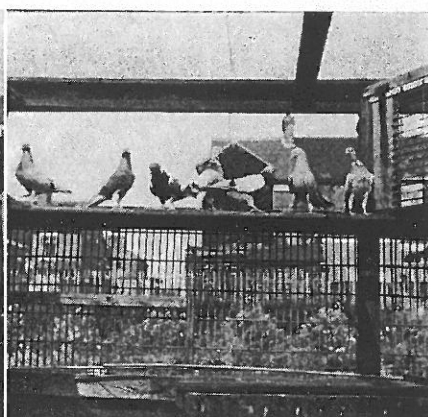
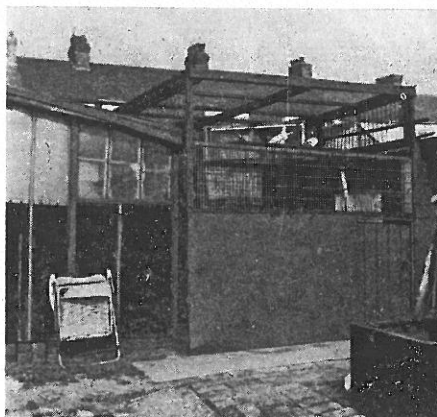
Wilf pointed to the floor in front of the flyers compartments and said, "many's the hundred of hours I spent sleeping here". This gives you an insight as to why Wilf Lovatt was a successful flyer.

To the left of the entry into the fly coop was the breeders section shed which interior was much like the flyers shed. The breeders compartments were larger inside with all cock birds above and hens below, in a single group, with a single perch for each. The lathed front was made so that partitions could be slid through, separating the compartments into individual pair breeding compartments. A total of eight pairs could easily be bred in this arrangement.

About the birds? Well let me tell you. I have owned, handled and seen many good ones and many bad ones, but of the six pairs of breeders and the half dozen youngsters, I could have grabbed blindfolded and come up with a perfect Flying Tippler. There was no way to pick a pair. You handle a blue bar, it was a doll. You handle a yellow, another doll, and so on with grizzles, silver duns, etc. Every bird felt like it was ready to go and they were in moult. These small compartments made the birds gentle, easy to reach, and they walked away from your hand like it was a pleasure to have met you.

As to feather, beautiful. The width of the primaries not over impressive and the length of them related to the tip of the tail feathers the approximate one inch I have seen all my life with the exception of one bloodline. The Lovatt quill was hard, very hard, in my large hand tested with a tough thumbnail.

After seeing and handling these birds I could come to but one conclusion, Wilf Lovatt keeps his birds in top physical condition all year round, for surely the month of September and moult under way, is no normal time to be training for flying.



Wilf Lovatt's Flying Tippler Loft

First picture shows the Flying Tippler loft of Wilf Lovatt, Stoke-on-Trent, England. Center section is the fly coop. To the right is the breeders' loft and to the left is the flyers' loft. Second picture shows Wilf Lovatt's Flying Tippler breeder hens. — Photos by Robert B. Funk, Hialeah, Fla.

I would have loved to gather each and every bird up and ship them home, leaving him without a feather. Newcastle disease? Somewhere along the line the Pigeon Fancy at large has come up very short in settling the inequities of the divisions of chickens, ducks, geese, fowl, and the mammal, the pigeon. I can only contribute it to the fact that on a percentage basis, the pigeon is consumed as food to such a small degree as opposed to chickens, etc., that the pigeon classification is tossed into the fowl category by governing agencies around the world for lack of a consumption need to do otherwise.

I asked Mr. Lovatt to show me wheat, he showed me a nice fat little grain. I asked to see barley, the same. I asked to see his breeders mixture, it was somewhat like ours however with cracked instead of whole flint corn, and brown cowpeas instead of our cream colored Canadian Field Peas. I asked if he fed sunflower seed during moult and he said no, linseed.

When mentioning the fact that Tipplers do not fly well in the heat of the sub-tropics of Florida he suggested a half spoon of rice with water for each bird, two hours before the fly. The rice will puff up in the craw and provide moisture and oxygen the birds need in the heat. I shall try it.

Rue tea was mentioned. I saw and smelled it. It is a rough leaf mixture the odor of which somewhat reminded me of sassafras, but not the same. I could not tell you where to get Rue for making tea for the birds to drink.

Mr. Lovatt offered me this and other products to take with me which I gratefully refused. I would not deprive him of one grain or drop plus the fact that the Rue might hold me up in U.S. Customs on the grounds that it also looks like (but does not smell like) marijuana. I have seen some of this too, in my years around airports (Marijuana) or Mary Jane as the special agents call it.

I had a new one sprung on me, powdered cola nut. It is simply cola nut ground into a fine flour-like powder. You bake a cake for the birds with this cola nut flour in it.

Since our conversation bounced from subject to subject, so must my article. Mr. Lovatt spoke very highly of our own Perc. Hagan of Travelers Rest, South Carolina. In fact, several times he commented on what a fine gentleman Perc. was. When I told him it had been ten years since I had visited Travelers Rest he could hardly believe it. But when I pointed out that the distance from Hialeah, Fla., to Travelers Rest, was about three times or more that of London to Stoke Station, he seemed to understand.

Gentlemen, it seems that Wilf is convinced that the first twelve hours are the hardest. If you can develop a kit to turn out twelve, they will go nineteen easy. How's that for confidence at age 76?

As I have mentioned, there are 20 hours of daylight in this section of England on the longest day of the year. Wilf was against the changing of rules to allow electric lights in dropping the kit. He has never used lights which lends support to my personal opposition to them. But then, you must go with the majority. Personally, I have always felt that lights tend to take away a good part of the skill in dropping a kit in those last fleeting moments of twilight. I'm just a romantic, I guess.

To give you more of an idea of just what kind of a man we visited, Wilf, after returning to work for his father after World War One, lost the sight in one eye in a working accident. He turned to window washing as a profession and raised eight children with it. A man apart from most. He was also a trapper because the animals ate up the gardens.

I gather, as the stories unfold, that Wilf took the record in 1963 after he lost his dear wife.

England is the freest country in the World, he said, which is a good indication to me that here is a strong supporter of his country.

He was sincerely sorry that I could not take back a few pairs of his birds and at ten pounds the pair it would have been a steal. He suggested I see Perc. Hagan.

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A Visit With Wilf Lovatt

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In looking over the varied colors of his birds he again confirmed the age old statement that the Flying Tippler is bred to fly not to look pretty. You can't play favorites, he said, treat them all alike. He did suggest crossing the light prints with the darker birds though. He had no light prints in his loft. Given stock, time and knowledge, Wilf leaves a person feeling like you could lick the world in Flying Tipplers. A beautiful optimistic man.

You have read and heard much about Parrish's Chemical Food. I saw it, I smelled it. It reminded me of the cherry cough syrup kids take, but not the same. Wilf said as a kid he had been fed Parrish's as a tonic. It is an iron tonic, 18 to 20 drops from an eyedropper in one pint of water. The product is Parrish's Food B.P.C. Chemical Food, from Boots Pure Drugs Co. Ltd., Nottingham, England. Pay up and order a bottle if you want to try it. As a substitute, Amoniated Citrate of Iron.

I mentioned having used wine in the water, he said that is fine. I asked about training and feeding, he said that he trained for a fly for two weeks, but three days before he fed corn the first day, wheat and seed the second and wheat and seed the third. He mentioned canary seed in part.

The most of the talk after the visit and picture taking at the loft was inside the cottage over a cup of tea. Wilf wanted to keep Gloria with him when he learned she took neither sugar nor milk with her tea. We saw his many trophies and flying records and talked of other worldly matters besides pigeons. Over his trophy cabinet was a clock enoused in a ceramic arrangement in color of one pigeon on each side looking towards each other. This was a present from his children, the boys of which did not follow in his pigeon minded pattern, he believes because as teenagers he forced them to go referee other fanciers flying. There are many long hours for a young man to be tied down to this.

With all of my planning and then finding myself on the train heading from London up to Stoke-on-Trent, I had some inner apprehensions about forcing such a visit on this man. After meeting and talking to him and as the taxi picked us up and he hailed the cabbie "take good care of them" I knew I was proud to have met and known Wilf Lovatt. Even still with an inner sorrow for any inconveniences I may have caused him.

If you want to know just how the food and drink is rationed out, and when, to each bird, drop in on Wilf Lovatt and sleep along side him, on the floor of the loft, for hundreds of hours, down on the allotment, at 65 Kelvin Ave., Snyder-Green, Stoke-on-Trent, England. I'd love to be able. It shall never happen.



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