

## SQUABBING

Giant Homers started as a squabbing breed and this is my experience with squabbing. My introduction to Giant Homers was at the 1952 Des Moines National. As I was admiring the Giant Homers, an older gentleman ,Ed Mrovka, began talking to me and then " took me under his wing". He took me upstairs from the show room to where they were having the annual meeting. There they had a small freezer with dressed squabs displayed. That seems very unusual now, but it was their way of encouraging fanciers to raise Giant Homers and joining the club, and it worked for me.

The squabbing business was going strong in 1928 when the Giant Homer Association was organized-incidentally the same year I was born. Destiny ? They were used because of their good size, vigor, and productivity.

In the middle '50s a few of my birds weren't of show quality or good red color. So what to do? A close friend, Fred Schnieder, raised show Kings and ran a locker plant in Fort Madison. So, we and Grant Besser, another local Giant Homer breeder, decided to send squabs to the Chicago market. Fred froze them, packed them in dry ice, and shipped them. We got about \$1.25 a pound for them, and they New York dressed to a little over a pound apiece.

At about 4 weeks old they have reached maximum weight and feather under the wings have sheathed out to be easily plucked. After that the fat would be reduced by exercise developing into muscle and called by the market "hard or old". Whites , recessive reds, and silvers were preferred because of the light skin color.

To kill the birds we stuck a pointed knife through the roof of the mouth where the neck joins the skull and given a little twist and withdrawn. this death is as quick and painless as possible. as soon as it has died the crop is flushed. Before it stiffens we dry pick the feathers, leaving the head, head feathers, insides,& feet intact This was to assure the market that it is a pigeon and not a crow or some other bird. Care was taken not to tear or bruise the skin. The squabs were not drawn and immediately cooled in water. The squabs kept better undrawn when shipped than drawn.

When older pigeons were being used at home, I would just pull heads, skin and eviscerate them, as it was much easier and quicker than the above process. Elenora would put them in a pressure cooker until done and pick the meat from the breast and legs to use. The breast made about 80% of the meat. This is why our requirement for a long deep keel is stated in our standard.

She used that meat plus the heart and liver to make a casserole with a pie crust liner adding peas, carrots, onion, spices and a thickened broth. Sometimes, she would add biscuit dollops on top. Other times, a layer of pie dough. YUMMMM ! Our 3 kids all loved it !

Gerald Hobbs