Derby Arona: The Most Extreme One Loft Race in the World

By Silvio Mattacchione BA MA

A number of years ago, I believe it was 2003 I became aware of the performance of a racing pigeon “Bayo Casablanca”. It was really quite a story and I wrote a long and detailed article outlining the circumstances of that performance. For those interested the original article can be found at http://www.silvio-co.com/pigeons/bayo.htm and was entitled “Bayo Casablanca: World Record Over The Sea.” To say that I was fascinated would be an understatement. Prior to the "World Record "flight of "Bayo Casablanca" owned by Jose and Abel Ledesma of "Ledesma Loft," no bird had ever successfully flown this distance over the sea to be clocked at their home loft on the morning of the second day. It means that this incredible athlete flew at least 1000 kilometers over the ocean on the day of release!

So who is Jose Ledesma? Much to my surprise I found that Jose Ledesma is a Composer of music. He produces incredible music that combines his love and respect of the past and its popular island traditions the sounds of his country and his people fused to the anticipation of all that the future may promise. He has vision that he is able to express in music and in the forming of living art in the breeding of very beautiful yet incredibly rugged racing pigeons capable of incredible feats. Most people do not know that the world famous Dutch fancier Wout Smeulders (breeder of the Smeulders Janssens, the Kannon 23 X 1st etc) was also a Conductor and incredible lover of music. So do Composers and Conductors have an edge on just normal pigeon breeders? I do not know but I may have to investigate further. Jose is successful in many different fields of human endeavor. Beautiful music, beautiful design and beautiful racing pigeons what more could you wish to achieve?

Well it would seem that Ledesma is always looking for a challenge. Most men would never have considered attempting to organize a one loft race let alone bring it to International attention and of all places on an Island in the middle of the Atlantic. If anyone had ever run such a scheme by me I would certainly have accused the originator of such an incredible idea of being “a few notes short of a symphony!” Yet this is exactly what Jose Ledesma did! He successfully created the “Ultimate Challenge” he brought the “Ultimate One Loft Race” into existence regardless of all of the negative pontifications the “nay sayers”. There is no one loft race in the world that can lay claim to being the “Ultimate Challenge” that is not up until Ledesma created “DERBY ARONA”.

“Derby Arona” has within a brief five years established itself as a “World Class” sporting event. The marriage of an ancient activity (the racing of pigeons) with the 21st Century technology of
the internet allows fanciers from all over the world and all walks of life to showcase to the entire world their prowess as breeders of the ultimate animal athletes. Reputations can be made overnight if you have both the courage to participate and the horsepower or more appropriately the “pigeon power” to establish a world class performance.

I can assure my readers that this race is not for the faint of heart, your pigeons must be exceptional in every way or you will indeed be wasting your time. This race is for the realist, the brutally honest fancier who believes in the superiority of his stock and is willing to challenge the “Atlantic Ocean” and all that, that entails. This race is not for whiners or believers in affirmative action, this race is for the professional seeking to pit his breeding prowess against the fury of the seas. You will be racing against the very best endurance pigeons in the world for the highest prize money in Europe.

THE HIGHEST PRIZE MONEY IN EUROPE

2011 RACE

220,000.00 Euros

In North America and most of Europe we fly our pigeons over forests, over mountains, over deserts, over cities, over every imaginable and hostile terrain, but rarely are our birds confronted
with the absolute fury of the open seas. Winds and waves that can break enormous ocean going tankers in half are just some of the dangers. The open oceans are certainly the most formidable force in nature that our exquisite, fearless, little warriors could ever be confronted with. Over the ocean racing has no human equivalent but if it did if would have to be “Ultimate Fighting”. Imagine yourself being required to do battle with Fedor Vladimirovich Emelianenko mixed martial artist Champion now multiply this by many factors and you can begin to imagine the challenge. The power of the North Atlantic is unforgiving. Remember this word “unforgiving”!

I think, it would be an understatement if I were to say that racing pigeons instinctively do not like to fly over large bodies of open water. In Taiwan as well as many other Island Nations like The Canary Islands many fanciers value a racing pigeon solely on its ability to fly over the ocean. Therefore they seek out and greatly value racing pigeons that can fly over an unforgiving open ocean! Let’s be very clear here, not all racing pigeons have the requisite qualities to be able to do so. These flights are dangerous, grueling and can and be deadly. Risking flights over the open ocean requires the ultimate in terms of a pigeon’s ability to orient, its physical performance, its endurance, its courage and its iron will to return to its home.

So what is my sudden fascination with water, when most friends of mine know that I cannot swim a stroke? I am fascinated because it never fails to amaze me that the birds that we keep can have so much courage, so much raw power, so much strength, so much endurance, so much determination and such a love for home that nothing, not even a deadly ocean would stop them from trying to get to their homes. Yet it seems that the Canary Islands (officially a part of Spain) has a large, extremely dedicated racing pigeon fanciers community as well as racing pigeons that face these incredible challenges every race day. Just imagine the oceans, totally
unpredictable, deadly calm one minute and gigantic 10 storey waves and winds the next. Water, fog gale force winds, peregrine falcons and add to all of this a distance of 300 kilometers and you certainly have a recipe for the “most extreme one loft race in the world”. The “ultimate “challenge! This then is the background for the Derby Arona which (and I believe rightly) bills itself as “The Most Extreme One Loft Race in The World”!

In 1990 I spent some ten days or so in the Canary Islands at the second world parrot congress. Most of my time was spent in Tenerife. Tenerife is famous as the site of the world's greatest "747" disasters and it was also the site of a "Raquel Welsh" movie entitled "1000.000 BC." Part of the island is desolate, moonlike in terrain and the higher altitude is beautiful, tropical: an ideal vacation spot. Yet in 1990 the only pigeons I saw were flying near the shore and out over the ocean, near the hotel that I was staying at. At the time I could not even begin to imagine the extent of racing that existed on those remote islands.

As of the time of the writing of this article North Americans are still unable to compete in “Derby Arona” though work is underway by the organizers of this race in conjunction with the relevant Agricultural authorities in both jurisdictions to hopefully arrive at a protocol that will finally allow Canadian and American racing pigeons to compete in the 2010 event. Till this happens we can only sit on the sidelines and watch as the Europeans and others take up the challenge. There are a number of long established highly successful and fully subscribed “One Loft Races” in the world today. The two that have the longest and most successful track records and pay out the largest prize money are “Sun City Million” in South Africa and “Derby Arona” in Tenerife, Canary Islands.

![Figure 4](https://www.jerrydownsphoto.com)
Only the very best racing pigeons bred should be sent to Derby Arona. The entire training takes place via huge ocean going ferries very similar to the one represented in the photo below. The releases are videoed so as to have a permanent record of not only the release but the conditions at the time of the release. The birds are well trained and given every opportunity to perform at the very best of their abilities.

The flights are not easy but the youngsters must come to know and understand the conditions that will confront them. Below you can see the giant wake left behind the ocean ferry. There is no room for error here.
You can see the first pigeons emerging for the deck of the ferry and they are confronted immediately by the ocean.

More and more birds emerge and they need to be alert to not only the ocean but also any predators that might emerge. And within minutes that is precisely what actually happened on the offshore training toss of Feb 11 2010. Two falcons (see the two yellow circles on the next photo) approach the flock, the flock scatters and dives immediately, knowing instinctively that there
was safety closer to the surface of the ocean, as the two falcons move into position the bulk of
the pigeons are not sticking around.

As the two falcons strike (see the yellow circles) the bulk of the flock dives at incredible speed
and literally touches the surface water of the open ocean. Never has such a dramatic event ever
been captured on videotape. The racing pigeons, in a frantic maneuver to escape the danger skim
the surface of the ocean at breakneck speed, as their protection from these deadly hunters of the
skies
This incredible series of photographs will give you a sense of what our incredible racing pigeons are capable of.

The 2010 Derby Arona attracted participants from 28 countries a virtual “who’s who” of the racing pigeon world worldwide. A United Nations of racing pigeon fanciers descended upon Tenerife to enjoy the hospitality of this tropical paradise and hopefully also emerge victorious in the ultimate challenge that is Derby Arona. With the emergence of the One Loft Races worldwide the sport of racing pigeons rose to a new level. Racing pigeons in exotic destinations for large prize money what a great excuse for a family holiday!

Figure 5 Tenerife is an incredible holiday destination for the entire family. A favorite destination for visitors from all over Europe and clearly you can see why!
I look forward, to personally participating in the 2011. Europeans have an ongoing opportunity to support a world class event, that is professionally operated at the very highest level with complete transparency built into every facet and where the birds receive incredible care and attention to detail is paramount. Jose Ledesma the virtuoso composer has created his greatest “Opus” for racing pigeon fanciers of the world and it is called “Derby Arona!”

I leave you with one image and this image is what our sport is ultimately all about. The face of victory. We all love our pigeons and we all love to win and this shot tells it all.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 6 The face of Victory at the 2010 Arona Derby! Nothing tastes as sweet as VICTORY!*