

# Oswaldtwistle *Homing Society*

## How do we recruit new Members to the Sport?

Looking through the Race Results in the British Homing World, a quick analysis shows that 151 clubs have 5 members or less – 5 clubs with 1 member, 20 clubs with 2 members, 31 clubs with 3 members, 42 with 4 members & 51 clubs with 5 members – and some of these fanciers will probably have to travel to other clubs to mark their birds & have their clocks set to comply with RPRA rules. Projecting forward 5 years, how many of these clubs will still be in existence?

Oswaldtwistle Homing Society is now a strong Club with 44 members including 8 partnerships. During the last 3 years we have recruited 24 new members, 21 of whom are new starters including 6 Asian members, two 12 year old boys & a Junior School. The Club is projecting to have 50 members by the start of the new season. The Club has had to turn down a number of applications because Fanciers are just outside the Club boundary, so enquiries are passed on to other clubs in the Federation although opening up the club radius would be a logical solution.

One of the main problems in recruiting new members is the cost of starting up, so if you can help in this area you have a chance & so the Club offers a new starter package. Previously junior lofts have been used for new starters, but now find it more economical to pick up old sheds for free or little cost, cut out a square & fix a 4 bird stall trap & base to the front of the shed, together with a set of box perches. It also makes sense because the new starters always want a bigger loft in their second year. These costs are funded by a grant from the RPRA, Future of Sport Committee, & a detailed application for financial support to this committee usually results in a positive response with the Club receiving £2000 during the last couple of years.

Ten young birds are given to each new member & the loan of a T3 clock. Local Fanciers & those further afield are very generous in donating young birds & an appeal on Pigeon Chat for second hand T3 clocks resulted in the Club receiving 11 clocks, some in working order & others serviced & fitted with new batteries by B Leefe & Sons Ltd at half the normal cost, in return for being allowed to display their advert on the Club's website. Some of the lofts are on loan with a signed agreement that they are returned to the Club if the member leaves the sport, & there can be a similar agreement for clocks as well.

As a result of two Oswaldtwistle Homing Society articles in the British Homing World – “The First Step” & “Way Ahead” the Club is becoming known for encouraging new members to the sport, & has started to receive donations of loft equipment, baskets, drinkers, feeders & young birds which enabled some new members to be virtually set up with a minimum outlay. This year thanks to Bamfords all the new starters each received a free bag of Breed & Wean under the Homing Pigeon Starter Pack Scheme. The Blackburn & District Federation also encourage new starters with free membership to young persons under the age of 18.

The Club promotes the new starter package by siting a small loft in the grounds of a local shopping & garden centre with a poster promoting what is on offer. Posters are also put on allotment fences & in Barbers shops & fly posting in discreet places – one enquiry came from a poster on the door of a Gents Loo before it was taken down.

Sometimes it is necessary to liaise with the local council to find an allotment, as the new starter may only have a back yard, which may not be suitable for racing pigeons, so there is regular communication with the local

allotments manager. Local press are always on the look out for information about organisations & feature write ups about the Club. Small adverts in the local newspaper usually generate enquiries & details are promoted on the council's voluntary services website & newsletter.

The Club runs campaigns to target the over 60's by contacting local Clubs, Societies & Associations. By 2017 there will be 10.5 million over 55's & some will be looking for a new hobby. Talks are also given to Schools, Rotary & Lions Clubs. The advantage of school visits is two fold, one being the chance of a school deciding to install a loft of their own, & secondly the possibility of one or two of the children persuading their parents to let them keep Racing Pigeons. One talk ended up with the school joining the Club & also resulted in good publicity in the local press. The Presentation for the older age groups is different from the ones used for schools.

The key to school talks is keeping the children interested, & besides telling them about the general aspects of racing pigeons & the part they played in winning two world wars, they love to see some birds & hear a story about each bird. Dangers encountered by racing pigeons are highlighted - birds of prey, cables & telephone wires & other perils eg. which happened to a Fancier who, whilst waiting for his birds to return from a race, received a telephone call from a member of the public to say your red pigeon has just been shot. On another occasion, a bird returned from a race & did not enter the trap & when the Fancier looked on top of the loft he found it had been killed by a cat after just flying 300 miles back to its home.

Another important way of finding new members is word of mouth, casual enquiries sometimes from allotment holders need to be followed up with a

personal visit & explanation how the new starter package works & general information about the sport. All the members encourage anybody who shows an interest & welcome anyone who wants to join. The Club have a great membership who all help one another & there is no doubt word of mouth spreads that everyone is welcome whether novice or established Fancier.

Another selling point to attract new members is the fact that the Club owns its own wooden structure headquarters which is fitted out with racks to hold the baskets, with drinkers on from the start until the transporter arrives, & members putting their birds through under cover which is an advantage in adverse weather conditions. The area is fitted out with benches, tables & chairs. There is a fridge for drinks & a kettle for tea & coffee, & an honesty box to collect the monies. There is also a heater to keep everyone warm & socialise together whilst waiting for their clocks to be set or printed result worked out by the Club Secretary. The headquarters has been financed with a grant from a local charity organisation. The Club originally applied for £1,500 to extend the original cabin but the charity committee came back & said “no we don't want you to have an extension, we want you to have a new building so re-apply for £6,500.”

The Club now has its own website [oswaldtwistlehomingsociety.co.uk](http://oswaldtwistlehomingsociety.co.uk) which gives information on how to join with details of the new starter package & is a good way of promoting the sport locally, & has resulted in a number of enquiries. The website also contains a number of articles about the Club & information on the Presentation Evening.

Some new members will need help with training their birds, as they do not have their own transport, so they can join the Club Training Programme which is run by a club member with his mini

transporter offering two mid-week tosses. Once the new members have joined the Club it is important that they are given encouragement & assistance – they receive specific information, how to feed & settle the young birds & how to prevent young bird sickness, & the Club runs a vaccination clinic so they can attend with their birds.



The Mini Transporter

There will always be winners & losers in any sport & so the Club have created incentives for all members with the formatting of three league divisions with promotion & relegation, so the different members can compete on the same level & have a chance of winning a trophy. There are also leagues for new starters & the Junior Sections & a Team Spirit League, with an established member & new member paired together, &

it is surprising how the leagues are fiercely competed & go down to the last race before the winners are known. These competitive opportunities are always of interest to the new starters in the initial discussions about them joining the sport. There is a big difference between the skills of the older members & new members who need every bit of encouragement they can get & the leagues help to keep up their enthusiasm & sometimes older members in other Clubs don't want to accept change. “I don't want to fly in the same league as so & so” & “we had to learn the hard way & new members should do the same”.

At the end of each season the Club organises a Presentation Evening with an Artist & Supper, so that the winners can be acknowledged & receive their trophies, & an annual brochure is produced which includes general information about the Club, race results, trophy winners & the Club constitution & equal opportunities policy.

The members are always interested to see their names in print & there is a write up inside BHW Lancashire Life each week during the racing season. All these little things add up to be part of the bigger picture to attract new members to the sport.

Finding new starters is like scouting promising young footballers, but if you put in the effort it can be done.

**Oswaldtwistle Homing Society**

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Secretary Lee Dawson [Full details here](#)  
[Liberation News here](#) [2015 results here](#)

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[Report a Stray pigeon here](#)

**New Member Application Form download here**  
[Race Entry Sheets here](#)  
[Club Rules here](#)

[Prize Presentation 2014 Full report here](#)  
[Prize Winners 2014 - Full details here](#)  
[New Developments - Full details here](#)

**The 2014 Winners here**  
[Club Training Programme 2015 full details here](#) Starts 31/3/2015

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01484 686033  
[mysoft@btinternet.com](mailto:mysoft@btinternet.com)  
[www.mysoft.co.uk](http://www.mysoft.co.uk)

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