

### Lewis McCalley

Lewis recently joined the Lanarkshire Federation in late 2019, moving from Avonbridge, West Lothian to Greengairs Nr Airdrie.

He joined Clarkston club to compete in his first young bird season in 2020, racing a small team of 12 racers.

He had a cracking first season, on top of the leaders board most weeks and winning .1st & 2nd Open Lanarkshire Federation Ripon.

Great start to his career and making a real statement for things to come.

Wetherby Open 1st & 2nd Open Lanarkshire Federation 2021 .

That's twice in two years 1st & 2nd Open, who says lightening doesn't strike twice!

He also recorded 1st & 2nd section from Kelso 1 this season.



Lofts from front view



Lewis at the aviary



Lewis McCalley

Lewis has agreed to undertake a **Question & Answer interview** on his successful recipe for the young bird racing into Lanarkshire, Central Scotland.

For those not aware of where Lanarkshire is an extensive inland county in the south of Scotland, bounded on the north by the counties of Dumbarton and Stirling, on the east by the counties of Linlithgow, Edinburgh and Peebles, on the south by Dumfriesshire, and on the west by the counties of Renfrew, Ayr and Dumfries. It is about 52 miles in length and 33 miles in extreme breadth, comprising an area of 926 square miles . The county, also called Clydesdale (or Strathclyde), from the valley of the river Clyde. In a nut shell it's the biggest pigeon federation in the British Isles!



Big Lloyd



Open Winner 552

**Question 1** -Can you give us some background about your time in the Sport?

My Dad had pigeons as long as i can remember I used to go in the loft occasionally and go with him to visit local fanciers like Davie Hunter, Muttley, Jim Smith, Tattie Findlay and White Brothers. It wasn't until I was around eleven years old in 2001 I started taking a real interest watching the races and spending a lot of time with the birds.

I came on board as a partner and we raced as A Mc Calley & Son, always getting a turn and enjoying reasonable success in club, Federation, Combine and National races.

From around 2009 onwards my father started working away from home and I took on more of the day to day running of the pigeons with my Dad keeping me right (Or trying to as I often didn't listen) I moved through here in late 2019 and we dissolved the partnership with my father hoping to start up at the old location once he has fully retired.

**Question 2** -When do you pair up and what is your health programme before pairing?

I usually pair the birds up the first weekend of February. I have tried it earlier before but found it a lot of work and difficult with the sparrow hawk attacks on the youngsters that aren't yet on wing. The youngsters are weaned the end of March beginning of April, this suits me best. The old birds are vaccinated for PMV when last he lays her second egg.

Prior to pairing I usually leave the old birds together through the moult and separate the sexes around Christmas.

I don't give routine antibiotics treatments but do use a few supplements regularly. Nothing special, I like a few oregano based products and alternate between two or three of them.

I use Naturaline and Sedochol a fair bit when the birds are moulting and will give Gemthepax on the feed dried off by provit regularly too.

Before pairing I pay a bit more attention to their weight trying to get them out a bit more often if the hawks permit it.

When the breeders are on youngsters I usually have maple and green peas in porcelain dog bowl on the floor for them all day and will feed a mixture twice a day. I quite like Versele Laga start plus and Mariman Varimax but I'm pretty choppy changy and will mix something else through it if I take the notion.

I like Natural Grain pick stones, pots, vitamineral and mixed grit in front of them all the time when the youngsters are in nest. I will also give them some Matrix and Vanrobaeys super grit after the twice a day feed.

**Question 3** When do you vaccinate your youngsters and how do you manage them after they leave nest?

I usually wean them on the same mixture and supplements and when on darkness. I don't use antibiotics but use supplement mentioned.

Will give the supplements on feed and clear water most of the time, changed regularly

I usually bring in some youngsters to race and I try to arrange it so they are as near the same age as i can get. Once the last birds are added Ill vaccinate them all for PMV.I usually wean them at three to four weeks.

My YB loft at present is 9x8 ft and last year I started with 22 youngsters ,this year 40. I'm undecided whether Ill build more lofts for next season or keep it the same and have around 35-40..

The young bird loft has Muttley pipo perches.I only keep them in this loft whilst they are on darkness then put them into the old bird loft 3-4 weeks before first race.

I like the youngsters out walking around the garden, bathing ect.as early as possible preferably before they can properly fly.

I don't basket train them as such but will take drinkers away one day before I feed them, give them a full feed and put them in a big race crate I have, will go back 20 minutes or so later, put the drinkers on and they usually drink from them pretty quickly having not had water after their meal. Then I put them back in the loft. The next time they go in the basket will be once training starts.

**Question 4** What's next for the youngsters?

Once the youngsters are batching I put them on a sort of "sunshine darkness" where they are

darkened by my partner in the afternoon and I take the darkness shutters of when its dark just before I go to bed.

This enables me to get them out first thing. I find they exercise well early in the morning. I never flag or chase them at all. Depending on weather they will fly two to three hours at this stage. They are usually fed around 8am before I go to work, they are given as much as they want whilst on darkness. Fed a little at a time, during this time I will put in a small percentage of tic beans in the feed, once they start to leave these they've had enough. I just leave them in the hopper though as it's their only meal. Not loads left but I try to gauge it so there are none left when they are darkened in the afternoon but enough so they can eat later in the morning.

I've tried quite a few ways of training youngsters at my old loft. Trained twice per day at one point, tried training them a few weeks before racing. I've sort of settled till later the last few seasons though. With them not being early bred or particularly mature I find they come of the darkness they clear out for long periods, as long as they're doing that I don't tend to train or annoy them too much..

This year i started training them 12 days before first race .I've not really settled on a place to train yet since moving through here and tend to stick to places I got reasonable good training when at my old house. This year before the first race they had 6 tosses from just outside Whitburn approx 9 miles south east of loft and 1 toss from Pathhead which is around 36 miles south east. Again I've done it different ways once racing has started last year I trained a lot between races, this year I lightened the feed more tried to stick to loft flying, once a few had laid as the racing programme I left them on open loft much of the day and went to either Whitburn or Clifton Hall (Approx 20 miles) once per week.

I've no real set way, learning with it and trying to adapt. I try to have all their exercise or training done before work do at night I just give them a clean out, relax and mess around with them.

**Question 5** What challenges in the form of illness do you come up against and how do you overcome these?

I get young bird sickness in some form most seasons, when I first started to see it in the youngsters it was pretty severe but through time it has become pretty mild and not a massive inconvenience. I think using oregano base products helps prevent it coming to much, since I started using those regularly I've not had any massive problem with it. If they are not quite right I'll keep them in for a few days, lighten the diet and give plenty of clean water so they drink freely. I don't usually starve them, I tried it one year after reading about it online and didn't think it had a very positive affect on the birds. If it's pretty bad and the birds are vomiting I don't mind the others eating it as I think it goes through the loft quicker. Any years I have intervined through starving or some product or other I've found it prolonged it.

If there's nothing underlying and the birds were previously in good health I don't panic too much, luckily I usually see it in them early in the year. If it was during the season id maybe react differently. This year my season was spoiled a little not by YBS but fat eye. I'd never had any issues with it before but between the second and third race this year. I had a few showing the swelling .The annoying thing was they looked otherwise good and the temptation was there to pick some out to send but I found a bird could look fine at night then I'd go into the loft in the morning and its eye was swollen. So I sat the third race out and used comed lysocur drops, a drop in each eye and nostril twice per day for five days, they cleared up pretty quickly. They are a sort of herbal drop. I think going forward I will use them as a precaution and give them to the birds in the evening after a race. There is no antibiotics or anything in them so my thinking is if they do no good they don't do any harm.

**Question 6** -How do you motivate your pigeons?

With them not being early bred they tend to motivate themselves as the season progresses and they hit a bit of maturity. Everything is new to them, first nest ect. If earlier bred all these things would take place earlier in the year instead of during the racing, which is fine. Can then separate them or whatever but with limited time I try to keep it as easy and enjoyable as possible. I will sometimes put in old birds or two in to even up numbers. I try and give them nice places to nest as well and have shelves in the top corners, will darken boxes, build nests for them etc. I used to wind them up a lot but often found the ones I felt were most motivated were late home. Don't know if it's too stressful for them or what? Now I tend to just let them do their own thing and make the loft nice for them. A lot just happens by chance-a mate lost, taking up with a new mate etc.

**Question 7** Loft design, ventilation, loft management?

The lofts were purchased from the local shed manufacturers. One is up on stilts and was actually sold as a summer house with perspex panel doors and windows. An aviary was built onto the front of this then another shed added to the other side of the aviary at the lower level so the roof of the lower loft acts as a landing board.

The only ventilation is through the doors and windows. I can open and close them too suit, but I don't do much about ventilation etc, and feel if there aren't too many birds in the loft it's not really a big worry.

I'm thinking of putting another loft up or converting the garage going forward, but will probably make do with the two small lofts for next season.

I'll spray the birds two or three times per year with Johnston's anti mite spray and find they usually stay pretty clean. Internal parasites I don't do anything in particular but think the oregano type products keep the ailments under control.

I don't use antibiotics for canker but will give Pigeon Vitality tricoli stop capsules ad lib during the racing.

I scrape the loft regularly, have used beechwood chips in the past but it's not a massive set up so scraping isn't a problem. I Hoover the loft and use a blow torch pretty often too.

Haven't really got a favourite product. Reading about farming techniques etc, I don't think the food we give them now is as nutritional as it once was. I give them a mixture of things hoping it gives them a better diet with fewer shortfalls. My Dad says I should throw it all in the bin.

**Question 8** - Provide information of your birds breeding lines?

Bit of a mixture Tom, mainly Woodroffe Brothers bloodlines with a few different things added. I still have some of my old lines that were in my previous loft and since moving through here I've introduced birds from Dalgleish family from Ecclefechan, birds from Mio Krivokapic of Bothwell, Lanarkshire, Birds from Hugh Menzies of Slamannan and Lloyd Westbury from Corwen, Wales. I'm happy with all these introductions and think I should have good options racing at all distances.

**Question 9** -What's your prep in relation to feeding for racing?

This year the youngsters were fed mainly Gerry plus throughout the racing and went onto with a little Beyers barley initially added once off darkness. I'd give them peanuts ad lib as a treat and used some readband, sunflower hearts and hemp through the feed at the end of the week and on return from races.

The feed time are regular during racing, they get 1/4 oz per bird at 8am before work then at night fed at 7pm. This is a little at a time and to appetite. No food is left down for them with the exception being Thursday night where I'll leave it for an hour or so and will feed earlier on Friday morning and leave for them for a little while then too.

**Question 10** -What is your favourite type of racing?

I enjoy pigeon keeping in general, I like the day to day things. As for racing I like and respect all types of racing. I used to read a lot many of the great distance fanciers in Scotland. It really appealed to me and still does. I think locally the longer races are truer and not as dependant on location etc. I had one or two long distance birds at my old loft and seeing one return from Gold cup races badly hawked broke my heart to be honest. It's hard seeing a bird come back from any race injured but seeing my favourite pigeon return from 500 miles injured is something I found very hard to take.

At present I'm only a member of Clarkston Club in Lanarkshire Federation, I feel I'm still finding my feet since moving through here but would hope to be in a position to compete in more races and join National clubs in the future.

**Question 11** How do you pick your pool pigeon?

I try and base it on the pigeons behaviour and see if there's a bird doing something it doesn't usually do or I'll try and pick a form bird. At my old loft I had a few birds that were my first pigeon to the loft three or four times in a row which makes things a lot easier.

**Question 12-** Racing system?

I don't really have a set way of racing. I have tried racing the birds split at my old loft but found it unworkable at times due to persistent peregrine attacks and would often end up re pairing the birds to settle them down. I hope to do well with the old birds next season as I've a stronger team going into 2022.

Albert Woodroffe gave me a piece of advice and that was to take things a day at a time with pigeons.

**Question 13 -** Averages and point systems?

I think averages are good, they are difficult to win but being the Champion fancier in a club, fed etc, should not be easy. Points system as a separate thing would be good too and another way of highlighting the top flyers.

**Question 14 -**How can we improve the sport?

I don't think there is an easy answer on how to improve the sport. I think it would take cooperation between organisations. I'd like to see Federations only racing from under 200 miles and National clubs starting from shorter distances and having more races.

It's hard to say what the sport will look like in the future the birds of prey problem is probable as bad as its going to get, unless Britain's land mass expands its hard to see where there will be territory to sustain more of them.

**Question 15 -**What about the social side of the sport?

Yes I do quite like the social side of the sport, I don't go to as many things as I used to but will be attending the federation presentation this year. I've been to Blackpool a few times and it's certainly a great weekend.

Thank you for asking to do the write up Tom, you do a great job as the PRO for the Federation and Lanarkshire are fortunate to have you. I'm flattered at being asked as I don't really feel it's warranted with lots of great flyers in the fed. I've been made very welcome since moving through here and looking forward to competing and hopefully improving in Lanarkshire Fed over the coming seasons.

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Photo 1

Photo 2 Aviary between two small lofts

Photo 3 Open winner 552

Photo 4 Big Lloyd

Photo 5 Lewis McCalley