

Ten Facts About Live Pigeon Shooting

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Established in England in the 1750's Live Pigeon Competition Shooting has long since been outlawed in the United Kingdom, but a great deal of its legacy remains. Not only in much of the terminology still used today, but also in the large number of surviving weapons built exclusively for the sport, many of which continue to give faithful service to their current owners at clay pigeon shoots around the country.

1. In June 1827 Lord Kennedy and Squire Osbaldeston shot a four day live pigeon match for a bet of 2,000 guineas (£2,100). This was roughly the equivalent of around a quarter of a million pounds by today's standards.
2. For many years there was an annual live pigeon match between selected teams from the House of Lords and the House of Commons.
3. In many rural areas of the British Isles, probably because of their food value and cost, pigeons were often substituted with sparrows and starlings for competition shooting. In Australia they frequently used budgerigars and parakeets.
4. Quite often the local shooters would gather on the outskirts of a live pigeon shooting ground when a competition was being held there in order to pick off the escapees for the pot. This custom was known as by-shooting.
5. The birds that survived this second gauntlet were the ancestors of our now all too common town pigeons. The pigeon employed for competition shooting was the Blue Rock, which was a coastal bird and a natural cliff dweller. The nearest thing resembling a cliff top roost or nesting site in our towns and cities were the ledges and chimneys of the buildings. Thus the humble "street pecker" was introduced to urban living.
6. The now universal 2¾ inch shotgun cartridge was originally produced to accommodate the increased load demanded by live pigeon shooters when the rules were changed forbidding any bore of gun above that of 12-bore to be used in competition. Features such as top-rib extensions giving a treble locking facility, and side clips on the standing breech were also innovations introduced to combat the excessive loads used in live bird competitions. Other ideas borrowed from wildfowling guns were also often incorporated into the design of the "Blue Rock Pigeon" gun.
7. In some live pigeon competitions the *one miss and you're out rule* was applied. This meant that the longest unbroken run of kills won the match.
8. As well as prize money, trophies, and occasionally a gun was presented to the winner of a match. Often some very strange prizes were awarded to the successful winners of live pigeon competitions. In rural areas in particular livestock was frequently on offer. This often ranged from chickens, goats, pigs and sheep, right through to bullocks. In one case at least it is recorded that at

a Northampton shoot twelve bullocks were divided between a Mr W. T. Coton and Mr E. Lovell. In the instances of livestock prizes these were obviously alive at the time of winning, but should a single beast have to be shared by two competitors this was not the case for long.

9. Prior to the introduction of manually operated collapsible box traps and its variants, target pigeons were often released from under an old hat.
10. Much of the terminology from the live pigeon shooting days has been carried over into the inanimate bird shooting of today. For instance the sport itself is called Clay pigeon or Trap Shooting. A "trap" is still used to launch the target into the air and the target itself is universally referred to as a "bird" or a clay "pigeon". The command "Pull" is still used to instruct the "trapper" when the "bird" is to be released, and a hit is registered as a "kill", whilst a miss is termed a "lost bird". Just as a malfunction of the "trap" or a damaged and erratically flying clay today is ruled a "no bird", so too was its fitful counterpart or a bird that refused to rise in those bygone days when competition wing shooting was in its infancy.