



## Speaking with HENRY GEORGE

Henry George is Australia's most successful exhibitor when it comes to collecting first, second and third placings at the National Championships each year. (I have based this fact on placings from 1990 to the present time). Besides being a very successful exhibitor, Henry is also a renowned National Judge held in very high esteem by all who have "standing" in the fancy.

Henry and his wife Dianne made Keith and I feel very welcomed when we visited them at their home at Mt Samson. The George's have forty acres where they live in a stunning home, have a beautiful aviary (better and bigger than our home) and a beautiful warm-blood horse stud. Dianne points out she does most of the work with the horses but now that Henry has retired, he is helping out.

As reported in our last issue, Henry did very well again at the National Show, which was held in Hobart in May.

*Editor:* Once again, you have done very well at the Nationals this year earning a first in the Greens: Eleventh in the Blues but, according to the Judges, it would have done better if it had been in condition more: First and third in Clearwings: Sixth and eleventh in the Cinnamons, better if your birds did not object to the light: Fifth in the Yellow Face: Second and fifth in Dominant Pied and second in the Hens, and if this class was awarded a minute earlier, you would have won it.

The Light Green that won the Green Class – I believe that bird has always been beaten by a Greygreen you own. Is there any relationship between those two birds and why wasn't your Greygreen in the selection show?

*Henry:* I agree I was a little unlucky in the hens. With the Greens, yes there is a relationship but it is distant. They are not brothers or half brothers but they are related. The only reason the Greygreen didn't go in was that its tail was only four centimeters long on the selection day.

*Editor:* What about the Hen that came in second – is she any relation to those two Greens?

*Henry:* Yes again distantly – we are not looking at a brother and sister relationship.

*Editor:* Are you going to mate her to one of the two Green cocks mentioned?

*Henry:* I have actually put that hen to the Pied Sky cock that came fifth.



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Some of the trophies won over the years.

*Carol:* The blue cock that came home in eleventh placing – how was that one bred and don't say by putting a hen and a cock together.

*Henry:* That came out of my Blue line, which now has in it four generations of National Champions mated to a Yellow Face line, which I have had for many years. My intention was to introduce the blue line into the Yellow Face line so that one should have been a Yellow Face.

*Editor:* Now you told me your aim was to win a National with a Violet. How are you setting about to do that?

*Henry:* Yes it is a good challenge. I am in fact putting the Violets that I have over the Blue line. This Blue line evolves from the Skyblue that won the Nationals in Adelaide in 1994. Then another year a Cobalt won in Cairns – he bred the Cobalt Pied that won the Nationals on the Gold Coast in 1999 and it has just gone on like that, so there are a lot of relationships of colours other than Blues that have gone into it. Last year I introduced it into my Yellow Face line and I am now introducing the blue line into the Violets with the intent of getting the Violets up to National level.

*Editor:* Will you mate Violet to Violet, when there is so much written about Violet being a lethal gene?

*Henry:* I have not put Violet to Violet. I like to try these sorts of things to see the outcome and when I've got two Violets of a quality to put together, I will do it to see what happens. I like to prove these sorts of things. I believe the lethal gene exists in some lines of Violets but I don't believe all Violets are related so I want to prove or disprove it for myself and I will do it sooner or later, probably later this year.

*Editor:* You did very well with your Clearwings this year winning first and third. Were they a surprise or did you know you had a good chance. I was told Victoria was going to win the Clearwing class, not you.

*Henry:* It was a surprise. I knew I had some reasonable Clearwings but I did not feel they were up to the quality of winning. I was told the Victorians were going to win the Greens, Clearwings and the Hen class.



*Editor:* How are you breeding your Clearwings? Are you going Clearwing to Clearwing or Clearwing to Split?

*Henry:* Well the ones that were produced last year were Clearwing to Clearwing. I have mated my Clearwings to produce splits and then put those splits back to Clearwings. This current year I've got two very good dilute hens that I am putting the Clearwings over so we will see what that produces. In theory it should produce Clearwings directly in the mating. Also in theory it should produce clear winged Clearwings whereas in my experience if you go back to Normals, you produce increased mark-

*The winning Clearwing.* Ings in the wings and then you have got to put them back to very clear winged clearwings to clean up the wings and you lose on some of the features of the Normal you had used earlier.

*Editor:* My concern is I think you might dilute the body colour as well thereby losing the contrast between body and wing.

*Henry:* Well that clearly is a possibility but I have to try things myself and see how they go. I am not convinced that will be the case but it may well be. What I think will happen is when I start mating Clearwings from these matings back together again, they will produce some Dilutes which will be waste. There is always some problem when it comes to out crossing a variety like Clearwings.

*Editor:* Are you thinking about going into the Crested Variety?

*Henry:* In one word "NO". I don't like Crests because I like the outline of the budgerigar and to me the Crest makes it lose the outline. I think it is great that some people like to breed them, as we need them for the Nationals.

*Editor:* Do you pair your birds on pedigree or visually?

*Henry:* Normally I pair much more on pedigrees than visually – I particularly like Uncles to Nieces, Aunts to Nephews and those sort of relationships.

*Editor:* How long would it take you to pair up your birds or is it easy, as you know most of your lines?

*Henry:* Some I have worked out basically as I know the relationships. I put some distantly related birds together because of their physical attributes but I am a very slow pairer of birds because normally what I do is I select the hen that I can see is in breeding condition, and then go through my lists to find the related cocks in the sort of relationships I am interested in, and put those cocks in my display cages next to the hen and then pick the one cock that physically suits the hen bird. This means that it is a slow process – I only do a few at a time. Some people have said to me t "I mated my

birds yesterday” and they have filled all their cages. I don’t do that; I pair up slowly over a period of time as the hens come into condition. I use the hens as the criteria not so much the cocks. Obviously when I am looking at the final pairing, I will not use a cock that is right out of condition.

*Editor:* How many rounds would you let them have?

*Henry:* Two normally. Sometimes if there are good ones in the two rounds, I will let the hen lay a third round and foster the eggs out.

*Editor:* If a pair of birds has bred some nice youngsters one year, would you put them down the next year?

*Henry:* I have never ever done that. You are going to, at the very best, produce the same again and you don’t get that many seasons out of a bird. If you split the pair up and mate to other birds, the second year you can bring the relationships back together again down the track.

*Editor:* What would be the oldest bird you would use?

*Henry:* The oldest I am using this year is a 1996 bred Greygreen. He was fertile last year so I am hopeful. He bred the Pied Greygreen cock that came second in the National this year.

*Editor:* How many birds would you have flying?

*Henry:* At present I basically keep around 300 breeding stock, and then it depends on any point in time how many youngsters I’ve got. Forgetting the birds that are in the cages that are going to be sold, I have the basic three hundred plus the 2002 rung youngsters that at this stage run at about 220. I normally purchase 500 rings and that tops it but sometimes I have to go back and purchase another 50 rings like I did last year.

*Editor:* You must go through a lot of seed. What is your feeding programme?

*Henry:* I get ten bags of Golden Cob Supreme every month. The breeding pairs get hulled oats, bread moistened, not soaked, in milk with canary egg and biscuit spread over the top. They get a high protein supplement, soaked wheat and oats, which I mix fifty-fifty, carrot, silver beet and chickweed. They get a very decent and varied diet. They get the carrot, silverbeet and chickweed all year round and the flight birds also get the soft food leftovers from the breeding pairs

*Editor:* How do you handle the petty jealousies in the fancy? You are a very successful breeder/exhibitor and people always want to knock the tall poppy.

*Henry:* I try to avoid it and not get involved. Walk away from trouble when you can. That is my philosophy. One of the things I have heard is that when I am involved as a selector for the Nationals and my birds are in it, than it is unfair as I select my own birds. Nobody has said it to me directly but the feedback has come back to me.

*Editor:* Don't you believe that criticism like that comes from people who have never been involved in the selection process and never been witness to it or are just plain jealous?

*Henry:* Possibly. But I would like to draw attention in particular to last year in Western Australia when I had eleven birds in the team and I was one of the selectors and only four of my birds were actually benched, and this is because if I believe one of my birds is the outstanding bird then it will go in and I feel this was proved in Western Australia with two firsts, a third and a fourth from the four birds. But if there are two birds and nothing much between them as to which bird should go in and which shouldn't on the day of the show then I will always leave my bird out and put the other one in. I have had my share of success and I would like to see others get it.

*Editor:* Well having been one of your fellow selectors on many occasions, I can back that up – you are the most honest person out when it comes to selections and I am not “sucking up” to you by the way.

*Henry:* I try to be anyway.

*Editor:* This year the preselection was judged under a different format. You were one of the three main selectors – how did you find that format.

*Henry:* I thought it worked out very well and successfully. I have made my own assessment of results that the different method has achieved because I know that there were a number of birds selected this year that would not have been selected under the former system as they were not in the first three at the end of the initial judging. One of those that comes immediately to mind is the Cobalt of Jan Hallett's that finished up winning the Blue Class at the Nationals. It was not in the first three and under the old system would not have gone to Hobart.

Likewise the Greygreen that ran second in the Nationals was not in the first three in the preselection initial judging. Those two come to mind immediately but there were something like five or six birds that under this method were put in this year but previously would not have been put in. Another one I have just thought off was the Yellow Face Cobalt which was placed somewhere around eleventh or twelfth in the preselection but finished up fifth at the Nationals and in fact was the most successful of our Yellow faces benched.

Another one that has just come to mind is the Lutino that would not have been in the team but ran third in Hobart. The different format didn't alter our final placing of third in the order of States but I believe we gained, and this is subjective, somewhere between thirty or forty points extra under the new selection process. It made us much closer to New South Wales than we would have been under the former process.

*Editor:* You know what people are going to say don't you? That the birds that were placed above these at the preselection show would have done better than the ones your fellow selectors chose.

*Henry:* Let's think of the classes. In each class one was benched that was one of the selected ones at the initial stage and in most cases, the ones the three selectors chose came above the originally selected ones. For example the Yellow face Cobalt the final selectors chose came fifth in the Nationals whereas the first selected one at the preselection came in eleventh placing. Similarly, the Lutino that the selectors brought in finished third in its class and ahead of the originally judged bird. The blue that was brought in won its class. That is the way of answering that comment. It wasn't like we eliminated the first birds. On each occasion, one of the first judged birds went in and nearly every time we brought a bird in, our selections were placed higher than the other ones.

*Editor:* Judging is always an issue. Do you find judging easy this day and age with the birds the way they are or do you feel it is a challenge every time you go out?

*Henry:* It varies – it depends on the class of birds you get. It is a challenge if you get a lot of birds that are similar and of mediocre quality. It is good and exciting when you are judging a class and you see some outstanding birds. They select themselves but when you get ten or twelve birds and they are all of very similar mediocre quality then it is much more difficult.

*Editor:* Looking at the National results, I see we have to improve our Black Eyed Selves dramatically. Have you given any consideration into branching out into them?

*Henry:* I cover enough varieties. I have thought about going into more recessive varieties and in fact last year I added another one and have gone back into the Lacewings, which I did have years ago. In fact at one stage I got my Clearwings down to only two cocks left and they were getting pretty old so I had to make a decision whether to get rid of them or purchase more and get back into them. I decided there weren't too many people breeding Clearwings especially when the two of you got out of them, therefore I decided to get them going again.

*Editor:* Very successfully done.

*Henry:* Well that is partly due to you. The birds that were at the Nationals are related to the two hens that I bought from your auction.

*Editor:* What are your feelings about splitting the Light Greens from the other Greens and the Grays from the other Blues at the Nationals?

*Henry:* Personally I don't think it is necessary. It will add a lot more classes and take more time to judge. I know the argument is that the Light Green can't compete against the Greygreen and the Skyblue and Cobalt can't compete against the Gray. That has been proved wrong a number of times as I referred to earlier the Cobalt that won, his father the Skyblue that won in Adelaide, again the Cobalt this year. If you get them good enough they can win. Mind you, you can produce skyblue from the Grays and likewise Light Green from the Greygreen. Similarly it was a light green that won the greens class this year.

*Editor:* Getting back to Clearwings again – at the National Judges workshop they had a discussion on Clearwing judging. Could you explain to us what the final decision was?

*Henry:* Well the basic decision was that it is a variety bird and that the variety had to predominate therefore they are looking for birds that have clear yellow or white wings and have a good contrast in body colour. There still has to be some balance drawn up between variety, colour and markings, and size, deportment and head qualities. In the end the judge has to make the decision on the day but it is a balance between size and variety. There are forty points for variety and sixty for type, so a bird that is only slightly ahead on conformation ethically should not now be placed ahead on one that is good on variety. It is not something that can be laid down in black and white as it all depends on the birds in front of you. This principle applies equally to other variety birds as well.

*Editor:* There were a lot of heavily marked good type Recessive Pieds at the National show which were beautiful type but too heavy in the markings. We had the same problem at the preselection show with one of Neale Love's birds which was streets ahead in type but very heavily marked.

*Henry:* And if I recall correctly, very heavily flecked in the head. Again exactly the same principle should apply. That point was made at the National Judges meeting, whilst we were talking about Clearwings, the same principle would apply to other varieties.

*Editor:* Now for the flecking issue – At the Nationals this year, flecking was not tolerated in first place at all. Do you think that should continue? For instance, magnificent birds ran in second or third placings but not first.

*Henry:* This is a personal opinion. Yes I do believe it should continue. It comes back to the same thing again as the Clearwings. There is no doubt the flecking is a fault and it has to be penalized – so a flecked bird to win in my opinion, must be a street ahead of the non flecked bird and mostly what you will find is that the flecked birds are penalized as they may well be ahead of birds in some areas but not ahead enough to carry the penalty for flecking and actually win. They will continue to be coming in the second, third and fourth placings, especially with me judging.

*Editor:* Would you like to see a ruling come in that states flecked headed birds not be placed in first position?

*Henry:* No I wouldn't as I feel that is too black and white. If you put that rule in you could conceivably, not so much in the Nationals but definitely in the local shows, get a super flecked bird and a wild budgerigar type (I am talking extremes here) as two birds in the one class and if you have the rule you mentioned, judges would have to put up the wild budgerigar type which I would not want to do as a judge. I don't like hard and fast rules which state that where you have a fault you should penalize a bird out of a place. You already have disqualification points for permanent faults which put birds out. However where you are into the fault classification where it really should be left to the judge to determine the extent of penalty that a bird should get compared to the other birds in the class – and that is clearly what judging is all about. If you have two birds that are similar, then the one with the fault should be put down.

*Editor:* What do you feel about the shifting of the Yellow Face to the bottom of the Matrix?

*Henry:* I am partly responsible for it as in the judges meeting I felt to have the Yellow face in what I call the half way house situation where some Yellow Faces of other varieties went into yellow faces whilst other Yellow Faces of other varieties went into other variety classes was a bit ridiculous. I felt it had to be one extreme or the other. They should be put high on the list so you only had the Yellow Face Normals, Cinnamons & Opalines in the Yellow Face Class and all of the others went into the other varieties or you went to the opposite extreme where all the Yellow Faces were judged in the Yellow Face class. The argument gained considerable support; I personally would like to see it in the higher position. You need consistency there and I don't think when it was in the middle there was consistency. I don't feel too strongly about either case.

*Editor:* Do you feel that if you have it at the bottom of the list so it includes all Yellow Faces whether they be Normals, Pieds, Spangles etc, that it may eliminate the Normal Yellow Face from winning as the Pieds & Spangles are the stronger birds at this stage?

*Henry:* I don't know if I can agree with you there. I feel the Normal varieties are still the stronger ones especially at National level. I have always tried to keep the Yellow Face out of the other varieties and keep it restricted to Normals, Opalines and Cinnamons. In my case, in most instances my Normal and Cinnamon Yellow Faces would be better than Spangle Yellow Faces.

*Editor:* How big is your aviary?

*Henry:* Twenty- five metres long and nine metres wide with flight cages protruding from that.

*Editor:* Getting off birds now, what do you do to relax?

*Henry:* I do work with the horses and the birds. As you know I recently retired but before then, when I came home from work a bit uptight, coming down to the bird room and checking nests etc was quite relaxing.

*Editor:* Are you retired fully or do you consult?

*Henry:* Well I haven't been doing much consultancy work in the past three or four weeks. I will probably do a bit from time to time but to be honest I have been too busy around here. I have been going outside about seven in the morning and not getting back in until about seven or eight in the evening. We are getting on top of everything now, so maybe the end of this month I will resume more consultancy work.

*Editor:* How many horses have you and Dianne got on the property?

*Henry:* I think it is about thirty eight. They take up many hours of work and then the hours you have to put into looking after the property mounts up. Garry Heuvel and Robert Peffer come over to help which assists greatly. The horses are mainly Dianne's thing although I am certainly very interested. It was really getting too much for her on her own before I retired so now we are sharing the load between us.



*Editor:* Now that you have retired, do you feel you may take a more active role in the administration side of the fancy?

*Henry:* Yes, I am already doing things with the Australian Warmblood

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Horse Association. I am Vice President. Probably next year when the selections come around I will be more prepared to do more administrative things in the budgerigar fancy as I did in the past.

Once again, I thank Henry and Dianne for welcoming us and for taking the time to answer all our questions.

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