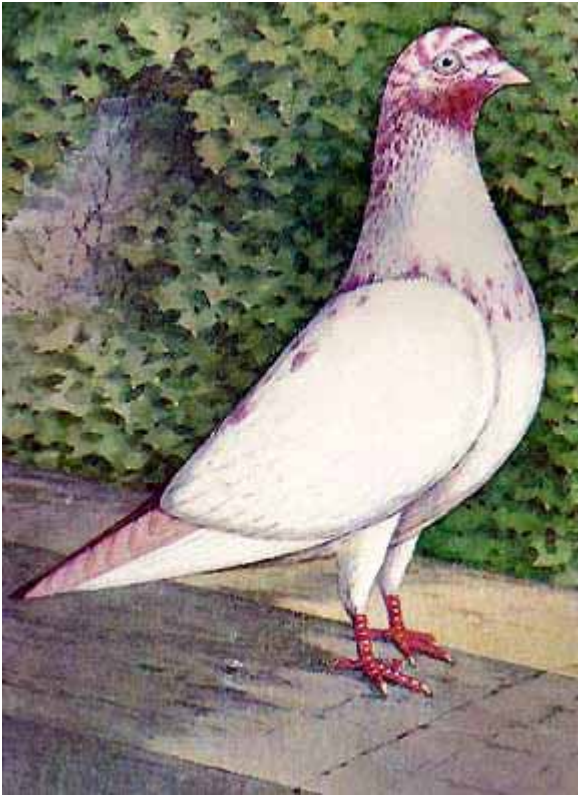


The West of England Tumbler in America

By: Chuck Zeller



The West of England Tumbler or “West” as it is mostly referred to here is compared to many breeds popular in America today a relative newcomer, having only been first imported from it’s homeland in Great Britain in the early 1900’s. Like many breeds imported from other countries that were originally developed as a flying and performing breed, West’s in America are today in the main bred for the show arena. If this is a good thing or not so good thing is often debated, but there is little doubt that the breed’s current high popularity is due to it’s attraction as a show breed and not a flying and performing breed. Interestingly in the breeds country of origin West’s are year by year also becoming primarily a show breed. Perhaps there as here city restrictions on the keeping of pigeons has brought this turn of events about?

Left: 1913 Ludlow print of a red grizzle clean leg West of England Tumbler.

Any early history on West’s both here before the 1950’s and in Great Britain back from the same years is sketchy at best as any writings on the breed or it’s fanciers for whatever reason was just not much reported on. From what information is available on the development of several flying and performing breeds in Great Britain we can learn that the West of England Tumbler traces its roots back to the old English Flying Tumbler. In writings on that breed there is written recordings of the Dutch Tumbler, Cumulet, Persian and Oriental Roller being used to develop that breed.

**Right: 1950’s Pageant of Pigeons champion.
Owner: Ralph Aldridge.**

We also can be pretty certain West of England Tumblers, Birmingham Rollers and Tipplers are first cousins being bred down from the same old English Flying Tumblers. According to early writings the three breeds began to transverse different paths of flying and performance development starting sometime during the mid to late 1800’s. In what is written on the three breeds there is nothing I’ve found that refers to West’s, Rollers or Tipplers as individual named breeds prior to about 1890, rather the three breeds were just called Flying Tumblers. In one document from 1913 which was a supplement to Pigeons & Pigeon World titled “Mr. W. H. Bell’s West of England High-Flying Tumbler Special” there are several mentions of one fancier having been a West’s fancier since 1872. Also in the same document there is mention of an old time fancier in Bristol having had West’s for sixty eight years which would mean he





started with the breed in the mid 1840's. Reading those accounts one might assume our breed has been called West of England Tumbler far earlier in time than most other writings indicate. However one might get misled by these accounts as in the same reports on these old fanciers there is mention they had flying tumblers way back then. One then might conclude that mention of these old fanciers having West's before about 1890 meant they started in West's when the breed was still called just a flying tumbler! I would suppose for historical purposes based on the majority of accounts it would be most accurate to say the West of England Tumbler as a named breed became such in the late 1880's-90's.

Left: 1909 Flying West by Ludlow. Black baldhead.

So let's recap, we can be fairly certain our breed became a distinct breed named West of England Tumbler not much before the year 1900. We know the breed was developed in and around Bristol, England from the English Flying Tumbler, we know in

the background of that breed was the Dutch Tumbler (not the Old Dutch Tumbler we have today), Oriental Roller, Persian Roller and Cumulet. We know from available literature that the West of England Tumbler, Birmingham Roller and Tippler are all of the same basic parentage. We know all three of these breeds shortly before 1900 were called just tumblers. Much information on West's can be read in "West of England Flying Tumbler" by Jeffery Oldham which was published in 1980. Mr. Oldham was a long time British West fancier.

Skipping to the breeds early history in America based on personal accounts related to me by several of the early West fanciers here the first imports came to Southern California in 1913, the second in 1916, the third in 1920 and the fourth in 1925. Tom Ratalic was the recipient of the first importation, John Beckman the second, Robert V. Moore the third and Dudley Schumacher the fourth. There may have been other importations but none of the early fanciers I spoke to indicated they knew of others. One early fancier Bob Eaton did relate to me he knew of a couple importations of clean leg West's to Canada sometime in the early 1900's. Some of these clean leg West's Bob said ended up in the New York area but within a few years seemed to vanish. Bob did keep a family of these clean leg West's up until about 1975. Ed Foote another West fancier also kept a few pair of clean leg West's.

**Right:
Show champion. Black baldhead.
Owner: Brian McCormick.**





Left:
1982 Pageant of Pigeons champion. Yellow mottle.
Owner: Larry Eastman.

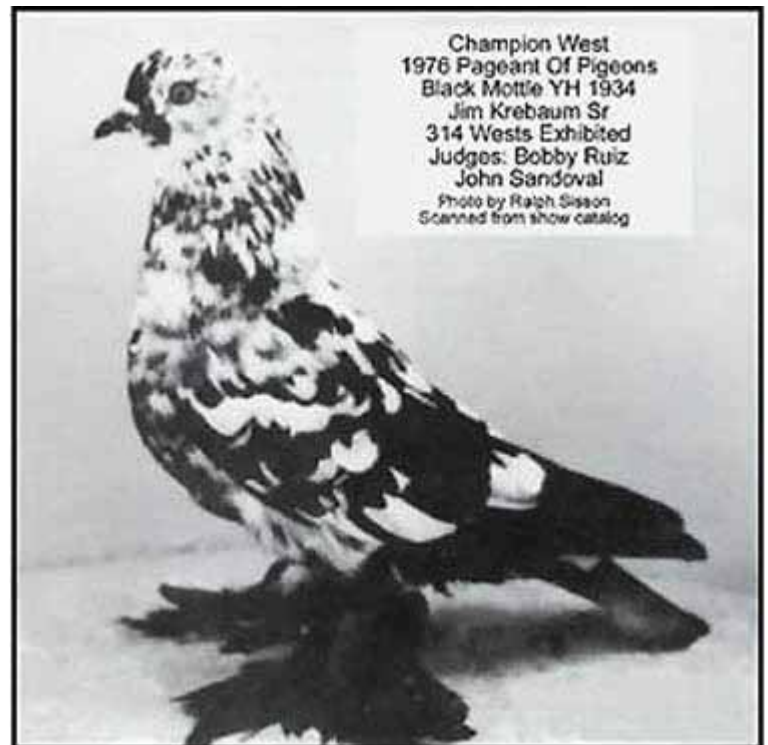
Within a few years of the 1928 importation West's were seen to become very popular and many fanciers wanted a start in the breed. That presented a problem Bob said as the demand for West's far exceeded the available supply. Based on what Bob related to me the solution was to cross another breed to the West's already here as to import more West's from Great Britain was cost prohibitive plus there was much turmoil in Great Britain which would lead to WWII. That meant to get any pigeons from there was near impossible even if one had the financial means to pay for the birds and shipping. Also entering the picture was that British West fanciers like all pigeon fanciers

there due to rationing of grain were forced to cut back to only a few select pairs. Some fanciers too were serving their country in the armed forces so had to dispose of their pigeons or entrust their birds to a friend or family member.

Right:
1976 Pageant of Pigeons champion.
Black mottle.
Owner: James Krebaum Sr.

According to Bob Eaton West fanciers here took the path of crossing their West's to other breeds for several reasons besides to increase the number of birds available to fill the growing demand. Bob related to me some wanted more colours than what were imported, some wanted to instill more performance in their West's, still others wanted to increase the muff size on their West's.

From what I was told mainly baldhead West's were imported but spangles in red and yellow also came over. In baldheads primarily reds, yellows, blacks, duns, blue bars and silver bars were imported. Bob did say he saw a couple cream bars, strawberries and ticked lavenders but that was it. I ask Bob about muff size and he said on average the muffs would cover no more than a silver dollar and most were what would be called grouse muffed. He also told me hock feathers such as we see on today's West's were non existent.





**Left: Red bar Grizzle pattern self.
Owner: Van Copple.**

When I ask Bob about the markings on the early baldheads he said basically they were all over the place with deep bibs, high cut bibs, V bibs and really wide bibs that were rounded. Bob said the cut on the back of the head went way down the neck almost to the point the bib terminated on the front of the neck, others he said were cut really nice and would be considered ideal today.

I ask what about the flights, secondaries and underneath of the baldheads on average. He answered in the main they were really close to 10X10, as for underneath he said they were mostly white.

He then added coloured feathers underneath did not become a problem till crosses were made and hock feather length increased do to those crosses. I then ask about the import spangles as far as how they were marked. Bob said on average the mottles (fanciers here did not call the imports spangles) were 75-90% white with the majority having coloured feathers only in the neck area down to the shoulders and down the chest but some did have coloured feathers on the wing shields. In answer to my questions on the flights and tail Bob said most had all white flight and tail feathers plus were pretty much all white underneath. Bob then said he saw a couple grizzles or what we would today call tortoiseshells plus a couple black grizzles.

**Right:
Best yellow baldhead 2006.
Owner: Brian McCormick**



What may seem odd to any who have seen West's in the few early English prints and photos published before 1940 is that in those there are many badges, beards, saddles, checks and barred self's yet there are no reports of those coming over here. Also in the early prints and photos there are far more clean leg West's depicted than muffed.



Left:
Andalusian baldhead National champion 2006.
Owner: Brian McCormick

To explain that we must again refer to what was transpiring in Great Britain about the time the first imports of West's came to America. As pointed out previously about that time Great Britain was more than a little embroiled in the turmoil that would lead to WWII.



And again as pointed out previously all fanciers in Great Britain at that time due to there being a shortage of grain and going off to serve their country cut their stock to only a select few pairs. Beings after WWII there is hardly a mention of clean leg West's, badges, beards, self's, rose wings etc one would guess that fanciers favoured the baldheads and spangles. That would explain why basically only baldheads and spangles came to America in the pre 1930 imports.

Above:
1970 champion. Brown baldhead.
Owner: Chuck Zeller.



Left:
Silver bar self 2005 National champion. Owner:
Terry Brechbill.

Getting back to West's and West fanciers in America according to what was told to me by many of the old fanciers that got into West's before 1941 fanciers crossed original imports and the youngsters of them to Old Dutch Tumblers, Birmingham Rollers, Danzig Highflyers, Cumulets, Tipplers, Oriental Rollers, Russian Tumblers and Long Face Tumblers.

Right:
Black mottle.
Owner: Chuck Zeller

Of course all these breeds were not crossed by the same fanciers to their West's but rather these breeds were crossed singularly by various fanciers. Some crossed to get more performance (usually more tumbling), some to add some different than what was available in West's color, some to get longer and fuller muffs, some to perfect or add some marking or pattern to their West's. Some after a cross found their West's no longer flew as high and long as the original West's or no longer tumbled so they crossed another breed (usually Rollers) to their West's to get these traits back.



Below:
Two Gray lace white bar (reduced black) baldheads.
Owner: Bob Christman.



No matter the reasons different early West fanciers crossed other breeds to their West's they did so. Soon there were very few pure as they came over from Great Britain West's here. Adding even more to the dilution of the original import West blood was that most of the fanciers here when America entered WWII joined some branch of the service.



**Left: 2005 Grand National best self, white.
Owner: Bob Christman.**

Most were forced to dispose of their West's or as was the case previously with English fanciers cut back to just a few select pairs which were to be cared for by a family member or friend. The majority by necessity sold their West's to fanciers who for one reason or another did not have to join some branch of the service. All of course hoped they would return after the war and again start up with West's. They also hoped they would be able to find some of their family of West's. Unfortunately that was usually not the case as during the four or so years they were gone their West's ended up here there and everywhere. Returning veterans found it almost impossible to track down any of their previous West's so just went searching for any West's to restart with.

I'm sure most have at one time or another gotten rid of birds to a pet shop, feed store, friend or just another fancier. I'm just as sure most down the road having decided to get one or two back have found the norm is they once leaving your loft seemed to vanish into some black hole. That's kind of what faced those West fanciers who tried finding some of their old West stock after returning from serving their country during WWII. It is amazing how within a couple years birds one disposed of or put into the hands of other fanciers just can not be found. Fortunately there where in the hands of fanciers like my mentor Joe Brown lots of West's to restart in. Joe bought his Baldhead and mottle West's from one of the original importers of West's just before that fancier entered the service. By the time the war ended Joe had several hundred West's all bred down from West's off of the imports. Once the returning former West fanciers scouted around and visited those like Joe it was not long before they were back in West's.

Once the previous fanciers of West's had lofts built, gathered stock pairs and had young West's up in the air they began getting together with other West fanciers to exchange birds, sell or buy a few West's and just generally talk West's. The next step was to form a West club. That they did and the West of England High Flying Tumbler Association was born. Before WWII a West club many fanciers belonged to was called the National West of England Tumbler Club. Why that club was not restarted after WWII I could find no one who knew. With the forming of the West of England High Flying Tumbler Association (later the words high flying were dropped but when none seem to recall) members started holding lawn shows which were well attended. Though most West fancier back then primarily kept West's for the air they did enjoy the comradeship the lawn shows offered plus the competition against the best West's of the other members was fun. As time went on the club went through many ups and downs primarily due to the ever on going thought by many that the shows would lead to the demise of the true flying West. West fanciers also from 1947 through the 1970's could show their West's at Southern California Roller Club lawn shows as that club provided classes for flying type West's. In fact the majority of the clubs first officers were West fanciers. The biggest West show of each year even back then was at the Pageant of Pigeons, entries of flying type West's at the Pageant generally averaged just a bit under or over one-hundred birds.

In the early 1950's a new West began to make it's appearance at shows in Southern California, this new West was called the Show West of England Tumbler. The Show West was developed by Leslie F. Stroud of San Gabriel, California by crossing flying type West's to Long Face Muff and Clean Leg Tumblers. The Show West had a round and broad head like a Long Face Tumbler but not quite the pronounced forward bulging frontal of the LF Tumbler. The

beaks on Show West's were shorter than on a flying type West but not as short and boxy as on LF Tumblers. Body wise Show West's on average were a bit shorter and cobbier than a flying type West. Show West fanciers also wanted longer and fuller muffs, longer hock feathers and their West's to station with the heads held back with the eyes more over the legs rather than as was wanted on a flying type West over the front toes. The Show West standard listed all manors of colours in baldheads, mottles, splashes, grizzles and a number of self colours. By far the baldheads were most popular, in fact I attended countless West of England Tumbler Assn. shows from 1953-68 and do not recall seeing but a half a dozen mottles shown in all those years. In self's I saw a very few whites. In baldheads hands down the majority in shows were blue bars, blacks and silver bars. Few reds, yellows, red bars, cream bars or other colours were shown in baldheads.

Right: Red bar self. Owner: Chuck Zeller.

The West of England Tumbler Assn. from the early 1950's-1968 was disbanded and restarted a number of times. In 1968 the club was disbanded for the final time. One might ask why the club came and went so many times. The answer to that depends on the time period as for instance before the advent of the Show West membership went up and down depending on if there was or was not a rift going on between those that favoured showing their West's and those that thought shows would be the ruination of the breed as a flying and performing breed. After the Show West was developed and gained favour with a fair number of fanciers those fanciers took a leadership role in the club. That led to more emphasis on Show West's than flying type West's in the clubs shows which in turn led to even more dissatisfaction by the majority of flying type West fanciers/club members. The problem was none of the flying type fanciers/club members stepped up to serve as officers so quite naturally the Show West fanciers ran the club and shows as they saw fit and to favour the Show West. Interestingly even with the dissatisfaction voiced by the flying type West fanciers at most lawn shows held by the West of England Tumbler Assn. flying type West entries were double and more then those in the Show West classes. Also of interest was entries at Southern California Roller Club shows in the Flying West classes always remained high.



In 1968 the West of England Tumbler Assn. was disbanded for the final time as the leaders of the club who were Show West fanciers went into raising Long Face Muff and or Clean Leg Tumblers. Pretty much after that the Show West did a disappearing act as a breed. Flying type West fanciers now had only the SCRC lawn shows and Pageant of Pigeons to show their West's. Perhaps the demise of the West of England Tumbler Assn. for good was a blessing in disguise. Flying type West's fanciers had been so dissatisfied with the club for so long it is doubtful even had the flying type West fanciers decided to restart and run the club there was just such a stigma attached to the club name after the development of the Show West and it's devotees taking over the club it likely would have folded within a few years. In 1968 shortly after the demise of the West of England Tumbler Assn. flying type West fanciers who belonged to and showed at all SCRC shows began talking about forming a new club devoted to West's. The majority of fanciers said they would join and support a new club only if it supported flying type West's but not Show West's. It was decided to talk to as many flying type West fanciers as possible to get their input on a new club. Overwhelmingly those contacted said yes they

would join a new club, support its lawn shows and the West meet at the Pageant of Pigeons. Some said they would join if the new club would set up flying contests. After many jaw sessions at SCRC shows it was decided the new club would be named the Southern California Flying West of England Tumbler Club and the inaugural show would be held at the 1969 Pageant of Pigeons. A standard was written, copies printed and distributed, membership cards printed and awards gathered for our first club show. As I recall we had twenty five members by the time the Pageant rolled around. Of those ten were juniors. At the Pageant we signed up about ten more members. You might say we were off and running at full throttle.



Left: Pageant of Pigeons Champion. Blue velvet baldhead. Owner: Brian McCormick.

Overall the club ran smooth for the first few years, sure we had some downturns in participation at our shows due to losing a few fanciers who got out of West's but generally we were doing fine. All of a sudden in 1971 we started picking up a number of out of state members and especially on the east coast. Before long we had a dozen New York members alone. Next thing was our members started getting in droves inquiries from out of state people for West's. Things were looking very rosy for our new West club. Unfortunately wham out of the black depths we hit a snag, seems like some due to nothing but greed and for the sake of a quick buck decided to send to out of state fanciers/club members pure culls they picked up for little of nothing at feed stores. Needless to say we had some mighty unhappy members mostly from the

New York area, next thing we know we lost most of those New York members as they decided to start their own club and submit a standard they wrote to the NPA. That standard in part allowed for baldheads to have down to eight white flights and up to three white secondary feathers on each wing. A round head and short beak also was called for. Who can blame them as the above were the type West's sent out by some here in So. Calif.

What to do now was the question we in the Southern California Flying West of England Tumbler Club ask ourselves. The damage was done but we decided in 1972 to change the name of the club to the National West of England Tumbler Club. This was not done to run and hide or act like it was the former named club that was responsible for stiffing the out of state fanciers/club members. Rather we changed the club name because besides the issue of some selling culls to out of state members many of our out of state members expressed to us that they felt they had little or no say in West's goings on. They explained the club was by its name viewed as a local So. Calif. West club, all the officers were from So. Calif. no offers of support for shows elsewhere were proposed so in essence they felt their dues were all going to local So. Calif. fanciers. That was pretty much true so those here thought by re-naming the club the NWOETC and dividing it into an eastern and western division with an eastern and western Vice President out of state members would number one be more apt to offer input to the club and number two help us make the NWOETC a true national club representing West's fanciers all across America. In part we were successful but mainly we were not as we failed to hold on to many of the back east fanciers. In fact within a very few years most got out of West's. Somehow we needed to come up with a format that offered outside of So. Calif. fanciers a true voice in the running of the club and in the breeds direction. That down the road would come to pass.



Left:
Show Champion. Red baldhead.
Owner: Terry D. Bishop.

Starting around 1975 the West of England Tumbler was on the path to becoming an outright show breed in America, few and fewer of those taking up the breed and joining the NWOETC had any interest at all in flying their West's. In So. Calif. due to city restrictions in older once small animal friendly towns coupled with urban sprawl into undeveloped or agriculture areas where new home lots were postage stamp size and covenants were put in place against all but a dog or cat being kept, if one wanted to keep pigeons they had better keep them hidden. In other words flying or even letting out any breed of pigeons was risking being told by city officials to dispose of them post haste. Adding to the West becoming in the main a show breed was the fact that more and more new West fanciers saw their first West's at a show, they were attracted to the breed by it's beauty, station, colour and

markings. They in most cases knew nothing of the breed's proud heritage as a flying and performing breed, they did not know the breed was developed a hundred years before as a suburb aerial performer.

By 1991 West's were really on the upswing in popularity in many areas of America, new colours, markings and patterns were being seen in shows on a regular bases. A few of the So. Calif. fanciers like Jim Krebaum Sr. and Larry Eastman began to travel to and enter West's in shows across America. Black self's, black mottles and andalusian self's were on top frequently in shows, these three were such standouts in the shows more and more new and other breed fanciers became drawn to the breed and the NWOETC. As more and more outside of So. Calif. fanciers took up West's and joined the NWOETC it became obvious the club had to reorganize under a format that gave all members representation in the running of the club and in the direction the breed would go in. The old format of an eastern and western district just did not serve that purpose. Even West fanciers in So. Calif. which was still the hotbed of West's and who's members by far made up the majority in the NWOETC were dissatisfied with the clubs current setup.

Right: 2006 Champion. Yellow mottle.
Owner: Brian McCormick.

In 1991 after much input from West fanciers a Constitution and By Laws was drafted and voted in. The new Constitution and By Laws called for the club to be split into six districts each with a district director elected by only the members in that district. There would be an eastern and western Vice President voted on only by members



in a specific area. The President, Secretary Treasure, Band Director and Election Commissioner could be from any district. The NWOETC also would be affiliated with the National Pigeon Association, the club would hold it's annual meeting and show each year at the NPA Grand National show, the club would officially host meets besides the NPA Grand National, the Western Young Bird Show and Eastern Young Bird Show. Awards would also be put up by the NWOETC at one show in each district per year. The club in addition adopted by a majority vote the 1991 Diane Jacky West drawing as it's standard drawing and would make available to members WEST bands. Also in 1991 due to West fanciers in California wanting more local shows the Southern California West of England Tumbler Club was brought back into being. The word flying was dropped from the name as few anymore flew their West's. It might be interesting to some to know that during the 1990's there were several local West clubs affiliated with the NWOETC. Some of those were the Central California West of England Tumbler Club, Northern California West of England Tumbler Club, Go West in Oregon, United West's in Utah, Southern California West of England Tumbler Club, Albuquerque West Club and a club in Colorado. Most of these clubs went by the wayside after a few years for various reasons except the SCWOETC, Albuquerque club and Central California club. Of all the local clubs the SCWOETC has been the most successful being in reality as strong as the NWOETC. That no doubt is due to so many West fanciers residing in So. Calif. and after 90 plus years that area still being the center of West's in America.

After 1991 with the reorganization of the NWOETC West fanciers especially outside of So. Calif. hoped support for the club would increase greatly. However for a few years that did not come to pass, in my opinion that was directly related to the reforming of the SCWOETC in the same year. Far too many So. Calif. West fanciers saw no reason to support the national club as they had now a local club that offered them directly more than enough West activity. Some even dropped out of the national club while others only maintained their membership to get WEST bands. For many of us that was a sad turn of events as we viewed those with such a mindset as only looking at the short term, caring only about what went on in their local area but nothing about what was best for the breed and all West fanciers. For several years after the 1991 reorganization the NWOETC and restarting of the SCWOETC the later became stronger and stronger while the NWOETC remained rather stagnant except for an influx of outside of So. Calif. members. Things though by 1995 were about to change for the better as far as the NWOETC was concerned.



**Left: Pageant of Pigeons res. champion.
Owner: Doug Boyland.**

Beginning in 1995 several once very active West fanciers rejoined the West show and club scene, also some veteran other breed fanciers took up West's. That combination proved within a few years to work to the national clubs benefit and in fact even to the S.C.W.O.E.T.C.'s benefit. In addition for a several years there had been a committee in place to update the West written standard so it reflected the majority of West's being bred, the West's being shown and the 1991 standard drawing. That effort was in a stall and had been for a couple years. Starting in late 1995 many or at least enough voiced their opinion that it was not in the best interests of the breed or clubs to have an approved standard drawing and written standard that did not mimic each other so the written standard needed to be updated.

They reasoned that West fanciers were breeding for, showing and judges were picking West's that conformed to the standard drawing but not the written standard. Second some ask why there was at most shows a copy of the written standard the judges would refer to and even quote from in making their picks yet their final picks did not represent the type West in what they referred to and quoted from. None of the judges had an answer except to say "We more go by the standard drawing." That made little or no sense as most of the time they did not ask to see nor was there out on display a copy of the standard drawing. Adding to the confusion was that a number of the veteran fanciers and club officers said the written standard was fine as it was so needed no updating or only a couple clarifications in some areas which they said meant to some colour descriptions and the mottle description. Even more confusing was that those arguing against a written standard update were fanciers here in So. Calif. only. Fanciers/club members elsewhere were pretty much unanimous in their views the standard needed updating from beginning to end.

After much discussion the standard committee went forward with its work and finally in 1999 an updated written standard that closely mimicked the standard drawing was approved, submitted to the NPA and accepted. The new standard was also overwhelmingly accepted by the SCWOETC. Finally we had two West standard documents that jived with each other. Amazingly or not maybe not so after the new written standard was adopted West's and both the NWOETC and SCWOETC took off. None of the three has much slowed since.

What was really gratifying is after the standard update the NWOETC and SCWOETC really began to work together. That too seemed to kick the popularity of the West of England Tumbler into high gear. By the year 2004 new West fanciers it seemed were coming on board every few weeks. Most important was the breed was gaining quite a number of long time other breed fanciers. It seemed from conversations with them the top reasons for their getting into West's and the NWOETC were that they liked the abundance of activity and level of competition the breed offered. They liked the helpful and friendly attitude of the West fanciers; they liked the availability of top stock birds offered by top West fanciers at very reasonable prices. They liked that West's needed no special handling requirements as far as problems in getting them to produce youngsters, they needed no trimming to breed, no fostering of their young and were unadorned of fancy or exaggerated feathering that restricted their producing round after round of young.

**Right: 2007 National champion. Red self.
Owner: Matt Matuska.**

They especially said they liked that West's were available in just about every colour; pattern and marking pigeons came in. Today in the year 2008 West's continue to gain in popularity across America. Veteran fanciers who have raised and shown West's for many long years are delighted our breed and clubs have been on such an upward spiral. None of us could have envisioned such a scenario way back when the SCWOETC and NWOETC were first formed. Most certainly none of us even dared dream we would see what has transpired in West's up through today when we first started in the breed.

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