



Member Profile

Stuart Williams

a focus on auctioneering

Stuart and his family had pet Budgerigars for many years before they became involved with the BSNSW in the early 1990s when Stuart was introduced to David Smith, then Chairperson of the Western Area Branch, who gave him some show birds. In Stuart's words, this introduction 'started a very pleasant time and many friends with budgerigar breeders.' Stuart is currently secretary of the Hills District Branch.

One of Stuart's major contributions to the Fancy has been as a successful auctioneer at many budgerigar auctions. Here he shares his experiences and expertise about auctioneering for the benefit of vendors, buyers and Branches.

How did you get started in auctioneering and involved with auctioneering Budgerigars?

I started as an auctioneer in Bathurst in the early 1970s with the stock and station agents, Elder Smith Goldsborough Mort (now commonly known as Elders Real Estate). I suppose it all happened by accident when, as the Real Estate and Property Sales Manager, I organised a house clearing sale. Unfortunately our regular auctioneer's car broke down and my Branch Manager announced to me, 'It's all yours!' I looked at him in dismay, but he said, 'You can do it!' After about the first five lots my throat was that dry nothing was coming out. However, with plenty of water and support from the team, we got through some 300 lots.

From then on the voice improved and with more and more clearing sales and property auctions I progressed to the stock sales. This was an eye opener—some of the signals that were used varied from the wink of an eye to the shake of a pencil. One of the best auctioneers that I saw in those days was Tony Croft who at the time was the senior auctioneer for Dalgety Australia. As a lot of people in Northern NSW and around Tamworth know, Tony and his wife Gliss are well-known budgerigar breeders and National winners.

I first got involved with auctioning budgerigars at the Western Area Branch when they used to have in-house auctions and David Smith asked me would I like to do them. At the time Allan Ryder used to do all the auctions in NSW, but when he moved to Victoria I sought of took over.

How do you prepare for an auction?

Preparing for an auction in some cases can be very demanding. Some auctions can take days to prepare, getting from the vendors all the paperwork, extra comments and details that are

required. For auctions like the Hills District Branch Auction, it is a matter of preparing on the day because all the paperwork has been so expertly done for me by Mark Chidel and the Hills District Committee. As far as legal requirements are concerned, you have to make sure that the Conditions of Sale are read, whether buyers listen or not—as long as they are read then they are binding.

How do you conduct an auction?

When conducting an auction you can't plan any timing for each lot—it all depends on the lot—obviously, the longer it takes the more money it is bringing. A lot of auctions would be over a lot quicker if the buyers who know what a bird's value is were prepared to bid higher in the beginning. It would save a lot of time as well as probably not costing them as much money in the long run. Those who want a particular bird and want to start bidding at a low price let everyone else in on the bidding and, as with most auctions, it is IMPULSE. If a bird is worth say around \$500 and someone starts the bidding at \$50, it lets the smaller buyer in and, because of the impulse and adrenalin, these bidders will keep going. If they started the bird at say \$300 it sometimes takes away the impulse buyer. This is not to say we don't want the smaller buyer—they are essential at any auction.

What are some of the challenges you have encountered conducting auctions?

There are always challenges when you are doing an auction. At the start of the day you have scratchings and bird changes. These are things that happen at every bird auction, but the most frustrating thing is when go through the changes and the bird isn't what you have been told it is. I asked a seller one day, 'How come you have so

many scratchings and changes?' The answer was, 'Because I sell so many birds privately I don't know which ones I will sell and I have to change them.'

As far as pitfalls are concerned, the biggest problem an auctioneer has is when people think it is an afternoon picnic and start waving to each other across the room. As an auctioneer you are looking for those signals and you take it as being a bid only to find out that it is a wave to their friends.

The other problem for an auctioneer is people who want to wait to the very last second to bid. They quite often don't get the lot and then want to argue about the bid. But, after a few misses, they soon wake up to bid early. It is mostly the same people at each auction who do this.

Have you had any unusual or funny experiences auctioneering Budgerigars?

Unusual and funny experiences are few and far between so you have to try and make some fun as you go. However, one unusual experience was when I was accused of selling a bird to a friend. The particular accuser was one of those people who like to test your patience and bid as the hammer is falling. But you get over those instances when the next lot comes around. Most sellers are very easy to get on with as are the buyers.

What advice would you give sellers?

Probably the only advice I can give is don't put rubbish into an auction—send them to the pet shop where they belong.

I believe the best way to present your birds is exactly the same way you would prepare them for a show. The better they look the more they are going to make for you.

What advice would you give the first-time visitor to an auction?

My advice to first-timers at an auction is to just watch what is going on for a while. See what is going on before you start bidding or sit with someone who knows how auctions work.

What have been some of your memorable auction experiences?

My most memorable experience would have to be the 2004 Nationals at Coffs Harbour—as big a thrill as selling the first million dollar property in Bathurst. It was state against state, especially after NSW had won the title—you could have a dig at the other states for trying to buy NSW birds so they could try to beat us the following year!

Another super buzz was also in 2004 at the Hills District Auction. Buyers came from all over Australia to see and bid on two Albino brothers from Cec and Brenda Gearing from Western Australia. They made \$5,000 each.

It is at times like this when you really enjoy the job in front of you.

What advice for a successful auction would you give Branches?

The elements for a successful bird auction are very simple for Branches, whether they are having a small auction at their Annual Show or a major auction as big as what the Hills District Branch has. Make sure you have some big name sellers and that you have reasonable birds that are going to sell. Try not to have reserve prices as there is nothing worse than having to pass a bird in—it seems to put a stopper on some buyers.

If you want your auction to improve, cut down on the numbers of birds, improve the quality and have some good breeders to supply birds. If all this comes together your Branch will have happy sellers, contented buyers and an auctioneer who has had a successful day

Interview by Marilyn Harrington