

HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA

"Saving the breeds that were the foundation of our sheep and wool industry"



NEWSLETTER NO 19 July 2010

Life Goes On ! Or Does It ?

By Ivan Heazlewood

"You silly thing!" She said it quite a few times during last winter. It is not that she is a vindictive, nagging woman by any means. It was really only a bit of benevolent advice tinged with tolerance, affection even.

It would come after we had opened the curtains on mid-winter mornings and could see, as we lay in bed, the decrepit old ram slowly, painfully, struggling to his feet.

"You silly thing" she would say "that old ram will never get any lambs, you should send him to the pet food man"

Strange isn't it how women never fully understand the durability of male virility. Mind you there were often times when I wondered if she could well be right. He wasn't a very robust specimen. He had been around for a long time and was now too frail to survive the fighting that always goes on when the rams get boxed up after the autumn mating. He was definitely the sort that qualifies for the special little paddock near the house. The eyes were getting dull, the ribs were beginning to hollow out a bit, the wool, though still showing character had lost much of its splendour. But the legs! Oh the legs were the things that caught your attention on a cold frosty morning. They were stiff and rickety and seemed to move in all sorts of uncontrollable directions.

Was it worthwhile? Would he make it? Logic of course said "no", but then sentiment would take over, I could not dismiss some of his achievements. Born in a far country, he had taken the high flight, he had brought new genes to the flock and had brought his distinction on himself.

Each year some of his sons and daughters had, early, claimed attention, they had joined the exclusive group which merited familiarity with lupins and Lucerne, they had gained credits at local contests. Several had joined the elite of our land, as they made the crusade, carpet on the floor to the "Big One". They had experienced the night-long maritime excursion and seen the milling crowds of unenlightened humans. Beneath the brilliant banners and streaming lights and before tiered stands filled with the country's critics they had lined up with the nation's best. Lined up!! They had gone to the top of the line and walked away with the broad blues.

The old boy had indeed done us proud and I felt that I owed him something, a reward for services rendered as it were. Logically, of course, it was one of his sons which should have had priority. There is no progress in a stud, the pundits say, unless each succeeding generation is better than the last, but it would be nice if he could make it through the winter and have a handful of special ewes.

Spring, I told myself, brings renewed life, but my confidence diminished as September passed (drop him a handful of oats as you feed the show sheep) and October waned and he could still hobble from point to point. Mind you, there was some hope in the fact that by November the hind legs, on which the venture so much depended, were decidedly better than the front.

December and January came and the attention of "she who delivered judgment" was diverted to Christmas, garden and grandchildren. No comment was made but I secretly felt that the time was approaching when I should draw attention to a quickening step and a brighter eye.

This has been an unusual season for summer rains, green grass in February, the ewes might cycle, perhaps the rams could go out a few days early.

So half a dozen good ewes were selected, the old bloke fitted with a saddle harness and put back on his familiar territory.

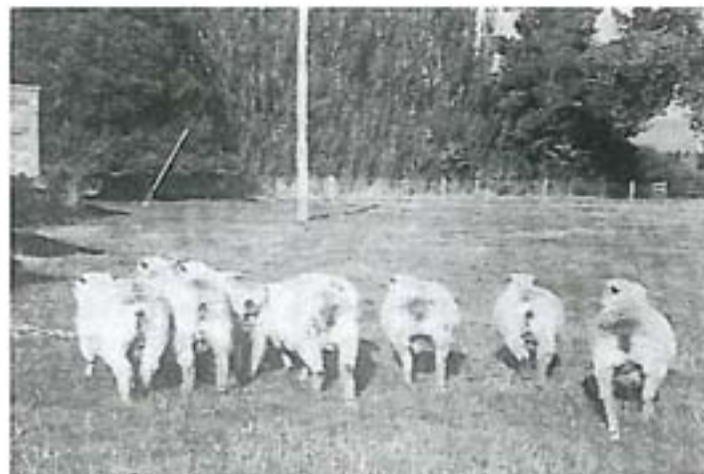
Of course other rams were joined on the same day, good rams, young rams, reliable rams eager rams, but there is no plausible explanation of the house paddock event of February 25th.

Now like you I can, to some extent, read the sheep's mind and predict what they will do but I am sure that sheep can't read the human mind – or can they? Did that old ewe sense my anxiety and decide to set my mind to rest to prove a point?

In any case of all the flock she was the first off the mark, or under the mark, with a mark, and before mid March 100% of his little group were showing blue bums.

I didn't exactly say "I told you so," but I did draw "her" attention to the happenings over the garden fence.

"Don't count your chickens" she said. "He may yet be infertile".



Off the mark, under the mark and with a mark!

Well of course, as those autumn days progressed, I was reasonably confident. Was there not some visual evidence, a group of liberally marked blue bums. I was not cocky, mind you, but mildly confident. There was always the chance that "she" could be right. After all, what guarantee of new life does a blue grease mark really portray? Energy, perhaps, is indicated but not necessarily fertility.

However as the second half of March passed and April matured justification for allowing the old ram a last fling seemed more and more reasonable. He resented having his small harem removed and walked the fence looking for new conquests. In his mind the mating season or indeed mating "ad infinitum" was by no means over. He exuded confidence and with some minor reservations I could share it.

Isn't it strange how those first frosts of May can bring reality, reassessment: apprehension even? Those balmy days of April can lull you into a false sense of security. Almost as if the confident warm days of summer will last forever. As if the outcome of every action in March is positive, as if every seed you have sown will germinate, as if every ewe with a raddle mark on her just must be in lamb.

May is different. May cools both conviction and confidence. May brings warnings of the difficulties ahead, of plans that have crumbled, of projects that have come to naught, of March matings that have been unsuccessful.

May can be soul shattering but it does condition you for the dreary days of June when the mind seems to fill with anxieties. Those shorter working days which leave so many hours to stew over petty problems. Have you been foolishly impractical? Has sentiment and vanity brought disaster? Has old age failed the flock?

July is odd. There is no logical reason why July should be uplifting, but it can be. In July the days, although getting longer, seem darker, the mud is deeper and the frosts are heavier, the rainfall is higher but the grass is shorter. July is topsy-turvy, the valuable rams are forgotten and the ewes receive all the attention. For March mated ewes July brings crutching time, revelation and dare I say, elation!

Well not quiet elation, too early for that; perhaps we should say satisfaction, for although I dare not draft the old fellow's ewes off and actually count the number of swelling udders, work out the percentage and walk a little higher I could see most of them were in lamb.

You could say that August is lambing month and so it is, but for me it was the month for diplomacy. In March, I hadn't exactly said "I told you so" but I had drawn her attention to the blue burns on the small flock over the garden fence and received a sobering reply. How the old ewes had all lambed down and the tailing, tagging and recording had taken place and a sense of panic crept over me because the results were just too good.

Actually I should have been quiet pleased with myself, my judgement had been vindicated, the old ram did serve his few ewes, he was fertile, there were good lambs on the ground. I could well have been triumphant and claimed a victory but that would have been silly as there were important things at stake.

I have never before thought of crutching as a blessed event but this time it was for it gave me time to develop a strategy, to prepare for a question I knew would inevitably come. For most people a crisis causes their past to loom before them, but for me it was the future I feared. I thought of all the good things in life which after many years I had come to expect as normal but which could easily be withdrawn. If I used the wrong words or even the wrong tone could I be forced to accept cold milk rather than hot on my breakfast cereals? Was it likely that the much savoured cup of after-dinner coffee would fail to automatically appear at my elbow, or, perish the thought, was it possible that the electric blanket might not be turned on?

There must be no suggestion of victory, success or superiority. This was certainly to be an answer which needed few words and an even tone so that when she asked "Did that old croak of a ram really get any of those ewes in lamb?" I simply said: "Yes all of them; mostly twins".

-- And -- "Life went on".

This article has been reprinted in memory of Mrs Beverly Heazlewood who passed away peacefully in mid June 2010. Many Heritage Sheep Breeders and Tasmanian Sheep Breeders attended Beverly and Ivan's 60th Wedding Anniversary in their historical farm barn in November 2007, a very joyous occasion with both Beverly and Ivan sharing many happy anecdotes of their life together.



Life goes on! August 1996 with progeny on the ground will the "old fello" retire!

Lincoln's Saved

50 Lincoln's were saved from the Gippsland Hills by Brian and Helen Harker, and resettled at Major Plain in the Dookie Hills in North East Victoria under the prefix Heljoy, flock number 652.

A small flock was originally selected by Katie Brown from the Beattie Farms flock and the Richardson Brothers flock and transferred but not registered. Today the flock has grown to 50 mixed aged ewes and rams.

In May 2010 Heljoy Lincoln's made their debut in the show ring at the Strong Wool Breeders Fair.

In a breed where the numbers of flocks and sheep are not great this rescue is very significant, congratulations to the new stud masters and every success to the Heljoy stud.



At home in the Dookie Hills, Heljoy Lincoln's

**Annual General Meeting
Heritage Sheep Australia
Australian Sheep and Wool Show, Bendigo
Sunday, 18th July 2010, at 12 noon.**

October 2010 Newsletter No 20

Thankyou to all those members who have contributed to this issue.

The next deadline is 1st October 2010. I would be delighted for any contributions from members, either email or post.

Email Jacque @ mcarchitect.com.au