

# RICHMOND

## M E R I N O S

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## WELCOME TO OUR 2017 NEWSLETTER

With wool, lamb and mutton prices hovering around top historical percentile levels for most of the year its hard to remember (at least in recent times ) a financially stronger period for the humble merino. The only downside at present is the ongoing dry spell being experienced across most of the wool growing areas however long term weather forecasters are predicting a wetter end to the year which if eventuates will only add to the "perfect storm" for merino breeders.

One particularly pleasing aspect of wools resurgence has been the widening price gap for better quality and finer micron lines with up to \$5/kg difference at the time of writing between 17 and 21 micron. This premium was evident when we sold our lambs wool in the Autumn for a 1400c/kg greasy clip average and a top line price of almost 1700 cents. When we sold the wether lambs over the hooks in July the combined value of the carcass and the wool clip came to a tad under \$200 per lamb.

On a lesser note the ongoing mulesing issue is once again rearing its ugly head with old chestnuts such as "there's no genetic solution available " and "we can't breed these sheep overnight " being bandied about by the pro mulesing brigade. The frustrating thing about hearing these comments is that we have been breeding these sheep for almost 2 decades and during this time have worked hard to ensure that we are providing genetics that are highly profitable as well as mules free.

To further deepen the problem in an effort to raise fleece weights the industry seems to be increasing the wrinkle on their sheep to a point where it is becoming harder and harder for them to turn their flocks around when the proverbial hits the fan.

Remember adding skin to sheep is a dangerous shortcut to increasing fleece weight. It brings with it a multitude of problems and is negatively correlated to many profit driving traits such as fertility, constitution, growth and fibre quality. The only pathway to successfully increasing fleece weight without compromise is through measurable fibre density and staple length.

### 2017 SALE DATES

#### FRIDAY 8 SEPTEMBER INSPECTION DAY

Auction rams on display with current figures. Inspections from 10am-4pm.

#### TUESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER ON-PROPERTY RAM AUCTION

Inspections from 10.30am. Sale commences 1.30pm.

#### WEDNESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER PRIVATE SALES

Grade rams available at set prices by appointment from Wednesday onwards.

### 2016 SALE REPORT

Rising wool and lamb prices and the prospect of a big spring lifted Richmond's 2016 on property auction to new heights with an average price of \$2273 for 117 rams sold. Although the average was over \$500 higher than the previous year there was still a considerable number of lots sold in the \$1000 range which enabled astute buyers to fill their orders without breaking the bank balance. Top price for the day was knocked down to the Allen family of "Kiah Lake" , Berridale who payed

\$10,000 for an extremely well balanced poll sire with a good spread of breeding values for both wool and carcass and a beautifully aligned stud quality fleece. The Lawson family of Cookardina payed the second top price of \$8000 for a very meaty 120026 son with plenty of fibres on him while another 5 lots topped the \$4000 mark. New client George Haylock "Old Springfield " Cooma and return buyer Ted Morgan "Geeron" Forbes were the main volume buyers on the day taking home 12 rams each. It was great to see the sale so well supported by both old and new clients and was a very satisfying result particularly after such a stressful lead up to sale day with one of the biggest floods in 20 years inundating the ram shed and parking area just days before kick off. At one stage we were unsure whether we would even be able to go ahead.



The \$10,000 top price ram purchased by Jock and Angus Allen.

Photo courtesy of Brigid Arnott



Auction shed and parking area 3 days before sale

# A GOOD YEAR FOR LAMBS

With lamb prices this season reaching well over \$6/kg there were plenty of satisfying sale reports from clients over the winter. One of the best results was achieved by the Walker family of "Cumnock Farm", Grenfell. The Walkers averaged \$185 over the hooks for their wether lambs at only 10 months of age and were fed purely on pasture without any grain supplement. The lambs averaged 58kg live weight with the heaviest hitting the scales at around the 80kg. The standout result however for this sale was the lambs exceptional yield of 47% indicating a terrific ability to convert feed into muscle.

## THE THREE TOOLS FOR GENETIC PROGRESS

In the modern age of measurement driven livestock breeding it is easy to get carried away with chasing the elusive high indexing animals and trait leaders. The development of a good line of breeding stock however is much more than purely a mathematical equation. At Richmond we utilise three separate selection tools to help us move forward.

### VISUAL CLASSING

First and foremost all sheep must meet specific confirmation and visual fleece traits standards. In particular our stud ewes and sires should express fibre alignment, softness, staple length and lustre with a deep and bold crimp. These visual markers indicate to us that the animal has an advanced skin with high fibre density and a superior processing fleece. These are important traits of fibre producing animals. Mostly they are difficult to measure but they are vitally important if we are to continue producing a quality product and hold our share of the fibre marketplace.

### MEASUREMENT

Our preferred method of objective measurement are ASBVs. Providing the data is properly collected and the accuracies are good then ASBVs give a much more accurate assessment of the animals genetic merit than raw figures. ASBVs enable us to monitor our genetic progress ensuring that our production levels for the main profit driving traits are moving in the right direction.

### BIOLOGY

By understanding the biological processes specifically behind follicle development and fibre growth we are able to make better informed decisions in our selection process. Dr Jim Watts performs a full range of skin tests on all our prospective sires and ET ewes ensuring that our elite stud animals are tested for follicle density, primary fibre diameter, secondary/primary ratios, skin thickness and many other tests.

Most studs adopt one of the above methods as their primary classing tool (generally either measurement or visual classing) and often go to great lengths to warn commercial breeders against the other method. At Richmond we feel the only way forward is to use a balanced combination of all three methods. We want our animals to grow an elite fibre that maintains an advantage over its competitors, we want to be sure at the same time that our production levels for the profit driving traits are continually rising and we want to understand the biology behind why this is happening.

# SIRE SELECTION – TRICKS & PITFALLS OF THE MODERN ERA

Selecting rams on sale day in the modern era has become an increasingly complex process. Once upon a time all we had to was trust our eyes and our hands to guide our decisions. Nowadays not only do we have wool tests and raw data in the mix but also a wide array of breeding values (ASBVs) to decipher before we manage to get anything on the back of the ute. If we want to make the right decisions however it is important to understand as much as we can about how these new figures are derived and how much trust we can put in them.

Following is a list of important "do's and don'ts" concerning the deciphering of ASBVs as well as some old fashioned tricks of the trade regarding ram preparation for sale day. It is by no means a definitive list but hopefully it covers some important areas that are often missed by prospective buyers on sale day.



Don't let figures compromise visual traits

**DO** Visually assess the animals confirmation. Bad feet, dippy backs, pigmentation and hocky hindquarters are just some of the faults that should be avoided but are not included on a ASBV list.

**DO** Place importance on the visual and handle qualities of the fleece. Style, lustre, softness and staple structure are all important traits that should not be ignored. They directly effect the processing performance of the fibre as well as the eventual quality of the garment. They also have a direct bearing on the fleeces ability to resist weather damage and fly strike and more often than not produce a premium on sale day. Long term selection based on figures alone will gradually erode these very important traits.

**DO** Make sure the ASBV accuracies of the traits you are selecting for are high enough to be worthwhile taking notice of. As a general rule traits for young rams without any progeny should have around 70% accuracy . If they are 50% or less then you are basically guessing.

**DO** Be aware of the feeding regime the rams have been run under. In a very competitive marketplace many stud breeders push their rams to the limit in a race to present the biggest possible specimens on sale day. It is under these circumstances that accurate ASBVs can be of great assistance in sorting out the rams with actual high genetic growth from the pretenders.

**DO** Be aware of the rams age. Autumn drop rams will be naturally bigger on sale day than spring drop rams but this doesn't necessarily mean they will breed genetically bigger sheep.

**DON'T** Buy rams that have spent a considerable period of time in the ram shed. Any genetic fleece faults will not be expressed , their CV% and SD will be artificially low due to their tight feeding regimes and their fertility is often impaired.

**DON'T** Set strict maximum and minimum limits for breeding values during your selection process. Rams without progeny in the system will always only have a limited level of accuracy for their ASBVs. Their figures can change considerably after their progeny's traits are recorded so give yourself some room to move and remember that ASBVs should only be used as a guide and not as the sole method of selection.

**DON'T** Expect that selecting for high yearling clean fleece weight figures will automatically give you higher adult fleece weights. The data for this trait is usually collected from the rams first lamb shearing and above average fleece weights in lambs does not always translate to high adult weights. Also be aware if a yield test was taken when the fleeces were weighed. If not the ASBV figure may differ considerably from the actual fleece weight as correlations from other traits are used to manufacture a breeding value. Again use the figures as a guide only.



## SEMEN SIRE 150182 (x130579)

A very productive ram across multiple areas with a great combination of traits that sit at the top end of the industry. He has depth and width with a great backend and the carcass attributes that indicate the ability to breed heavy, early maturing lambs. His combination of high follicle density and higher than flock average fibre diameter give him wool cutting ability to go with a long stapled, bold and deeply crimped fleece. He has an exceptional SD and comfort factor for a paddock run ram of 19.7 micron and is structurally perfect.

WOOL TESTS				ASBVS					SKIN TESTS			
MIC	SD	CV%	CF%	YWT	YFAT	YEMD	YCFW	YSL	DENSITY	PRIMARY FIBRES	THICKNESS	FIBRE LENGTH
19.7	2.9	15.0	100	10.0	0.8	2.0	17.7	18.7	83.3/mm <sup>2</sup>	15.4mic	0.68mm	0.63mm/day

