

# RICHMOND

## M E R I N O S

Flock No. 5021  
Stud Classer: Charlie Massy  
Stud Consultant: Dr. Jim Watts

## WELCOME TO OUR 2018 NEWSLETTER

The drought conditions across much of the eastern states have created many financial and management headaches with some areas of Queensland and northern NSW experiencing their driest periods on record however the silver lining has been record wool and sheep meat prices.

On a personal note we had some great results from our commercial flock with 10 month old wether lambs making \$180/head and our lambs wool breaking the magical 3000c/kg clean mark. The ewe lambs cut almost \$70/head when we shored them in April which I thought was a great outcome considering the meat value of their brothers. Results like these really underline the fact that modern, fertile plain bodied merinos are essentially the only true dual purpose breed.

This year we will again be offering approximately 130 hogget rams at our on property sale. Having been raised through the driest 12 month period in the last decade we are expecting the sale team to present well under the circumstances. We feel the rams are genetically more advanced with continually improving carcass traits, higher average follicle densities and fibre quality that sits at the top end of the industry. Earlier in the year with drought setting in and the long term seasonal conditions looking grim we considered selling the tail end and locking the remainder of the young rams up in a feedlot situation in order to prepare them for sale in optimal condition. After giving this much thought however we eventually opted to let them forage under natural paddock conditions with supplementary trail fed grain. Under these conditions the better doing animals will always rise to the top and both us and our clients will have a better chance of making the right selection decisions come October. By retaining and collecting data from the entire drop we are also able to present much more accurate ASBVs on sale day.

We won't be holding an open day this year however we are more than happy for any interested clients or potential clients to arrange an inspection of the sale rams prior to sale day if required. Please don't hesitate to contact us for any queries regarding ram sales.

*Stud ewes in drought lot, June 2018*

## 2018 SALE DATES

### TUESDAY 2 OCTOBER **ON-PROPERTY RAM AUCTION**

Inspections from 10.30am. Sale commences 1.30pm.  
Offering approx 13-14 month old rams.

### WEDNESDAY 3 OCTOBER **PRIVATE SALES**

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

## 2017 SALE REPORT

Another successful on property auction was underpinned by terrific market conditions throughout the year for both wool and meat. It was great to crack the \$10,000 barrier twice but as always there was still plenty of quality rams knocked down within the \$1000 – \$1200 range. One of the more pleasing aspects of the day was hearing those in attendance commenting on the depth of quality throughout the auction team.

Overall a 95% clearance was achieved with 126 rams selling for an average of \$2165. The sale topper reaching \$11,000 was purchased by the East Loddon Merino stud of Wanganella. Sired by the Western Australian ram Challara 394 he stood out as one of the best carcass animals in the catalogue as well as possessing a high quality fleece. Not far behind selling for \$10,000 was a highly productive son of 13-579 knocked down to Damon and Sophie Soster representing Dalkeith Herefords, Cassilis. The ram was one of 12 lots that the Sosters purchased on the day. Other volume buyers were the Haylock family



*2nd top priced ram purchased by Damon and Sophie Soster of Dalkeith Herefords*

of Cooma who took home 15 sires for an average of \$2167, Geeron partnership, Forbes who bought 14 rams for a \$1229 average and the Grinter family of West Wyalong and Kitto family of Tallimba who both took home 8 lots each.



*Top priced ram purchased by Marcus and Tom Hooke of East Loddon Merino stud*

**CONTACT** TREVOR AND SARAH RYAN, "RICHMOND" QUANDIALLA NSW 2721. PHONE: 02 6347 1166  
RICHMONDMERINOS.COM.AU

 [FACEBOOK.COM/RICHMONDMERINOS](https://www.facebook.com/RICHMONDMERINOS)



# FAREWELL TO THE JONES FAMILY

Earlier this year we farewelled one of our original clients the Jones family of "Mascot" Grenfell. Richard and Mary Jones purchased their first Richmond rams 14 years ago and this year dispersed their flock in preparation for retirement. When the Jones first came to Richmond they were already breeding along SRS bloodlines and over the following years through good management, a thorough understanding of genetics and judicious sire selections they developed the "Mascot" flock into one of the most advanced and productive operations that I had the pleasure to deal with. We wish them well in their future ventures.

## IS THE GENETIC MULESING SOLUTION PROFITABLE?



Recently the SRS Merino Facebook page posted these two photos illustrating how a commercial breeder was transforming his flock towards non-mulesing by joining rams like the one on the left to ewes like those on the right. The post received considerable attention with it's fair share of negative comments alluding to the ram being of low profitability and in particular poor fleece value. With the ram pictured being a Richmond sire I felt compelled to respond and following is my word for word reply.

"As the breeder of the ram on the left I agree that at the moment or indeed at any time it is important to maintain good wool cuts in your merino flock. The beauty of the ram pictured is that he has a naturally bare breech but is not strippy on the points. He is a good wool producer with a very high follicle density of 109 follicles per square millimetre and an above average clean fleece weight ( ASBV ) of +14.6. His sire 130579 is a ram that has been used widely in the industry and has an ASBV of +19. I do not own the ram pictured but his half brothers here at home all cut over 10kg out of the paddock. Our ewe flock cuts around 6kg at 18.5 micron and we mark 120% on joining numbers. I have commercial clients that are cutting between 7-8kg for their ewe hoggets. I realise that some of these wool figures aren't huge compared to some heavy skinned traditional sheep however the point is they are very acceptable and profitable considering we are achieving them with high reproduction rates, quality fibre a strong focus on meat production and a smooth, wrinkle free skin that addresses the important mulesing issue. "

Since 2005 AWI has invested \$35 million into researching alternatives to mulesing and yet a profitable genetic solution is right under our nose. These sheep are productive, they are profitable and with correct use they can transform flocks to non-mulesing within a few generations.

# WHEN FLEECE WEIGHTS AINT FLEECE WEIGHTS

Just like the old "oils aint oils" Castrol ad from years ago sometimes what you see on the surface doesn't give you a true indication of what you're actually getting.

Back in April I was feeling pretty chuffed with what the ewe lambs produced from their first shearing. They cut 3.7kg with an average greasy price of 1804c/kg including all skirtings at 61.1% yield. This gave them a return of \$67.10 /head. Not bad I thought for a lambs fleece. Shortly after this I was told of some similar aged lambs from a traditional heavy skinned flock that cut 5kg/head. On face value this seemed like a very impressive figure but with some further research I came up with some interesting findings. I wasn't able to get exact wool tests or auction prices for the clip in question but with the help of wool brokers and staff that had carried out the shearing I came up with some figures that I'm sure would be very close to the mark. The table below shows an estimated comparison between the two clips.



	RICHMOND LAMBS	TRADITIONAL FLOCK
GREASY WEIGHT	3.72 kg	5.0 kg
YIELD	61.1%	54.5%
CLEAN WEIGHT	2.27 kg	2.72 kg
MICRON	16.2	18.0
C/KG (clean)	2954	2383
\$/HEAD	\$67.10	\$64.82

Although not a definitive comparison due to the estimation of some figures the end result nevertheless gives us plenty of food for thought regarding our ram selection decisions. The table shows us just how important yield and clean c/kg are to fleece value. Add to this the long list of advantages that the Richmond phenotype brings such as higher fertility, faster growing lambs, greater constitution and easy care low maintenance, ethical and sustainable production and the decision becomes a "no brainer".

## THOUGHTS ON FAT AND MUSCLE

The use of genetic fat and muscle traits (usually expressed in the form of ASBVs) is a relatively new selection tool which is often not fully understood by those who are using it.

The industry seems to be divided into two camps in this area. Those who completely disregard the traits and those who seem to focus their entire selection program around improving this part of their flock. Like most things the correct approach lies somewhere in between. As merino breeders we are coming from a very low base regarding these two traits so the increased industry awareness in this area over recent years has definitely been a positive however if we want to develop profitable and balanced flocks then we need to understand how fat and muscle interacts with other profit driving traits and how increasing or decreasing them effects the phenotype and production of our flocks.

Below are a list of positives that these traits can bring to our flocks as well as some possible problems that we need to be aware of.

### POSITIVES

- Increased muscle gives us better doing more resilient sheep that produce heavier lambs at a younger age
- Increased muscle is strongly correlated to higher fertility under all conditions
- Although not proven it is likely that better muscle and fat gives us greater feed efficiency.
- Higher genetic muscle is correlated to better worm resistance
- More fat gives you higher fertility when nutritional conditions are low
- More fat means improved eating quality.

### NEGATIVES

- Increased fat is correlated to lower fleece weight
- High genetic fat has very little effect on fertility under good nutritional conditions
- Rapidly increasing muscle combined with selection pressure on post weaning weight can change the animals body shape creating a smaller, thicker set



4 Richmond sires, all trait leaders for muscle and positive for fat but importantly are also above industry average for clean fleece weight

sheep that may increase the likelihood of lambing difficulties as well as reduce the potential fleece weight through a smaller surface area for follicle production.

At Richmond we think the positives outweigh the negatives when it comes to muscle and fat and consequently we have aimed to lift the levels of these traits in our flock however like many things in sheep breeding it is important to maintain balance in our selection criteria. Using extreme animals to rapidly increase any trait is fraught with danger and there are some obvious potential problems that we need to be aware of if we head down this path. Our current policy is to aim for sheep that are at least positive for ASBVs in both traits with a preferred muscle figure of around +1 to +2. We feel that by aiming for this range we can safely move forward with all profit driving traits without running into any compromises or potholes along the way. On a final note it is important to realise that many rams with big carcass figures may have inflated clean fleece weights due to their early maturity and high growth. These rams often do not carry their early fleece weight through into adulthood so as always when selecting sires on sale day remember to place as much emphasis on the animals visual appearance as it's figures. Generally if you think the ram looks like he won't cut much wool then he probably won't.

