



# Woodpark

## Merino and Poll Merino studs

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Picture: Kent Taylor's shearing team from Jerilderie this autumn

## Wool comes back



With a record high market putting wool back on the sheep industry radar, we are both considering the future and reflecting on the work that has been done at Woodpark since the early 1990s. In many ways, with the strong wool market and solid sheep prices of today, we are so aware that the future Owen Huggins was working toward when he started developing today's Woodpark sheep, is here now. We feel these sheep are the ideal balance for today's industry.

When Owen began breeding toward the plainer bodied Woodpark sheep we have today, about 20 years ago, he was considering the body type which has now become so desirable. It was a long, slow and measured process of gradually developing the uncomplicated skin type the Woodpark sheep demonstrate today. The sheep now have a very mobile skin on a body that has more depth and squareness and offer more carcase. The sheep have a mobile, high fibre

population skin, the characteristics which deliver soft, good processing type wools with excellent fleece weight. The transition to a plainer body has been made without sacrificing those crucial fleece attributes. Our breeding was through our own genetic selection using the genetics already in the flock to develop this sheep type which has the real balance that suits today. Our view gained from attending Bendigo, Hamilton and the like is that much ...**continued p2**

## Out and about



*The floods at "Oakwood" in January . A plains flood met a flood from the river after 10 inches of rain in the first week of January. A metre of water lay across the plain and every acre of Oakwood was under water. To keep out of the water, sheep took to channel banks while a few hundred spring drop lambs stood in the woolshed, the only spot they could sit down. There is an Oak tree ridge that had never before been gone under water and it topped that by over a foot. As all those similarly affected by the floods know, it was a desperate a time and an astounding contrast after the previous dry years. But even with the season's dramatic extremes it has become quite tight and dry of late. We have however finally brought the cattle home from lease country, this has been a wonderful saving for Owen and Helen after thirty months in northern NSW.*

### **July 15-17 Australian Sheep and Wool Show, Bendigo**

*We will have a display of sires, auction rams and rams for our Hamilton sale pen at the annual event. It would be great to catch up with any who are at the show.*

### **July 28 Woodpark Knowledge Network afternoon, Eurolie/Narrawong, Hay** *Second gathering of our informal information gathering and social sessions.*

### **August 1, 2 Hamilton Sheepvention**

*At Hamilton this year we have five rams offered in the annual multi-vendor sale. The pen includes two older spring drop rams we used at Eurolie. The other three are the younger Autumn drops as is usual at our auction. In the future we intend to have a selection of our young rams which we have used for a season and build toward presenting a 24 month pen. Reducing the number of sheep taken away from*

*the auction. Sheepvention is not an established market for us so we believe they should represent good value, unlikely to be above and beyond the auction.*

### **August 19 Elders Ram Expo, Deniliquin** *Displaying at this Spring field day hosted by Elders which also has industry information and a range of breeds.*

### **September 26 Annual Ram Sale**

## Industry benchmarking

Woodpark Poll has a ram in the Bluechip Livestock Young Sire Evaluation program at Temora. The program used semen from 10 rams over 400 ewes with full ASBVs to assess different rams' performance under the same conditions. Our ram was Woodpark Poll 09-700, with other entrants including WA's Coromandel stud's Sir

Thomas, as the major link sire. Meanwhile, mid last year we entered Woodpark Poll 07-161 in the Dookie Sire Evaluation. We will use this information in working towards gaining linkage with the progeny we are producing this year in our own AI program. This gives us great linkage within our own sheep and our direction

and within the industry. This will in turn give us greater tools when we are selecting our own rams and better information for clients making selection decisions.

By benchmarking against some of the industry's genetics we are able to cross reference that with our in-flock benchmarking. This provides much greater clarity.

## Wool comes back *cont*

*Cont. from p1...* of the industry has moved their sheep type so quickly to the plainer bodied sheep that sheep have lost fleece density and therefore wool cut potential in doing so. It is our experience this is a process that takes time, to un-complicate the tight skins, free up the body shape, increase depth, width and length of body, in fact creating more surface area.

And at the same time to lift staple length and get the right type of skin on the carcass which allows for high fibre density, high grade wax wools on pliable skins.

These wools tend to be soft, fine fibre which processes well and achieves price premiums.

These are the body types that are strongly linked to ewe fertility and are also, so easy care.

# Wether trials good for measuring

Not only have we been pleased with the results achieved in recent wether trials by Woodpark Poll blood flocks but external comparison mechanisms such as wether trials give us great information about where the sheep stand in the greater flock. Of course they do not measure everything, such as fertility but they do provide a means of comparison within the industry and for learning. We are also getting more detailed and independent information about the way these sheep perform when they are measured against other, well regarded, flocks. In several wether trials in the past five years the Woodpark Poll blood sheep have consistently been among the heaviest weighing. In the CWL wether trials and its follow

up the wethers from the Euroлие flock were the second highest body weight and also posted above average fleece weight and below average micron. In the Peter Westblade Memorial Merino Challenge, two Woodpark Poll blood flocks from very different environments, but a similarly dry year last year, the Houston family of "Budgewah" Hay and the McNaughton family's "Burong", Seaspray flocks performed particularly well in the carcass section of the trial. They are tracking 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in the trial for bodyweights backed by wool results. The McNaughtons' longstanding Woodpark Poll flock has recorded excellent results for meat and wool. It's a great outcome for these wethers which had a terribly dry

start to life. The Houstons' emphasis on wool quality over the past few years are showing results backed by the trials. In the first shearing of the Bookham wether trial the Woodpark Poll wethers from the Euroлие flock stood up well against the higher rainfall areas' sheep. The 2yo wethers had 52" on them, from last shearing until the end of February. Fleeces at shearing showed no water damage. One of only two flocks from west of the Hume, the Euroлие wethers were below average micron of 17.3 micron with an above average fleece weight and the highest bodyweight. It is a big commitment by breeders to enter the trials, which have attracted high calibre flocks from other dedicated breeders.



*A "Budgewah" wether carcass during assessment at Fletcher's abattoir last August.*

## Ram development program

We are using progeny testing as one of our major tools to identify our best young up and coming rams, helping us find the rams that are really kicking the goals, that don't just look the part themselves but deliver it repeatedly in their progeny. We can take this process so far visually but the testing allows us to make that next leap. We are using our best genetics to make that step. Progeny testing involves using a single ram, which we have done through our AI program. (This allows us to use it across another group of ewes to get a double usage of that ram). We lamb them down in their individual groups, lamb mark and identify them so when they come through to fleece weighing, micron testing and body weighing we can get the genetic capacity of individual sires, collecting data that will give us the means to make better mating decisions. It gives us more reference points to rank our own genetics. In our AI program we used semen from nine sires. The sire group included some of our best rams, an external link sire and one of our own performing sires.

This ram has been also been used in the which we have used in the Dookie sire evaluation. The progeny testing each year is helping us rank them and make sure they deliver to their genetic capacity and ensures we get the best lambs on the ground. The progeny testing means we can identify not just the physical characteristics that will help deliver the best rams but also evaluate their genetic capacity, so we are seeing their genotype, not just their phenotype. It's about seeing the reality by testing them on the ground. At lamb marking this year, we are excited to already see the results of that breeding program. Although no testing has yet been done on those lambs, the subtleties of differences are already evident and exciting. We have enjoyed this first look at the lambs and their skins, particularly the softness evident in those skins. It all helps us build up a bank of knowledge about the rams we are using. We are now looking to the next lamb marking and in two years time to see what these lambs will produce.



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## 'Knowledge Network' meets at Hay

Our next breeder gathering for our new information sharing network will be held on Thursday July 28. Almost 30 people gathered last Spring to catch up with other sheep breeders and share information about topics including scanning and benchmarking.

With the emphasis as much about catching up with others and tapping into their knowledge as getting hold first-hand of the information researchers can take years to accumulate, the "foundation" meeting started over lunch and was followed by two guest speakers.

The speakers talked informally with much discussion during their talks to and from the people attending. The group then put together a list of suggested priorities for future meetings. We are in discussions with sheep industry organisations and are excited about the prospects for some interesting times ahead. Organisations seem keen to work with small groups and it is great to access information and have closer access to speakers than may happen at a large field day or seminar. Making it easier to get the information you need or

answer that specific question about your operation. When we first started talking to people about the idea of a gathering to share ideas and information about sheep and anything to do with the sheep industry, and just for a general catch-up, it was great to see how interested people were in the idea. It is also a great chance to catch up with others in similar situations. Our next session will include a guest speaker about ways to work with the current sheep and wool markets, look over some sheep and some chat.

## Polls up \$172 at Woodpark – (The Land/Stock and Land)

"A FURTHER swing from horned to Poll Merino rams was emphasised at last week's Woodpark Poll Merino ram sale, as traditional horned breeders came to specifically buy poll genetics.

Woodpark Poll stud is one of the main Poll studs in southern NSW, servicing a big part of the Riverina and large areas of Victoria. The Huggins family offered and sold 98 of 100 rams to a joint top of \$3100 to average \$1621, which was up from \$1449 in 2009.

As usual the rams went to a good spread of buyers

with 18 of the 30 actual buyers, taking home three or more rams and only three buyers taking home a single ram. Ron Rutledge, Elders Finley, started the sale saying with 10,000 Merino ewes averaging \$170 at Hay last Friday and records of \$237, there was an upside to investing in good genetics and purchasing quality rams. Top honors were shared with Craig Wilson, Blue Chip Livestock, Young, paying \$3100 and \$1800 for two rams for Rowan Houston, "Budgewah", Hay. Mr

Wilson said the 16.6 micron Spring drop ram was the best sheep in the catalogue for balance of figures from +14 above average for greasy fleece weight percentage to -2.3 standard deviation and combined with a 128 bodyweight percentage.

"This ram was in the reserves to be retained in the stud as a sire and would suit the Houstons flock, which is currently in the top 10pc for carcass traits in the Peter Westblade Memorial wether trial. The second of the top rams, a 19.8 micron

ram, with low SD, 1231 GFW and 115BWT, was purchased for the same \$3100 top by Richard and David Bibby, "Burrupa", Tatyoon, Victoria, to further their flock in the poll direction. Mr Bibby said they hadn't bought from Woodpark in 10 years, but came back to chase the polls as they move away from horned Merinos, and chased bigger framed sheep for their area, of which they struggled to find rams to suit in Victoria." Brett Tindal, The Land, 23/9/2010

**Woodpark Poll  
Annual ram sale  
Monday September 26 2011**

*Poll Merino and Merino rams available for private selection in days following ram sale*