



A System for Judging Sheep

Notes from 1998 (Oamaru) and 1999 (Paihia)
Black and Coloured Sheep Judging School

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When invited to judge a show, accept if at all possible. I know if dates clash, the people asking will understand, but don't let distance or apathy stand in your way. I personally always feel honoured to be invited to judge, and the bigger the show, the greater the honour. I hope you all feel the same way.

Judges are not appointed lightly and to accept appointment as a judge we must also make a commitment.

I believe that every judge in our Association should know the difference between a good sheep and a bad one, know the qualities of each breed, know the faults common to all breeds and be able to place them in order of merit as he or she sees them on the day.

The purpose of a judging school, and these notes, is to get us working with more consistency and to make us more aware of the expectations of us when we go to judge a show.

Once you have received an invitation to judge at a show, study the schedule carefully. Check what classes you will have to judge with respect to shearing dates, sheep ages and any special conditions which that particular show may have. Sheep are entered under the conditions nominated in the schedule and must be judged accordingly. Check for any special classes. These may include Championships, Best-woolled sheep, best lamb or something else.

Arrive at the Show half an hour before judging is due to commence and report to the steward concerned. Then stay away from the pens until judging is due to commence.

Points to check with the steward before commencing judging:

- Have "pairs" or "breeding groups" been nominated?
- Are there any special classes?
- Will you be required to assist with judging the "InterBreeds" or "All Breeds" classes? Some shows appoint a separate judge for these classes, while other shows use all of the judges from the various breed sections.

Present yourself well

Men should wear a tie and casual or dress trousers, not jeans. For bigger shows a jacket or sports coat is appropriate.

Ladies, although your choice is wider, jeans and T-shirt are not appropriate.

Bib front overalls, or a white coat are appropriate while judging.

Judging

Although always looking for the perfect sheep, we must be able to compare one against another and rank them in order of merit as we see them on the day.

A systematic approach when judging reduces the chance of not seeing the good things about a sheep or overlooking faults. Missing a top sheep is the worst mistake a judge can make.

The system I use is to:-

1. See what is on offer
2. Inspect each sheep individually
3. Walk each sheep
4. Make a decision and write down pen numbers
5. Tell the Steward my placings
6. Select Champion and special class winners

Considering each step in more detail.

1) See what is on offer

Walk along the pens and get an overall view of the classes. Before each class walk along again to make sure how many sheep you have, where they are, and an idea of what is there.

2) Inspect each sheep individually

Head

I start at the head and check that the teeth meet the pad, correctly – not over or under shot. This also gives an indication of age which can sometimes influence placings. Teeth which are partially erupted can often be twisted and must be given the benefit of the doubt that they will straighten. A sheep should have a good broad muzzle and clear vision, but with good wool over the sides and back of the head. The head should have character and be masculine in rams and feminine in ewes.

Wool

I then check the wool, opening the fleece at the shoulder, midside and hind-quarter looking for evenness at each point. Check down the forelegs to points which should not run out to small “pencilly” staples and the hindlegs which should not run out to coarse wool or hairiness. The belly wool should not come too far up the side and there should be a well-defined “dripline” where fleece wool meets belly wool. Back wool should be similar to the rest of the fleece. “Mushy” or plain wool over the rump is undesirable as is weak shoulder wool with shorter staples. The fleece should open up nicely with lack of cross fibres. Crimp should be well defined and even over the whole fleece and along the staples. There should not be too much tip. This indicates uneven fibre diameter within the staple. Colour variation or lack of intensity is not a fault. Soft handle is important. Harsh handling wool should be penalised.

Be aware of lighting. Darker fleeces are very hard to see in poor light. In some pavilions it may be necessary to take some sheep to better light to check their wool.

Always close the fleece after opening, particularly with fine woolled sheep.

Body or conformation

The back-line should be fairly straight in most breeds, carrying well out to the tail, which should not be too low set. Merino sheep and their derivatives, the Corriedale, Halfbred and Polwarth, have a higher shoulder and more sloping rump than Romney sheep and their derivatives. Hill sheep, with a tendency to walk longer distances, like the Perendale and Cheviot have a higher shoulder and shorter body.

- i. The shoulder should not be too heavy with the blades well set in
- ii. The neck should be of medium length and set well to avoid a dip from neck to shoulder.
- iii. The loin should be wide, long and well fleshed

- iv. The hindquarter should be long, wide and full and the hind legs set well apart with a fullness between them. Again Merinos and their derivatives have a less full crutch and hind legs that are closer together.
- v. Both front and hind legs should be well set with the feet square and sound.
- vi. Pasterns should be neither too straight nor too weak. Weak pasterns are a serious fault.
- vii. The sheep should be well grown and in good condition. Good bone is essential. It is the framework of the sheep and an indicator of constitution and robustness. Bone will vary according to the breed with the heavier breeds having the heavier bone. Lighter framed sheep like the Merino and Gotland also need a decent weight of bone.

3) Walk each sheep

Let each sheep out of the pen and walk it towards the steward who should then walk it back towards the Judge.

Check for:

- i) Free movement
- ii) Sound feet and legs
- iii) Straight action
- iv) Balance (body shape in proportion)
- v) General alertness – head held high
- vi) Do not be afraid to re-check any particular point such as suspect feet or anything else you may have notice, either in the pen or with another walk.**

4) Make a decision

If necessary get out your first and second choices, or your second and third choices or all three together, and compare them side by side. Check placed rams for two testicles and ewes for two sound teats. Aged ewes should generally have reared a lamb in the current season.

Make sure wethers are not placed in a ewe class (most embarrassing)

To be able to place sheep we must be able to weigh up the good points of one sheep against the good points of another sheep as well as one fault against another fault. This is where personal preference and tolerance often comes in. Major faults must be heavily penalised. Only place worthy sheep. If a sheep is not “up to it” do not give it a placing. Judges are not obliged to fill all potential placings in each class.

Write down the pen numbers of your placings. The schedule is a good place to write these as the respective classes are all neatly laid out.

5) Tell the steward of your placings

Check, and even re-check, the he/she has got them right.

6) Select champions and special classes

When judging each of the various sheep classes keep in mind the Championships or special classes. Remember that our Champions go out with all the other breeds. Try to select a Champion sheep that is well presented and will do our breed proud in the “Inter Breeds” section.

Some additional points to consider

Judging pairs or groups

In a "Pair of Sheep" (eg two ewe lambs) the sheep should be similar in breed, wool type, face cover, size and general appearance. Overall quality must obviously also be considered.

In a "Breeder's Group" (eg ram, ewe and ewe lamb) the sheep should be similar in breed and wool type. The ram and ewe should be compatible breeders and the ewe lamb near to their expected progeny. First placed Ram, Ewe or Ewe Lamb does not automatically become first in the Breeder's Group.

Sheep in wrong class

In smaller shows this can often be corrected by the steward, such as if a two-tooth ewe is in an aged ewe class or vice versa, and the sheep judged in their appropriate class. In big shows this cannot always be done. It is the exhibitor's responsibility that their sheep are penned correctly

Unfairly presented sheep

Unfairly presented sheep can be a contentious issue. Some shows say the judge's decision is final. Other shows have rules that the Chief Steward of the sheep section arbitrates whether a sheep is unfairly presented.

Associate Judge

Please involve Associate Judges wherever possible. They need experience to gain competence. When judging with an Associate Judge involve him/her as much as possible so they can learn from you. You as judge must decide on your placings. Ask your Associate to give you their opinions AFTER YOU HAVE MADE YOUR DECISION. Remember also that our Judging Committee relies on you to give your opinion on the competence of the Associate Judges working with you.

Register of Placings

Often there is a book of classes and places to be signed by the Judge. This is where your own record of places comes in. Check each class as you sign.

Concentration is essential

Concentration is important when judging. I do not write comments on each sheep as I go. If part way through a class my concentration is upset for some reason, by a break in proceedings, I sometimes have to back-track and refresh my memory. At the end of the day each sheep is still in my mind and I can generally remember its good and bad points.

Discussion Time

A big part of showing Black and Coloured sheep is to give exhibitors a chance to compare their sheep against those of other breeders. It is most important that we as judges make ourselves available at a given time – generally "after lunch" or "at 2 o'clock" to talk to the exhibitors about our placings of their sheep. I know for some judges this can be rather daunting, especially those with limited experience when some of the exhibitors may be judges themselves. **Be positive in the reasons for your placings.** The fact that two sheep were placed differently at another show by a different judge a month ago is irrelevant. We all know that sheep can change and judge's opinions differ. This is all part of showing. There may be some criticism of your placings, but you have placed them as you saw them at that show.

I again emphasise – this is my system. Yours may be different, but have a system