

Australian Dorper & White Dorper

History



DEVELOPMENT OF THE DORPER

During the 1930's it became apparent that the sheep breeds available at that time, were not able to produce the type of high quality carcass required by International meat markets under the extensive and often harsh grazing conditions of South Africa. The South African Department of Agriculture, together with local sheep breeders, therefore embarked upon a long range research and development project in order to rectify the problem. In the early experiments it was discovered that the Dorset Horn x Blackhead Persian produced the most desired attributes, so it was decided to concentrate all research on these two breeds.

The **Blackhead Persian** was selected for its non-selective grazing, coat shedding, hardiness and good mothering abilities. The **Dorset Horn** was selected for its rapid growth rates and carcass attributes. The Dorper Sheep breed was developed through strict selection pressure for all of these positive attributes from the founding breeds, hence all traits are expressed in today's Dorper sheep.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHITE DORPER

Several breeders in South Africa originally decided to concentrate upon the breeding of a white sheep. These white sheep were bred out of **Dorset Horn x Blackhead Persian** or the **Dorset Horn x Van Rooy** crossbred. These first sheep were known as "Dorsian" ("Dorsie" in Afrikaans). A separate breeders Society was formed, however in 1964 it was decided to affiliate with the Dorper Sheep Breeders' Society, since the aim was to breed the same type of sheep with exception of the colour.



THE AUSTRALIAN DORPER & WHITE DORPER

SAABCO first introduced the breed into Australia in 1996 with the release of Dorper embryos for sale. Wescorp the importer was based in Perth and the majority of the embryos sold went into Western Australia, although some were bought by sheep breeders in other states. 1997 saw the importation of more Dorper embryos and the first consignments of White Dorper embryos into Australia. Initially Australian farmers displayed lukewarm interest in the Dorper sheep. Their introduction was fairly low key, unlike the Damaras (introduced at the same time), which received full entrepreneurial promotion. Prices for early stock were very high as their numbers were few and it was a costly exercise getting these animals on the ground. At this time also, a lot of more traditional farmers had difficulty getting their mind around the concept of NOT shearing sheep.

With the fall in wool prices and continued rise in the costs of producing wool, coupled with sustained high prices for lamb, more and more farmers have begun to take a serious look at the Dorper sheep. Drought conditions in many areas of Australia also prompted a great deal of interest in the breed, as the ewes are able to turn off good lambs even in harsh conditions. By 2010 there was a very high level of interest in Dorper sheep all around Australia. Being such an adaptable breed of sheep, interest in them covers the whole spectrum; from people who want to run thousands of sheep in order to turn off cost effective lambs into the meat market, to hobby farmers who just want a couple of easy care lawn mowers to keep the grass down on their block.



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Breed characteristics

EASY CARE

Dorpers do not require shearing, crutching, mulesing, jetting nor constant surveillance for fly strike. They are the ultimate easy care breed.

ADAPTABLE

Dorper sheep are able to thrive in a wide variety of climatic conditions; from arid to semi-tropical areas. They are suited to areas of 100mm – 760mm annual rainfall.

ECONOMICAL

Excellent feed utilization and conversion abilities, require low levels of maintenance as they are a wool shedding sheep. Dorpers do not require shearing, crutching, mulesing, jetting nor constant surveillance for fly strike.

GOOD GRAZING

Dorpers are non-selective graziers, ie they eat weeds and all. Dorpers like coarse grasses and woody weeds, and seem to do better if they have roughage in their diet.

MEAT PRODUCTION

Dorper lambs are only small at birth, but make rapid weight gains. A live weight of 36kg can be reached by 3 to 4 months of age. Meat processors like Dorper and Dorper cross lambs as their carcasses have excellent meat yields and fat distribution.

FERTILE

The Dorper is one of the most fertile sheep breeds. It has a long breeding season which is not seasonally limited. Multiple births are also prevalent which allows for the increase in flock size quicker than other breeds. Ewes are good milk producers and excellent mothers. Lambs are often vigorous and stay close to their mothers from the time they are born. Weaning rates of 150% and above are not uncommon.

FAST GROWING

Dorper lambs grow rapidly and can attain high weaning weights. This in turn means they are ready for early marketing and require less feed, animal health and husbandry inputs.

LONG LIVING

The Dorper sheep are long lived and will remain productive throughout their lives.

HARDY

Hardiness was an original breeding objective for the Dorper breed. Australian experience to date has shown that Dorper and Dorper cross sheep have survived experiences that often threaten the lives of other breeds. Dorpers have a strong will and ability to survive.

TEMPERAMENT

Dorper sheep are intelligent and curious which makes them easy to handle with very little training. Rams, unlike some other breeds, are good to work with in the yards.



the breed for today and the future.

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