

Breed Characteristics

- **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.** The concept behind the development of the Dorper Sheep was to develop a sheep that could give the maximum returns with the least inputs. Thus Dorpers have excellent feed utilisation and conversion abilities (ie they do well even on pasture with poor nutritional value where other sheep breeds would not thrive, thus converting a poor asset into profit). They require low levels of maintenance in comparison with most other sheep breeds, as they are a wool shedding sheep and therefore do not require shearing, crutching, mulesing, jetting, nor constant surveillance for fly strike. It is also claimed that they are disease resistant.
- **Good Grazing habits.** Dorpers are non selective in their grazing, i.e. they eat everything , weeds and all. Other sheep breeds are highly selective in their grazing habits, preferring and only doing well on clovers and softer grasses. Dorpers like coarser 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 from that time . They are grazing by day 2 and fill out and grow very quickly. A live weight of 36kg can be reached by 3.5 - 4 months of age without difficulty; it optimum conditions much greater weights can be achieved. Meat processors like the Dorper and Dorper cross lambs because their carcasses have excellent meat yields and fat distribution.
- **Fertile.** Dorper sheep is one of the most fertile of sheep breeds. It has a long breeding season, which unlike many other sheep breeds is not seasonally limited. It is possible to have lambing intervals of eight months. This coupled with the fact that Multiple births are prevalent, means that flock size can be increased more quickly than with most other sheep breeds. The ewes are good milk producers and excellent mothers. The lambs are vigorous and stay close to their mothers from the time they are born. Hence weaning rates of 150% and above are not uncommon.
- **Fast Growing.** As the Dorper and Dorper cross lambs grow rapidly they can attain high weaning weights. This in turn means that they are ready for early marketing and therefore less feed and animal health (eg. drenching) and husbandry inputs.
- **Long Lived.** The Dorper sheep are long lived and will remain productive throughout their lives.
- **Hardy.** One of the main aims in developing the Dorper Sheep was hardiness. The engineers of the breed have certainly been successful in this respect. Australian experience to date with the breed has shown that Dorper and Dorper cross sheep have survived experiences that would have made other breeds of sheep curl up their toes and die. They seem to have a very strong will and ability to survive.
- **Temperament.** Dorper Sheep are intelligent and curious so can become very easy to handle with very little training. The rams, unlike some other sheep breeds, are good to work with in the yards (they are unlikely to want to bash you up).