

An Introduction to the Dorper and White Dorper

The Dorper

By Trisha Esson.

Dorper Origin: The Dorper was developed in South Africa in the 1930's by crossing Blackhead Persian ewes with a Dorset Horn ram. They were bred to produce a high quality carcass under extensive conditions. The Blackhead Persian was selected for its non-selective grazing, coat shedding, hardiness and good mothering abilities. The Dorset Horn was selected above other British meat breeds of sheep, as being superior for its rapid growth rates and carcass attributes. The half – cross Dorper x Persian was seen to be the superior cross of all that were tried in the experiment and the one which would be the basis of the Dorper Breed.

Description: White sheep with short, dullish black hair predominately in the neck and head area.

Attributes: The Dorper is a fast growing meat producing sheep known for its ability to adapt and survive in a variety of climatic and grazing conditions. The Dorper is a productive, low maintenance and easy care sheep breed with good muscling and low fat scores.



Newly weaned Dorper lambs.



Young White Dorper Rams.

The White Dorper

White Dorper Origin: The person who played the most important role in the development of the White Dorper was G Cole-Rous. He farmed near the Agricultural College where the development of the Dorper was taking place. As his Merinos were performing poorly under natural pasture conditions he became very interested in the development of meat sheep. “He bought Persians and also two Dorset Horn Rams of outstanding quality which were imported from Australia in 1937.

The first crosses between the persian and Dorset Horn were mostly spotted but there were also white lambs. He mated 12 (white) half cross Dorset x persian rams with his Merino ewes and produced quarter- cross Dorset lambs (1/4 DH: 1/4 BP:1/2 Merino). Thus, he became a Dorset x Persian (Dorper) breeder, but he concentrated on the white variation. In later experiments, Dorset Horn x Van Roy cross- breeding was also done and the Dorper was also built up partially by this crossbreeding.”(C. Milne/ Small Ruminant Research 36 pp.101)

The early sheep of this breeding program were called Dorsian Sheep. In 1964 geneticist FN Bonsma explained that these two sheep breeds carried the same genes so the word Dorper was accepted for both types of sheep. At this stage the two breed Societies amalgamated & all sheep accepted into the one stud book.

Description: A white sheep, with full pigmentation around the eyes, under the tail, on the udder and the teats is the ideal. A limited number of other small coloured spots is permissible on the ears and underline.

Attributes: Like the Dorper the White Dorper is a fast growing meat producing sheep known for its ability to adapt and survive in a variety of climatic and grazing conditions. The White Dorper is also a productive, low maintenance and an easy care sheep breed with good muscling and low fat scores.