

A Brief History

of the Dorper and White Dorper sheep in Australia.

By Trisha Esson.

SAABCO first introduced the breed into Australia in 1996 with the release of Dorper embryos for sale. Westcorp, 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 the other states. White Dorper embryos were imported soon after going mainly onto farms in South Australia and NSW.

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| <p>The Ad which appeared in the Weekly Times for the SAABCO auction of the first Dorper embryos sold in Australia.</p> | <p>South African Dorper breeders who contributed embryos to the SAABCO auction</p> |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mr G M Compion- Spieelpa Dorpers * Mr Ernestus Connan – Circle Five * Mr B J Cronje - Cronje Dorpers * Mr J R Dell – John Dell Dorpers * Mr M J Jornaan – M Jornaan Dorpers * Mr M W Phillips – Heathfield Stud * Mr P J Van Der Merve _ Westfront Dorpers * Mr Albert Van niekerk – Klipkoppies Dorper * Albie Van Niekerk – WT Stud * Mr G J Viviers – Viviers Dorpers |

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 animals on the ground. At this time a lot of traditional farmers had difficulty getting their heads around the concept of NOT shearing a sheep. It is not a breed that slots in where the Merino or traditional prime lamb breeds fitted. There is no necessity for annual shearing, mulesing, flystrike treatment, lice and tail docking. Because of their polyestrus breeding there is also no mating season; they can be mated at whatever time of the year suits their owner.

The wool industry was quite derisive of the “exotic sheep breeds” arguing that the breed would contaminate wool clips. If the experience in South Africa was to be repeated the risk was not to the clip but to the dominant position held by the merino. A long running

and bitter campaign against the introduced breeds was well supported by the Rural press, livestock agents and other members of the rural establishment. The bitterness of the contamination argument coupled with peer pressure was successful in deterring many farmers from trying Dorpers and White Dorpers.

Against all these odds the Dorper and the White Dorper began to gain a foothold in the Australian sheep Industry. The speed at which numbers of and interest in the animals have built over the past few years has been phenomenal and with it, the Dorper and White Dorper are beginning to change the Australian sheep Industry.

A number of factors played a role in prompting Australian farmers to view Dorpers and White Dorpers in a more favourable light. The fall in wool prices, the continual rise in the costs of producing wool and the difficulty in finding professional shearers, coupled with sustained high prices for lamb resulted has resulted in more and more farmers taking a serious look at Dorpers and White Dorpers. Sustained drought conditions in many areas of Australia have also prompted a great deal of interest in the breed, as the ewes are able to turn off good lambs even in harsh conditions. In Australia the growth of a sheep breed is best measured not by numbers of sheep, but by who is making the change to Dorpers. Some of Australia's most dedicated Merino farmers have included a small Dorper or White Dorper flock in their enterprise, whilst traditional prime lamb sire breeders can see the advantage of a composite ram with the Dorper clean belly, crutch, legs and face. Dorpers are the less-work breed that is enticing sheep farmers who have “gone cropping”, back into prime lambs.

At present there is 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, to turn off cost effective lambs, to hobby farmers who just want a couple of easy care lawn mowers to keep the grass down on their rural block.



Stud Dorper Ram



Dorper Ewe and Lamb.