



RIDGWAY

Poll Merino Stud

Ric, Gail & Matthew Ridgway

Newsletter
Number 12
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Welcome

Welcome to our 2014 newsletter. A lot has happened in the last 12 months.

From our family and sheep perspectives, events have been very pleasing. However the big fire in the Billiat Conservation Park in January impacted our property and caused much stress. Fortunately the season has been positive since.

We are excited about the quality of the stock we have for sale this year and proudly recommend them to you. We hope you find this newsletter both interesting and informative.

2014 Calendar of Events

Bendigo - Australian Sheep and Wool Show (display only)

▶ **Friday 18th - Sunday 20th July**

Keith - South East Merino Field Day (display)

▶ **Wednesday 23rd July**

Karoonda - Karoonda & Districts Merino Field Day (display)

▶ **Friday 25th July**

Ram Select Workshop On-property

▶ **Wednesday 30th July**

Hamilton, Victoria - Hamilton Sheepvention (display & offering 5 rams)

▶ **Monday 4th & Tuesday 5th August**

Kulkami - Ridgway On-property Ram Sale (offering 160 rams)

▶ **Monday 11th August**

Inspection from 10.30am - Auction at 1pm

Murray Bridge - Classings Classic (offering up to 12 rams)

▶ **Monday 8th September**

Adelaide Royal Show Merino Ram Sale (offering 3-5 rams)

▶ **Friday 12th September**



Billiat Fire

I'm sure no-one needs reminding of how hot it was last summer with record high temperatures. Unfortunately, significant fires were a consequence, including one in the Billiat Conservation Park that adjoins us. This fire was more devastating than any previous fires in the park, burning over 90% of the entire park.

Not a good sight in summer to see this burning in our heritage block ►



95% of our Heritage Agreement block was wiped out as well as boundary fencing, plus approximately 80 hectares of pasture in five paddocks that bordered that Heritage Agreement block.

Fortunately our luck changed in mid-February. Summer rains are not always welcome but in this case they were. After that very hot and dry early summer we received up to 3 inches (75mm) of rain and had a good germination of both summer and winter feed over the whole farm. This prevented the erosion problems that we feared on the burnt out areas. Since then, every time we've started to dry out we've had another rain. We hope everyone else is also having a good start to 2014.

The aftermath of the fire and showing the grass growth that prevented erosion. ►



Family News

We can't hide our pride and joy any longer. Since last year's newsletter our family has altered somewhat and we (Ric and Gail) have stepped up to the very exciting title of grandparents.

It started with a spring drop!

Sire, Matt and Dam, Rachel became parents to our first grandchild, Olivia Kate Ridgway. Then less than 6 months later, on 4th March this year, Sire Josh and Dam, Catherine also became parents when Halle Joy Ridgway was born.



Olivia (left) and Halle (above)

Of course we don't equate them to sheep terms of sire and dam in reality, but just as parenthood is an exciting new phase for Matt, Rachel, Josh and Catherine, it is also an exciting new phase for us as grandparents. It stimulates us to strive harder with our sheep program. We have more mouths to feed now!

Ram Select Workshop

From our Calendar of Events on the front of this newsletter, you will see we are hosting a Ram Select Workshop. Facilitators will be Michelle Cousins from Cousins Merino Services and Steve Milne from Richmond Hill Agribusiness, Victoria.

It will be on **July 30th** from **9:30am to 3:30pm** with morning tea and lunch provided. There is a relatively small cost of \$50 per business.

While that charge is very cost effective, we will reimburse that \$50 to anyone who purchases rams from us during 2014. It is our way of rewarding producers who are open enough to accept new advice and information on how to improve their management and buying decisions.

The projected overall learning outcome from the workshop is to increase ram buyer confidence in selecting the best value rams to match their breeding objectives.

That will hopefully be achieved by attendees by:

1. Bringing an understanding of the value of selecting rams based on the expected performance of their progeny by using breeding values.
2. Informing what Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) and Indices are and how to interpret and use them.
3. Bringing an understanding of the value of investing time in ram assessment and selection.

4. Helping you to establish and clearly define your breeding objective.
5. Teaching you how to assess, grade and value rams for purchase using both visually assessed traits (phenotype) and ASBVs (genotype).
6. Giving you knowledge on the steps to take in preparing for your next ram purchases, both before and on the day.
7. Identifying people, including locals, who can be contacted to assist you in preparation for making your ram selections if needed.

Attendance at one of these days is to improve and refine your knowledge, not to label you as someone who desperately needs help. None of us is too old to learn something new!

We will have a selection of sale rams on display for inspection, plus sale catalogues will be available.

Those wishing to attend are asked to register by **25th July** with Ric (**08 8578 8039**), Matt (**0439 460 554**) or Steve Davidson at Landmark Lameroo (**0427 229 094**).

Star continues to rise

Remember this photo from last year's newsletter?



Ridgway 1137 was sold at the Classings Classic in 2010 for \$25,000 to Wallaloo Park, plus a series of semen users. Naturally we retained semen for our own use from a ram we rated so highly.

His star continues to rise! In late 2011, Merino Superior sires contacted

us, requesting we enter him (via semen) in the Balmoral Sire Evaluation Trial which we agreed to. It commenced in 2012 and has been run over the last two years.

He was one of only two Poll Merino rams in this 19 ram trial. His progeny have excelled for clean fleece weight and staple length. They display sound structure, having no problems with feet, legs, mouths and shoulders. His progeny also displayed above average eye muscle depth and fat measurement reading. He is a true 'dual purpose' Merino.

In our flock classings his 2013 progeny had the lowest 'cull out' rate of all the sires that we used (20% compared with an average of 29%).

At the other end of the scale, he also had the highest

percentage of tops (33% compared with an average of 20%). Sons and grandsons of R1137 are again prominent amongst our sale rams this year.

A link to the trial's final report is on our website.

2014 Sale Rams

While 1137 is a sire of real note, he is just one of a top group of sires that we believe are helping take our flock forward in leaps and bounds, so don't overlook any of the rams we will have on offer. If you can attend the Ram Select Workshop it will help you identify the best value rams to match your needs.

We have 242 rams available this year. On their recent test the group average wool figures are:

Mic 18.5, SD 3.0, CV 16.1 and CF of 99.8.

From that 242 we will be offering 5 rams at the Hamilton Sheepvention ram sale. Up to 12 will be reserved for the Classings Classic and 3 to 5 for the Adelaide Royal ram sale. At our annual on-property sale we will offer 128 in the main auction, plus 32 will be available in the mini auction that follows (160 rams in total).

The balance of approximately 60 rams that are still of very good quality will be available for private selections.

Ewes for Sale

As in the past few years we also have some good quality ewes for sale. These are available for private selection on a 'first in' basis. On the record of the past, if interested it would pay to get in early as they have not taken long to find new homes!

The sale numbers are about the same as last year: approximately 280 x 1.5 years, 180 x 4.5 years and 150 x 5.5 years.

Thank you to those who have purchased our ewes in the last couple of years and are having success with them.

Lambing Success

All the wool and carcass attributes in the world are somewhat meaningless if the sheep cannot reproduce in high percentage numbers. Live lambs on the ground are the biggest contributor to sheep flock profitability. The higher the percentage, the greater the selection pressure we can apply and thus our genetic advancement will be greater for all those wool and meat traits.

We are pleased to have been able to report consistently high lambing percentages from our breeding ewe flock. In 2013 it was **115%** lambs weaned on ewes mated. This year it has been even better with **121%** marked. With the season as it is we would expect very few losses between marking and weaning.

Those sort of percentages allow strong selection pressure and excellent genetic progress when identifying breeding requirements for the flock.

Technology Use

This is the third year we have been using Merino Select and ASBVs. As we send in more data we build up more linkages and accuracies in the data we receive back. The Pedigree Matchmaker system we highlighted last year is also giving us more accuracy in extended pedigree information which also increases Merino Select linkages and accuracies.

Our use of AI has been undertaken for 15 years and has become more extensive in each of those years. More recently we have also undertaken an annual embryo transfer program.

We feel our progress has been significantly enhanced by using the best available sires, homebred and introduced, plus our identified superior performing ewes more widely. During this time, we have appreciated and developed our relationship with Margie and Bill Trowbridge and Brecon Breeders staff.

Our 2014 laparoscopic AI program with Dr Margie Trowbridge, Brecon Breeders in action.



Sales Success

We enter the 2014 sale season with confidence on the back of our 2013 sales' successes. In total we sold 184 rams last year. A break-up of last year's sales is:

- Hamilton Sheepvention - offered 10 rams, sold all 10 (9 at auction and the other straight after) to a top of \$3500 and averaged \$1639 - a good solid result going into new areas.
- Classings Classic - offered 13 and sold 11 at auction to \$3200 and averaged \$2018.
- Adelaide Royal - Adelaide saw all 4 rams offered sell to \$7000 and average \$4000.
- With the annual on-property sale where 101 sold at auction for a \$1304 average it took our total auction sales to 125 rams at a \$1477 average. Private sales accounted for the balance of 59 rams. As with all averages though there was a far greater percentage of sales at great value prices under that figure than the ones above it.

The highlight of our on-property sale was a new Ridgway annual sale high of \$4000 which was \$400 up on the previous year. This was paid by Gary and Joseph Murdoch (*pictured second right and second left with Ric and Elders purchasing agent Adam Pitt, Elders Yorketown and Landmark auctioneer Gordon Wood (left), North Cowie stud, Warooka for Ridgway 441, a replacement ram late in the catalogue originally destined for the Classings Classic in September. This impressive 13 month old ram with a high quality 20 micron fleece weighed in at 102kg, had a YCFW of +17 and Growth of +6.9, culminating in a Merino Production Index of 149.*

Alastair and Deb MacAllan, Woodchester (*pictured right with Landmark auctioneer Malcolm Scroop and Matt*) made their intentions of buying top quality rams known early on, paying the sale's second top price of \$3500 for R134, a high growth son of R1090 with elite wool. They later added two others at \$1900 and \$1000. Thanks to all buyers at all sale venues.



Ric opening our annual on-property sale



Ridgway Poll Merino Stud

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