



CLYNTON COLLETT
~ superior genetics ~

MEATMASTER ~ PRODUCTIVITY IN THE MELTING POT

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Published: FARMERS WEEKLY, 13 APRIL 2001



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BREEDERS ARE CROSSING DAMARAS WITH OTHER MUTTON SHEEP IN QUEST OF THE ULTIMATE MEAT MACHINE

The Beefmaster turned beef breeding into the science of pragmatism. Sheep Breeders have now come up with an ovine equivalent – the Meatmaster.

Bred for optimal meat production and survival characteristics, appearance has been a secondary consideration in the development of the Meatmaster, and Wool is regarded as completely superfluous.

“Since the news first broke that a new South African Sheep Breed was being developed for tough, extensive conditions, we have been utterly overwhelmed by the enormous interest in the Meatmaster, reports Clynton Collett, a Breeding Specialist instrumental in developing the new mutton Sheep.

“Sheep Farmers in all parts of Namibia and every province of South Africa have contacted us. We have become even more convinced that there must be a terrific need for a Breed like the Meatmaster.”

“As Breeders, we would like to state that we are putting a new and distinctive Sheep Breed on the Market. In no way is it our intention to discredit existing Breeds. Our sole aim is to provide South African Sheep Farmers with an alternative which we believe may help them make their Sheep farming operations more profitable”.

Clynton insists that Meatmasters must in no way be seen as just another new Sheep being bred to satisfy the whims of a particular group.

“This is exactly what we’re trying to get away from. We want, once and for all, to breed a hair Sheep with the sole intention of increasing profitability – which means we must learn to love whatever we find makes us most money. This is why selection for characteristics such as internal and external parasite resistance is more important to us than body shape or other attributes which are attractive on visual appraisal.”

So is there room for another South African Sheep Breed? We already have so many. There are five major woolled Sheep Breeds in this Country, he points out – the Merino, Dohne Merino, SA Mutton Merino, Letelle and Afrino.



Standards for two of these Breeds are almost indistinguishable, but each of the other three has a very distinct role to play in the breeding of woolled Sheep.

“We also have a number of British and other foreign Breeds. All kept primarily for meat production, they have two disadvantages – they have to be shorn and they are chiefly seasonal Breeders. “Then there are the hardy Breeds with hair instead of Wool. Most are long-tailed, fat-tailed or fat-rumped types. They include Blackhead Persians, Van Rooys, Blinkhaar Afrikaners, Karakuls and Damaras. Two are fairly similar, but the other three all have very distinctive characteristics, and are suited to different markets or climatic conditions.

“Our fourth group consists of Breeds which have hair but aren’t fat-tailed. These Sheep are bred solely for meat production. The needs of a huge market are met by virtually only one Breed – the Dorper. The Meatmaster will compete in this market, giving Farmers an alternative with its own distinctive characteristics.”

A UNIQUE BREED

When you examine the Meatmaster’s unique attributes, you soon realize that this isn’t just a new Breed which will provide competition in a monopolistic market. It offers solutions to problems South African Sheep Breeders have wrestled with for many years. At their first meeting prospective Breeders agreed unanimously that Meatmaster must be bred with just one objective – profitability.

“For this reason we are attracting Breeders who are open-minded enough, and have a broad enough vision, not to formulate rules and Breed standards which suit only a select few. We are setting standards which will enable the Breed to grow and develop so that it maximizes profitability under as wide a range of conditions as possible,” Clynton explains.

Breeders took a radical decision – the Meatmaster must have a percentage of Damara blood, but the rest of its genetic material can be derived from any other Sheep Breed. There is a sound reason for their insistence on Damara blood. Two of the most important Meatmaster selection criteria are at strong herd instinct and a covering of hair with a fluffy Wool undercoat shed naturally to keep the sheep healthy and neat – pronounced Damara characteristics which will only be retained of the new Breed has enough Damara blood.

At present Meatmasters are mostly Damara-Dorper crosses. White Dorper crosses probably produce the most promising results. Van Rooys, SA Mutton Merinos and other Breeds are also used.



“Breeders of Dorpers and other Sheep who share our vision of both standards and norms of selection, but don’t want to do away with ewes they have selected over a long period for fertility and other important traits, can join our group and breed Meatmasters simply by buying F2 or F3 Meatmaster Rams and putting them to their Ewes”.

Whichever way you choose to go, Clynton emphasizes that bearing the breed standards and selection norms of the Meatmaster in mind at all times is vitally important. Because they form the basis of the new Breed, Breeders will have to adhere strictly to them.

“The Meatmaster sets the breed standard. How you achieve it is up to you.”

MEATMASTER BREED STANDARDS

COLOUR AND SKIN PIGMENTATION

Any colour or combination of colours is acceptable, but good skin pigmentation around the eyes and over the ears is essential.

HEAD AND HORNS

Ewes must be feminine and rams masculine. Horns are acceptable in both sexes, but a preference for polled animals is actively encouraged.

COAT

The coat should consist mainly of short, glossy hair with an undercoat of fine, fluffy Wool. Meatmasters should never need shearing, so shedding their coats naturally is essential.

CONFORMATION AND LEGS

Meatmasters must be of average size with functional, efficient body conformation and well-placed legs, so that they can walk long distances.

TAIL

The tail should be well attached, and preferably no longer than the hock. It should be a neat wedge-shape, with only a moderate covering of fat. Docking the tail should never be necessary.

HERD INSTINCT

A strong herd instinct is vital – it simplifies management in dense bush or mountainous terrain and prevents small groups wandering away on their own or getting through fences. Sheep with a well-developed herd instinct protect themselves and their lambs from predators.



A quick glance at these requirements confirms that there is no Breed – not even the Dorper, at present dominating this category of sheep – which has remotely the same breed standards.

“Unlike other breeds, the Meatmaster doesn’t have to conform to any norms prescribing body shape – the breed standards don’t specify what the ears should look like, how the neck and shoulder should be attached, or the shape of the forequarter or any other part of the body,” says Clynton.

“We simply state that the Sheep should have good, functionally efficient body conformation. We are determined, once and for all, to breed a profitable Sheep, and then learn to love what we’ve bred, instead of just producing another Sheep which is pleasing to the eye.”

Selection policies are directed towards developing an extremely fertile Breed. Ewes must be good mothers which rear Lambs successfully. Rams must be virile and capable of serving ewes effectively. Above all, they must be able to walk long distances. Lambs should reach a slaughter weight of 15-25kg as soon as possible, with an average grading of A3 at these weights. Meatmasters must be easy-care in all respects. Shearing and tail-docking should be unnecessary, and dosing, inoculation and dipping minimal.

SELECTING FOR GOOD GENETICS

“We intend establishing the Meatmaster on the broadest possible genetic base, incorporating as great a diversity of genetic material as we can, that’s why we recommend that all our Breeders should have their animals performance tested, although this isn’t compulsory during the upgrading process. Various forms of Stud Breeding will be permitted, but sheep will have to be performance tested for full registration.”

The aim of performance testing will be to evaluate income per Sheep, based on lifetime production and reproduction. An index will be calculated and used for selection with this objective in view. Showing will be permitted for the purpose of familiarizing prospective Breeders with the Meatmaster and promoting it, but on an entirely new basis – there will be no competition.

Breeders will exhibit their animals and discuss individual merits. Each exhibitor will be given an opportunity to explain why he decided to show a particular Sheep, quote performance statistics and draw attention to outstanding traits. All auctions will be veldt Ram sales, and only performance-tested animals will be accepted for sale.

“Our Meatmaster slogan is ‘Nature’s Moneymaker’,” Clynton points out. “We are prepared to work hard to make it precisely that. If you had any doubts about the Meatmaster to begin with, I’m sure you agree by now that it isn’t just another new sheep breed.”



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“It’s actually entirely different – it looks different, its performance is different and our breeding strategy is very different. Some Farmers have been breeding Meatmasters for as much as ten years, and all reports indicate that everyone is impressed by their exciting performance.”

“If you are a broad-minded Breeder who isn’t just intent on just making a fast buck (although you may indeed do so), a diligent Breeder willing to invest in an animal capable of dominating the meat market of the future, we invite you to join us.”

“Development of a Sheep like the Meatmaster is long overdue. We have studied South African and Australian Sheep Breeds, and we’re convinced that the Meatmaster won’t just be a success in South Africa – it’s a potential world-beater.