Famous sheep breeds. 2. The Corriedale

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T. H. Anderson's Champion Corriedale ram at the 1959 Perth Royal Show

V. F. Pederick & Co.'s Champion Corriedale ewe at the 1959 Perth Royal Show
The Corriedale sheep is a breed which has achieved widespread popularity throughout the world as a dual-purpose animal. It was evolved by New Zealand breeders who—not fully satisfied with the performance of either the Merino or the British long-wool sheep under their conditions—sought an animal which would combine the superlative wool-producing properties, and outstanding foraging ability of the Merino with the better meat production and better mothering qualities of the British sheep.

Despite the multiplicity of sheep breeds throughout the world—Great Britain alone has about 30 recognised pedigree breeds—the existing strains are still inadequate to meet the widely-differing requirements of sheepmen in many countries, and cross-breeding is widely practised.

From time to time, progressive breeders have attempted to "fix" a cross-bred strain or in other words have attempted to create a new breed by a fusion of two or more breeds.

Increased knowledge of the science of genetics—the mechanism of inheritance—has greatly simplified this task in recent years, but most of our existing "pure-bred" strains were evolved from miscellaneous collections of ancestors long before the discoveries of Mendel were publicised. Breeders bred to an "ideal," mating the individuals which most closely approached that ideal, and rigorously culling progeny which failed to achieve the required standards.

By following these principles, the originators of the Corriedale breed successfully evolved an "inbred half-bred" which is perhaps the world's best example of a truly dual-purpose sheep.

**HISTORY**

The breed originated almost a century ago—in the 1860's—soon after Mr. James Little arrived in New Zealand from Scotland with a consignment of British long-wool rams and ewes for Dr. Webster and Mr. Aitken who owned properties in North Otago.

He stayed in New Zealand to manage a property named "Corriedale" for Dr. Webster and it was there that he conceived the idea of establishing an inbred half-bred flock which would combine the best qualities of the Merino and the British sheep.

There seems to be considerable doubt as to the precise breed of the British sheep imported by Dr. Webster. Most writers simply refer to them as Longwools, using the capital letter. Britain has a Devon Longwool breed, so-called to distinguish it from the Devon Closewool but Dr. Webster's sheep may have been Lincoln's, Leicesters or any other of the longwooled, as distinct from the shortwooled British breeds.

James Little named his new breed "Corriedale," after the title of the property, but on the death of Dr. Webster
the estate was sold and the flock dispersed. Although Little continued the work in 1878 on a property he acquired in North Canterbury, a large-scale breeding programme had already been commenced on similar lines about four years earlier.

In 1874, Mr. W. S. Davidson, the manager of the New Zealand and Australian Land Company—the largest pastoral company in the world—had mated 1,000 stud Merino ewes with selected stud Lincoln rams on “The Levels Estate” in South Canterbury. The original parents were bred from each year for some years, the female progeny being heavily culled again and again.

Eventually they were mated to the pick of the half-bred rams and continued to be inbred for generation after generation.

Other flock owners followed suit using English Leicester, Border Leicester and Lincolns but “The Levels” flock is the oldest in New Zealand.

Eventually Corriedales were admitted to the New Zealand flock book, the regulations governing entry at that time not specifying any particular longwool breed, but merely that the sheep were the progeny of half-bred rams from half-bred ewes and the result of not less than 15 years of inbreeding, the original stock being the progeny of Merino and longwool sheep of any pure breed.

The Lincoln cross soon swamped all the other strains however and has come to be accepted as the true Corriedale. For many years the breed had to contend with prejudices, engendered in many cases by unscrupulous breeders who sold crossbred sheep as Corriedales. As a result of this there was often a wide variation in wool types among sheep which were all classed as Corriedales.

Today, thanks to some excellent work by the breed societies, the Corriedale has overcome all the early prejudices and has made tremendous progress during the last 20 or 30 years. Large consignments have been exported to North and South America, Japan, South Africa and many other countries. There are two Corriedale breed societies in the U.S.A., where this splendid sheep has many adherents.

Incidentally, it interesting to note that U.S. breeders made a parallel attempt to evolve a new breed by crossing Cotswold
and Lincoln rams with Merino ewes of the Rambouillet strain, and inbreeding and culling the progeny. The idea was to evolve a sheep better suited to range conditions in the north-western states. The Americans called their new breed the Columbia and it is reported to be gaining rapidly in popular favour.

The Australian Corriedale Association was formed in Melbourne in 1914 and has done some splendid work on behalf of the breed in this country.

**POINTS**

The following standards of type are recognised by the Australian Corriedale Association:

**General Appearance.**—The Corriedale should at once give the impression of being a well-woolled and evenly-balanced sheep, with a remarkably hardy constitution, the ram being of distinctive character and bold outlook. Being a dual-purpose sheep, consideration should be given to both wool and carcass.

**Head.**—Hornless, broad, strong, well-woolled, but free from wool blindness. Blue or black spots on ears are no defect but black or brown spots on hair or wool are defects. Wide-open nostrils, black preferable.

**Neck.**—Broad and strong, forming a good scrag.

**Back.**—From neck to rump, long, level and broad.

**Brisket.**—Deep and wide.

**Ribs.**—Well sprung and deep.

**Hindquarters.**—Well apart, deep and broad, and well let down towards hocks.

**Legs.**—Moderate length, with good bone, set straight and well apart. Black markings on wool or hair are defects. Brown markings on wool or hair are to be considered serious defects. Hoofs of fair size, well formed, and black in colour preferred.

**Wool.**—The Corriedale should carry a heavy, even fleece of good length, dense staple, pronounced crimp and even tip. The object quality is a long-stapled, dense, bulky 50's to 56's, but a somewhat lower
spinning grade, especially in a ram, is not to be discriminated against. A characteristic of the pure Corriedale sheep is the remarkable evenness in the length, density and quality of the fleece throughout. In the males the purse should be covered with wool not too coarse or hairy in texture.

**DUAL-PURPOSE**

From the foregoing it will be seen that the breeders' aims have been to produce a sheep that will grow a valuable fleece, with both weight and quality, on a carcass which meets the needs of the butchers and consumers. Pure Corriedale lambs have commanded good prices and when Corriedale ewes are mated to Downs rams a good export lamb may be obtained.

The Corriedale crosses well with other longwool breeds and is widely used on Merino ewes to produce a good type of comeback wool of 58/60 quality. Corriedale ewes produce a high percentage of twins and are good milkers and mothers.

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