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The Romney Marsh

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Messrs. R. H. Rose and Son's Champion Romney Marsh ram at the 1959 Perth Royal Show.

These well-known breeders took the Championships and Reserve Championships in the Romney Marsh classes for both rams and ewes.
The Romney Marsh, sometimes known as the Kent, is the most popular of the British longwool sheep breeds used in Western Australia. Rams of this breed are widely used for mating with Merino ewes, the crossbred female progeny of the matings being in demand for subsequent mating with Downs-type rams to produce export lambs.

The breed takes its name from an expanse of about 50,000 acres of lowlying land in the county of Kent, England. For many centuries the sea has deposited vast quantities of silt along the coastline of south-eastern England, and the soils of the Romney Marsh range from rich alluvial loams to sand and shingle.

The town of Romney was one of the original Cinque Ports—Dover, Hastings, Hythe and Sandwich were the others—which, in the 13th Century, provided ships and men for the defence of the English Channel. Romney once boasted a famous harbour, but the course of the River Rother was changed by a great storm in 1287 A.D. and the gradual silting of the coast led to its decline.

Although the term "marsh" is something of a misnomer—reclamation work has continued there since the time of the Romans—the country is flat, treeless and lowlying. During World War II, about 150,000 sheep were moved from Romney Marsh to other areas in case it became necessary to flood the land as a defence measure.

Only hardy animals can thrive in this exposed area which is swept by gales from east and west and offers little or no shelter. Drainage channels or dykes suffice as fences and hedges in many sections of the marsh.

The breed has been kept practically pure for centuries as long before the introduction of a Flock Book, many Romney Marsh flocks were bred by families who handed them down from father to son and worked ceaselessly toward breed improvement.

It is highly probable that some Dishley Leicester blood was introduced late in the 18th Century—most British longwools benefited by such an infusion—but if this was the case it did not result in any diminution of the traditional hardiness of the Romney Marsh flocks.

The Romney Marsh sheep as we know it today has proved itself adaptable to a wide range of climatic conditions but remains unexcelled for wet country, having inherited a marked resistance to diseases such as footrot and fluke. Attention to such important matters as early maturity, better carcass conformation and improved fleeces has resulted in the development of a breed which has gained many friends throughout the world.

The Romney Marsh is popular in New Zealand, Australia and many South American countries where its foraging ability enables it to thrive under conditions where many other breeds could barely gain a living.

Although not quite the equal of the Border Leicester for early maturity, the
Romney Marsh is preferred in this State for lamb-breeding activities in the higher rainfall areas of the South-West and Lower Great Southern districts.

Romney Marsh ewes are good mothers, producing large quantities of milk and a high percentage of twin lambs under good flock husbandry conditions.

**POINTS**

**Head**—Wide; good thick foretop. Broad forehead, with no horns.

**Face**—Level between the ears, and white in colour; nose black. Face of ewes full; of rams broad and masculine.

**Eyes**—Large, bright, and lustrous.

**Ears**—Of good size.

**Neck**—Well set in at shoulders, strong and thick.

**Shoulders**—Wide, well put in and level with the back.

**Chest**—Wide and deep.

**Back**—Straight and broad.

**Ribs**—Well sprung; wide across hips.

**Hindquarters**—Rump well turned; thighs well let down and developed.

**Legs and Feet**—Legs short, displaying big bones, and white in colour. Large shapely feet, perfectly black and well woolled down.

**Skin**—Healthy pink colour.

**Fleece**—Of dense, even quality, spinning somewhere about 46's, and of a decided staple and character from fore-top to end of tail. Fleece should cover poll. The wool is of a demi-lustre type, five to six inches in length with seven to nine crimps to the inch, and the staples are more blocky at the top than is the case with other English longwools.

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