



## The Sheep Section

**We have been showing our sheep at Stithians Show since 1998 and it has always been one of the highlights of our year.**

For a few months before the show, we've been eyeing the stock and thinking about which ewe, shearling, lambs and possibly ram to take to the show. Often it is not until the shearlings are shorn that you can finalise which of these to show and then it is a question of managing their condition so they are just right by the time of the show. The most well grown forward lambs are looked over to check teeth and limbs and weed out any that don't match the breed standard for showing. For the three to four weeks before the show the sheep are made ready for showing by getting them used to being on a halter, walked in the halter, handled all over, the fleece cleaned, carded and trimmed until by the Sunday evening before the show they are ready for the next day and the car is packed.



Meanwhile up at the showground dedicated volunteers have been laying out lines of hurdles and fitting them together to form pen after pen; sometimes it seems impossible to get them to link together as they should, with the aim that they can be opened and closed without undue difficulty on show day! The tents and marquees have been put up, trophies have been returned, rosettes are prepared, judges appointed, stewards briefed. Usually this follows a cycle repeated over many years but this does not diminish from the work and time put in by all those people who have worked behind the scenes for months to ensure another successful show.



Arriving at the showground early on the Monday morning there is usually a magical stillness and quiet (though one year, I remember a downpour of biblical proportions!). Over the next few hours there is a steady arrival of sheep not only from all over Cornwall, but also from Devon and some even further afield still. Sheep are unloaded, trailers are parked and display boards erected. Often a spare pen is utilised to set up camp for the day - folding chairs are put up, all manner of showing equipment unpacked, often in large wooden grooming boxes, flasks of tea and coffee and early morning snacks supplied. The sheep are bedded, fed and watered (though hay is often held back until after showing has been completed so it doesn't disturb the carefully prepared fleece. Movement licences are handed in, a bit of banter with our Sheep Secretary, stewards, fellow competitors and returning friends. There is an early morning hive

of industry with last minute preparations: a final carding up and trimming, sponging off that last bit of muck that your top sheep has laid on, spraying colour onto fleeces for some

competitions, sorting out safety pins and showing numbers to display, finding the cleanest halter and the whitest show coat. While all these preparations are going on there is a steady stream of visitors looking over the sheep. Some are just happy to observe, others are inquisitive, keen to find out more and touch the sheep. Throughout the day many old friends find their way over to the Sheep Section and we all chat with them while showing off our sheep; this is truly the best part of the day for me.

My breed of sheep are Hampshire Down. When we first had them, we were the only registered pedigree flock in the county. The breed was bred primarily for meat and rams are used in a variety of commercial flocks (in terms of breed and topography) to produce fast growing, easy finishing lambs. With their distinctive appearance of black brown hair around eyes, ears, muzzles and legs and a fine white fleece they are also a real crowd pleaser at shows and for smallholder flocks. It is a joy to show the breed itself and our stock in particular and we always hope they will do us proud in the ring.

Showing is a chance to compare your sheep with others of the same breed and also other sheep of the same type; it is good to have some idea of how to gauge your breeding against others. Showing the animal itself is quite a tense process, hoping it does well and doesn't misbehave (which does happen on occasions - when the best behaved animal suddenly decides it's all too much and throws a bit of a tantrum!). There are anxious moments while I wait for the decision of the judge, but always with respect for the decision. There is a quick turnaround between classes, changing numbers, leading one sheep back to the pen, wrestling hurdles to get them open and the sheep in, then get the next one out and back in the show ring. The hope is you can win some classes, win the section and get through to the supreme championship. The Best in Show Supreme Champion has so far eluded us but we have had a Reserve Champion.

Over the years the whole family has been involved, our children have both shown sheep, fine lambs have come back as shearlings and older ewes, and sheep bred from them have taken their turn in the show ring. At the end of showing, it is good to thank the judge no matter the result; judging is not an easy job and there have to be losers as well as winners.

After the showing is done there are usually a few hours to have a look around the rest of the show. With only a five minute journey home, my sheep are usually the last to leave, in a little island of pens left standing in an otherwise empty field, save for a few stacks of hurdles dotted around. The car is packed, the sheep are loaded, the pens dismantled and its off home again at the end of a long, tiring but very happy and satisfying day.

Roll on 2022 when we can hopefully all be back in the real show ring!

**Paul Stevenson**  
Trustee and Past President

