



Proven production: Charmac Merino Stud principal Leon Martin lambs his 100 stud ewes three times every two years, achieving an average 127 per cent marking and 44kg weaning weight.

New genetics give rise to new wool fabric

Case study

Farm information

Property owners
Leon and Sandra, and
Ian and Val Martin

Location
Table Top, Southern Riverina NSW

Property size
320ha

Annual rainfall
700mm

Soil
Friable black loam over free-draining
orange clay

Enterprises
Limousin beef cattle stud, Charmac
Merino sheep stud



At a glance...

- ▶ South African Merino genetics are producing dual purpose, plain-bodied sheep thriving under Australian conditions
- ▶ The Charmac Merino sheep are shorn every eight months and lamb three times every two years
- ▶ A new fabric, Wool Charné, has been developed to help value-add to the Charmac Merino wool product

After taking over a small stud flock of Charmac Merinos in 2010, **Leon and Sandra Martin** are now not only promoting these new Merino genetics, but have developed a woollen fabric to add further value. **Pamela Lawson** talks to these progressive producers to see what led them down this novel path

Charmac Merinos originated in South Africa, and were bred as true dual-purpose sheep, generating 60 per cent of income from their meat and 40 per cent from their wool.

They are 100 per cent Merino and are typically plain bodied, have a clean breech, are of medium frame, well built and have favourable meat-fat-bone proportions.

Their fleece is free-rolling, with white, soft, high quality wool.

According to Charmac Merino Stud principal Leon Martin, Charmac Merino genetics were first introduced to Australia during 2007 by Phillip and Pam Dutton of Wyanga Merinos, Uralla NSW, to improve the body type of their sheep without affecting their fine wool quality.

Initial imports

Embryos were imported from South Africa and developed into two breeding ewe flocks.

These consist of a 'South African' flock of pure Charmac bloodlines and an 'Australian' flock of ewes which are 50 per cent Charmac and 50 per cent New England Merino.

"I first came across Charmac Merinos when I was asked to assess the physical

constitution of the Dutton's sheep as a service of the agricultural consulting firm I operate," Leon said.

"When the Duttons decided to scale back their operations and concentrate on their cattle enterprise, I was delighted to be offered their entire Charmac flock as a new enterprise for our Table Top property."

Breeding up

The Martin's Charmac Merino stud is now made up of 100 stud breeding ewes (half 'South African' and half 'Australian') which are run in two separate mobs to allow comparisons to be made.

The young sheep are assessed for constitution, physique and wool, with only the best retained for stud.

"The Charmac flock is fortunate to contain a diverse selection of bloodlines, all of which came in the first consignments of embryos," Leon said.

"I am now constantly engineering the breeding with various bloodlines of rams with ewes in order to breed the best possible sheep for future use in the stud.

"At this stage we have deliberately used natural matings so we can record and learn as much as possible about the

individual sheep while there is a vast range of sires available.

"We can also keep track of individual characteristics such as horn status, as breeding polled sheep is a high priority for the stud going forward."

Building numbers

The Martins graze their sheep on pasture, supplemented with cereal oaten hay during winter or prolonged dry periods.

Oaten grain is fed to the ewes during lambing, to support the high percentage of multiple births.

"The ewes are lambed every eight months, so we lamb three times every two years," Leon said.

"We lambed in September this year and the 'South African' ewes achieved 126 per cent lambs at marking, and the 'Australian' ewes 128 per cent.

"When we weaned the 2011-drop lambs during July this year, the 'South African' ewes' lambs averaged 43.1kg liveweight (both sections) while the 'Australian' ewes' lambs averaged 44.2kg.

Wool production

"We crutch our sheep at four months and shear every eight months, in order to prevent the wool staple length from being too long.

"Over a 12-month period, the rams produce 8kg of wool on average, while the ewes produce 5.2kg.

"Our wool for the hoggets is 16–18 micron, and while the rams can mature as low as 17 micron, they typically average 19–21 micron.

"Similarly we have mature ewes with 15 micron wool, but they too average 19–21 micron.

"Charmac Merinos are very quick to shear thanks to their plain bodies and the minimal amount of wool on their legs and belly."

Easy care

Despite the past two summers being very wet, hot and humid, the Martins have not had to jet their sheep to prevent flystrike, thanks to the Charmac's plain body.

"We have been amazed by their resistance, given the conditions, and have saved a significant amount in animal

losses, labour and chemical expenses," Leon said.

"It has also meant we have been able to promote our wool as being clean and chemical-free.

Public feedback

"All our young ewes are currently retained for breeding and to strengthen our burgeoning Charmac flock, although some may be offered for sale as the flock grows.

"Once we have chosen the young rams to retain in the stud, the remaining rams are offered for sale to the public.

"To date we have only offered limited numbers for sale due to the small flock size, but purchasers of our Charmac Merino rams have commented their progeny are plainer bodied than their Merino dams, are less work to run and grow well."

Product promotion

When it came to marketing their wool, the Martins knew they had a unique product which could be further value-added with some hard work and promotion.

They said they did market research and soon established that there are customers wanting woollen garments made from non-mulesed wool.

"But we wanted to go one step further so with professional help, we had a new woollen fabric made from our fleece using a new weave," Leon said.

"We have named this fabric 'Wool Charné', and have promoted it to the Australian fashion industry, creating a lot of interest.

"We are now in the process of making our first major consignment of Wool Charné.

"A quantity of our wool clip which has accumulated over the past two years is now being processed to fill this consignment, while the balance will be sold at the Geelong Wool Store as the first consignment of Charmac Merino non-mulesed wool to be sold in Australia."

Future plans

The Martins are now looking forward to promoting Charmac Merino genetics to other sheep and wool producers, as they believe they provide an exciting outcross to most of the Australian Merino flock.

Exciting times: To value-add to their Charmac Merino wool, the Martins have developed Wool Charné, which has been well received by the Australian fashion industry.



"While Charmac sheep are already providing good production and therefore income for both lamb and wool, they most importantly show the international wool and fashion industries that Australian producers are willing to produce and sell non-mulesed wool as requested," he said.

"We are also looking forward to progressing the marketing of our Wool Charné fabric, and anticipate needing to buy wool back from the progeny of Charmac rams which have been bred to quality Merino ewes." **FA**

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Surviving and thriving: The South African genetics of Charmac Merinos are proving well suited to Australian conditions, producing a plain bodied, dual purpose animal that does not need mulesing.

