

THE BORDER LEICESTER: *Tough enough!*

The Border Leicester breed has what it takes for commercial operations, direct meat sales and the small producer of handspinning fiber.



Commercial Use and Breed Development:

The Border Leicester's prepotency (ability to transmit its characteristics) has made it an invaluable asset both in commercial production and the development of many other breeds. Highly adaptable, the Border Leicester remains a top breed in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

In Australia the Border Leicester is the number one commercial lamb sire. Sheepmen in the USA have been impressed with this breed as well. Dr Lyle G. McNeal, Utah State University sheep and wool specialist who is renowned for his preservation work with the Navajo Churro breed, has fond memories of his experiences with Border Leicesters under tough range conditions:

"For many years during the late 60s through the early 80s, we conducted research in Southern Utah under harsh range conditions and a traditional migratory sheep band of 1,400 ewes. The sheep were shed lambed in the spring in drop lots. The ewes were wintered near Eastern Nevada under salt bush and sagebrush grazing conditions. Water came in the form of snow. In the spring, the pregnant ewes were herded a few hundred miles back to the shed lambing facilities.

"Once the ewes had lambed, they were turned out onto spring grazing, usually on a Pinon-Juniper type of range. Later the sheep were trailed up into high mountains.

"We utilized rams of three different genotypes: Suffolk, Targhee, and Border Leicester. The breeding ewes were Western-white face. The ewes nursed their lambs under high mountain range conditions until fall, when lambs were either selected as replacements or sold.

"We found that the Border Leicesters gained well under these primitive conditions. The rams had less health problems, i.e. feet and legs, and remained sound under the difficult herding and trailing conditions. The Border Leicester was hardy, and still gained weight under those conditions. We also found that Border Leicester carcasses were more tender and yielded more cuts to their carcass weight. They herded well with our stock dogs. The ewes rarely abandoned their offspring like I witnessed with the Western-white face ewes. Overall, we found them to be a breed of sheep grossly underrated and tough enough to function under the West's harsh range conditions."

"The Border Leicester" continued on reverse . . .

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Productivity:

The Border Leicester ewe is noted for excellent mothering abilities, high fertility, good birth weights, and high milk production with sound, long-lasting udders. Lambs show high growth rates, feed efficiency, and muscling. When crossed with other breeds, the offspring tend to retain these traits.

Temperament:

The Border Leicester is well known for its sensible temperament. Even the rams are typically well behaved. Stock dog handlers around the country commonly use Border Leicester sheep, or breeds or crosses derived from Border Leicesters. One West Coast producer, having already raised other breeds of sheep, purchased Border Leicesters strictly for working and training her stock dogs. A frequent competitor at sheep dog trials, this breeder says, "*Handlers are looking for sheep which are not temperamental and flighty, or mean/defensive, and which herd well.*" She sums things up rather succinctly, noting that, "*Border Leicesters are just plain easy to get along with.*"

Showing:

The Border Leicester is a joy to exhibit. They are steady yet possess an innate presence that makes them eye catching in the pasture or in the show ring. With his good manners, the Border Leicester is an excellent choice for youth. In addition, the American Border Leicester Association has an active youth program.

Lustrous Longwool:

The Border Leicester belongs to a unique group of sheep due to a characteristic of the scale formation on the wool fiber. This characteristic causes light to be reflected and gives a lovely glow or luster to the wool. Border Leicester wool has long been held in high esteem by handspinnners and fiber artisans. The wool is a handspinner's dream; strong yet soft and silky to the hand.

The American Border Leicester Association:

The American Border Leicester Association (ABLA) has been serving the Border Leicester breed since 1973. To learn more about what the Border Leicester or the ABLA can do for you, contact Di Waibel at 503-266-7156, or momfarm@canby.com, or visit the ABLA website at www.interrain.com/abla

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