

SHROPSHIRE SHEEP

A great British tradition

If the transport systems we have today had been available in the 18th and 19th centuries, we would probably not have a "Shropshire sheep". Nor for that matter, would we have any other native British breed. Instead we'd have a "Standard British Sheep" – no doubt with a kite mark stamped on it somewhere!

When the Shropshire breed first emerged, there was very little movement of breeding stock within the country. Drovers walked their fat-stock many miles from rural areas to the cities, but the breeding stock remained - and developed - within each region. And the way each breed developed was important.

All native British breeds evolved to suit the local conditions in the areas where they originated. The Shropshire was the most northerly of all the British lowland breeds. It proved suitable for a wide range of conditions and the

breed's popularity continued to grow for many years.

The expression: "Go north for your stock, but go south for your wife" was commonly repeated. Reasons for going south for a wife are unknown! Going north for stock is, however, based on a very

sound principle: Stock brought from harsher northern climes to more temperate conditions perform better than stock moving in the opposite direction.

In the 1960s and 1970s, it became fashionable to go *south* for your stock - a long way south in fact: to the Continent. Large numbers of European breeds were brought across the English Channel, miles from the local conditions for which they had been bred.

But fashions come and go. Today, thanks to renewed interest in traditional British food and pride in our great livestock heritage, some of our native breeds are making a comeback. Many farmers now realise that for British conditions, a native British breed is best. In the forefront of this revival is the Shropshire. The breed has never lost its ability to thrive in a range of British conditions.

So, if you are looking for a wife, go south if you wish. But, if you are searching for a breed of sheep with excellent characteristics, and one that's bred for British conditions, look no further - it has to be Shropshires!



SHROPSHIRE SHEEP

The Shropshire is a traditional Downland, terminal sire breed, with a distinguished heritage. It has many desirable qualities that appeal to flock-owners in the 21st Century.

The modern Shropshire:

- **Thrives in a wide range of conditions;**
- **Finishes consistently off grass alone;**
- **Produces top quality carcasses and tasty, succulent meat;**
- **Lambs easily with a high lambing percentage;**
- **Is highly resistant to Scrapie;**
- **Possesses great longevity and resistance to many ailments;**
- **Grazes in conifer plantations without damaging trees;**
- **Produces high quality wool, suitable for hand-knitting.**



For more information about Shropshire sheep and details of pedigree breeders with stock for sale, contact The Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association and Flock Book Society

www.shropshire-sheep.co.uk



SHROPSHIRE SHEEP

A traditional British breed that excels in a wide range of farming systems





The Shropshire has a remarkable heritage and possesses attributes that are particularly relevant in the modern era of commercial, yet sustainable, farming.

History of the Breed

The Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association was established in 1882 and has the distinction of being the oldest sheep breed society in the UK. The breed itself was developed in the early 1800s from sheep that roamed areas of upland heath and common land in the West Midlands: The Long Mynd in Shropshire; Cannock Chase in Staffordshire; and Morfe Common on the borders of Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

The steady development of these native sheep into a uniform Shropshire breed resulted in vastly superior animals with dual attributes of good meat production and high quality wool.

Favourable reports of the Shropshire spread quickly and soon farmers were using purebreds in Scotland, South West England and throughout the Midlands. The Shropshire became highly esteemed worldwide and in the early 20th century



pedigree animals were exported around the world. They were especially popular in North America, Australia and New Zealand, where Shropshire flocks remain to this day.

The fortunes of the breed declined, however, with the prevention of exports – a result of two world wars and sporadic outbreaks of foot and mouth in Britain. Committed British breeders have continued to develop the Shropshire, maintaining the breed's great strengths of high quality meat and wool, as well as its excellent commercial performance and adaptability.



Flexibility For Flock-Owners

Shropshire sheep thrive in diverse geographical regions and climatic conditions. In Britain, the breed is to be found from the English lowlands to the highlands and islands of Scotland. Shropshires also flourish in the high rainfall areas of Ireland and at altitudes of more than 300 metres (1,000 feet) in mountainous areas of Wales.

Shropshire rams are renowned as terminal sires. Crossed with commercial ewes or purebreds, they produce high quality lambs that match the exacting standards of today's meat buyers. The breed also has a well-proven ability to finish successfully from grass alone. This recommends Shropshires to all lamb producers wishing to maximise use of low cost, home-grown feed. The Shropshire is equally suited to organic and extensive farming systems, such as Countryside Stewardship schemes.

Great Prolificacy and Longevity

Shropshire ewes have the ability to lamb early, and regularly achieve lambing percentages of 160%. As dams, Shropshires are docile, milky and rear twin lambs with ease. They are extremely hardy and have a long, productive flock-life.

Top Quality Shropshire Lamb

Developed primarily as a supreme meat breed, today's Shropshires retain the ability to produce finished lambs of the highest quality. The breed combines fast growth with excellent carcass conformation and leanness. Shropshire breeders have frequently celebrated successes in lamb carcass competitions, and these awards are backed by

commercial sales records: Typically around one third of Shropshire lambs will be graded "U" and two thirds as "R" for carcass conformation at fat class 2 or 3L. So, Shropshire lambs are eligible for premium prices from many meat buyers.

A trial at Walford College, Shropshire in the 1990s, investigated the use of Shropshire rams as terminal sires on commercial North Country Mules. The trial demonstrated that **95%** of the resultant lambs graded in fat classes 2 or 3L – a staggering 28% improvement on the MLC all-lamb average of 67%.



Excellent Scrapie Resistance

Since the launch of the National Scrapie Plan, over 1,000 Shropshires have been Scrapie genotyped. The breed is completely free from the "V" allele, which is linked to Scrapie susceptibility. Indeed, a substantial number of animals have been identified with the ARR/ARR genotype, which confers the highest level of Scrapie resistance.



Christmas Tree Bonus

Shropshire sheep have a proven track record of being the most consistently reliable breed for grazing in conifer plantations, without damaging the trees. Christmas tree growers in the UK and other northern European countries now use Shropshires as a cost-effective and environmentally friendly method of weed control. The owners are reaping the benefit of two crops from every acre of trees.

Valuable Shropshire Wool

The Shropshire has a more complete covering of wool than any other Downland breed and grows a heavy, dense fleece, typically weighing 2 to 3kg. The wool is of high quality and suitable for a wide range of uses. The Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association produces its own range of Shropshire yarn, hand-knitted garments and woven items, such as travel rugs, throws and scarves.

