

Charollais Feature in BBC Hit Programme

Carroll Barber reports on "Lambing Live" from the BBC



Over five nights in March many of us were glued to the BBC's programme 'Lambing Live'. It was one of the most significant pieces of television in recent history to accurately portray the life of a farming family and their sheep enterprise. For those who did not see the programme it was a live production from the Beavan's farm near Abergavenny in the foothills of the Brecon Beacons. They farm 500 acres of prime Welsh farmland and run 900 ewes, along with beef cattle a few pigs and chickens.

The idea for the programme started way back in mid 2009, when presenter Kate Humble was approached by the BBC with the idea. "We've got this marvellous idea for a brand new live series called Lambing Live. We want to do five programmes on five consecutive nights on a farm, the week that all the sheep give birth." At

first Kate was sceptical about the success of such a programme but soon realised the possibilities of the show. "Sheep are an intrinsic part of the British landscape. You can't have a chocolate box scene without sheep looking pretty on a hillside but how much do we actually know about them? And the fact is, we love lamb. I think I'm right in saying it's Britain's favourite meat and yet how do we connect the little white fluffy things on a hillside with lamb and mint sauce on a plate? How does one become the other?"

Starting in September 2009, Kate began her apprenticeship to the Beavans to learn the skill of shepherding. And her first task was to select the rams for the flock. This as for so many farmers in Wales means a trip to the NSA Ram Sale at Builth Wells to select some new stock

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sires for the flock. Jim and Kate Beavan run Welsh Mule and Suffolk x Mule ewes and have for a number of years been keen advocates of the Charollais ram. Many vendors will have been aware of the camera crew at the sale, as Jim coached Kate in the art of ram selection. In Tim Prichard’s pen of Castellau ram lambs they got down to the business end of the tups “the most important thing about a tup is he must have two good balls” explained Jim and went on to show Kate how to check these. Secondly Jim stressed to Kate the importance of a tup with not too strong a head and how this assures an easier lambing for his ewes. He was also keen to select rams with good strong hind quarters; for strength during the mating season and also to produce progeny with good, chunky, meaty back legs.

They considered the purchase of ram lambs but in the end went for two shearing rams from the Champion Pen of E Probert & Sons, Leominster, Herefordshire. The two they selected were both sired by Galtres Favour, which was a joint purchase by the Mortimer and Wraycastle flocks for 7,100 gns at the 2006 Worcester Premier Sale. Both were March born; one a triplet out of a Harmby Moor Capelo ewe and the other a twin out of a Bould Flash Harry ewe. Kate was very impressed by the NSA sale “it has a lovely

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*“Lambing Live” Team - (rt to lt)
Kate Beavan, Adam Henson,
Kate Humble and Jim Beavan.*

“They give easy lambing and produce a nice, meaty lamb which is fast growing”



atmosphere, like a big family day out. There is so much evidence of the extreme work and love that breeders have put into rams and they are so proud to present them to potential purchasers.”

The rams duly arrived back at the Beavans’ farm and certainly looked a picture as they ran out of the trailer into a green pasture. A few weeks later Kate was back on the farm preparing the rams for work and at that point they received their names, Hercules and Shanks. Having been raddled ready for action they turned the new tups out into a field of ewes. Much to the amusement of Kate, the Beavans and most of the viewing population the two tups promptly turned heels and ran in the opposite direction – but not for long! Soon they were hard at work and the fruits of their efforts were clearly seen when Kate returned for scanning on the farm. The family were delighted with the scanning results; a total of 46 triplets, 192 twins and 55 singles were due for the programme.

The first live programme went out from the farm and not one birth happened. But things soon started and the audience were witness to many live births, the majority of which were unassisted. Kate Humble’s co-presenter was Cotswold farmer and Countryfile presenter, Adam Henson. Adam is no stranger to Charollais rams having purchased a couple for his own flock of Lleyn x Romney ewes. He soon commented on the lambs “the Charollais rams have produced some great looking lambs, which is what it is all about.” He asked Kate Beavan why they liked the breed “I like the Charollais personally as they have nice small heads which gives easy lambing, as compared to say a Texel with a big head which can cause problems and lambs get stuck. They also produce a nice, meaty lamb which is fast growing.”

Over the five nights all the aspects of lambing were tackled; fostering, feeding, tailing, castration and prolapse and it was excellent to see such strong, quality Charollais cross lambs going out into the fields at 24-48 hours of age. The care, dedication and sheer hard work that we all as sheep farmers put in to bringing new life into the world was expertly portrayed. The whole purpose of lambing; to produce lamb meat for the consumer was dealt with in the last programme. Kate saw a couple of lambs go through the whole process. Jim Beavan summed it up brilliantly “It’s what we are in business for, to produce a good lamb for the butchery trade. So to be honest I’m proud to see a finished animal hung up with the right conformation. The lamb has had a nice life and its quite fulfilling to see the whole job through full cycle.”