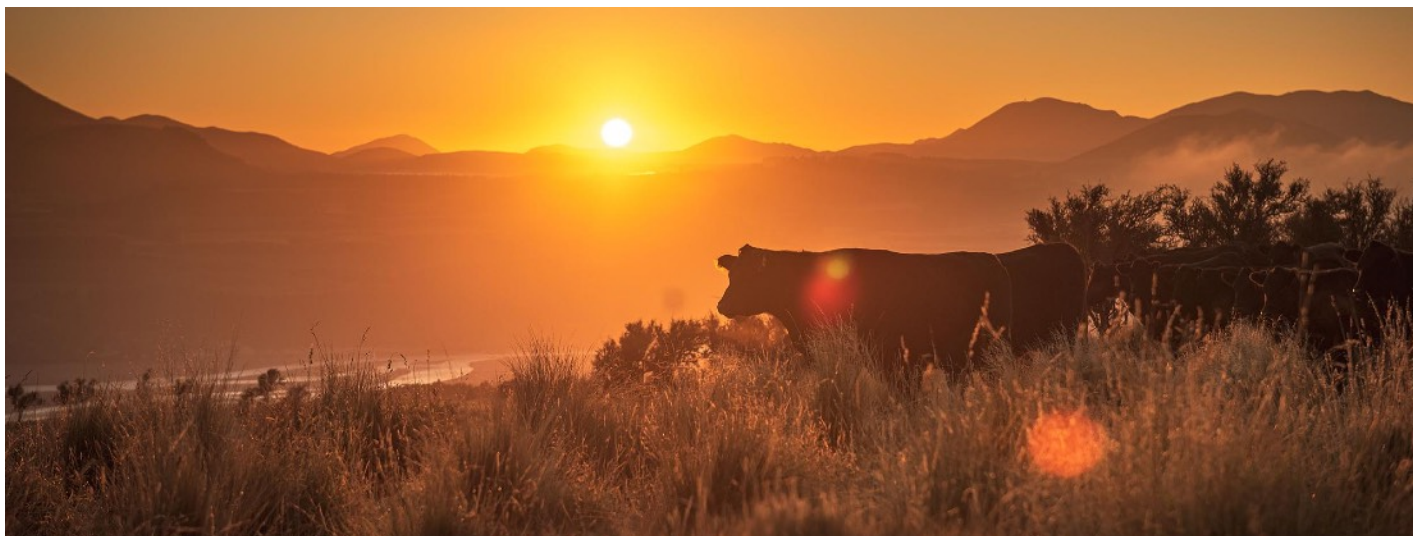




# CLEARDALE

EST GENETICS 1943



**Ben Todhunter**  
**Cleardale Station**

When I looked at last year's newsletter the intro talked about a couple of floods, patchy weather, up and down grass growth and people operating at capacity. So, nothing's changed then! We've been trying to run our system with a little bit of a buffer to make it easier for people, animals and the land, and also to deal with any of the curveballs that are getting thrown at us. In October we used all of our feed buffer and came close to making some hard calls with stocking numbers — with a dry cold spring and with 140ha of irrigation still out of action after the June floods had damaged the hydro system. We've built that feed buffer back up again with a favourable November and December but are very wary of potential slaughter constraints through the autumn, putting pressure on feed supplies, when we may need that buffer again.

It can be a tough gig this farming lark and it doesn't appear to be getting any easier in the near-term with rising costs, reducing returns, increased interest rates and poorly thought through regulatory changes. So, what's the bright spots or reasons for optimism? Firstly, farming in NZ has actually been a great place to be for the last few years. And as a country we have a lot going for ourselves including our isolation, plentiful renewable energy and outward facing culture. Where we, as a business, have always tried to operate is to know and get closer to our customers. It's interesting to look at the data out of the US beef market and Kevin Speer in his article 'Speer: Real Money For Real Value | Drovers' - <http://bit.ly/3FYVSeX> talks of the increasing returns from focusing on the consumer...

I do like this way he describes differentiation in a subsequent article:

"Pan vs knife: In the end, there are essentially only two approaches to the business. One strategy invests in consumers and emphasizes making the pie bigger (the pan); the other is driven more by rivalry and worries about how the pie gets sliced (the knife). Only one of them, though, results in success and prosperity: pan beats knife every time." - Kevin Speer

This has been the NZ Merino approach and now some of the differentiated meat programs such as Silere, Lumina, and AngusPure are gaining traction, and that is where we as a business are continuing to target our supply and genetics.

## 171230 - The numbers that are changing the industry

Some numbers mean something once they're joined together. Cleardale 171230 is his actual name, and he's a freak. Well he's actually a sheep, but his numbers are freakish... After having a quick look at 1230's latest numbers I thought it would be interesting to tell his story...

It started back when John Brakenridge was looking to increase the supply of fine wool in New Zealand, and had the idea to breed a finer fleece on crossbred sheep – The Sheep Transformation project (NZSTX) was born. Part of that project was breeding a fine wool sheep that exhibits crossbred performance. At the same time, there was a group of farmers who got together to set up a breeding scheme – Southern Cross Sheep was born.



But let's go back a step. In the late 1980s there was a fine wool boom and this idea had already been trialed, and failed. So what were the lessons then, and how could we overcome them now? One of the main problems was that the fine wool sheep got all manner of diseases, particularly footrot.

At this stage we didn't really know how heritable it was in fine wool sheep and also whether or not resistance to footrot would have any negative correlations with positive production traits. Helping us in all this was Dr Mark Ferguson. He had a mate, a self-described 'tightfisted wanker' from Western Australia. We signed a JV to use his genetics over our half-bred ewes and breed this dual purpose fine wool ram that we were seeking. Thommo (David Thompson) had been breeding meaty, plain bodied merino for some time and his stud, Moojepin, was leading the Australasian industry in these traits.

As this was going on the New Zealand merino industry was working together to develop a breeding value for footrot. A progeny test was set up to compare genetics from a range of fine wool sires, with one of the key objectives being to objectively challenge the progeny for footrot, which would help to inform the breeding values.

In 2014 Moojepin 652 and Moojepin 319 semen was used over 400 of our finer half-bred ewes. From this mating two formative progeny were born – AB 74 was selected to be used as a hogget and mated to a Southern Cross half Melrose dam, and gave birth to SX 634. AC 347 was mated as a hogget and proceeded to rear twins.

We used SX 634 over quarter-bred ewes in 2016 and 2017, and in the 2017 mating he went to Cleardale AC 347. From this mating we got our mate 1230, an incredible outcome just three years into a group breeding scheme.

I can remember the day in 2018 when we were looking to class the rams for mating. Ferg was excited about the performance of 634 and keen to see him. We got the rams in and couldn't find 634 anywhere, until the shepherd who'd got them in pulled a tag from his pocket. SX 634 had just died in the paddock. The only thing to do was select some of his best sons. On first inspection 1230 hadn't made the grade, but because he was a triplet we looked closer. We checked the mother's background and saw that she'd reared twins as a hogget, twins as a two-tooth and then triplets.

After a bit of mucking around Ferg and I settled on 1230, and the rest they say is history, for this ram will take some years to be bettered. He is super sound footed and for a great number of traits he's in the top 1% of the Australasian Fine Wool database. For some traits he's close to, if not the top animal.

With a micron breeding value of only 3 microns above the average, it's very rare to have this combination of traits. Growth, carcass, disease resistance and fertility all in one package, which is why he starts getting the 'freak' status.

He has been used widely at Cleardale and within the wider industry. Ferg advised me to not sell 1230's semen to protect our advantage, while advising his other clients to use him, however we decided that he was too good to keep to ourselves and it was worth raising the industry standard together. Prior to the 2022 lambing he had 580 progeny across eight flocks.

## A visit from AngusPRO magazine

Back in January 2022 we were fortunate to have Victoria Rutherford-O'Sullivan visit us to have a look at what we're doing with our Angus programme here at Cleardale. The stunning imagery and article featured in the annual AngusPRO magazine, which was published alongside Country-Wide Beef in May. You can read the article online via: [www.anguspro.co.nz/magazine](http://www.anguspro.co.nz/magazine)

EXCERPT: "We aim to breed a functional, efficient cow that turns out a first-class eating product," says Ben. "Animals that can perform in the hill and high country and fit into Five Star, AngusPure or any other quality customer programs."



## Giving back

In March we had a ceremony to honour the final part of our public walking track in the Rakaia Gorge. The track and artwork are designed to highlight the area's biodiversity and history. Local carver John Reihana from Arowhenua carved a wonderful pou depicting the legend of the Rakaia Gorge taniwha and it has been erected at the lookout to watch over the area.

Interpretive panels tell the Maori legend of how the gorge was formed, the struggle between the taniwha living in the river and the nor'west wind that came from the mountains. A giant metal taniwha by Methven sculptor Hannah Kidd also sits alongside the track. Since we purchased this property five years ago we have been delighted with some of its special biodiversity, and we're working with central and local Government, the community and neighbours to protect and enhance that biodiversity. It's heartening to see internationally, that it appears the single track focus on carbon for climate change is starting to expand and biodiversity is being recognised for its importance. In Australia a biodiversity credit market has now been formed. At NZ Merino this will also be one of the priority pillars for the ZQRX scheme.



## On Property Ram Auction - January 23rd 2023

At our first SX Fine Wool auction last year, we were heartened by the support shown for what we've been trying to do with our sheep. It has been encouraging to get out and about and see some of the progeny, and the different ways people are looking to use these genetics. I've seen a diverse spread of usage, from crossbred farmers going finer, people lambing hoggets looking for easy lambing with options, halfbred and Corriedale farmers going finer, and fine wool farmers looking to bring footrot resistance, growth, and fertility into their flocks. Given the support shown last year and the depth and quality of this year's drop, we will offer 110 rams on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January. The ram sale catalogue is live on our website.



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**ON PROPERTY RAM AUCTION**  
29 Double Hill Run Road, RD12, Rakaia

Monday 23rd January 2023, 1pm

If you haven't already been in contact about your ram requirements for 2023, please fill in the form below and return by post or email (attach a photo of this table).

BREED	Merino	SX Fine Wool	Halfbred or 3/8th	English Leicester
NUMBER NEEDED				

## Contact the Team

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\* Catalogue live on Website \*

