



Quality the watchword at Welsh Texels

Having bred Texels for more than 25 years the Evans family's Welsh prefix is well known in South Wales, but in the last few years it has quickly become recognised further afield, thanks to the determination shown by Tomos Evans to progress the flock.

"When my mother and father started with Texels in 1989 it was with some ewes from Stephen Williams Wollascott flock. Those sheep did a great job for us, building a solid foundation from which to breed great commercial rams and females which bred well year after year.

"Then in 1996 I started to get a bit more interested in the sheep and my parents allowed me to buy a ewe lamb from the Llyfni flock that I spotted at the Royal Welsh Show. She was by Kirtle Boxer and out of a dam by Cambwell Yellowstone. That was the start of the journey for me and spurred an interest in breeding a sharper, more breeders type of sheep."

Following that, as ewe numbers grew the family staged an on-farm production sale in 1999 and sold 80 of the older ewes. "Then in 2000 we bought a Curig ewe lamb by Cambwell Emperor and in 2001 we used AI for the first time as we were unable to buy rams due to foot-and-mouth restrictions."

"We used North Quarter Deluxe on everything that year and he had a great influence on the female lines. In 2002 we took the plunge and showed at the Royal Welsh Show for the first time. "I took a ewe lamb which stood seventh. I was delighted with that result and it really spurred me on to continue breeding the type of sheep we were."

The following year Tom bought a Claybury ewe and for the first time in 2004 undertook some embryo transfer work, flushing

the Claybury ewe, DHL00007. "Those few years in the early part of the 2000s were really the beginning of a new era for the flock which has got us to where we are today.

"In 2005 we went to the Irish National sale at Blessington and bought Shannagh Lincoln, a Craighead Hercules son out of a Glenside Gurka daughter. We were pleased with his progeny and we were continuing to move the flock forwards."

But it's not just the rams that have had an influence and Tom is keen to secure additional female lines when the opportunity arises. "I'm always open to buying in new females when I believe they can add something to the flock. In many ways buying fresh females can have a bigger impact on a flock than buying rams and with the use of AI it is relatively easy to access good quality rams.

"In some cases you may have to wait a year to use AI, but that gives you a chance to see how they're breeding, so it's not always a bad thing. As a result we haven't, historically, spent a lot on rams, preferring to invest in good females when they become available."

One ram which was bought and proved highly successful was Cambwell Napolian, a ram bought in 2007 at the lock-down sale at Lanark. "He was a Cambwell Laird son and left a real mark on his females, they were the next generation to improve the flock still further."

The family then staged another sale in 2010, selling 100 females to help bring numbers back to a more manageable level. The Welsh flock currently runs with around 50 ewes with 5-6 selected annually for embryo transfer.



"With the success of embryo transfer we were getting to the stage where we had too many ewes for our acreage. I also like to offer groups of proven females every so often to give people a chance to buy quality breeding ewes.

"Young people like me can't always afford to buy the best gimmers at Society sales or in-lamb sales. It has been a good way for me to secure better bloodlines and I like to help others where I can."

Other females to join the flock have been ewes from the Procters flock and a Greenwood ewe by Swaites O'Sullivan bought at Chelford as well as select ewes from flocks such as Glenside and Cornerstone.

"The Greenwood ewe, I liked from the moment I saw her at Chelford. She just had something about her. We lambed her naturally the first year and then flushed her after that to Mossknowe Pudsey.

"That was one of the best crops of ewe lambs we've ever had and included a ewe lamb sold to David Bradley Farmer and the shearling ewe which was female and reserve overall champion at the English National Sale in 2014 and sold to Charlie Boden for 7000gns."

Without a doubt 2014 was the year the Welsh flock came of age, with a host of successes at both shows and sales, including winning the South Wales Club progeny show with a pair of Teiglum Tornado lambs as well as winning the Dyfed Club flock competition and winning the show at the early NSA sale with a shearling ewe by Cairness Ranger.

"We also topped the South Wales Club Sale with a ram lamb, Welsh VavaVoom, at 900gns and won the Dyfed Club in-lamb sale with an aged ewe by Rascarrel Peppermint which then sold for 1000gns. We also topped the sale at 1150gns with a maternal sister to the 7000gns gimmer.

"To top it off we were champion at the South Wales Club in-lamb sale with a Cairness Ranger gimmer which sold for 900gns. It was a remarkable year, but gave me the confidence that we were heading in the right direction."

However, while selling females to breeders is a mark of how far the flock has progressed in recent years Tom is clear about where the bread and butter of the flock's income is.

"We have to keep a focus on our commercial ram lamb buyers. We sell all our rams as lambs and they have to be the type of sheep our commercial customers want. More importantly, they have to produce the type of lamb that processors and retailers are looking for."

"We sell about 35-40 ram lambs a year and I'm always conscious when looking at rams that we need that early growth and shape to produce quick growing well bodied prime lambs. Increasingly our commercial customers are looking for figures too, so we have to bear that in mind when looking for rams."

Tom says that he also wants sheep with that bit of breed character to draw in potential new buyers. "They've got to be bit sparky, the last thing I want in our pen anywhere is a dull sheep. That said we never look to buy a ram as a complete package, it's always about adding in the next bit to the flock, be that body, character or skins. You never get the sheep you want in one package, so we have to add the extras when we see them."

With the flock now firmly based on proven female lines Tom says the time may have come to invest more in a ram, but it will have to be right sheep to add something to the flock, he adds.

When it comes to selling the family are careful, only taking sheep to major sales when they believe they have something suitable. "We've only ever taken one sheep to Lanark, Welsh Unique, which sold for 1000gns and I don't want to take another unless I know it will be worthwhile. We can sell ram lambs well enough here without adding extra costs to sales.

"Local buyers at the NSA Main Sale at Builth Wells and the South Wales Club Sale are the bread and butter for us."

"I'd like to sell the odd ram or two for better money in due course and continue to drive the flock forward for the benefit of our customers."