

# Strictly Sheep

Take your places, people, for a show full of glitz, glamour and grazing! Our sensational sheep keep Nidderdale's landscape looking the way it does and put the sparkle into farmland all over Britain. But which sheep have the most star quality? Janina Holubecki goes backstage to meet the contestants.

## Variety Performance

Have you ever wondered why there are so many different kinds of sheep in Britain and why sheep up north are very different from sheep down south? It's because one area of Britain can be very different from another and each British breed has been developed to cope with the specific conditions of its place of origin. This means that every breed of sheep has its natural strengths and weaknesses: it may score very highly for some attributes and not for others. So the sheep will have to do their very best to impress the judges...

Our Strictly Sheep contest starts in wild, remote areas such as Upper Nidderdale where the native sheep upland breeds such as the Swaledale and Dalesbred are specialists in survival. Upland sheep score points for being extremely tough and hardy surviving on relatively poor grazing land, such as moorland. They are very nimble and light on their feet: practicing their show-stopping moves by grazing on steep hillsides.



Shaggy Swaledales protect their lambs fiercely and though they may lose a few points for style, they more than make up for it in toughness and agility!



The Dalesbred is similar to the Swaledale, but has slightly different markings. It is much less numerous than the Swaledale but Nidderdale has always been one of its strongholds

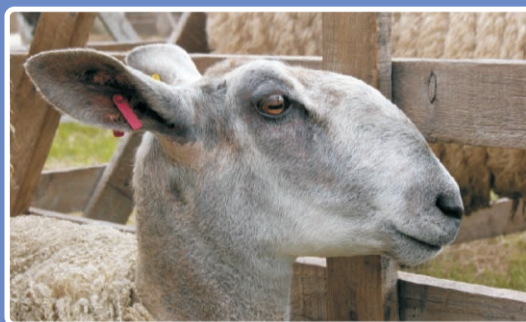
### Swaledale & Dalesbred - Judges' Scores:

- 10 Hardiness
- 10 Mothering instinct
- 4 Ability to produce & feed several lambs
- 4 Quality of wool
- 4 Amount of meat

Total 32/50

## It takes two

What if we pair the Swaledale or Dalesbred ewe up with something more glamorous? Enter a longwool breed of ram, for example the Bluefaced Leicester. With their curved, Roman noses, Bluefaced Leicester sheep definitely have something of an aristocratic air about them. Their wool is refined and silky compared to the coarse, shaggy locks of upland sheep. They are also prolific (the ewes usually having two or more lambs) and, in spite of their airs and graces, they produce lots of milk to feed them! However, as you might expect, these aristocratic animals are not quite as tough as their upland partners.



Aristocratic Bluefaced Leicesters may lose a few points for being soft, but they make up for it in terms of poise!

### Longwool Bluefaced Leicester - Judges' Scores:

- 4 Hardiness
- 5 Mothering instinct
- 10 Ability to produce & feed several lambs
- 8 Quality of wool
- 5 Amount of meat

Total 32/50

So, again scoring very highly in some areas, but a fairly average score overall.

## The Semi Final

By pairing the hardy little upland Swaledale or Dalesbred ewe with a refined longwool ram, the resulting offspring, known as a halfbred or mule, combines the best qualities of both parents. In Nidderdale, you can mainly see two types of halfbred: the North of England Mule and our very own Masham halfbred - though the latter are far scarcer.



An attractive North of England Mule at Askwith Show.



The 'Mad Masham' is sired by a Teeswater longwool ram rather than a Bluefaced Leicester.

### Mule or halfbred ewe - Judges' Scores:

- 8 Hardiness
- 10 Mothering instinct
- 10 Ability to produce & feed several lambs
- 7 Quality of wool
- 5 Amount of meat

Total 40/50

So, the Mule or halfbred is a better all-rounder than either of its parents - but that isn't the end of the story.