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Matthew Smith, Master Shearer - August 15, 2017

World record breaking England-based Northland and Hawke's Bay shearer Matthew Smith has reached one of his ultimate goals by being acclaimed a Master Shearer by Shearing Sports New Zealand.

The honour was bestowed at the SSNZ annual conference in Christchurch last week, the 33-year-old Smith being woken at his home in England early-morning to be told the news in a phone call from chairman and shearing legend Sir David Fagan.

It recognises in particular Smith's taking of World record shearing to the Northern Hemisphere with the ultimate record of 731 strong wool ewes in a nine-hour days on July 26 last year at Trefranck Farm, St Clether, in Cornwall, where he farms with wife Pippa.

It was the first World shearing record attempt in the Northern Hemisphere and sparked a flurry of record-breaking activity in the UK, including two World marks in Smith's same Trefranck shed - Irish shearer Ivan Scott's lambs record of 867 five days later, and three weeks ago the eight-hour tally of 644 shorn by brother and New Zealand team member Rowland Smith.

Rowland Smith was made a Master Shearer at the age 29 in 2016, recognising mainly his competition shearing triumphs including a 2014 World title and multiple Golden Sheards and New Zealand championships' Open final victories.

Matt Smith was far from new to World records shearing, having also once also held the eight-hour record with a tally of 578 shorn at Waitara Station, between Napier and Taupo on January 15, 2010.

He said after learning of the award that he's now going to devote more time to competitions – the Golden Shears and New Zealand championships finals being on “the bucket-list.”

A big target is a place in the Golden Shears Open final for the first time, having twice won the Open Plate (for the six eliminated semi-finalists). He first became a contender when he reached the Top 30 quarterfinal shootout 16 years ago, at the age of 17.

He's off to a good start, having won four out of five finals in the UK this year, including the Golden Shears of Great Britain, at the Royal Bath and West Show.

In 2014 he was called-on to substitute for injured New Zealand team member John Kirkpatrick in Wales, and was the best individual in a Kiwis' win at the Royal Welsh Show, whuile it was also in Wales that he scored possibly his biggest win in 2011, beating David Fagan and that year's New Zealand team members, Dion King and Rowland Smith, in the Open final at the Corwen Shears.

His show shearing career started as a 13-year-old Junior entry at Warkworth, and he was soon in the tally hunt, with his first 200 at 14, 300 at 15, 400 at 16, and 500 at 17. His first 600 came at the age of 19, when he also shore his first 300 merino ewes tally.

He has been a shearing globetrotter almost half his life, with nine seasons in North America and even more in Eastern Europe, in Russia and still regularly in such countries as Estonia, Finland and Latvia, including helping train locals.

A particularly memorable event was seven years ago when he shore 523 merino wether lambs in a two-stand children's hospital chairy event in the US.

Matt Smith said the Master Shearer Award is the “icing on the cake” after the big team efforts that went into the records in the UK.

He becomes the 67th machine shearer acclaimed a Master Shearer since the awards were introduced with the naming of 28 Master Shearers in 1975. The Smiths are the fourth set of brothers, following Godfrey and Ivan Bowen, John and David Fagan, and Darin and Edsel Forde.

There are 22 Master Woolhandlers and 19 Master Blade Shearers.

Three Master Shearers have passed away this year, being Murray McSkimming (January 21, aged 85), Bob Michie (February 11, aged 76) and Colin Boshier (May 30, aged 84)



Photo: Emily Fleur Country Photography

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