

Kirkpatrick sets unusual pace in national series - January 26, 2010

Napier shearer John Kirkpatrick has reached unusual heights as leader of the PGG Wrightson National Round after four of the five qualifying events throughout the country. Despite winning more than 110 titles in 15 seasons of open competition in New Zealand, including the 2002 and 2008 Golden Shears opens and the last two New Zealand championships finals and heading the Shearing Sports New Zealand national rankings, Kirkpatrick has never reached a final of the National Round, the country's top shearing series.

The series comprises qualifying rounds at Alexandra (merino), Waimate (lonwool), Christchurch (corriedale), Raglan (lambs) and Pahiatua (second shear), and semi-finals and a final at the Golden Shears in Masterton, where all five wool types are shorn in the one event. Last year Kirkpatrick made the top 12 for the first time, but was eliminated in the semi-final.

An undoubted champion on the crossbreds with which he is familiar in Hawke's Bay, the big bug-bear in the PGG Wrightson series has always been the unfamiliar merino sheep of the first event at the national finewool championships at Alexandra each October. It's the only compulsory event in the five qualifying competitions.

This season Kirkpatrick claimed four points as ninth-placed qualifier at Alexandra, where four of the top five were South Island shearers, and has claimed 10 at each subsequent show, for being third-placed series entrant Waimate, Christchurch and Raglan.

He is well-placed to cement his position at the head of the top 12 in the last qualifying event at Pahiatua on February 28.

Alexandra was also where Te Kuiti icon David Fagan, although scoring just a single point in the heats, shore a merino final in New Zealand for the first time in more than 20 years.

Despite that record, he has won seven of the finals of the event which incorporates the McSkimming Memorial Triple Crown, first contested in 1973.

This time Fagan, having taken maximum points at Waimate and Raglan, trails Kirkpatrick by a single point, with Jerome McCrea, of Whanganui, in third place – possibly the first time North Island shearers have been in the first three places in the qualifying stages.

It is five years since the South Island last did not have a shearer in the eventual first three, and while reigning champion Tony Coster, of Rakaia, is currently 12th and on the cusp of elimination, fellow regular finalists and South Island hopes Grant Smith, also of Rakaia, and national merino champion Nathan Stratford, of Invercargill, are currently fourth and fifth, all among seven South Islanders currently holding places in the top 12.

Coster features in the decals adorning a Hyundai Santa Fe touring vehicle which the final winner gets as the feature prize to use for 12 months.

The current top 12 are: John Kirkpatrick (Napier) 34pts, 1; David Fagan (Te Kuiti) 33pts, 2; Jerome McCrea (Wanganui) 29pts, 3; Grant Smith (Rakaia) 26pts, 4; Nathan Stratford (Invercargill) 23pts, 5; Cam Ferguson (Waipawa) 19pts, 6; James Fagan (Te Kuiti) 18pts, 7; James Win (Reefton) 17pts, 8; Andy Mainland (Invercargill), Gavin Rowland (Christchurch) and Ryan Miller (Christchurch) 15pts, 9 equal; Tony Coster (Rakaia) 13pts, 12.

Best shot yet to come for full-boar Ball - January 25, 2010

King Country contractor and pig-hunter Dean Ball gave a big indication that he, too, will be giving it his best shot in the chase for a place in New Zealand's World Championship team when he won the open final at the Tauranga Show on Saturday.

Ball, 42, who won a World teams final with fellow Te Kuiti veteran David Fagan in Edinburgh in 2003, nailed Fagan and current World teams champions Paul Avery, of Stratford, and John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, in the four-man final over 15 polled dorset-romney cross lambs. While the 48-year-old five-times World Champion Fagan was first off the board, Ball's quality carried him to victory by more than a point.

Back on his farm after bypassing Sunday's Horowhenua Show Shears in Levin for a day pig-hunting on a King Country farm, and claiming a boar in the process, Ball said the quality of Saturday's final was just some indication of the job ahead, with only two shearers to wear the black singlet at the championships at the Royal Welsh Show in July.

"It would be nice to be one of those two," he said, signalling his plans to compete in both of next weekend's North Island shows in Taihape and Rotorua. "But look at the four in Saturday's final, and there'd be at least a dozen others really trying to get into that team."

At least two more serious contenders, Hawke's Bay shearers Dion King and Cam Ferguson, reached the open plate on Saturday, for the four eliminated semi-finalists, but in a surprise result it was another Hawke's Bay shearer, former professional golf aspirant Phil Wedd who claimed the consolation honours.

Ball reckoned he'd been "bridesmaid" at Tauranga at least six times, but despite that and having not won a final since the Pahiatua Shears on the weekend before last year's Golden Shears, and having this season reached only one other final - at the Great Raihania Shears in Hastings in October - he has been consistently in national team reckoning.

Like other contenders, he's after competition miles to prepare for the Golden Shears in Masterton in March and the New Zealand championships in Te Kuiti five weeks later.

To represent New Zealand at the championships he must win either of the two titles, or as happened in 2003, come second at Te Kuiti if both titles are won by the same shearer.

He is under no illusions about the job ahead. Since 1998 he's shorn in 11 Golden Shears open finals, more than any other shearer who's never won the title, while at Te Kuiti he's also never won the major honours, and in shearing more than 30 New Zealand Open, North Island Shearer of the Year or Circuit finals on his hometown stage has only had two victories.

While Fagan had to settle for second on Saturday, with more than 590 wins in open competition behind him, he had good reason to smile after seeing teenaged son Jack score his first win, in the junior final. Far North shearer Tipene Te Whata and Whanganui's Haven Matthews won the senior and intermediate finals, as they had at the national lamb shearing championships two weeks earlier.

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Win wins again, but shearing's the winner - January 24, 2010

A continued resurgence in shearing sports in the top of the South Island was shown when more than 40 competitors took part in the Tapawera Shears near Nelson on Saturday.

The four shearing classes attracted 35 entries, including 18 in the open class and an improved seven in the junior class. Some of the shearers were also among the 12 who entered the woolhandling events which have been introduced to four of the Top of the South Shows this summer.

The open final was won by Reefton-based Jason Win, who in shearing his 17 sheep in 13min 7sec, won the race by 22 seconds from Whanganui gun Jerome McCrea. Once quality points were also counted Win cemented a comfortable win over the northern hope, by almost 3.4pts.

It reversed their order from the national longwool championships at the Northern Southland Community Shears in Lumsden eight days previously, when McCrea was third and Win fourth, both being beaten by New Zealand representatives John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, and Nathan Stratford, of Invercargill, but beating King Country icon David Fagan.

The Tapawera Shears was the second show on this year's Top of the South circuit, which ends with finals in Nelson in November.

None of the open finalists at the Golden Bay show a week earlier reached Saturday's final, but win's father and 2009 Tapawera champion Sam Win won the weekend's open plate. Also indicating developing depth was that none of the four winning shearers or two winning woolhandlers in Motueka repeated their successes at Tapawera.

The senior shearing title was won by Tapawera shearer Brett Williams, Welsh visitors Elwyd Jones and Dafydd Roberts were first and second in the intermediate class, and Jotham Rentoul, also based at Tapawera, won the junior final, while Amy Benseman and Gail Bramley, also both of Tapawera, won the junior and novice woolhandling events respectively.

The next show in the Top of the South competition is on Waitangi Day at Reefton, where World Championship hopes Gareth Daniel and Gareth Evans start an eight-stop Wales team tour with a match against the best two local open shearers.

The woolhandlers, whose first contest was at Nelson in November, have one more show in the region, at Murchison on February 20.

The shows are among more than 60 on the Shearing Sports New Zealand calendar.

King Country shearer misses record by five - January 19, 2010

King Country shearer Stacey Te Huia has fallen just six sheep short of breaking the World eight-hour ewe-shearing record.

When the final bell came at 5pm, Te Huia had shorn 573, failing in his bid to eclipse the mark of 578 which was set by Far North shearer Matthew Smith in a Hawke's Bay woolshed last Friday.

Needing to average slightly under 145 in each of the four two-hour runs at Motekenui Station, the scene of three other successful bids on other records in the last three years, Te Huia was on target at lunch with runs of 145 and 148, for a half-way total of 293.

But the tide turned in the third run from 12.30pm to 2.30pm when he counted just 137. Needing 149 in the last two hours to break the record, he was unable to get back on track with just 143...

Te Huia, 29, was aiming to bring the record back into the family, older brother Hayden having held the record with a tally of 495 from 1999 until Southland Jimmy Clark shore 560 in 2008, the record broken by Smith four days ago.

Shearing Sports New Zealand chairman John Fagan, a lambs and ewes record holder of the 1980s, said it was a "massive" effort, and highlighted the extent of Smith's achievement last week, the first ewe-shearing record ever attempted in Hawke's Bay.

NEWS FLASH - On behalf of Shearing Sports New Zealand, January 19, 4.10pm

A shearing record attempt in a King Country woolshed is expected to go right to the wire this afternoon with Te Kuiti hopeful Stacey Tuia needing his best run of the day to crack the mark of 578 which was set just last week. Te Huia started on target with 145 in the first two-hour run from the start at 7am, and 148 in the next two hours to lunch. But the first run after lunch added only 137, leaving Te Huia needing 149 in the last two hours to the final bell at 5pm. The record of 578 was set in Hawke's Bay on Friday by far North shearer Matthew Smith, who has been in the shed at Motekenui Station watching today's bid.

NEWS FLASH - On behalf of Shearing Sports NZ, January 19, 12.30pm

Te Kuiti shearer Stacey Te Huia is starting the afternoon just ahead of the target pace required to beat a World eight-hour ewe shearing record which has stood for just four days. Shearing at Motekenui Station, between Te Kuiti and Bennydale, and needing an average of just over 77 an hour, the 29-year-old Te Huia shored 293 in the four hours to the lunch break. Chasing the record of 578 set by Far North shearer Matthew Smith in Hawke's Bay on Friday, Te Huia shored 145 in the first two hours from 7am to morning smoko at 9am, and 148 in the crucial two hours from 9.30am to 11.30am. The afternoon runs are from 12.30pm to 2.30pm and 3pm to the final bell at 5pm.

NEWS FLASH - on behalf of Shearing Sports NZ, January 19, 10am

King Country shearer Stacey Te Huia has started his World ewe-shearing record bid on target in a woolshed at Motekenui Station, between Te Kuiti and Bennydale. The 28-year-old, chasing an eight-hour tally of 578 set just last Friday by Far North shearer Matthew Smith, needs an average of 145 for each of four two-hour runs, and hit the target with 145 in the first run from 7am to 9am. The attempt ends at 5pm today.

Wairoa Show Shearing - January 18, 2010

Wairoa Shears officials were rapt with the success of their annual event when it attracted increased entries on Saturday despite having to be transferred from the A and P Show to Ohuia Station because of the heavy rain.

Organiser and open-class shearer Bart Hadfield said there were 87 entries, and added: "We would usually only get about 70."

Among them were Far North shearer Matthew Smith who only the previous day had shorn a World record of 578 ewes in eight hours at Waitara Station, near Te Pohue. There were also shearers from Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Australia, all currently working in New Zealand and headed by 2008 World Championships finalist Gavin Mutch who came from Whangamomona, near Stratford, to win the Wairoa open final, afterwards proudly wearing a Taranaki rugby jersey to show his allegiances, although having more proudly worn the kilt of his native Scotland on such past occasions.

Hadfield said that with the rain getting heavier on Thursday night and the likelihood stock trucks would not be able to get sheep into the showgrounds shearing pavilion, there was a possibility the Shears would not happen.

He decided a shed close to town would be needed and contacted Ohuia Station's Robbie Booth, who did not hesitate in making the four-stand shed available, and spent the next day getting the facilities ready in time for the show's Speedshear on Friday night.

"I had never been there, but it was the only option," Hadfield said. "I didn't know of anywhere else."

Sheep suppliers Greg and Jenny Law, of Tiniroto, also had no hesitation in still making 460 sheep available.

Mutch was in a field of 27 open shearers, taking advantage of the absence of recent past winners and Napier shearers Dion King and John Kirkpatrick who were competing in Southland, along with at least four other top North Island shearers.

Mutch, who was sixth in Shearing Sports New Zealand's national rankings last season but who hadn't won an event in this country for almost two years, was totally dominant in the 15-sheep final, taking 12 minutes 58 seconds, finishing 52 seconds ahead of nearest next-man-off Angus Moore, from Marlborough, and putting a sheep-around both other finalists.

An uncle and his nephew were among the winners as Gisborne shearers claimed the other three championship finals, the senior title being won by Tama Niania, the intermediate by Wi Ngarangione (his fifth win in his first six intermediate finals), and the junior by Henare Niania.

Meanwhile, back at the showgrounds, with over 80mm of rain in the area since the show started, a two-day salvage operation was under way with farmer Rick Clark and farmer-contractor Darrin Hills using their tractors to move dozens of horse trucks, exhibitors vehicles, rodeo vehicles and sideshows through the quagmire.

All with a "smiley face," Mr Clark reckoned, while Mr Hills said: "Why else would anyone want to glo the show on a day like that ?"



The four Wairoa Shears championship final winners: from left Gavin Mutch (open), Tama Niania (senior), Wi Ngarangione (intermediate) and Henare Niania (junior).



There might have been 60 years' difference in age, but the sport was just the same for the youngest and the oldest competitors at the Wairoa Shears at Ohuia Station on Saturday. Pictured are Wairoa shearer Peter Edwards, who at the age of 73 was third in the veterans event and fourth in the local senior final, and Masterton schoolboy David Gordon, who at the age of just 13 was third in the junior championship final, beating New Zealand Lambs and Royal Welsh junior champion Steve Rowberry, of England.



Lunch on the go, as judges and helpers take a break at the Wairoa Shears, after torrential rain forced an 11th-hour shift from the showgrounds to the woolshed at Ohuia Station.

Next shearing record bid - January 17, 2010

The new World ewe-shearing record set by Far North shearer Matthew Smith on Friday is being challenged just four days later by a King Country gun aiming to get the record back in the family where it had once been for just over eight years.

The record of 578 will be tackled by 29-year-old Stacey Te Huia on Tuesday at Motekenui Station, near Bennydale, in a shed which has been used for three other successful record bids in the last three years, including the nine-hour lamb and ewe records set by Hawke's Bay shearers Dion King and Rodney Sutton three weeks apart in January 2007.

Te Huia is already in the World Sheep Shearing Records Society books, as holder of the two-stand record he and brother Hayden set when they shored 986 ewes in eight hours in December 1999.

On that day at Marton where the family was then based, Stacey Te Huia did 491, but it is the solo record, which Hayden claimed that day with 495 and held until two years ago, he's now after.

While some say he's trying to become the first to do 600 ewes in an official eight-hour record bid, mother Jo says he'll be happy if he beats the 25-year-old Smith's record by one.

While contractor Neil Fagan and some of his staff went to Hawke's Bay to see Smith's astounding achievement on Friday, Te Huia stayed home, doing about 400 rejects from the record-bid mob.

"His eyes lit up when he heard Matt's first run was 149," she said. "Someone had been talking it up, saying he would do 160 or 165, but that wouldn't have been Matt."

Needing an average of 140 for each of the four two-hour runs, plus one to break the record, Smith stayed well ahead of the target set when Southland shearer Jimmy Clark broke Hayden Te Huia's record and shored 560 in eight hours in January 2008.

Stacey Te Huia now needs to average almost 145 a run, and become only the second man, after Smith, to average less than 50 seconds a sheep in an eight-hour record.

The record attempt will start at 7am on Tuesday and is scheduled to end at 5pm, with most of the family involved, along with veteran champion David Fagan and Northern Hawke's Bay farmer Marg Baynes who a year ago with daughter Ingrid set a World women's lambshearing record in the same shed.

Magic day for Matt as ewes record blown apart - January 15, 2010 ... 6pm

Far North shearer Matthew Smith launched himself into the records book with a near perfect effort as he smashed the World eight-hour ewe-shearing record northwest of Napier on Friday (January 15). Starting at 6am and heading for a 4pm knock-off, the 25-year-old from Ruawai breezed past the Southland shearer Jimmy Clark's previous record of 560 with about 15 minutes to go, and set a new mark of 578 at the hill-country Waitara Station, which is destined for use as a windfarm.

Ignoring the rain outside and needing an average of 140 for each of the two-hour runs, with one to spare at the end of the day, Smith shored successive two-hour tallies of 149, 144, 143 and 143, the new mark being derived after the four judges rejected just one, a dry ewe, during the two-hour run to the lunch break.

When Clark set the previous record two years ago, he shored runs of 140, 141, 139 and 140, smashing the previous mark of 495 which had been set by Hayden Te Huia at Marton in 1999.

Chief judge Peter Black, from Australia, said from the magical start Smith had got better during the day, and finished with a quality rating of 10.93pts, comfortably inside the limit of 12 which if breached at any time would have resulted in a warning and possible disqualification. After some worrying moments at the wool-weigh the previous day, the final 10-fleece weigh averaged 3.1kg a fleece.

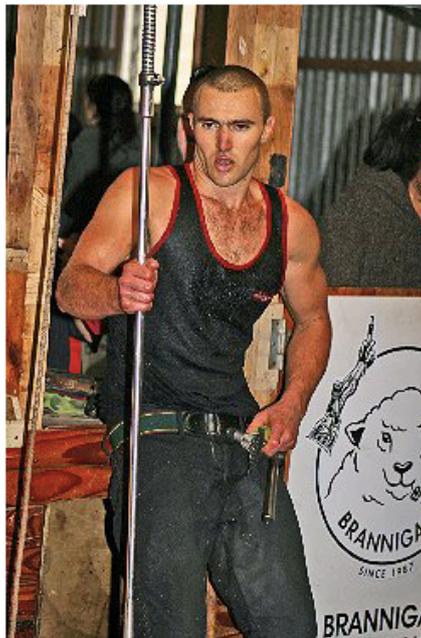
Smith, who in 2006 won the Golden Shears Open Plate, for the six semi-finalists who did not make the final, had set his sights on the record a year ago, planning also a two-stand bid with younger brother Rowland, who won the Golden Shears junior final in 2004 and the senior title two years later.

The two had each been shearing around 500 a day on the Waitara Station flock last year, but a back injury suffered by Rowland put him out of contention, although Matthew said there is still plenty of time for the younger gun.

Matthew had made his regular trip to the Northern Hemisphere in the off-season, passing through North America, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, and the UK where he operates a small run in Cornwall, and where he also won one competition, at Balmoral.

He returned to Hawke's Bay to work for Hastings contractor Kerry Brannigan, and in his corner for the day on Friday was former nine-hour record holder Justin Bell, now a farmer near Weber in Southern Hawke's Bay.

He also wasted no time getting back into competition, travelling the very next day to a rain-soaked Northern Hawke's Bay to compete at the Wairoa show shears, which were transferred to a woolshed near Wairoa because of the weather.



Ewes Record - January 15, 2010 ... 1pm

Far North shearer Matthew Smith is well on the way to a new World ewe shearing record with 292 shorn at the halfway mark of eight hours in a remote shed northwest of Napier. Starting at 6am at Waitara Station, near Te Pohue, and chasing an eight-hour record of 560 shorn by Southland shearer Jimmy Clark two years ago, the 25 year old from Ruawai shored 149 in the first two hours to morning smoko and 143 in the next two hours. Clark had shored 140 and 141 at the same stage of his effort, in which he beat the previous record of 495 set in 1999. Smith's bid is scheduled to end at 4pm.

Shear luck ahead for north shearers as big guns head south - January 15, 2010

Six of the World's best shearers are making one of New Zealand shearing's longest trips today to compete in two major events in Southland, opening the way for some of the usual long-suffering also-rans of the North Island competitions to claim some prizemoney while the regular winners are away.

King Country icon David Fagan and nephew James, former Golden Shears champions John Kirkpatrick and Dion King and fellow Hawke's Bay shearer Cam Ferguson, and Wanganui gun Jerome McCrea were all expected to be competing in the Northern Southland Community Shears near Lumsden today (friday) and the New Zealand Crossbred Lamb Championships at the Southland Shears in Winton tomorrow (saturday).

Additionally, World champion and dual Golden Shears open champion Paul Avery, of Taranaki, is not planning to compete at any show this weekend, taking a break after retaining his national lambshearing title at Raglan last Saturday with six stitches in an arm cut while teaching a teenager to shear, and fellow regular finalist and occasional winner Dean Ball says work in his King Country contracting run will keep him away from the competition board until next week.

While helping create one of the toughest competition fields in Southland for some years, the top shearers' absence from the North Island has become an incentive for other shearers to head for Northern Hawke's Bay to compete at Saturday's Wairoa Show, without King who won last year, and Kirkpatrick who won 12 months earlier.

Fagan says the money on offer in the Southland shows, bolstered by two hotel speedshears in the region, is not necessarily the main attraction, with some shearers competing mainly to substantiate places in the South Island Shearer of the Year competition, in which they must have shorn at least six competitions to qualify for nexty month's finals in Gore.

But it will be a different scenario in Wairoa, with the possibility of a new name being added to the list of open competition winners in New Zealand... No one outside the missing eight has won an open title in the North Island south of Auckland since February last year.

All three weekend competitions also feature senior, intermediate and junior competitions, while most of the country's top woolhandlers will be in Southland for the competitions at Lumsden and Winton.

Meanwhile, attempts to revive a shearing competition this weekend at Warkworth, north of Auckland, have been abandoned because of problems providing a shearing stand.

Lambs champ Avery wins again despite cut arm - January 09, 2010

World shearing champion Paul Avery retained his national lambshearing title in Raglan today (January 9) despite six stitches in a cut arm which almost stopped him from defending the title in possibly his last season of competitive shearing.

Avery cut the arm while teaching a teenager to shear at home in Taranaki and said that until "three days ago" he wasn't going to be defending the title.

One of 33 shearers to enter the open class at the championships, the first post-Christmas event on the shearing Sports New Zealand circuit, he was surprised to get past the quarterfinals and said: "I was already in my good clothes to go home when I heard my name called out for the semi-finals."

But, he managed to qualify, ninth of 10 in a list headed by World lambshearing record holder Dion King, of Napier, and then with a change to a thinner comb put in his best performance in a season troubled by a late start to shearing, and bolted into the five-man final as top qualifier.

King, back in the country after spending the first half of the season in Australia, failed to reach the final in which the pace was set by veteran Te Kuiti speedster Digger Balme, who led almost throughout, shearing the 20 sizeable lambs in 15min 32.08 sec and beating second-man-off Avery by more than 18 seconds.

When judging was completed it was a repeat of last year's quinella, with Avery beating Napier shearer and 2008 World Championships teammate John Kirkpatrick, and 48-year-old King Country veteran David Fagan third, followed by Taranaki-based Scotsman and former winner champion Gavin Mutch, with Balme, sacrificing quality for speed, in fifth place.

Far North shearer Tipene Te Whata repeated his intermediate final form of last year to win the senior title, his fourth win his new class. Leading rival Matene Mason, of Masterton, was eliminated in the semi-finals and Te Whata was beaten off the board in the final by Kane Kapene, of Martinborough, although second ultimately went to Tama Niania, of Gisborne.

Age won over youth in a surprise intermediate result, with 41-year-old Wanganui shearer Haven Matthews winning the title and ending the unbeaten intermediate grade run of top-ranked 2008-2009 junior Wi Ngarangione, of Gisborne, who had to settle for second place.

The junior final was a triumph for overseas competitors with Hastings-based workmates Steve Rowberry, 21, from Hereford in England, and Jack Robinson, 18, from Londonderry in Northern Ireland, finishing first and second.

Hawke's Bay shearer Cam Ferguson, who shored 856 lambs in nine hours in a shed near Waipukurau last month, gained some compensation for his elimination in the open quarterfinals by winning the Te Mata Speedshear a few hours later. More than 350 people watched him post the fastest time of 19.56 seconds. Jerome McCrea, of Wanganui, was runner-up in 20.32sec, and Digger Balme, of Te Kuiti, was third with 22.08sec.

The senior speedshear was won by Pio Pio shearer Tom Moorhouse



The senior speedshear was won by Pio Pio shearer Tom Moorhouse (25.94sec), Dannevirke's David Hape was second with 26.04sec, and Shelford Wilcox, of Gisborne was third (26.06sec.)



Results from the Western Shears' National Lambshearing Championships at Raglan today:

Open final (20 sheep): Paul Avery (Stratford) 15min 50.21sec, 58.31pts, 1; John Kirkpatrick (Napier) 16min 26.4sec, 60.17pts, 2; David Fagan (Te Kuiti) 16min 25.63sec, 62.132pts, 3; Gavin Mutch (Whangamomona) 16min 45.13sec, 62.756pts, 4; Digger Balme (Te Kuiti) 15min 32.08sec, 5.



Senior final (10 sheep): Tipene Te Whata (Tautoro) 12min 22.7sec, 50.218pts, 1; Tama Niania (Gisborne) 13min 6.2sec, 51.143pts, 2; Aaron Haynes (Feilding) 13min 38.99sec, 52.117pts, 3; David Garland (Feilding) 13min 41.35sec, 53.568pts, 4; Kane Kapene (Martinborough) 12min 22.04sec, 56.602pts, 5.

Intermediate final (4 sheep): Haven Matthews (Wanganui) 6min 35.79sec, 28.79pts, 1; Wi Ngarangione (Gisborne) 6min 17.06sec, 28.853pts, 2; Nathan Gleeson (Stratford) 6min 41.67sec, 35.584pts, 3; Sharnie Rimene (Masterton) 7min 18.63sec, 36.932pts, 4; Robert Davidson (Northern Ireland) 7min 17.64sec, 37.382pts, 5.



Junior final (3 sheep): Steve Rowberry (England) 5min 5.66sec, 29.95pts, 1; Jack Robinson (Northern Ireland) 4min 59.78sec, 31.989pts, 2; Jake Moore (Marton) 5min 20.21sec, 32.343pts, 3; Jack Fagan (Te Kuiti) 6min 32.66sec, 35.633pts, 4; Cushla Gordon (Masterton) 7min 27.91sec, 37.396pts, 5.

Lambshearing Champs - January 04, 2010

The countdown to this year's World shearing championships begins in earnest for many top shearers as the Shearing Sports New Zealand season resumes with the national lambshearing championships at the Western Shears in Raglan on Saturday.

The event, the first since the end of November, is expected to include defending open champion and Taranaki farmer Paul Avery, who won the World title in Norway in March 2008. Avery, 42, is contemplating making this his last competition season, with the goal of defending his World title in Wales, but to retain his black singlet he must win either the Golden Shears open title in Masterton in March, or the New Zealand open title in Te Kuiti five weeks later.

Avery is however facing one of the keenest competition seasons ever, with 2008 World championships teammate John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, King Country icon and five-times World champion David Fagan, and at least six other top contenders, all knowing they will have to do the competition miles to make sure they are ready for the challenge, in which many say the hardest part will be gaining selection in the two-man New Zealand team.

The open competition heats on Saturday will also form the fourth of five qualifying rounds in the top all-wools competition, the PGG Wrightson National Round (incorporating the McSkimming Memorial Triple Crown). Previous rounds were held at Alexandra (finewool) Waimate (longwool) and Christchurch (corriedale), and the fifth round will be held at Pahiatua (second-shear) at the end of next month, the top 12 qualifying for the finals during the 50th Golden Shears a few days later.

Further details and contacts for individual competitions are available at www.shearingsports.co.nz while current PGG Wrightson national Round points are available at www.goldenshears.co.nz

