

TIPS & TRICKS

SHEARING HEAVILY PREGNANT FEMALES

By Russell Gent

Occasionally, it is important for the welfare of an animal to shear at a time which may not be desirable for other reasons. I am often asked about shearing heavily pregnant females who may be suffering from heat stress.

The first thing is to assess if the animal is likely to become further stressed by being restrained. You can do this by catching the animal in a pen with other animals in it and running a hand over her back and over her side a little. This would usually give you a good indication if restraining her is likely to cause her to become upset.

If this is the case, then I would put three alpacas together in a pen of 6 feet x 4 feet, allowing room for me to stand in the middle of the pen and to be able to reach her without moving hardly at all. The other two animals will restrict her ability to go around me, while also making her feel more comfortable, because it is not me stopping her from going round the pen and because she is not alone. She will settle quite quickly once she realizes she is not going to be caught and restrained. The oblong shape of the pen also makes it harder for her to go around and around, making it much easier to shear her without holding her at all.

I prefer to use hand blades because they are quiet and less stressful, but on an unrestrained animal, hand blades should only be used by someone experienced with using them. Electric machines are much safer to use on an unrestrained animal.

Always begin shearing along the far side of the back bone and then

working down the far side with parallel strokes, passing the clipped fiber to someone on the far side.

Again, working inside an oblong pen makes it easier to stand about half way along the side of the animal, making it very difficult for her to kick you or spit at you, as she cannot spit



around corners. You also can hold your left hand up to the side of her face, without touching, to stop her turning her head toward you. Make sure no one walks around the front of her; they don't often spit if they do not have a target.

If the animal still gets upset after you have done a few blows, remember you really only have to shear off her back fiber and down the sides a little bit to alleviate the heat stress problem. Then just leave her until after she gives birth when she then can be properly shorn. However, I have found by shearing in this unrestrained way, I have usually been able to shear the whole animal.

If the animal sits down, just carry on shearing her where she sits as if

nothing has happened. Don't try to make her stand up. If she gets no reaction from you because she sat down, quite often she will stand up again. But, you will be surprised at how much area you can shear while she is sitting. Remember, the reason you are shearing her is for health rea-

sons. The fleece and cosmetics are secondary; she can be tidied up later.

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"I had a linguistics professor who said that it's man's ability to use language that makes him the dominant species on the planet. That may be. But I think there's another thing that separates us from animals. We aren't afraid of vacuum cleaners."

Jeff Stilson
