

**SOME industry observers believe that with the growing number of uncertainties facing Australian sheep production, the industry is well and truly at the crossroads. It is highly likely, for example, that sheep numbers will continue their downward slide. But there are also many influential people with a more optimistic outlook and predict demand for quality seedstock will remain strong into the future. David and Karen Ridgway, principals of the Ridgway Advance Merino and Poll Merino studs, are among those who have tremendous faith in the industry – and with their vision and passion they are confident the future has bright prospects.**



DAVID AND KAREN RIDGWAY, principals of the Ridgway Advance Merino and Poll Merino studs.

## Ridgway Advance - the prefix says it all

PROPERLY-PLANNED breeding programs, mostly involving the use of artificial insemination, are the cornerstone of the rapidly-growing popularity of the Ridgway family's Ridgway Advance stud.

The home base of David and Karen Ridgway is in the Emu Flat area 32 kilometres north of Bordertown in South Australia's South East, with other holdings 15km north of Bordertown, at Joanna, south east of Naracoorte and at Kulkami in the Murraylands.

It all started in 1997 when there was a restructuring of the Ridgway rural interests founded by John Ridgway in 1990, with David and his brother Ric taking half each of the 2200 breeding ewes.

It presented a whole new challenge to David and Karen, one they have met head-on and been rewarded with some very encouraging results.

The fact that at the 2007 annual Ridgway Advance ram auction, the 100 rams offered in the main auction cleared under a keen, well-sustained demand for the healthy average of \$1450, is an indication of the giant strides this stud has made in such a short time.

The stud has built up a loyal band of about 60 ram clients throughout most parts of SA, Victoria, New South Wales, and Western Australia.

If you want further proof, the 10 Poll Merino rams offered from Ridgway Advance at last year's Classings Classic ram sale at Murray Bridge sold for the impressive average of \$2800.

"We have gone through the seemingly impenetrable barrier of selling top stud sires to other studs and this has given us great encouragement," David said.

In 2006, for example, Ridgway Advance sold the ram RA165 for \$10,000 to Niel Smith's Calcookara stud at Cowell.

Another ram from the stud sold for \$7000 to John Daniell's newly-formed White River Poll Merino stud, Port Lincoln.

Reports suggest that both sires are breeding-on for the two Eyre Peninsula buyers, instanced also by the fact that many of the top rams to be penned at the 2008 Ridgway Advance ram sale on August 13 are sons of RA165.

Again, there will be at least 100 rams of the April to July, 2007-drop, regulation shorn in March, in the main auction and David is very pleased with their progress. They will be sold with all relevant information, including current wool test figures.

"We are confident we will be presenting young rams that are exactly what the market is after," David said.

"Buyers are certain to appreciate the progeny of the sire WD2, with their rich, long-stapled fleeces on well-structured frames."

Much of the foundation stock had a Collinsville bloodline, mostly through purchases from Oriental Park stud at Tintinara.

Infusions from the Marnoo district of Victoria further progressed the stud – they were precisely the type of sheep David had in his vision and these, too, stemmed largely from the Collinsville bloodline.

### Establishing a genotype over 10 years

The Ridgways have always aimed to produce sheep with a loose, pliable skin with long-stapled, white wools.

They have been careful not to sacrifice wool cuts, and to retain the large SA frame.

The mulesing debate has given this type of sheep a strong push in recent years and for the first time this year the Ridgways dispensed with the mulesing shears.

Of the 1700 ewes in the Ridgway Advance flock, 1500 are mated by AI, targeting proven outside sires and some of the top, home-bred rams, aiming at all times to produce uniform lines of sheep.

"We are moving forward by introducing genotypes, still with our basic ideals well-and-truly

in mind - and in the process we are creating our own genotype," David explained.

"Visitors to our ram sale on August 13 will be able to see for themselves that there is very little difference in the quality of rams from Lot 1 to Lot 100."

In the stud's aim at concentrating on getting enough genetics from top, proven sires for its breeding program, larger numbers of sheep from these elite lines can be provided.

Basically, Ridgway Advance is trying to simplify Merino breeding within the flock and for its clients.

It is supplying big-framed, plain-bodied, fertile rams with strong constitutions and bone, carrying long-stapled, free-growing, white wools in the 17-20-micron range.

"We have never lost sight of the fact that today's Merinos have to possess dual-purpose characteristics – that the meat side of the equation is of paramount importance in combating some of the claims being made by other breeds," David said.

"The free-type skins, in our opinion, have always been the way to go, but today it is just as important to have them on big bodies.

### Leading figures have this to say ...

SA sheep consultant – Brian Jefferies:

David and Karen Ridgway have focused their breeding programs on producing large, plain-bodied rams with balance and covered with the elite SRS-type wools. The stud's rams are true dual-purpose animals, well adapted to both dry and higher rainfall areas. These sheep, of good conformation, free of wrinkles, do not require mulesing. It is true to say that the Ridgway Advance stud has advanced rapidly as any other stud of which I am aware. Its meteoric rise has been largely due to the studmaster's vision in pursuing sheep which have all the attributes of the modern Merino.



Landmark stud stock manager/ auctioneer – Malcolm Scroop:

Ridgway Advance stud has enjoyed tremendous success, formed a strong clientele, and the principals conduct a spectacular on-property ram auction. The 2008 sale in August highlights another exciting year with the sale rams looking as good as ever and more of them to satisfy the growing demand. A big point in the stud's favour is its strong push towards balance, constitution, strong bone and sound feet. I have been involved as auctioneer and sole selling agent at this auction since its inception and can strongly recommend the stud's rams to sheep producers. If you are looking for a direction, great backup and good people to deal with, then Ridgway Advance is your stud.



"We haven't chased fads, just gone down the path we firmly believe is the right one for ourselves, our clients and the sheep industry as a whole".

### The 2008 calendar

**July 18-20:** Australian Sheepbreeders Association Show, Bendigo, Victoria

**July 22:** South East Merino Field Days, displaying at Keith Showground

**July 25:** Mallee Merino Field Days, displaying at Karoonda

**August 4 and 5:** Hamilton, Vic, Sheepvention, offering a pen of five rams

**August 13:** Ridgway Advance on-property ram auction - selling agents, Landmark (auctioneer Malcolm Scroop)

**October 3:** Classings Classic ram sale, Murray Bridge.

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A SELECTION of the 2008 Ridgway Advance sale rams on the property at Emu Flat.

# RIDGWAY ADVANCE

BREEDING THE MODERN MERINO



**'THE GENETIC LINE of MERINOS'**  
**ANSWERING ALL TODAY'S MANAGEMENT DEMANDS**

**Auction WEDNESDAY**  
**13th August 2008**  
**Bordertown - 160 Rams**

**David & Karen Ridgway**  
**RSD 612**  
**Bordertown, SA 5268**  
**(08) 8754 2028 – 0409 408 263**