

Golden Shears 2008 Begins!

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THE excitement and pure physical poetry of competition shearing takes centre stage on opening day of New Zealand's premier shearing event tomorrow.

To win the Golden Shears Open Title is every shearer's dream and the 2008 event in Masterton will see shearing guns from around the country, and the world, in fierce competition.

With the physical fitness of a marathon runner, shearers display extreme skill and accuracy to take the wool off sheep at lightening speeds.

Golden Shears spokesman Greg Herrick says the event is always a fantastic spectator sport.

"It's poetry in motion. It's like a boat race where the competitors are racing closely to the finish line, working virtually in unison, blow for blow, but every now and then one man nudges ahead."

"They are athletes with brilliant, fit, athletic skill. Then they've got a live animal which they have to handle while operating a dangerous machine, the combs and cutter, doing some 3000 revolutions a minute."

The Golden Shears runs from Thursday February 28 to Saturday March 1 and sees competitors from New Zealand, Norway, Australia, Scotland, Wales, and South Africa battle for the top titles with the action beginning early tomorrow at 7.45am.

Shearers are no strangers to an early start though, or hard work. Mr Herrick says an average shearer would tally up something between 400 to 500 sheep a day.

"Many shearers shear an eight hour day doing two hour runs at a time. Then you get guys shearing a stayout day from 5am to 5pm, that's where the big tallies are coming from."

"It's a helluva long day and you can understand the drain on the human body when an adult sheep can weigh anything between 60 to over 100 kilos. It's like running two marathons back to back every working day," Mr Herrick says.

The Golden Shears, which celebrates its 50th birthday in 2010, is very much a fixture of the New Zealand rural calendar and closely linked to the national identity as a farming nation producing some of the world's finest wool.

Mr Herrick says the event has built up a lot of mana over the years and has an international reputation.

"We're now part of New Zealand history and for many shearers around the world their ultimate aim is to get to Masterton and compete in the Golden Shears," he says.

Taranaki's Paul Avery is the reigning Golden Shears champion but will have to work hard to retain the title with a solid line up of challengers this year.

“Paul had been waiting in the wings then all of sudden in recent years he's come to the fore and stamped his mark in the history books. He's found his top gear,” Mr Herrick says. Avery won the event in 2005 but Dion King gained the title in 2006 before Avery came back with another win last year.

Mr Herrick says there is a top echelon of shearers in New Zealand today, some of whom will be among the finalists on Saturday. The group includes Avery and King as well as Dean Ball and Digger Balme and past winner John Kirkpatrick.

Shearing legend and 15-times Golden Shears winner David Fagan is also is still very much in the picture.

“This group has been dominant for a number of years. It swings in roundabouts with one winning a competition one weekend and then another somewhere else in the country the following one.”

For all competitors there is a lot at stake with three of the four-person shearing and wool handling team to be selected for the World Champs in Norway this October.

For a full programme, live video streaming during the competition and media releases see www.goldenshears.co.nz.

For more information or images contact the Golden Shears Media Group on 027 5788 137 or via email at goldenshears@pete.co.nz