

Saturday March 1 2008

THE cream rose to the top at the world's greatest shearing contest tonight, Golden Shears 2008, with the performance of a lifetime from gun kiwi shearer John Kirkpatrick.

Kirkpatrick, from the North Island's Napier, raced to victory in the Golden Shears Open Championship in Masterton, New Zealand, which is regarded as the pinnacle of competitive shearing around the globe.

The unassuming 37-year old won the Golden Shears in 2002 and said he's been back every year since to try and regain the title.

But the wait paid off. And doubly so.

As the Open winner Kirkpatrick now goes on to represent New Zealand at the World Shearing Championships in Norway in October.

"To win it a second time is just great, but most of all to be a team member to Norway, that is probably the biggest thing," he said.

"I'm glad I held off to now."

Event commentator Koro Mullins told a full house at Masterton's Memorial Stadium that the event was the highlight of the shearing year in what is a hard industry.

"They sometimes say this is the hardest, dirtiest, smelliest industry there is but here to night we get our chance to glorify it."

Kirkpatrick did just that in the championship against 15-times Shears winner David Fagan as well as past-winner Dion King and reigning champ Paul Avery along with Scotsman Gavin Mutch and gun Dean Ball.

Fagan was first finished on sheep one but it soon became apparent Kirkpatrick was having the shear to end all shears.

King was close on his heels though on sheep eight but Kirkpatrick was still ahead at the halfway mark.

Shearing his heart out, Kirkpatrick well and truly pulled away from the pack by the 15th sheep and was soon an animal ahead of Fagan.

The stadium noise rose to fever pitch as Kirkpatrick swung into the long blow on the 20th and final sheep and roared as he shot it through the shute at 15 minutes and 35 seconds finished.

King was next half a minute later followed by Avery, then Fagan, Ball and Mutch.

The quality judging more or less confirmed the finish with Kirkpatrick in the top spot and Avery in second, which was no mean feat considering he'd shorn in the Trans-Tasman test for New Zealand earlier in the night.

King was in third followed by Fagan then Mutch and Ball.

Golden Shears spokesman Greg Herrick was rapt at the conclusion of a successful three-day competition and congratulated Kirkpatrick on his effort.

"This is the night that John Kirkpatrick has been fighting for since 2002. He got close before but this time he's finally there again," he said.

"This was the biggest Golden Shears of the last 10 years and it just keeps getting better."

The Golden Shears ran from Thursday February 28 to Saturday March 1 and saw competitors from New Zealand, Norway, Australia, the UK, Ireland and South Africa battle for the top titles.

The iconic event celebrates its 50th birthday in 2010 and 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.

For a full programme and live video action see www.goldenshears.co.nz.

For free images or further information contact the Golden Shears Media Group at goldenshears@pete.co.nz or phone 021 488 137 or 027 5788 137. International callers phone 006421 488 137 or 006427 5788 137.