

Thursday February 28 2008

THE old school of shearing reared its handlebar-head at New Zealand's favourite shearing contest today.

Moustachioed Rusty Campbell, at the tender age of 72, took on shearers a third of his age at the 48th annual Golden Shears in Masterton.

Campbell shone in the Junior Shearing Event for shearers who have recorded a shed tally of up to 210 sheep in a 9-hour day.

Rusty by name, but certainly not by nature, he displayed a well-oiled style using his signature 1972 handpiece comb and placed 21st out of a field of 63.

The commentators and crowd applauded the "young fella from Dargaville"

"Rusty is from up the far North and he's having a great shear on stand three. It's good to see our more mature shearers having fun," the commentator called.

"He knows where he's going down that last leg."

Campbell made the journey to the shears as part of an annual trip with mates Rex Salisbury, 65, also from Dargaville and Ken Massey, also 65, from Whangarei.

"We've given up professional shearing long ago but we have a bit of a holiday every year and do about five or six shows in a row and finish with Masterton because I believe it is the best show in the world," said Massey

Salisbury said the trio warm up before their road trip shearing the odd sheep from friend's flocks.

Campbell wouldn't be drawn on his performance.

"I don't worry about that, I let the judges answer that one!" he said.

However, he was more than happy to detail the history of his ancient comb.

"It's a very narrow comb. You can't buy them anymore. My wife bought it for me to go back competition shearing. When I finally got back into it a couple of years back she said she'd been waiting since 1972 for me to go back to the shows."

Salisbury said a bit of ribbing between the trio saw them make their respective come backs to the world of competitive shearing.

Although Campbell had a slight problem with the antiquity of his gear to begin with.

"A joker rang me up who said he knew me who I hadn't seen since 1966 and asked me what I was doing next Saturday. I said I was going to the local A and P show and he said 'have you got your handpiece?' I said you've got to be joking."

The old mate wasn't and Campbell couldn't resist the challenge.

But when he arrived at the show he couldn't use his handpiece. It was so old it wouldn't couple to the dropper.

Salisbury knows a thing or two about old handpieces himself. He collects the shearing tool and his earliest example is a 1912 model.

He placed 52nd out of 65 in the Intermediate Shearing Event followed by Massey at 59th.

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

The contest, 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.

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 0064 21 488 137 or 0064 27 5788 137.