

## Striving for Success in Ireland

### Alan McDonald, Ormston House, Killeigh, Co Offaly Flock 1852



Since the introduction of the Lleyne breed in Ireland one name has consistently been around the top in both our shows and sales.

Alan McDonald clearly knows what he is doing and his success doesn't just happen by accident. No stone is left unturned in his constant search for improvement. Many sell their best sheep for a quick cash injection or perhaps to make a run at top price in a sale but the man from Ormstown has always retained his top stock for

his home flock. Years of rigidly sticking to this principle means the gap between his top and bottom stock has closed so tightly that picking his sale pens must be an unenviable task but even so it's always very noticeable how even and well presented his sale pens are.

Many breeders just match them at the mart, other professionals spend an hour or two at home putting them in 5's or 10's. A day is spent in Killeigh, help is drafted in, the red book, his bible, comes out and decisions are carefully made. The book contains the background of his flock so that no mistakes are made with what bloodlines go out the gate and he's had a few successful ones in his time.

His flock's beginnings mirror that of many, when he was looking to start his flock Robyn Darker was the man to get you Lleyne's, Robyn imported 60 shearling Lleyne ewes from Derek Steen in Scotland. These 60 were split into 4 starter flocks of 15 ewes each. Alan got 15, his neighbour Brian Matthew's, Galways Brendan Donnellan and David Oliver from county Louth all got 15 each to start their flocks, safe to say they were 60 quality ewes as all 4 flocks got off to a successful start, none more so than Alan.

The standout sheep in his starter flock was 809/06/580 who left a lasting impression living for 11 years and producing 25 lambs in that span. But it wasn't just within Alan's flock she made an impression, her very first son and Alan's first ram sold was Ormstown Samson who was purchased at Tullow by Malachy Harney for €1700 which was at the time and stood for some years a record price for a Lleyne ram in the south of Ireland. This ram lived up to the early hype when two years later Malachy Harney returned to Tullow and won all 3 classes with Samson progeny. So early indications told Alan he had a solid base of ewes on which to build which turned his attention to rams. Sourcing rams which will further his flock has been his main focus since then. First to catch his eye was 1659/10/02293 a ram bred by Peter Shields from

Carlingford Co Louth. This ram bred true to type sheep with his top son selling for €1350. He certainly cemented the good start that had been made.



The next notable addition required a trip overseas to the farm of John and Charles Geldard where 621/13/06437 was selected. A grandson of the 18,000 Nobleman this ram really made a huge impression on Irish soil both in the show ring himself where he won the Irish supreme championship in Tullamore amongst many other prizes but more importantly in the quality he left in his progeny. His offspring

were marked with style which made them stand out but perhaps his greatest trait was in how uniform they were.

Next notable purchase was 287/15/01384 from Arfon Hughes in Wales. Arfon and Sian had been travelling over to Alan's farm for many years to conduct the south of Ireland clubs ram inspection so it was inevitable that at some point over a cup of tea and a chat after a long days work that a ram would change hands. Arfon's ram made an instant impact on the Geldard ewes already in place. He had been bought to reinforce the good breed traits already in place but instead this ram turned out to be a prolific ram breeder with many sons breaking the €1000 mark up to a top price of €1320, purchased by David Beattie. Sometimes breeding is not an exact science, in fact it never is and maybe that is what makes it so compelling.

The Flock had now reached a point that any ram bought in needed to be of the highest standard and to this end he visited the place where it all began and knocked on the door of Derek Steen. 809/17/11059 was the outstanding candidate from the rams on show and wasn't left behind in Scotland. This ram represented a landmark moment in that on this occasion the new addition to the flock was the very best the breed had to offer, a ram that surely would have had a major impact in the Autumn sales had been intercepted and was now on his way to Ireland. Much admired by all who saw him this ram has bred true to type sheep with great length and feminine heads. He was used so extensively within the flock that almost all flock ewes now carry his bloodline.

Last year saw Alan and long time girlfriend Aoife tie the knot but not before they traveled to Llest lleyms to seek out their next headliner from Dylan and Anwen Jones. Although the quality was extremely high they managed to whittle it down to two and then eventually one. 599/21/12964 was the choice (the other ram was later bought by Will Rowbottom for one of the years top prices). Lambing 2023 is now eagerly awaited to see what the new addition will produce, a son of Brighten House Gold Card he certainly has an excellent chance to produce something special given the quality of ewes he was mated to.

This philosophy of improvement through purchasing the best ram possible has left too many show wins and sale top prices to mention. Even though Alan has done terms as club chairman and as council rep it is probably his constant struggle for perfection that in turn raises his competitor's standards which will go down as his greatest contribution to the Lley breed in Ireland.

Written by David Beattie