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Breeds of Livestock—Sheep

XLIV.—Oxford Downs: Description and Characteristics

THE Oxford Down is a comparatively recent breed. The crossing which began the building of the breed was probably started about 1833 in the county of Oxford, England, and was continued until about 1854, since which time it is generally conceded that the breed has been kept pure.

The name Oxford Down was applied as early as 1857 and as a pure breed Oxford Downs were first recognized in the English shows in 1862.

In the making of the breed, Cotswold rams were largely used on Hampshire ewes, but the reverse crossing of the sexes was occasionally practiced. To a small extent, Southdown ewes were also used, but

the mutton type, being the largest and heaviest of all the Down breeds, and possessing a square, massive form.

SIZE.—The weight of Oxfords in good condition should be 225 to 275 pounds for rams and 175 to 225 pounds for ewes, although much heavier weights are reached. Rams weighing 400 pounds have been reported.

ADAPTABILITY.—Owing to their large size, Oxfords are better adapted to rich lands, good pastures and liberal feeding. This is probably the reason why they have never become numerous or especially popular in the South.

FEEDING QUALITIES.—The Oxfords feed well, making good gains and



OXFORD RAM

not nearly in as large numbers as Hampshire ewes.

Oxford Downs began coming to this country between 1846 and 1853, and since 1880 have been imported in considerable numbers. They are now widely distributed in this country and over Europe, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and South America, although their numbers are small in the Southern states.

The American Oxford Down Sheep Record Association, which maintains a registry for the recording of pedigrees, was organized in 1884. The secretary is W. A. Shafer, Hamilton, Ohio.

CHARACTERISTICS.—Superficially, Oxford Downs resemble Shropshires quite closely. They are hornless, have dark brown face and legs and are woolled over the forehead. The ears are long, thin and free of wool. The brown color, however, is somewhat lighter than in the Shropshire and the wool over the face is not so heavy, although the forelock is longer and looser. The Oxford also has a larger frame or more scale, and has a longer, coarser, more open and heavier fleece.

The Oxford Down is distinctly of

putting these gains on for a longer time and reaching heavier weights than other mutton breeds. Their early maturing qualities are average, but lambs make heavy weights.

The quality of the meat is good. It is large in quantity, of medium grain, and the intermixing of lean and fat is good.

The breeding qualities of Oxfords are fairly good. The ewes are good mothers and milkers and there is a large per cent of twins.

Wool.—The wool of Oxford Downs is the coarsest and heaviest in weight of fleece of all the Down breeds. Plumb says well-kept flocks should "shear a fleece averaging close to 12 pounds unwashed wool," but possibly 10 to 12 pounds would be nearer right.

Compared with Southdowns, Oxfords are much larger and heavier, better adapted to intensive farming conditions and liberal feeding and better for crossing, when size, weight, and larger fleece are desired. But Southdowns mature more quickly, have a wider range of adaptability and for crossing when conditions are less favorable, as in the South, and when refinement and quality are desired.

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