

Comments About Leadersheep

The following quotes are comments taken from the ISBONA elist regarding characteristics of leader sheep:

“Leadersheep do not have a specific colour, more commonly coloured than white.... How you can tell if you have a leadersheep is by their build, they are thin, tall and leggy. [A] Leadersheep is stand-offish until it has been caught, then s/he will surrender and the shepherd can easily turn around, the leadersheep will move with the shepherd, where as our regular sheep still struggle. From a distance you can see the leadersheep, they are more alert and quite often stand surveying their surroundings:)” [AV 3/23/09]

“Leadersheep are born with this will to power. They have something a bit more involved though, which is a personal investment in the wellbeing of flock members. You will see a true Leadersheep approach and lead a sickly individual from it's solitude back into the flock. You will see a true Leadersheep 'tell' you to fix a break in the fencing. You will see a true Leadersheep to block the advance of the flock when said fencing is down. These things and more a for-real Leadersheep will do. They are not 'flighty' or unable to be caught unless they have a problem with their shepherds. They engage and work in conjunction with their shepherds. Almost like very smart extra-sheep-savy dogs.” [CM 3/23/09]

“My leader ram does more than just act curious. He's very alert, puts himself between the flock and danger, herds them to the barn before storms or away from predators and will come to me if there's a problem. He's not a pet (altho I wouldn't describe him as skittish so much as regal) so when he does come up, there's a reason why. I've seen him do some amazing things and I've had guests see him do these things so I know it's not just wishful thinking on my part. This leader ram started exhibiting these behaviors a week after he was on my farm, as a 3 month old. He took over from the self-appointed matriarchal ewe and has been the leader ever since. He's less than 50% leader lines and his offspring are even less but he's truly amazing to see in action and the offspring I've kept and had out with the flock exhibit leader behavior also. If nothing else, it's just fun to watch him, but I also feel he provides added protection for the flock and I'm planning to get another this summer.” [AK 3/23/09]

“All I can share is how our 50% Leifurson behaves and how our little ewe lamb, Dottie behaves. She is I believe 25% leadersheep. Leifurson is always wary, he always hangs back, and he is extremely alert - he is also our dominant ram at the moment. Dottie is friendly and very forward. I do believe she may be the one to lead our ewe flock, once she is older. I saw very leaderlike behaviours from her when we had our breeding groups setup. [AT 2/19/09]

“I do like the leader sheep strain very much, even though the added smartness is a pain in the neck sometimes. Our leader sheep, Carmen, has a basically strong constitution, and terrific mothering and nurturing characteristics. However, she has a mind of her own and does what she damn well pleases. Also, she has eyes in the back of her head and second guesses us without any trouble at all. That being said I would like to have more leaders.” [MS 1/7/08]

“...look at how we've glommed onto the leadersheep. We Americans just love our leadersheep. Betchu we have a higher percentage of them here than they do there. [CM 1/7/08]

“I love Leadersheep. Truly absolutely love them. My personal sheep-world revolves around them. We are fortunate to have many 50%ers....i.e., AI sons/daughters from Southram Leadersheep. We have one that's 75% and a few that are inbetween. Then there are all the sons and daughters of the 50%ers. Some of these leaderline sheep show extraordinary intelligence. Some we can hardly tell from the regular Icelandics....”

“Here's a story: Saturn (an AI son of Skumur) looked like he might have fly strike late last Spring. He was new to us, having come directly from Tongue River Farm less than a month prior. He was loose with the ram flock on the 100acre pasture and we needed to get him in. With almost no misstep, absolutely no running away....no foolishness, he allowed himself to be herded into the barn compound. Once down there, he calmly entered the barn when we opened the gate and bid him in, and hung out while we made a pen for him. Then....THEN! he stood still while we sprayed him with screw worm spray...and continued to remain calm while we trimmed him really close with scissors (shearer was still one week from coming). This ram didn't know us, barely knew his pasture, and yet, he KNEW.”

“One of our Biskup daughters, Lorin (SRX515) is the best sheep that ever walked the earth. She also knows everything. She is always the last one thru the headgate, always the last one to be wormed/sheared, etc.. But, she is smart enough to know that she needs this and that there is no escape. When you're actually handling this ewe she is a perfect lady.”

“I think the whole wild and wooley Leadersheep is a fallacy.....a mistaken belief based upon unsound argument. A real Leadersheep is smart alright, wicked smart. But they are also extremely reasonable. You can actually tell them what you want and they WILL do it. Little mind readers they are.”

We have a Leadersheep in Training, young Ureka. Intelligent and curious. As a lamb she often led a band of her little followers MUCH astray. But now, she is beginning to take her job quite seriously. She is daughter our 75%er, Nepda....so Ureka isn't even 50%, but she has the brain.

Ureka story: Tonight to get them all away from the gate (so I could open it toward them) I took off my silk scarf and fluttered it at them. (it worked...at least this once). And a bit later, while inside the barnyard, everyone else ravishing the hay feeder, young Ureka approached and I showed it (the scarf) to her so she could take a sniff. Bold and trusting and curious. SHE is what you want in a Leaderewe.

It's our breeding goal to AI our Leadersheep to more Leadersheep. To get to 99.99999%ers. I want to breed Leadersheep and evaluate them for tendencies. It takes a LOT for a sheep to be the real thing. Wildness is not one of them. Alertness, yes. Skitzoid crazy, no. That would be a non-breeder here. [CM 1/5/09]

“.... I truly understand your feelings. Our beloved Fritha, a Blesa daughter from Stef, was a great girl...smart, clever, wise and wary. She had so many lovely lambs, although tall and lanky

herself, she could raise big fat triplets and keep peace and harmony in the ewe flock. She never missed a trick....” [EC 1/5/09]

“Intelligence is a mixed blessing in leader sheep. We had one and she was wonderful in many ways, but her smartness was often annoying. She was so observant that once or twice she escaped being sheared for a whole year. We had to figure out how to outsmart her to catch her for worming or anything else for that matter. The worst of it was, as soon as she saw us, somehow she would know that something was up and take off with half a dozen ewes to the other side of the pasture. Jay learned new cuss words for Carmen. The good thing about Carmen was she was very healthy, made beautiful triplets, and fed and took care of all of them so that even the littlest made it just fine. I miss her steady presence in the pasture and felt that if a predator made it into the pasture that she would round everyone up and take them off. We have guardians now, but Carmen was special.” [MS 1/5/09]

“I remember Mundi showing us about conformation at the VAI class. One of David Nelson's leadersheep (Goldie, maybe?) was helping us out as was one of his nice non-leader ewes. Mundi put his hands up and down on the non-leader ewe and explained what he looked for. Someone then asked him to do the same on the leadersheep. He tapped her on the head between her ears and said: ‘No. This is all that we look for in leadersheep’.” [MJ 1/3/09]

“I too don't want a flock of strictly leadersheep for several reasons not the least of which is that they are contrarians and independent thinkers. However I do have a few leadersheep in my flock and breed in their genetics to increase lamb vigor, milkiness, predator resistance and heat resistance. I generally cross them with my heaviest muscled rams. What I get is a nicely muscled animal that milks exceptionally well and is successful in keeping her lambs from being killed by predators. The leadersheep genes are very dominate and I am experimenting with how far I can breed away from the original leadersheep and keep these traits while adding the muscling in again.”

“I must say that all of my leadersheep have had exceptionally easy births also and exceptionally vigorous lambs. I really like the influence they have had on some of the ewes in my flock. While the improved Icelandic that has been selected for heavier muscling is a welcome addition to the breed, I was told that some of the AI rams have been known [to sire] lambs that have difficult births. This was told to me by a breeder in Iceland. So we don't want to focus so much on heavily muscling and lose the easy lambing aspect, of course. Most of the births in Iceland are attended, so pulling a lamb is not such a problem. But to those that want to pasture lamb, difficult births are not wanted, even if the resulting lamb is very chunky and heavily muscles. I want a balance of easy lambing and nice muscling too.” [SB 7/15/06]

“On one extreme I have never had a leadersheep that had heat stress. I think that this is because the leadersheep are taller and less muscled with thinner bodies, longer necks and legs. The heat is able to dissipate from their bodies easier that a thick bodied heavily muscled sheep.” [SB 7/14/06]

“I know I LOVE my leadersheep too! They have such GREAT personalities, and spots are always fun. We've never had triplets here and like Alethea I am not sure if I'm glad or envious?” [VB 3/23/06]

“Gawrsh!!! - two sets of triplets, all from my son of Biskup! One set of triplets comes from an Ari granddaughter - I like the prolificacy of these Leadersheep!” [HM 3/22/06]

“You can pretty much look at the extended pedigree of an animal to see if some of the known leader lines appear. Even with the small amount of knowledge of pedigrees that I have I can recognize some individuals. The one girl I have with any significant leader lines is my wildest ewe. Don't know if there is any correlation there or not, as my original 3 girls were about as friendly as the local deer when I got them. But this girl can do some impressive ‘airs above the ground’. I've seen a good 4' of air under her when she leaps. Another sheep in the way of ‘escape’? No problem - jump over them! She is still sure that I'm a very dangerous creature, and not to be trusted. Of course she's the one I think is the prettiest color, too (black mouflon that's starting to silver).” [SG 9/12/05]

[Q: Would a leader ram always be the alpha (top) ram in the flock..?]

“On our farm we have two leaderrams and they fight with each other over who is going to be “top leader” ram, but the real alpha ram is our Helison who interestingly steps in between those two when they start to fight with each other. He will position his body sideways between them, taking the brunt force of their “attacks” at each other. After he turns and keeps positioning himself to stop their fighting, they usually give it up. So in that group, he is the alpha ram, and the other two, who are the same age and about the same size, seem to keep trying to fight over who is top “leader” ram - or more likely, just who is in 2nd and who is in 3rd place!”

“In my ewe flock, two of the leader ewes will race each other to be at the front of the line on the way out to pasture, but it is my heavier, bigger ewes who are the alpha ewes. As the younger ones get older and bigger each season, they will occasionally try to take over that top spot, but the current top ewe holds her place (a Moli daughter). I have also seen ewes head butt each other similar to how the rams fight, but usually not with as much force. And I've also had other ewes who don't tolerate the fighting, step in between and position themselves to take the blows to prevent the fighting. I find it fascinating to watch the sheeps' behavior with one another within the flock.”

“This summer one of the 6 week old leader ram lambs decided to head butt a yearling ewe, who was of course much bigger. She held her ground, letting him come at her but he kept “pestering” her. So finally she stepped forward and gave him a good “butt” back, the force of which really knocked him for a loop. His neck arched back, he fell to the ground and lay there; I thought he broke his neck. Wouldn't you know I had visitors right at that moment too. We all stood there dumb founded, and I'm thinking “oh great, she just killed him in front of company!” So I went thru the gate to go get him and he rolled his eyes, looked at me and then jumped up and ran away. Whew!

[Q: What is the status of the leaderrams in relationship to the other rams?]

“The other adult rams are more "mellow" and don't seem to care about ranking so much. But anytime the status of the group changes, then there will be somebody else who has to be top ram so that the rest of them will settle down amongst themselves. It's pretty much synonymous with age/size/weight. I do find the two leaderrams tend to have their own "thing" going between each other, ignoring the rest of the guys, but bowing to the heavier, bulkier Helison.” [LG 10/19/04]
