

WILTSHIRE HORN

Summary

Developed on the exposed sheep walks of the Wiltshire Downs, the Wiltshire Horn is a hardy minority breed, well adapted to range over large expanses of poor quality pasture in search of forage. Its characteristic lack of wool is unique amongst sheep and offers distinct welfare advantages. A breed with established commercial uses.

Hardiness – a fairly hardy breed.

- *Tolerant of hot and cold climates* – developed on exposed open Downs and thus can cope with cold, but dry, conditions. White skin and lack of wool makes the breed also well suited to warmer climates.
- *Shelter* – keen on areas of scrub or small trees to shelter in at night and in bad weather.
- *Agile and active* – adapted to ranging over and coping with sparse, poor quality grazing, often on steep downland.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a breed with distinct husbandry advantages, particularly on humid lowland sites with thorny vegetation.

- *Handling* – generally docile, easy to move, load, dose and handle; older rams can be belligerent. Easily worked with a sheepdog.
- *Fleece* – shearing unnecessary as it grows little or no wool, and the short winter fleece, mainly a thick mat of hair on the back, is naturally shed in spring. Does not become entangled in Bramble or other prickly species.
- *Fly strike* – lack of fleece ensures incidents are very rare. A popular breed in Australia.
- *Appearance* – a large breed, adult ewes and rams have an average weight of 72kg and 126kg respectively. Both sexes are horned; the rams have heavy spiral horns. Fleece and skin white; some individuals have a few small black spots.
- *Long tailed* – thus usually docked.
- *Hooves* – varied opinion as to how frequently hooves need trimming, from twice yearly, to quite frequent treatment. Consensus that foot diseases generally rare.
- *Breeding* – gives birth easily. Lambs are vigorous and quickly on feet.
- *Fencing* – standard stock fence with single top wire sufficient. Also respects three-strand electric fence; as a horned breed, not suitable for containment within electric net fencing.



Matthew Oates

Grazing Characteristics - well adapted to grazing poor quality pasture.

- *Browsing* – eats young scrub and hedgerows, including Sycamore, Ash, Blackthorn, Oak, Hawthorn and Brambles. Also takes Thistles.
- *Grazing characteristics* – no specific information available.

Interaction with the Public – a useful breed for grazing sites with public access.

- *Public appeal* – striking appearance due to large size, very white coat and large horns.
- *Reaction to people* – can be friendly and docile when regularly exposed to humans.

Marketability – as a minority breed with proven commercial attributes, there is a market for breeding stock.

- *Meat* – lean, tender and with good flavour.
- *Lambs* – fast growing. Reach slaughter weight without excess fat.
- *Rams* – popular as terminal sires for the production of lean, early maturing, crossbred lambs.

Sites where Wiltshire Horn sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Fontmell Down Dorset Dorset Wildlife Trust	Chalk grassland. 38 ha	One of the best examples of chalk downland with very good populations of rare plants and Lepidoptera. Small flock (c.30) Wiltshire Horn sheep run alongside Beulah sheep and cattle. Advantages of Wiltshire Horn include: tend not to get caught in Brambles, little foot rot or fly strike, browse seedlings and Traveller's-joy.	Ann Halahan 01285 880028
North West nature reserves Environment and Heritage Service	Duneland and small parkland paddocks. 100 ha	Small flock (approximately 20) Wiltshire Horn sheep. Sometimes run with few Exmoor ponies or commercial cattle. Lack of fleece is a significant bonus. Range widely. Easy to handle. Good on rough forage; browses scrub and Brambles even when grass not in short supply. Breeding ewes respond well if given nutrient lick in lead up to lambing time. Generally docile and easy to move, load, handle and dose. Easily worked with sheep-dog. Quickly become trained to 3-strand electric fence. Likes areas of scrub or small trees to shelter in at night and in bad weather. Develop a daily routine.	Darrell Stanley 028 7776 3982
Old Winchester Hill English Nature	Chalk grassland. 80 ha	Approximately 40 Wiltshire Horn X Welsh Mountain ('Easycare') run alongside Beulah sheep. Browse scrub seedlings well.	Barry Proctor 01489 878536
Other contacts:		Wiltshire Horn Sheep Society	Richard Thwaites 01297 678539
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References