



Hampshire Down Breed Profile

Breed History

The Hampshire Down originates from southern England, particularly Hampshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire. The breed was developed during the early 19th century by crossing the Southdown with local horned sheep such as the Wiltshire Horn and Berkshire Knot. The resulting breed retained the Southdown's excellent meat qualities while gaining size, resilience, and adaptability. By the late 1800s the Hampshire Down had become one of the most influential terminal sire breeds in Britain and beyond.

Breed Characteristics

Appearance

Hampshire Downs are easily recognised by their powerful build and dark brown or black faces and legs. Their fleece is dense and white, providing good weather resistance. Rams typically display a strong, slightly Roman nose, broad shoulders, and heavily muscled hindquarters.

Temperament & Behaviour

Known for their calm, quiet nature, Hampshire Downs are easy to handle and ideal for both commercial and smallholder systems. Their low reactivity reduces stress during management, contributing to better welfare and potentially improved meat quality.

Production Qualities

Meat Production

Hampshire Downs excel as meat sheep. Their lambs demonstrate:

- Rapid early growth
- Excellent feed conversion
- Strong loin and hindquarter muscling
- Balanced fat cover
- High dressing-out percentages They finish quickly on both grass and concentrate-based systems, making them a favourite among commercial lamb producers.

Wool Production

Though primarily a meat breed, Hampshire Down wool is a durable, medium-grade fleece. Staples measure 2–3.5 inches, and fleeces weigh 5–7 lbs. The wool is suitable for medium yarns, tweeds, socks, and handcrafts.

Breeding & Maternal Qualities

Ewes display excellent mothering instincts, good milk supply, and strong lamb survival rates. Lambs are vigorous at birth and typically require minimal assistance. Lambing percentages range from 160–200% depending on management.

Adaptability

One of the Hampshire Down's greatest strengths is its adaptability. It thrives in a wide range of climates, from wet uplands to dry lowlands. The breed performs well under low-input grazing systems and intensive finishing programs. Hampshire Downs maintain condition effectively and cope well with variable forage quality.

Use in Crossbreeding

Hampshire rams are widely used as terminal sires in commercial flocks. They cross effectively with maternal breeds such as Mules, Lleyms, Romneys, Easycars, and Highland breeds. Crossbred lambs benefit from hybrid vigour, rapid finishing, and consistent carcass quality, making Hampshire sires a top choice for both live markets and abattoir grading systems.

Why Farmers Choose Hampshire Downs

Farmers consistently choose Hampshire Downs for their:

- Exceptional temperament
 - Fast growth rates
 - Excellent carcass traits
 - Hardy nature
 - Adaptability to varied systems
 - Easy lambing
 - High maternal performance
- These characteristics make them a dependable and profitable breed for commercial and pedigree flocks.