

Wiltshire Horn

A fully shedding sheep

The Wiltshire Horn occupies a space between wool sheep and hair sheep. The breed is often classified as a hair sheep, which makes sense because it sheds its coat annually; however, its fiber complement doesn't fit neatly with either the hair sheep or the wool sheep. The breed description says the animals are "covered in short, kemp wool."* The quality of the coat can vary dramatically between sheep, but it is far more wool-like than the coats of the Barbados Blackbelly and the Saint Croix. A study in the 1960s comparing fleece growth between Tasmanian Merinos and Wiltshire Horns observed that if the Wiltshire Horn's coat didn't shed, it would be considered a short-wool fleece, with fiber diameters ranging from finer than 40 microns to 80 microns. The lower end of that analysis puts the fiber diameters (although not their lengths) in the company of the longwools and the outercoats of a number of double-coated breeds. The upper end is about the same fiber diameter as human hair (in the world of wool, that's coarse).

Kemp fibers are notoriously stiff, short, and brittle. They do not display changed color when they are dyed. The bulk of the Wiltshire Horn fibers in this sample were flexible, longer than most kemps, and more



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supple. When a breed is not grown for fiber, surprises occur often and consistency is rare. In sum, this wool was quite readily spinnable.

The sample comprised fibers with a hand reminiscent of comparisons well below 40 microns—possibly in the mid-20s to low 30s. The fleece consisted mostly of fibers in the vicinity of 1 to 1½ inches (2.5 to 3.8 cm). Some were as short as ¼ inch (6 mm) and the shortest were kemp-like. Spinning an even yarn was out of the question without tedious, wasteful sorting, yet the result—spun directly from mini-combs, which eliminated the shortest, stiffest components—displayed a surprising amount of both luster and elasticity.

Take the fiber where you find it and see what happens.



lock and yarn photos reproduced to the same scale
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* Kemp has a specific technical definition according to ASTM International: "a medullated fiber in which the diameter of the medulla is 60% or more of the diameter of the fiber."