



Romanov hardiness traits are passed to crossbreeds such as this 1/2 Romanov lamb.

**"THEY'VE GOT EVERY OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTIC YOU'D WANT IN A SHEEP"**

## They Call Their New Sheep A "Fantasy Breed"

"They sell themselves. Anyone who sees them, wants them," says Nicki Blackstone, who along with her husband David and three sons, imports and raises purebred Romanov sheep, a "fantasy breed" that originated in Russia and has earned a fast-growing reputation in the U.S. and Canada.

Nicki says the sheep have "virtually every quality you've ever dreamed of including a high lambing rate of 3 or better, early sexual maturity, the ability to breed all year, outstanding mothering ability, extremely high wool quality, hardiness and many other qualities that make them a delight to raise."

The Blackstones got in touch with FARM SHOW after they noticed a letter to the editor in a recent issue (Vol. 13, No. 3) from a Canadian reader who was excited about a newly acquired Romanov ewe that had given birth to six lambs at once. The Blackstones wanted to let sheep producers in the U.S. know that the breed, which originated in Russia, is now available in the U.S.

"We imported our Romanovs to the U.S. in 1987, bringing them in through Canada. Now we have 40 purebreds and about 40 crossbreeds. It's almost impossible to believe what a wonderful breed this is, especially for U.S. producers because in breeding primarily for meat, we've bred the heart and hardiness right out of our sheep. Domestic breeds in the U.S. average less than 1 lamb per ewe and only about 65% of those make it to market.

"Romanovs, on the other hand, have a lambing rate of over 3 lambs per ewe and almost no death loss. The lambs are very aggressive - they're up and feeding immediately after birth - and the ewes have tremendous mothering ability. They can easily rear up to four lambs each so there's virtually no orphaned 'bottle lambs'. They mature early. Both rams and ewes can breed at 90 days and lamb at 8 months. However, we try to keep them apart until about 6 months. They produce twins and triplets consis-

tently, and quads and quints occur frequently. Our last 7 ewes yielded 27 lambs and they all survived. The most we've had at once is 5 but we know of several 6-lamb births and the breed is known to have produced 7 to 9 live lambs at a time. Romanovs are easy to breed and you can flush and breed them any month, unlike most domestic breeds that only breed in the fall.

"Although most wool sells for about 70 cents a pound, we get \$3.00 to \$5.00 a pound for our Romanov wool, both from purebreds and from 1/2 crossbreeds. Hand-spinners prize it for its unique luster and they say it's extremely spinnable. And although the Romanovs are not as heavily muscled as other traditional breeds, crossbreeding produces a hybrid with better muscling and a better overall carcass."

Nicki says nearly all of the characteristics of the Romanov carry over to the 1/2 crosses. "Romanov-crossed lambs are far superior to anything on the U.S. market. They mature so quickly people don't believe us when we tell them how old our animals are when we bring them to sale barns."

The Blackstones wean their purebred Romanov rams and ewes at 50 days and sell at 60 days. They say there are only a handful of producers in the U.S. and Canada selling stock.

"Romanovs have only been out of Russia for about 25 years. We're planning to bring in new bloodlines directly from Europe in order to meet what we think will be a huge demand in the U.S. in a few years," says Nicki. The Blackstones have been marketing Romanovs aggressively throughout the U.S. and plan to increase their purebred flock to 100 at the same time increasing their stock of crossbred animals. They also raise beef and hogs.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, David & Nicki Blackstone, 29800 TR 55, Lewisville, Ohio 43754 (ph 614 567-3463).

**FARM SHOW**

# Ag World

*Editor's Note: Most of what goes into Ag World stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of FARM SHOW touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching - everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.*

*If you've read or heard a good Ag World type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.*



Kids love to play with these quonset huts that Jim Alcock makes from culverts.

### QUONSET HUTS FOR KIDS

## Culverts Make Great Barns For Farm Toys

"I got the idea when I found a piece of half culvert in a ditch," says Jim Alcock, a Fort Macleod, Alberta farmer who launched a sideline business building and selling quonset huts for farm toys made out of culverts.

"When our neighbors saw the first one we made, they wanted one for their kids. Later a farm equipment manufacturer wrote a short article about them in a company magazine and we started getting orders from all over the U.S. and Canada," says Alcock, noting that the highlight of his business so far was a 5,600 mile working holiday he took with his family to deliver mini-quonsets to customers in 13 U.S. states.

"Kids Kuansets", as Alcock calls them, come in two sizes - 27 by 49 by 16 in. high

and 46 by 76 by 26 in. high. He also makes a wooden garage that measures 24 by 36 in. by 18 in. high and a hip roof barn that measures 24 by 48 in. by 30 in. high. Fuel tanks, grain bins and a grain auger are also available. Your farm name can be painted on any of the structures.

The big quonset sells for \$195, the smaller quonset for \$91, and the bin set, which consists of 3 bins, a hopper bin and a fuel tank, for \$45. The grain auger sells for \$15.

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