

MEDIA RELEASE

From Doug Laing, media officer, Shearing Sports New Zealand
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Caption

Top New Zealand bladeshearer Tony Dobbs, of Fairlie, in the Old Errowanbang woolshed in New South Wales in 2014. On Saturday he shears at a 150-years of New Zealand competition at the Central Hawke's Bay Show in Waipukurau. PHOTO/SSNZ

Celebration of 150 years' shearing competition in NZ

Possibly the first shearing competition reported anywhere in the World will be commemorated in a 150th anniversary blade shear at the Central Hawke's Bay A and P Show in Waipukurau on Saturday.

Leading New Zealand 2019 World blades shearing championships team hopes Tony Dobbs, of Fairlie, and Allan Oldfield, of Geraldine, will make the trip north for the November 10 event which will mark a century and a half since a bladeshearing competition at Waipukurau on January 21, 1868.

It predates by five years the long-time presumed earliest competition in New Zealand at the Canterbury A and P Show in 1873.

Whether it was the first definitely competition is unclear, but Shearing Sports New Zealand and Shearing Magazine publisher and editor Des Williams know of no earlier record than a February 1, 1868, Hawke's Bay Herald report that it was "the first shearing match in the inland district."

On Saturday bladeshearing regulars Dobbs and Oldfield being joined by North Island hopes Russell Knight, an Apiti shearing judge once taught bladeshearing by Dobbs, and Dannevirke shearer Neil Weggery, who has shorn across the World with both blades and machines.

Dobbs and Oldfield working the short bladeshearing season in Canterbury and lead season which at the Canterbury show in the week after the event at Waipukurau will decide New Zealand's two bladeshearers for the 2019 World shearing and woolhandling championships in France.

But Knight and Weggery number just one competition between them, Weggery having once won a small show in Scotland and claimed the prize he had sponsored.

The competition in 1868 took place on the property of Waipukurau town father H.R. Russell, whose layibg-out of the town included the A and P show venue – Russell Park.

It was won by James Walker, a shepherd to the chief Te Hapuku, runner-up was apparent favourite and more-experienced Inia Whangataua, of Takapau, Patangata shearer Nguha was third, and fourth was Hori Tawhai of Waipaoa (Waipawa).

"Out of the nine entries, five only finished their pens within the appointed time, four of whom were entitled to prizes," the report said. "Porikaapa was disqualified through the careless shearing of one of his sheep."

The shearers had to shear three sheep in threequarters of an hour, which both Dobbs and Oldfield shouldn't find any problem, having in their most recent competition, at Ashburton last month, each shorn five sheep in under 15 minutes.

The sheep were ewes "of Saxony and French merino blood", bred from a flock thought to have been landed in Wellington and driven up the coast to Hawke's Bay.

There were clear implications that speed was to be discouraged, the report, discussing conditions on the farm, saying that "it would be advisable to shear a reduced number in a better and more workman-like manner."

“There is no lack of good shearers, and it may be that the fault rests with the employer more than the employed,” it continued. “So long as some sheep farmers encourage the present reckless style, and the men are allowed to “tomahawk” their 100 or 150 a day, an improvement in the style of shearing cannot be looked for.”

The first machine shearing competition recorded in New Zealand was at the Hawke's Bay A and P Show in 1902, and is commemorated in the name of the current annual event, the Great Raihania Shears, named after original winner Rimitirusns

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Doug

Media

Shearing

mobile 0274-690644, home (64) 06-8436656

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Laing,
Officer
Zealand

