

## MEDIA RELEASE

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

Ethan Pankhurst, of Masterton, who has been making regular trips home from Australia in his bid for PGG Wrightson Wool national circuit points in New Zealand. Pictured at Waimate in October, he's back for the next round tomorrow at Marton. PHOTO/Doug Laing SSNZ

Not the money, the points, says budding shears champion

Masterton shearer Ethan Pankhurst has won 30 lower-grade finals over the years but is unfazed by having to go without as he serves his sport's unofficial mid-career apprenticeship trying to bust into the elite of Open-class competition.

But, based in the southwest Victoria town of Mortlake and crossing the Tasman regularly to keep in touch, the 25-year-old 2015 Golden Shears Senior champion could be on the brink of the breakthrough with the strong possibility of reaching a place in the PGG Wrightson Wool National Circuit showdown in Masterton on March 3.

With qualifying based on points for placings in heats at the New Zealand Merino Championships (finewool), the Waimate Spring Shears (long strongwool), the national Corriedale championships (coarsewool), he's returned home again for the lambshearing round at the Rangitikei Shearing Sports in Marton tomorrow Saturday.

The final qualifying round is at the Pahiatua Shears (second-shear) on February 23, the top 12 from the series going to the finals at the Golden Shears the following weekend, the winner claiming a place in the 2018-2019 New Zealand trans-tasman series team.

The big boost for Pankhurst came when he was second-to-top qualifier in the Corriedale championship heats at the Canterbury Show on November 17.

He was eliminated from the Corriedale championships in the semi-finals later in the day and was back off to Australia, not for the first time

without a cent to cover any of the expenses of the transtasman dash. But, aware of the big leap from being a Senior winner to an Open-class success and that not even the most successful in the lower grades can take anything for granted in the top grade, Pankhurst says it's not the money he's after.

"I flew back from Aussie to get the points for the PGG Wrightson Wool Circuit," he said. "It's a long road, it's just work in progress. Got a few years before any consistency comes in."

"It could be me one day getting the cheque, but that's not what I'm after. I just want to win," he said. "It was all about points for the circuit, though a final would have been cool. Maybe next time."

The 11pts for the day elevated his total to 17, for 8<sup>th</sup>-equal place on the leaderboard and a near-guarantee of a place in the Masterton showdown, with still two qualifying rounds to go.

In his third season in the Open class, Pankhurst hasn't won since the Royal Easter Show Senior final in Auckland in March 2015 – his 13<sup>th</sup> win in the 2014-2015 season. He'd also had three wins in the grade the previous season, during which he graduated from Lincoln, 10 wins in the Intermediate grade in 2012-2013, and four wins as a Junior in 2011-2012.

With defending champion Rowland Smith not contesting the series, Southland shearer Nathan Stratford is looming as favourite to win the PGG Wrightson Wool National Shearing Circuit for a second time. He has made the top 6 for the Saturday-night final 14 times in 20 seasons of Open-class shearing and will be out to win and regain the circuit's automatic place in the New Zealand team for the 2018-2019 transtasman series.

Previous leader Troy Pyper, of Winton, was absent from the third round at the Canterbury Show and slipped to 6<sup>th</sup> place, but with 20pts from the opening finewool round at the New Zealand Merino Championships in Alexandra and the Spring Shears' long strongwool in Waimate in October also all-but guaranteed a place in the premier dozen.

Ranking and points after three of the five qualifying rounds in the PGG Wrightson Wool National Shearing Circuit are: Nathan Stratford (Invercargill) 26pts, 1; Ringakaha Paewai (Gore) 25pts, 2; Colin O'Neill

(Alexandra) 24pts, 3; Grant Smith (Rakaia) 23pts, 4; Ant Frew (Pleasant Point) 22pts, 5; Troy Pyper (Winton) 20pts, 6; Paerata Abraham (Masterton) 18pts, 7; John Kirkpatrick (Napier) and Ethan Pankhurst (Masterton) 17pts, 8eq; Jack Fagan (Te Kuiti) 15pts, 10, Andy Mainland (Invercargill) and Stacey Te Huia (Forbes, Aus, and Te Kuiti, NZ) 9pts, 11eq; David Bick (Pongaroa) 5pts, 13; Dion Morrell (Alexandra) 4pts, 14; Turi Edmonds (Raetihi) 2pts, 15; Evan Johnson (Timaru) and Leon Samuels (Invercargill) 1pt, 16eq.

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