



## **Future Futurities!**

*John Gaye reports on an event where the true winner was the UK alpaca industry as a whole.*

The first ten years of commercial alpaca farming were celebrated in great style at the first British Alpaca Futurity on November 4th in the Grandstand at Newbury Racecourse. More than 120 animals were entered for the halter classes and 168 people were booked for the dinner, keynote speaker and auction. Several hundred people, alpaca breeders and members of the public, visited during the day along with a welcome contingent from Europe – France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden and Norway – being represented.

Six of the most established breeders in the UK got together in the summer and decided that the industry needed a showcase in which to demonstrate the ever increasing qualities of the home bred stock. In the USA the Futurity has been a long established event with tremendous marketing pull, so although the idea was not a new one, putting on a British Futurity meant starting with a clean sheet of paper, always rather intimidating for the organisers.

The first problem was to get across to the industry exactly what the Futurity meant. It differed from other shows in that all the animals being exhibited had to be progeny of stud males which had been nominated and sponsored by their owners. In addition each class would offer cash prizes to the first three places of £100, £50 and £25 respectively and the Champions would receive an extra £150. Meanwhile the owner of the stud male whose progeny were the most successful in class would receive 10% of the total prize money of his progeny. So there was much more at stake than the usual cachet of just winning and coming away with a rosette or sash. In addition to the show the Futurity offered an evening in which all could join in a wonderful social event and take part in the prestigious auction at the end of the day.

Participation in the show had started some three months before with the launch of the stud services auction on the web site. Many breeders, both large and small, offered up a stud service from their males and they were then put up for auction in a similar fashion to Ebay. Over one week at a time alpaca breeders could bid for some of the best stud males in the country and once this became known there was tremendous enthusiasm to join in the bidding. Each week there were about eight males to choose from and at midnight on each Saturday, when the bidding terminated, there was always a great flurry of activity to procure the services of those males who were still available. Many excellent bargains were achieved in this way and most importantly considerable funds – over £25,000 - were raised towards the costs of the Futurity.

Newbury racecourse was the superb setting for the whole day's events and in addition the weather provided a wonderful backdrop of an English Autumn at its best. Inside the grandstand building the organisers had laid out a superb arena and penning area; with various trade stands providing an additional focus of interest. As the whole event was to take place indoors some innovative thinking had to be done about the flooring and this had been solved with the use of astro turf for the show ring and the pens were laid out with carpet covered with industrially shredded cardboard on top. On the top floor of the Grandstand building, where the auction animals were penned and the floor was already carpeted, a waterproof membrane had been laid to ensure that the original carpet was kept pristine.

The show attracted 122 entries from 25 breeders, some with huge herds from which to choose and some with only a handful of animals. However without being threatened by quality

animals bred in Australia or Peru everyone had an equal chance to win. Judging was done by two highly respected international judges, Jude Anderson and Val Fullerlove, and they were watched by an audience of about 250 people. Amongst the crowd were breeders from Sweden, Norway, Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Holland and Germany; all of whom had travelled over specifically for the show. It was a real gathering of all those who take a serious interest in breeding alpacas and who wished to support the industry in this new initiative.

At lunch time both the judges and the exhibitors had a break from the show classes and a fashion show was laid on by Jenny Randall of Concepts of Peru using garments from all those who were exhibiting their products in the trade stands. The models were provided by the Misco Performing Arts Agency of Newbury and it provided a welcome deviation, or diversion, from watching alpacas particularly as some of the garments were produced by lingerie designers, which left little to the imagination.

The show concluded almost on time allowing everyone the opportunity to get changed for the evening events, which kicked off with a champagne reception. Once again the boys and girls from Misco laid on a repeat of the fashion show, but this one allowed the audience to be much, much closer. Once the excitement of the show had died down, and some of the men's heart rates had steadied once again, everyone sat to hear Jude Anderson give the keynote speech, in which she summarised much of her own experience and gave some excellent advice on the importance of the use of quality males if breeders wish to be successful in the business.

This was followed by the draw for the great raffle. Tickets for this raffle had not been cheap, each one costing £50. However the sale of tickets was limited and the prizes were superb, including amongst many others: a female alpaca, a box at Newbury races, a trip to the Altiplano of Chile and a Trafalgar paddock vacuum cleaner. However what made the raffle so successful as an event was the method by which the prizes were allocated. This was done by the certificate for each prize being placed in an unmarked envelope and then offered to the winner. So even if your name was first out of the barrel you might still only win one of the lesser prizes. Fate took a hand in the humour of this event as the alpaca was won by the owner of the largest herd of alpacas in Britain, the prize of five free shearings went to someone with 200 alpacas to shear and the prize of a training course went to one of the more experienced breeders in the room. Still they say it is never too late to learn!

An excellent dinner was then followed by the presentation of the Futurity Champion Males to Galaxy of Bozedown (Huacaya) and Dazzler of Bozedown (Suri) as well as the special exhibitors prize for the breeder with less than 40 females that went to Di Davies of Alpha Alpacas. Then the audience prepared for the highlight of the evening – the auction. David Tomlinson presided over this and as always gave an outstanding demonstration of how to run an auction. Although a couple of animals did not reach their reserves, bidding was brisk on the rest of them and prices were excellent. One alpaca had been donated by EP Cambridge for the benefit of the Futurity and one by Bozedown for the benefit of the two charities that were the nominated charities of the whole event. Both achieved high prices.

There had been some trepidation during the planning of the show amongst the organisers. Would the British alpaca enterprise be ready for such a show and would it be supported? For the first Futurity in the UK to attract the support that it did from so many breeders demonstrated quite clearly that people welcomed the concept of a wholly British show at which to showcase their breeding successes.

## **British Alpaca Futurity 2007**

### **Mark your diaries.**

The British Alpaca Futurity 2007 will take place at Newbury Racecourse on November 3rd and 4th. The judging of the show classes will take place all day Saturday and Sunday morning and running along side the show classes will be a number of lectures and workshops.

Please contact the organisers at [www.britishalpaca-futurity.com](http://www.britishalpaca-futurity.com) if you wish to receive more information about the 2007 event.

If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities for your company or alpaca breeding enterprise please get in touch either via the website or by telephone to John Potts on 01903 891 425.

If you would like to advertise in the Futurity catalogue please contact Rachel Hebditch 01884 243 579.