

Episode 7 – Beware the Shuswap Sheep Swap!

“What a nice fellow!” remarked the farmer as he inspected my ram, Hamish, standing placidly nearby. With a thoughtful look, the farmer scratched his chin and said “I know a Dorset ram which would be perfect for your flock, and you can do a swap.” That sounded fine to me, so we made the arrangements to swap the rams in the Armstrong Auction parking lot on Saturday.

Hamish, ever the perfect gentleman, walked calmly into the trailer and was happily munching on oats and apples as we set off for the auction. I was sad to see him leave, feeling regret that my “little donkey” (see Episode 5) was heading off to a new farm, but I reminded myself that I really did need to change out the rams regularly to avoid inbreeding problems.

We were the first to arrive at the auction in the early morning light. The auction manager inquired if we were wanting to put the ram into the sale, but we explained this was a sheep swap which garnered at least one raised eyebrow....

Just then, a truck pulled in with a makeshift plywood pen in the back. Three big dudes jumped out and I began to feel uneasy – why so many men to transfer one sheep, I wondered. That should have been my first clue.

The plan was for the “swap ram” to walk down a ramp from the truck into my trailer, and then Hamish would be led up the ramp and into the back of the truck. Simple!

My jaw dropped open and stayed that way when I saw the new ram – he was sporting the biggest set of curly horns I had ever seen! And he was severely agitated, throwing that massive horned head side to side, bouncing off the plywood walls of the pen. “Are you sure he’s safe?” I inquired hesitantly. The owner grinned “Oh, he’s very polite. He will eat right out of your hand, and he’s won awards as the best ram in show. Nothing to worry about!” I considered these reassuring remarks, and then requested that the farmer leave me his phone number, just in case I had questions. “Oh no, you don’t need my number. No need at all. He’s all yours now!” was the reply.

The next thing I knew, the great horned beast had ripped the ropes out of six strong hands and was barreling down the ramp totally unrestrained, his massive horns aiming directly at my ram’s woolly rear! Hamish recognized the extreme danger in an instant, and he exploded straight upwards in a super-sheep leap, over the gate blocking the trailer’s side door and right over the top of my head! As the three men wrestled to contain the horned beast now in my trailer, I ran around the parking lot chasing my poor traumatized Hamish, sweet talking him back to me.

A deal was a deal and the swap had been done, so I returned to the farm with the horned one tied three ways to Sunday in the back of the trailer. Within minutes of his release, the ram decided my knees had to be rearranged pronto, moving onto the barn walls, the gate and the fences. Everything shuddered from his non-stop massive horny head attacks. I skedaddled back

to the house, happy to still have the use of my legs, and called a Dorset breeder I knew in the area. “Oh yes” she said casually “that’s Thor, a one ram non-stop demolition derby!”

It took only minutes to load Thor back into the trailer, so determined was I to maintain my bones and barns in good order. The auction manager showed no surprise as I pulled up and opened the trailer, letting the massive horned beast run into a pen. “Hello Thor” she said “back again, eh?”

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