

**STANDARD of PERFECTION for AMERICAN KARAKUL SHEEP
A Guide for Registration**

The Karakul is one of the Asiatic broadtail types of sheep. Differing radically from many other breeds of domesticated American sheep, it is distinctly angular in build, long and narrow, with a sloping rump that blends into a broad tail. Historically born black with lustrous birth curls, Karakuls present in a variety of colors that can lighten and fade with time, or remain persistently rich and dark for life.

SIZE: Karakuls are medium-sized sheep. Rams weigh 150-225 pounds. Ewes weigh 110-150 pounds.

HEAD

General: Long, narrow, and sharply defined, with an indentation between forehead and nose, convexity over the eyes and along lower jaw distinctly prominent. Ewes should show a feminine, finely chiseled head. Rams should exhibit a distinctly masculine head with nape of neck strongly developed.

Muzzle: Relatively narrow especially in ewes; lips thin; nostrils narrow, slanting upward and outward.

Nose: Slightly to strongly arched, most prominent in rams.

Eyes: Large with yellow to brown iris; obliquely set. Eyelashes are often very long.

Forehead: Narrow; indented and sharply outlined.

Ears: Always pointing forward, slightly downward is preferred.

Ears should be soft and pliable; variable ear sizes* from very long to ear flaps, 1-2 inches in length.

Poll: Well rounded, narrow and prominent.

Horns: Ewes are usually polled but can have scurs, buds* or semi-developed horns.

Rams can also have small or large horns, with well-rippled outwardly curved spirals.

NECK

General: Long, thin and carried semi-erect; joining top of shoulder with pronounced curve.

Wattles: May be present on one or both sides of neck, a couple inches down from the jaw line.

BODY

General: Long and narrow with top line showing indentation in front of and back of shoulder point, highest at the loin, sloping angularly at rump and blending into the typical low set broadtail.

Shoulder: Slantingly set, thinly fleshed, point protruding.

Back: Indented behind shoulder point, sometimes concave and narrow.

Ribs: Very long with little spring; transverse section long oval in shape.

Loin: Side view convex; low at front and rear; strong but not overly broad.

Hips: Wide, prominent.

Rump: Long and sloping, free from excessive fat.

Twist: Shallow; covered by tail.

Thigh: Long, muscular but narrow.

Flank: Deep and flexible.

Chest: Deep and narrow, with large lung capacity.

Brisket: Narrow, coming almost to a V between front legs.

Breast: Undeveloped, blending from brisket into neck.

Scrotum: Well developed and carried high.

Udder: Strong and well developed with two prominent teats.

LEGS

General: Long, straight, with fine to medium bone. Fineness of bone is preferred.

Hooves: Sturdy with prominent dewclaws. Open-toes are common, as are long, resilient, but strong pasterns.

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**\* DETAILS**

**Ear sizes:** Very long ears go beyond the corner of the mouth, long ears almost touch the mouth corner, medium are about half-way down the face, short ears are 2"- 4" just past the eyes, elf are ear flaps, 1"- 2" inches in length. Longer ears are usually U-shape with thinner cartilage, shorter ears V-shape.

**Buds & Scurs:** Horn buds are short and sturdy, attached to the skull; scurs are horny growths not firmly attached.

# KARAKUL SHEPHERDS ALLIANCE ~ *where the flocks gather*

## STANDARD of PERFECTION continued

### TAIL (Adult)

**General:** Broadtail in type, joining the sloping rump with a broad base, narrowing to an appendage.

**Upper tail:** Small to very large U-or V-shape with much fatty development on each side and around the tailbone; sometimes wider than the body, may be long or short\*. Tail size depends on the sheep's condition, but the skin sack should be present whether filled with fat or not.

**Lower Tail:** Often docked as a lamb; long or short appendage, with little fat, may be long or short\*, straight, curved, angled, or flipped.

### HAIR & SKIN (Lamb & Adult)

**Hair General:** The fiber covering the head, ears, and lower legs that is not shorn as part of the fleece should be short, straight to slightly wavy; the ideal is silky and lustrous, but some varieties have coarse or firm hair. Wool on the poll is acceptable, but longer, wavier hair on the poll is preferred.

**Color:** Black and other color strains have luster throughout life. Other colors vary; may be white, or any shade of gray, brown, red, roan, or Sur\*. Minimal spotting, poll and tail tip, or extensive can occur in conjunction with any color or pattern.

**Skin:** Texture is soft, loose, thin and pliable.

**Color:** Black strains: skin of the muzzle, around the eyes, tongue, and inner mouth are decidedly blue-black to black-gray, somewhat lighter under the hair and fleece, but always of a blackish hue. Other color strains exhibit brown/tan, pink, or mottled pink-black inside the mouth and on tongue. Dark brown lambs may *appear* black at birth but will have tan or pink-colored eye rims and nose leather.

### WOOL (Fleece)

**Texture and Grade:** Long-staple wool of a coarse grade, usually open wave although sometimes straight. Shows good natural luster, free from matting, parting easily and cleanly to the skin and falling naturally into numerous locks; has very light grease content. Fleece should be as similar as possible over entire body in density, character and staple. Although single-coated fleeces occur, adult Karakul fleeces often have a finer, shorter undercoat along with a coarser, longer-staple outer coat; the two coats may be different colors.

**Length and Weight:** 12 months growth about 8" to 10"; although less common may be anywhere between 5" and 12"; weighing 4 to 10 pounds in ewes, more in rams. Newly shorn Karakuls should show high luster and a pattern caused by the new wool growing in several different planes.

**Color:** Traditionally Karakuls are born black, but other color patterns are possible and not discriminated against. Karakuls have a 'Fading Gene'; lamb color can fade, often evident by the first shearing, and gradually lightening each year. Some remain persistently dark for life.

**BIRTH COAT (Lamb)** Karakul lambs are born with curls of depth and high luster, ideally with short stage development (short fiber length). There should be a clear pattern in the arrangement of curls that carries over the entire coat, with texture that has a soft, silky feel. The preferred high-density coat has a firm and springy feel.\*

### UNDESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS

Body square and blocky, short and close-coupled, suggestive of meat-sheep conformation; heavy bone; ears set semi-erect or erect; very short head, or excessively large and coarse head; excessive wool on forehead; fleece distinctly woolly in character; fleece very coarse, dull, harsh, containing kemp or brittle fibers; tail showing little or no fat-tail development; exhibiting fat on the rump or fat in lower appendage.

### \*DETAILS

**Tail lengths:** The upper part of Karakul fat-tails can vary from short to very long, as can the lower appendages, which are gaged by the hocks-short is above, long is at or below the hocks. Docked or undocked appendages are acceptable.

**Sur color:** Visible only in the lamb and disappearing after a few weeks, it displays a color break on individual fibers. Each Sur-colored fiber has a darker base and lighter top half, making the dark pigment appear highlighted or shadowy behind the lighter-colored tips. The most extensive Sur coloring occurs over the entire body, both hair and wool; it most frequently occurs in large areas on the lambs' sides.

For more on colors refer to the *Color Genetics BASERS* guide on the **Registry** webpage.

**Birth Coats:** For details refer to the *Lamb Birth Coat Assessment* or *Barn Worksheet* on the **Registry** page.

**For additional Registry documents or to obtain papers referenced, please refer to our website or contact:**  
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