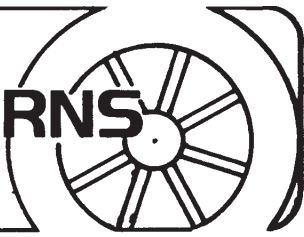


AS THE WHEEL TURNS



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EXPECTATIONS

BY

KATE FOREMAN

We're all prone to great expectations: the 95¢ gadget that will solve all kitchen problems, and then it falls apart in our hands the first time we use it. The situation holds true for spinning, too. One wheel just doesn't usually spin every fiber, so we acquire a flax wheel and maybe even an Indian cotton wheel to round out the wool wheel.

And it holds true with wool, too. The classic horror story, passed on from one generation of beginning spinners to the next, is about sending separate lots of beautiful wool-undoubtedly purchased at a premium price-to the woolen mill and having it returned in one batt, ruined, for all practical purposes (even though Sue Johns referred to it as a learning experience in one of her articles). To learn what spinners can expect from a woolen mill, I talked with Ham at St. Peter Woolen Mill. The key, according to Ham, is being very explicit about what you want. St. Peter is a custom mill, unlike the larger mills that have a 100 pound minimum. St. Peter will even separately card leg wool from back wool-as long as the spinner has separated the legs from the back, package them separately (different grocery bags in the same box), and indicated on the letter or purchase order that they are to be kept separate. I've sent down different dye lots of the same color (back when they did dyed wool) as well as two colors and wools to be blended; it's all come back exactly the way that I want it to. Most often spinners say one thing and mean something else; possible these people should talk with the people at St. Peter or another spinner to ascertain that they have the jargon correct, that

what they are asking for is really what they want.

Another problem is that chaffy wool will be returned chaffy. The solution is to tease the wool thoroughly before sending it to a woolen mill. Burrs won't come out in a carding process; they will, for a fee, remove manure tags and large pieces of hay. But they won't, even for a fee, skirt or sort the fleece.

Speaking of skirting a pleece, when buying a fleece, make sure that you know whether you're getting a skirted fleece or not. I'm not to sure that it makes a difference as long as you know which you're getting and are paying accordingly. Some fleeces are more difficult to clean than others, so they may not be available fully skirted. At the commercial fleece sources, the price difference may be the deciding factor. If you end

up discarding two pounds of matted, burred wool for which you have paid \$3.50/pound, you may be very angry; on the other hand, if you're paying \$1.25/pound, you may decide that your labor is justified. Besides, you can always use the matted pieces in felting, so our're not losing much. Some flock owners cover their sheep at all times to discourage the hay from becoming imbedded in the wool. Some are careful not to throw the bales of hay over the sheep, aiming more around the sheep. The key is to know what you're getting.

One further suggestion from St. Peter Woolen Mill: if you are washing your wool before sending it down to then, scour it on the dry side. If you haven't lost 50% of the greasy weight, it's not dry enough. That means it will gum up the machines at the woolen mill, which slows production for them (and we all want it back in a week) and costs extra money because they'll charge you to scour it to a sufficient level. When they wash the wool, they leave in 25-30% of the oil, so be prepared to add spinning oil if you have then wash it.