

FUTURE FEMALE LEADERS IN WOOL HARVESTING

Young women are now not only commonplace in shearing sheds, but the girls are also showing that by using best practice techniques they can more than match the boys. Here we feature four young female professionals that won titles at the AWI-supported 2022 Australian Shearing and Wool Handling Championships held in Bendigo in November.

Ella Picker, NSW

2022 National Novice Shearing Champion

Ella was brought up on the Picker family's 'Hillcreston' property at Bigga in NSW which specialises in the growing and breeding of Merino ultrafine and superfine wool. Now 25, Ella has been working at Hillcreston full time for six years now.

"I started to shear by asking my brother Sam to teach me. He has always inspired me and pushed me to do my best. He suggested I go to an AWI-funded shearer training course at 'Steam Plains' north of Conargo, which I did and, afterwards, Sam has continued helping me," Ella said.

"I love shearing because you can work at your own pace. It is so challenging in that you are always trying to get better and learn new things. I also really enjoy the physical side and pushing myself harder.

"It's incredible to see how many females are taking up work in the shed nowadays. It is absolutely awesome."

Ella won several novice shearing competitions before she won the big one at Bendigo in November.

"My brother has been super successful in competitions representing NSW a few times, so I tagged along with him to the Wellington Show, and then the Dubbo Show where I made the NSW team. I've done seven shows all up now," she said.

"The highlights are meeting some of the best shearers in Australia and making so many new connections. Another is having Sam and Scott Madden in my pen pushing me to do my best because they've taught me so much."

Ella has done two days shearing on the AWI sheep delivery unit, in which the sheep are delivered along a race almost directly to the shearer, virtually eliminating the catch and drag.

"I personally really like it. With me being so much smaller than the typical shearer and shearing heavy sheep, it really makes a difference on my body. Both days I was there, the sheep ran through the race really easily," she said.

Danielle Mauger, WA

2022 National Intermediate Shearing Champion

Following in the footsteps of her father, 24-year-old Danielle Mauger from South West WA is an established shearer in the Boyup Brook area and is also proving to be a skilled competitor. After winning a string of intermediate shearing competitions in her home state, she is now the National Intermediate Shearing Champion.

Although Danielle started competing in shearing competitions when she was at the WA College of Agriculture Harvey, shearing has always been in her blood. She grew up on an 80-hectare sheep farm at Balingup run by her parents Linda and Ross who is a semi-retired shearer.

Danielle, who received AWI-funded training at the start of her career, began shearing full time when she was 19 and currently works for a local contractor, Shear Pride.

"I love the freedom of shearing, how you can push yourself as much as you want. I also like the people; everyone has a different story and there are so many different personalities in



Ella Picker working in the shed (left) and having won the 2022 National Novice Shearing title in Bendigo in November (right).

the industry. I've never had a job that's had the same camaraderie or atmosphere. It's fast paced and intense but there's always lots of banter as well," she said.

Although Danielle acknowledges that shearing is hard work and puts a lot of strain on the body, it is definitely a job that she recommends.

"I think people that like hard work, working in a team and that like a challenge would like the shearing industry," she said.

With shearer trainers focussing on shearing technique and balance rather than brute strength, there are an increasing number of women willing to pick up a handpiece and join the shearing industry.

"From what I've seen there are definitely more females that are keen to learn how to shear, and slowly more that want to actually take it on as a job," Danielle said.

Sarah Haynes, SA

2022 National Senior Wool Handling Champion

Sarah, from Naracoorte in South Australia, recently turned 21 and has been working in the industry for the past three years. She began wool handling in her school holidays, as her father is a shearer, and then started wool handling full time when she finished high school. "I just fell in love with it," Sarah said.

She has received an extensive amount of training and mentoring, with Kursha Oster and Ali Tuinder helping to guide her since her first shed wool handling.

"Seeing how passionate the trainers are is what sparked my love for wool handling, I am extremely grateful for all of the training I've received to this day. The training has helped me immensely, teaching me to work more efficiently and perfecting skills," she said.

To have a better understanding of wool, Sarah did a Certificate IV in Wool Classing with SCAA Shearer Woolhandler Training Inc in 2021/2022.

Like Abbey Curnow (see next page), Sarah was chosen as an SCAA Shearer Woolhandler Training Inc's Woolclasser Ambassador and went on to demonstrate her all-round ability by winning the 2022 AWEX/TAFE National Graduate Wool Classer Competition, held in April at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

In only her second show competing in wool handling, the 21-year-old won the 2022 National Senior Wool Handling title at Bendigo in November. Her goal is now to represent her state in the open wool handling competition.

These two big competition wins, and receiving an Elders Clip of the Month award for her first big clip of 655 bales, are career highlights for her so far. However, Sarah says more than anything she simply just loves her day-to-day job in the wool shed.

"I absolutely love working in the wool industry. I am very passionate about wool handling and it gives me the freedom to travel all across Australia and the world, meet new people, stay fit and earn good money. I would highly recommend a career in the shearing industry!"



Danielle Mauger learning best practice technique at an AWI-funded novice training course five years ago (left) and winning the 2022 National Intermediate Shearing title in Bendigo in November (right).



Sarah Haynes in action at the 2022 National Senior Wool Handling at Bendigo (left) and with her winner's sash (right).

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Abbey Curnow, Vic

2022 National Novice Wool Handling Champion

Brought up on the family farm at Laancoorie, west of Bendigo in Victoria, Abbey Curnow started as wool handler in shearing sheds when finishing school three years ago.

"After I left school, Adam Webb gave me a job on his team North Central Shearing Bendigo and I fell in love with the job," Abbey said.

"After wool handling for about a year, I decided to take a 12-month wool classing course, through SCAA Shearer Woolhandler Training Inc. I was lucky enough to be taught by Marion Kelly and I also learnt a lot from my dad, who is a classer, and I had a lot of help from the amazing classers I work with at North Central Shearing Bendigo."

Abbey received her stencil in May last year and classed her first clip at the family farm 'Rosevenue' the following month.



Abbey Curnow working the sheds of central Victoria (left) and with her winning 2022 National Novice Wool Handling sash at Bendigo in November (right)

"Although as a job I mainly do classing, I still enjoy wool handling and being able to run around the board with my broom."

Abbey was chosen as SCAA Shearer Woolhandler Training Inc's Woolclasser Ambassador for her excellent workmanship, top attitude, and ability to work well in a team. As a Woolclasser Ambassador, she received sponsorship from AWI, Heiniger and Australian activewear brand ioMerino.

"I 100% recommend this job to anyone. The people I get to work with are what make this job so amazing. Plus, you are always staying active and fit, have the ability to travel, and make good money," she said.

"Some of my goals are to travel all around the country classing and woolhandling, and eventually take up a bit of shearing – I'd love to shear my 100 one day."



Trail blazing shearer Cathy Wendelborn



Cathy Wendelborn and Chairman of Shear Outback Sam Barnes.

Shearing legend Cathy Wendelborn from Quilpie in Queensland was inducted into the Australian Shearers Hall of Fame in April last year. She is the first woman to receive the honour.

Cathy originally hails from South Australia and began shearing in 1982, blazing a trail for women shearers. She travelled widely, shearing across Australia and New Zealand as well as being very involved in the competitive shearing world.

Cathy said it is great to now see a lot more women involved in wool harvesting, both in the sheds and competitively.



Hear from Cathy in Episode 237 of AWI's The Yarn podcast at wool.com/podcast.

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