

Get a grip on tuppings problems

Problems with tuppings are on sheep vet **Richard Knight's** mind



Now is mid-tupping season for most folk, with those early lambing shepherds looking at some nice, pregnant, sheep. As usual, though, we will get the flurry of phone calls about tups which don't appear to be working.

We try our best, with timely meetings about tup health examinations, usually referred to as MoTs. We try to create an analogy here with a regular, essential, examination – but the hot receiver tells us that we've still got a way to go yet!

Most commonly we find that the tup has been bought on a promise, although some breeders are now having

tups examined prior to sale, I gather, as is becoming popular with bull breeders. The cash flow repercussions of a bad 'getter', in a tight margin industry, are immense.

CLINICAL CHECK

A full clinical examination will look at eyes, teeth, feet, general body condition, and listen to the heart and lungs with a stethoscope. The business end, though, is where it matters and the testicles receive close scrutiny for evenness of size, consistency and total scrotal circumference within one month of, or during, mating.

A good working bare minimum for a tup lamb will be 30cm at the widest point, and over 32cm for a mature tup. These figures are for



guidance only and should always be discussed with the vet as breed variations may occur.

Also, it's a good idea if the vet has the final say on a measurement as testicular abscesses and infections can lead to a normal circumference, but with abnormal testicles.

If the vet suspects a prob-

lem, this will usually show up well on an ultrasound scan. Most vets with an interest in sheep work will offer, or be able to offer, a practical workshop on no-frills tup breeding examinations. The acid test, though, is a semen evaluation, provided that he has so far passed the tests.

This is often conducted through use of an electro-ejaculator (EEJ). The probe is inserted into the tup's rectum and an electrical current used to stimulate the prostate and associated glands and muscles to get the sample. This is definitely a vet task!

Modern EEJs are very well made and efficient so cause little distress to the tup, unlike the machines from 20+ years ago which were

used as a final clarification only when necessary. After careful consideration of the sample a diagnosis is reached and a certificate produced.

Happy tuppings!

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