

Lamas Hate Plucking!

Part 1 of 2

by Mary Pendergast

As the shearing season is sneaking up again I can't help but think of all the nice lama people out there trying to keep their animals comfortable and healthy by taking the fiber off. I also think of all the nice lama people cursing like sailors and fighting with their equipment. When I first started shearing my own llamas I remember all too well crying out in frustration, "can't someone help me?" The answer was yes, but I had to go to sheep shearing school to get it. To save you that particular agony, I have a few tips to hopefully help you get the fiber off. If you have lubricated everything in sight, and have positioned your cutter to be in contact with the cutting surface of the comb at all times, the wool should be flying. Unless of course, you have dull blades. If you have dull blades you will be plucking rather than shearing, and llamas hate plucking.

Chances are when you feel your clipper just isn't working and is good for nothing, dull blades are the culprit. Most people don't realize that brand new blades right out of the pack are rarely very sharp. Blades can also come back on the dull side from your sharpening service. I'm sure they're just trying to save some metal on your tools, but to do llamas you need sharp sharp. These factors coupled with the lag time of blades being out and blades coming back motivated me to learn how to sharpen tools. I would be unable to stay out on the road and do the numbers I do without mastering the grinder. It has been a

worthwhile challenge, and I would like to pass on a few tips to those of you beginning to sharpen your own combs and cutters. These techniques apply to standard blades rather than hair blades, which require a completely different set up.

The equipment needed to sharpen combs and cutters includes a grinding wheel with stand, arbor and motor (Figure A), a pendulum (Figure B) and glue and grit purchased from the shearers equipment supply. I use a cast iron wheel

on the paper. With a 4" sponge brush apply a healthy amount of glue to the wheel, spreading counterclockwise around the entire grinding surface of the wheel and finishing with even strokes from the inside edge of the grinding surface to the outside edge of the wheel, being careful not to get any glue on the inner ring (which is not a grinding surface) or over the outer edge. Glue and grit in these two areas can make the wheel run lopsided. The goal is to have a nice even surface to sprinkle with grit. Bumps or lumps will ding tools, and the glue isn't thick enough if you can still see any of the grooves of the grinding surface. Heap the grit on with a can similar to a salt shaker, making sure the entire wheel is coated. After allowing the glue to dry, excess grit that doesn't stick can be dumped onto the newspaper and poured back into you shaker. All this glue and grit business needs to happen

pretty fast, before the glue begins to dry. If the glue dries too fast, the grit won't stay on. In areas of the country that are extremely dry, you may have to add some water to your can of glue in order to keep it from drying too fast.

In areas that are humid

I find I need to "cook" the wheel in an oven or on a burner at low heat for a few minutes in order to get a good hard set.

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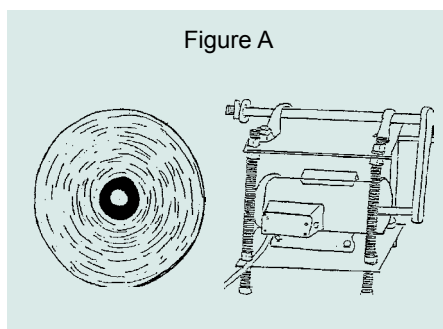


Figure A

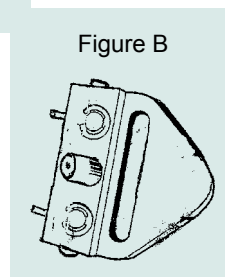


Figure B

with 1/2 degree bevel, mounted vertically and run counterclockwise with a 3hp motor at about 2600 rpms. The pendulum holds the tool to be sharpened and the glue and grit are spread on the wheel to provide a good surface for sharpening. The glue is water soluble which allows the set to be changed by simply soaking the wheel in water.

To set the wheel begin by spreading some newspaper out and place the wheel

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A soft set is very quiet and even mushy feeling as the tools move back and forth and will do nothing but polish the tools rather than sharpen them. You can fix a wheel with a soft set by sticking it in the oven on low for a few minutes to harden the glue, being careful not to leave it in for too long or on too high a temperature to avoid bubbling and chipping. Bubbling and chipping mean do over. Cooking the wheel also works when you need to set a wheel in a hurry, although I prefer to set a wheel the night before.

If the glue has dried too fast the grit flies off and you find you're running your blades over nothing but wheel, resulting in lots of heat and no sharp. The pendulum will get so hot you can hardly hang on to it. This kind of heat can also indicate the set is worn out and needs to be changed. Working a set like this feels grabby and is noisy. I hate nothing worse than dull tools so I change

my set fairly often, grinding maybe 10 combs and 20 cutters to a set. Most wheels can be set on both sides and when one side wears out just flip the wheel and keep going. A set should never be left on the wheel for more than 30 days as it will become difficult to soak it clean again. A wire brush can be used to clean the wheel completely, scrubbing with the grain of the sharpening surface.

Now that the wheel is properly set, the next step is to find a work area with the proper lighting. Artificial light is the best, shining from behind and to the right of the wheel (Figure C). This is typically the only light I have on while sharpening and it allows the sparks flying off the tool to be easily seen. When a tool is held up to this light, it will also catch the bright shine of a dull edge. I work on the left side of the wheel with the teeth pointed up. I have seen people grind on the right side of the wheel, which requires the teeth to

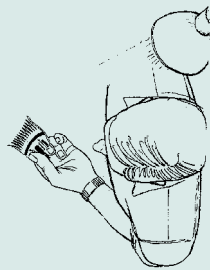
be pointing down. They will sharpen either way. I always sharpen combs first because they won't wear down as fast on the fresh grit as the cutters will. The whole idea with sharpening tools is to sharpen them just enough to cut without wasting any of your metal.

After re-checking the nut that holds the wheel in place for at least the third time (it will saw a hole in the barn if it comes off of there, not to mention the stitches if it hits you), you are ready to turn your grinder on and lay a tool to the surface. The pendulum is spring loaded on one end with posts that fit into the holes on the comb. The middle bar is pointed down while grinding combs, and pointed up to do cutters. I am right handed, so I hold the pendulum in my right hand, and then steady that hand with my left

Figure D



Figure C



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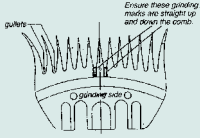
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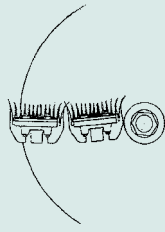
Figure E



by grabbing my wrist (Figure D). With the comb loaded onto the pendulum, gently place it on the rotating wheel in the middle of the grinding surface. That means middle left to right, and a little above middle top to bottom. The grind marks in the middle of the comb will be straight up and down (Figure

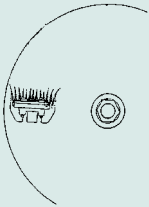
E) when the tool is in the proper place on the wheel. Too high on the wheel and they slant one way, too low they slant the other. With light pressure run the tool back and forth across the wheel, going so far left that 3 of the 13 teeth will be off the wheel (Figure F). Do this 3 or 4 times and on the last pass leave the comb on the left side of the wheel with a little extra pressure for about 3 seconds before checking for progress (Figure G). The entire surface of the comb must be ground, especially where the cutter has been running across the teeth. When you hold the comb to the light, you are looking

Figure F



for shiny silver lines on the edges of the cutting teeth (Figure H). These lines indicate dullness because light will reflect off of a blunt edge but not a sharp edge. Grind until those silver lines and wear marks are gone. The next thing to notice is that the comb will be throwing sparks. Those sparks need to come from the entire length of the cutting surface of each tooth in order to be completely sharp. I want a “fuzzy” appearance to the edges of the

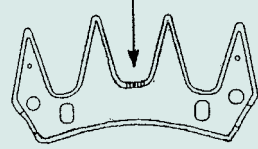
Figure G



teeth before I will call it sharp. You’ll know a fuzzy edge when you see it (Figure I).

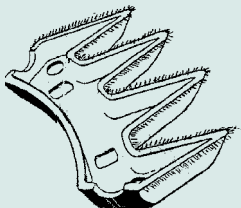
It is important to be able to manipulate the pendulum with differing degrees of pressure to target specific teeth that need work. The outside of the wheel sharpens faster than the inside of the wheel, so a little extra pressure needs to be applied on the inside in order to get a uniform sharpness. Unless

Figure H



this adjustment is made the cutter or comb will over time wear thin on one side and effect the performance of the tool. As you shear with a tool like this, all of a sudden it will take more effort to run the clipper across the animal, and there will be a row of fiber that is really long compared to the rest because the dull tooth pulls before it cuts. That’s plucking not shearing, and we all know what that means.

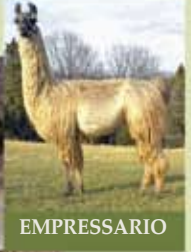
Figure I



Next issue, we will tackle cutters! In part 2 of 2 – Lamas Hate Plucking!

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Confucius Say...



by Sue Wilde

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A couple of weeks ago I was teaching at an elementary school and the day was supervising the grade 6 play practice. Part of the play featured Confucius and a few of his sayings. We know that all of Confucius' sayings are thought provoking and meant to provoke us to action. The "saying" that stuck with me that day went like this:

Confucius say: "do not worry about who knows you but of doing things that make you worthy of being known."

This saying provoked me to some serious thought. We know that marketing and selling is based on a personal level. We have all said that we will buy from "this store" because we were treated so well there and the products were great but we won't buy from "that store" because we weren't treated well and their products were not of quality. This is the same with selling our llamas!

What can we do that will make us worthy of being known? This question is not new. It can provoke us to some serious consideration but the important part is being motivated to act! Think of the people that you know that are "known." What have they done that make them worthy of many knowing them? Have they volunteered? Have they supported other volunteers? Have they assisted others? Have they promoted? Have they participated?

Have they produced a great product? Have they stood behind their products? Have they given value to others?

Now ask those questions about yourself!

Many people are known for the opposite side of these qualities. It is up to all of us how we wish to be worthy of being known. Our llama industry is important to us because we all love our llamas and desire that they remain worthy of being known too. We want them to have great value, not just monetarily but as a creature worthy of being known and owned. Think of all the times you have jumped to the defense of your llamas against the spitting myth. We are all quick to promote them as beautiful, enjoyable and profitable because we want them to be deemed "worthy of being known"!

Can we accomplish this on our own? It takes the "llama village" to raise llamas and make our industry "worthy of being known" by doing the things that will make us worthy. Volunteer! Support Volunteers! Participate! Assist! Produce the best you can and as Confucius say: you will be known because you are doing the things that make you worthy of being known! The bonus? You will be known for your good work and inspire others to also be worthy of being known! It takes team work to make the dream work!



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8:00 a.m.

4:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m.

Llamas should begin arriving, no earlier

Check-in begins for sale llamas

Sale llamas must be in place

Arrangements must be made for late arrivals.

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Noon

2:00 p.m.

4:00 p.m.

Show llamas must be in place

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Sunday, May 4, 2008

8:00 a.m.

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