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W L. McGarry  
*Department of Agriculture*

M Butler  
*Department of Agriculture*

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# SHEEP CRUTCHING TECHNIQUE

By W. L. McGARRY, Sheep and Wool Adviser  
and  
M. BUTLER, Shearing Instructor

**T**O obtain the best results and achieve the maximum returns from wool-growing, it is essential that the sheep should be efficiently cared for. Correct crutching, systematically performed as often as is necessary is a definite step towards ensuring the comfort and welfare of the sheep. A large proportion of the sheep in the agricultural areas are crutched either too early or too late, and many flocks are not crutched at all. This state of affairs is mainly due to the shortage of professional crutchers so that there are obvious advantages in farmers and their sons being able to crutch their flocks themselves at the right times of the year.

The practical demonstrational and instructional work in crutching combined with mulesing, which has been carried out in the farming areas, is now supplemented by this article. Those who have attended these demonstrations will find the article very useful for reference, and to others it will be of practical assistance during their crutching operations.

## TWO CRUTCHINGS YEARLY

With the usual autumn lambing, and where shearing is carried out during late winter and spring in the farming areas, it is recommended that at least **two full crutchings** be carried out each year among flocks of Merino ewes. The first crutching should be done about four weeks before the ewes commence to lamb, and the second about four weeks before shearing, or earlier if considered necessary. In the odd years when substantial summer rains occur it is advisable to complete the first crutching earlier.

Definite advantages follow as the result of the second crutching. These are:—

- (1) A large saving in wool is effected owing to the small percentage of stain and dag at

shearing time. A definite saving of shed labour and time follows upon the absence of stained and daggy wool in the wool room.

- (2) The stained wool from the crutch area does not soil other wool with which it comes in contact, and soiling of fleeces due to rubbing by the sheep in the pens is avoided.
- (3) While shearing is on, there is far less risk of sheep becoming fly-struck while waiting to be shorn.
- (4) The sheep come on to the board clean, which usually results in better all-round shearing than when the sheep are presented in a dirty condition.

## FAULTY CRUTCHING

Crutching in the farming areas at present is usually carried out with speed as the main consideration, and as a result, undercrutching, overcrutching, and faulty crutching are almost general practice. Little consideration is given to the performance of efficient work which, when effected, confers the maximum protection from crutch and tail



strike with the removal of the minimum quantity of wool. In addition, some styles, less effective than others, are hard on both operator and sheep. This latter applies particularly to ewes that are heavy in lamb when rough treatment such as "doubling-up" of the sheep, kneeling on them, or pulling up the back legs is likely to cause injury and subsequent loss.

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF STYLE

The style recommended for crutching closely follows that which has been recommended for shearing those particular portions of the sheep, and as such it will be good practice for learner-shearers, assisting them to become familiar with the machine and the holding of the sheep for subsequent shearing.

With the sheep in a sitting position, the starting blow is made around in the crutch immediately below the teats—care being taken to cover the teats with the fingers as a safeguard against damage. Next, make an outward blow on the top inside of the right hind leg. At the completion of this blow turn the machine and shear back inside the leg and lower crutch—continuing on outside the lower inside of the left hind leg. One more blow on the

top inside of the left hind leg will complete the crutch with the use in all of only four blows up this stage. When crutching ewes in lamb or ewes with lambs, the wool should, at this stage, be removed from the bottom of the belly just above the teats. Losses can occur through the inability of the lamb to find teats that are partly covered or obscured by belly wool.

Next, moving the sheep's right fore-leg to a position between the legs of the crutcher, move yourself back slightly and exerting slight pressure with the left hand in the sheep's flank to straighten the leg, shear back along the lower outside portion of the left hind leg and over the tail. Care should be taken to run the machine with the bottom tooth on the skin and the top tooth raised to produce a bevelling effect on the outer edge. Wiggling, or shearing the wool from around the eyes of any sheep that are wool-blind, can best be done at this stage.

Next bring the sheep into the position as for finishing shearing and, using the left hand in the flank, the crutching can be completed, again taking care to bevel the outer edge.

The illustrations accompanying this article show the holding and the correct and effective methods of crutching, wiggling, and ringing in detail.

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Arrangements have been made for the compilation of a comprehensive index to be incorporated in the December issue—a feature which will greatly enhance the value of the Journal as a work of reference.





## Detailed Description of Style

**Fig. 1.—FIRST BLOW IN CRUTCH.**

With the sheep in a **comfortable** sitting position and the fingers placed over the teats to obviate the danger of damaging them, make the first blow immediately below the teats. Shear **around** inside the crutch and not in a **downward** manner when in this position.

**Fig. 2.—SECOND BLOW ON TOP INSIDE OF RIGHT LEG.**

Now move the left hand into a position in the right flank to prevent the sheep lifting the leg and shear outward on the top inside of the sheep's right hind leg. With this blow completed, turn the machine into position for the start of the third blow.





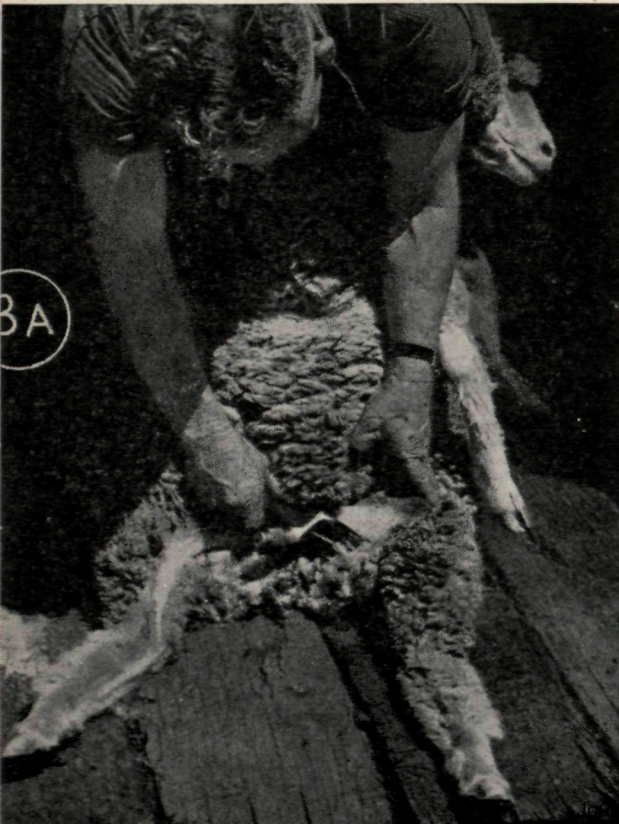
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**Fig. 3—START OF THIRD BLOW.**

Still holding the sheep in a sitting position, alter your own position by moving the right foot slightly forward in order to give better reach. Now press the left hand into the flank and shear back along the lower portion of the leg and around inside the crutch.



3A



**Fig. 3a.— CONTINUATION OF THIRD BLOW.**

This illustration shows how the left hand has been moved to enable the blow to be continued on outward on lower inside of left hind leg.

An additional blow outward on the top inside of the leg completely cleans the crutch.



4

**Fig. 4.—INSIDE OF CRUTCH CLEANED.**

This illustrates the crutch completely cleared of wool—using only **four** blows with the machine—and the wool removed from the insides of the legs. By shearing **around** in the crutch the danger of cutting sheep is considerably lessened and the work can be accomplished with greater ease. At this stage the wool should be removed above the teats of in-lamb ewes.

**Fig. 5.—SHEARING ABOVE THE TEATS.**

Still holding the sheep in a sitting position with the left hand on the belly, shear one blow above the teats. At the same time leave the wool bevelled by holding the machine at the correct angle, not flat, and then remove the remaining wool so that the teats are exposed. Care will be needed to avoid damaging the teats when removing the wool in this area.

5



6



**Fig. 6.—TEATS CLEARED OF WOOL.**

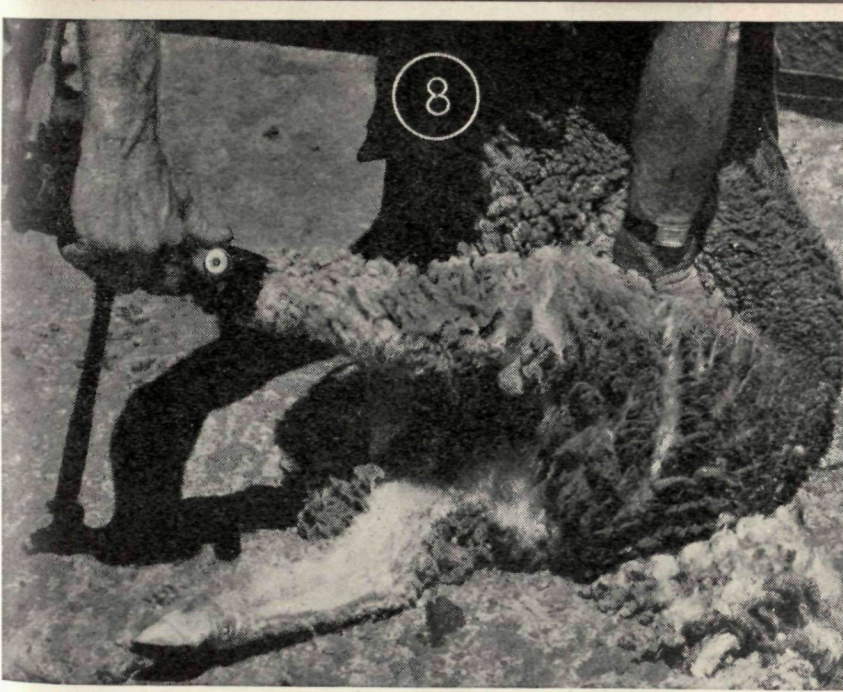
This illustrates the teats completely exposed and easily accessible to the lamb. With the teats exposed the risk of losing lambs is reduced because losses can occur through the inability of lambs to find teats that are partially or wholly covered with wool. In addition, the risk of damaging the teats during subsequent shearing is minimised as they are more readily seen.

**Fig. 7.—SHEARING THE FIRST HIND LEG.**

It will be necessary at this stage to alter the position of crutcher and sheep slightly to enable the lower part of the left hind leg to be shorn. This can be brought about by placing the sheep's right foreleg between the legs of the crutcher, who then moves slightly back and around to the right of the sheep, just sufficient to allow it to lean back so that its head rests in his lap. When pressure is applied with the left hand in the flank the sheep's leg can be held straight and the wool shorn from the lower part, whilst in this position. In making this blow it is necessary to shear back along the leg, at the desired width, to the tail and then remove remaining wool from the lower portion of the leg. Always hold the bottom tooth of the comb on the skin and the top tooth raised in order to achieve a bevelled effect on the upper edge of the wool.







**Fig. 8.—START OF BLOW ON FIRST HIND LEG.**

This more clearly illustrates where pressure is applied in the flank to straighten the leg and the manner in which this blow is made. Care should be taken to leave the wool bevelled and a little practice will enable this to be carried out quite effectively.

**Fig. 9.—WOOL BEVELLED AND FIRST HIND LEG COMPLETED.**

This illustrates the bevelled edge with the completion of the first hind leg. A bevelled edge to the wool is most important in order to eliminate the cover or shelter provided by a straight edge, which tends to fall over as the wool grows. Re-soiling will also occur more quickly when the wool is left with a straight edge and falls over as it grows longer. Note that the area over the tail has not yet been shorn.





**Fig. 10.—SHEARING OVER THE TAIL.**

After finishing the leg, place the left hand on the sheep's rump and, moving slightly backward, shear over the tail. This will allow the last hind leg to be shorn with greater ease. Note how the wool has been bevelled. At this stage the sheep will be in the best position for wiggling, which should be done before the sheep is turned in the opposite direction to complete the crutching.



**Fig. 11.—STARTING THE LAST HIND LEG.**

Before starting to shear the wool from the last hind leg it will be necessary to turn the sheep to face in the opposite direction with the legs of the sheep lengthwise along the board. To do this take hold of the sheep's right foreleg with the left hand, and, removing the foreleg from between the crutcher's legs the sheep can be turned easily and quietly to a position facing in the opposite direction and laying back against the legs of the crutcher. With the sheep in this position place the left hand on the flank and shear a blow outward from the tail along the leg, bevelling the wool on the upper edge in the same manner as on the previous leg.





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**Fig. 12.—FIRST BLOW COMPLETED ON LAST LEG.**

This illustrates the completion of the first blow on the last leg. It is now necessary to shear off the remaining wool from the lower portion of the leg, using just sufficient pressure with the left hand to keep the sheep's leg straight in order to eliminate the danger of cutting the hamstring.

**Fig. 13.—SHEARING LAST HIND LEG. (WRONG)**

This illustrates how hamstringing can occur as a result of the sheep being out of position and not under full control.

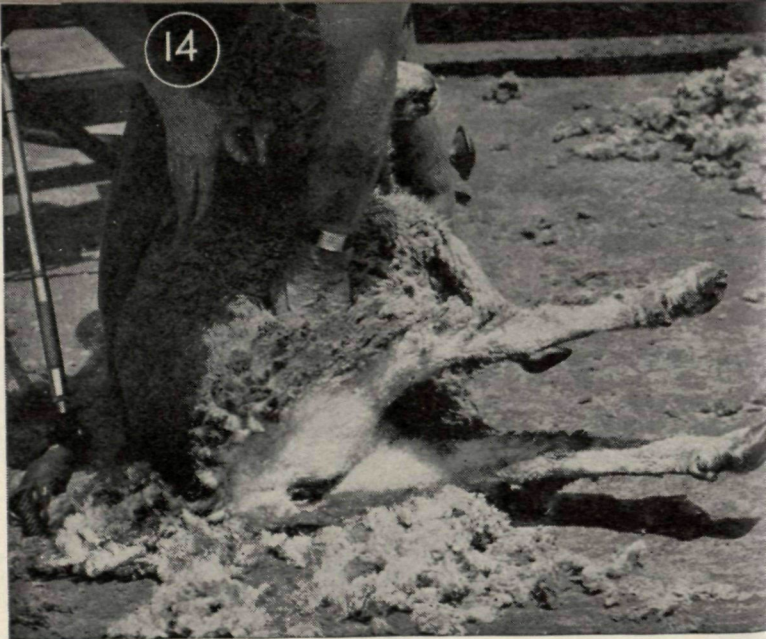
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**Fig. 14.—COMPLETION OF  
LAST HIND LEG.**

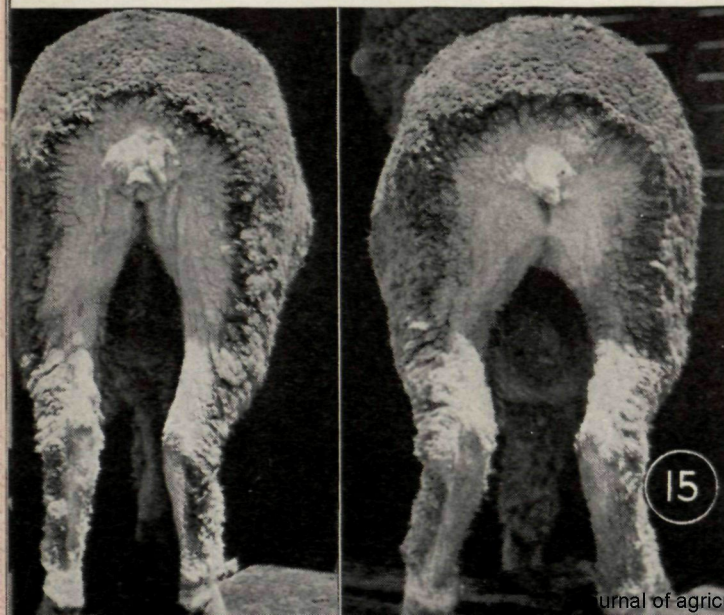
The last hind leg has now been completed and the sheep correctly and efficiently crutched.



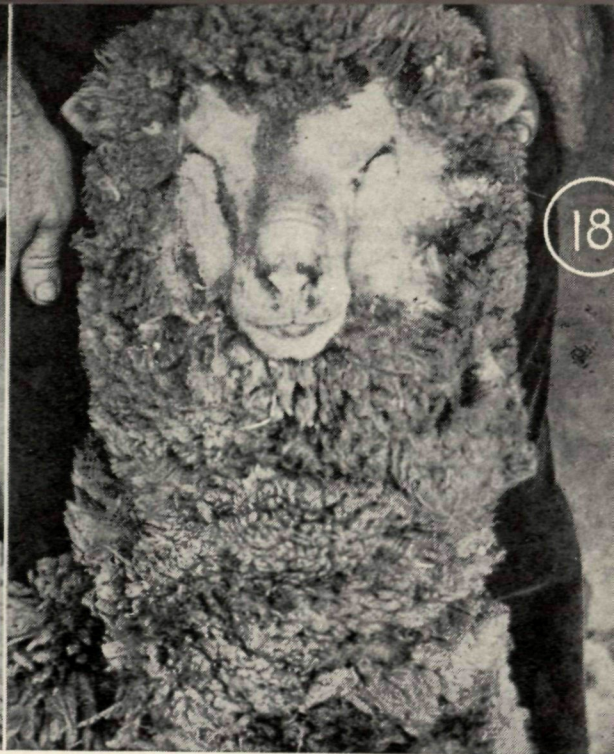
**Fig. 15.—THE FULLY CRUTCHED SHEEP.**

Note how the wool is shorn from the hocks and lower legs with sufficient width at the buttocks and with the correct distance above the tail. Note also how the wool has been bevelled to eliminate a straight edge, which, as the wool grows, tends to fall over and create pockets and cover which attract the flies and provide protection for maggots.

Compare this photo with Figs. 30-32.







## Wigging

**Fig. 16.—A WOOLBLIND SHEEP.**

Such sheep should be "wiggged." The wool should be removed from around the eyes in order to give the sheep a chance to thrive. This should be done after shearing over the tail and before crutching. (See Fig. 10.)

Compare this photo with Fig. 18.

**Fig. 17.—WIGGING.**

Straighten up from position shown in Fig. 10 and shear the wool from around the eyes by making a blow over the left eye back toward the ear, and a second blow outwards over the right eye toward the face.

**Fig. 18.—A WIGGED SHEEP.**

The wool has now been removed from both eyes, allowing freedom of vision.

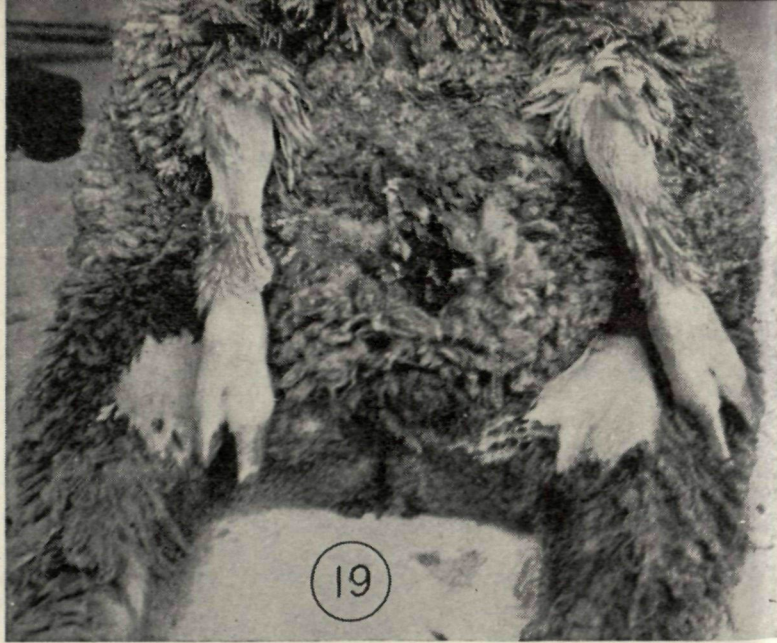
Compare with Fig. 16.



# Ringing

**Fig. 19.—STAINED  
PIZZLE.**

When crutching wethers or rams ringing is also often required. This is best done with the sheep in a sitting position and before starting the crutch. All stained wool surrounding the pizzle should be removed to allow free drainage and make the area unattractive to flies. Ringing also assists in reducing the incidence of sheath rot.



**Fig. 20.—COMMENCEMENT  
OF RINGING.**

Place the left hand firmly on the belly and start by making a short crosswise blow above the pizzle. **Do not shear downward.** Cross blows lessen the chances of cutting or destroying the organ. Next remove any remaining stained wool until the pizzle is free of wool and completely exposed.





**Fig. 21.—RINGING COMPLETED.**

This enlarged close-up illustrates the area surrounding the pizzle free of wool and it will be seen that the pizzle has been exposed and the edges of the shorn wool bevelled.

Compare this photo with Fig. 20.

## **Incorrect and Faulty Crutching**

The following method of crutching which is prevalent in the agricultural areas is illustrated in a series of photographs showing some of the faults that occur when using this particular style.

**Fig. 22.—COMMENCING BLOWS.**  
(WRONG)

The first and second blows are made outward on the inside of the right hind leg before touching the inner part of the crutch. This involves turning the machine against the drive to shear the bottom part of the leg. This is not good practice and there is always the danger of the sheep drawing the leg back towards the machine.

Compare with Fig. 1.





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**Fig. 23.—SHEARING  
DOWNWARD IN  
THE CRUTCH.  
(WRONG)**

When shearing the inner crutch with **downward** blows there is always the two-fold danger of cutting the teats off and cutting the skin that wrinkles as the udder is pulled up. In addition the handpiece and down tube frequently come in to a straight line which lessens control of the handpiece.

Compare with Fig. 3a.

**Fig. 24.—SHEARING INSIDE OF  
LEFT HIND LEG.  
(WRONG)**

The wool on the inside of the left hind leg is next shorn out with two more blows, taking **eight to ten blows** in all to complete the inside of the crutch when using this style. By comparison this area is completed in **four blows** with the style as shown in Figs. 1-4.

Numerous short blows are very undesirable in shearing and result in a learner developing a bad poky style which once learnt can not easily be altered.

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**Fig. 25.—LEFT HIND LEG  
PULLED UP.**

**(WRONG)**

The left hind leg is next pulled up and shorn downward bringing the sheep, with its head well pushed down, into a doubled up position which imposes added strain on both sheep and crutcher.

**Fig. 26.—RIGHT HIND LEG  
PULLED UP.**

**(WRONG)**

With the right hind leg next pulled up for shearing the doubled up sheep in these positions tends to become restless and to strain against the crutcher, who also has difficulty in cleaning over the tail of the animal.

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**Fig. 27.—REAR VIEW OF  
FIG. 25.**

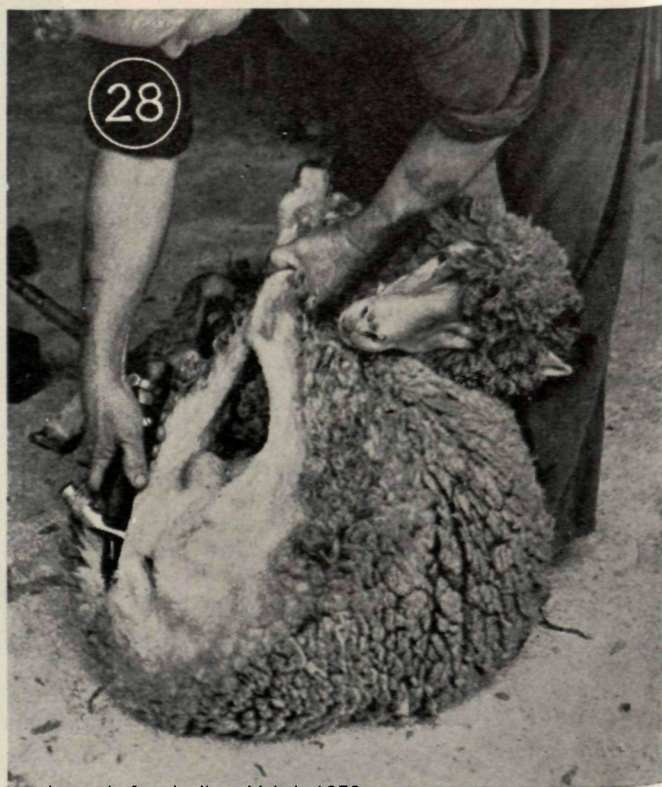
**(WRONG)**

This illustrates how the sheep is gradually working back through the crutcher's legs and only being controlled by the knee against the back of the sheep's head. It also shows the uncomfortable position of the sheep and the danger of losing control of the animal.

**Fig. 28.—SHEARING OVER  
THE TAIL.  
(WRONG)**

In shearing over the tail, when employing this style of crutching, it is often necessary to pull up both legs as illustrated. This position can cause injury to the sheep, particularly to ewes heavy in lamb, and the resultant straining and kicking by the animal will force its head between the knees of the crutcher who will then have lost control.

Always remember that catching hold of a sheep's leg or legs is inviting it to kick and strain—which it usually does!





**Fig. 29.—SHEEP OUT OF CONTROL.**

**(WRONG)**

With the sheep out of control the crutcher has considerable difficulty in completing the crutching and is forced to kneel on the sheep to complete the work—frequently with most unsatisfactory results.



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**Fig. 30.—SHEEP INCORRECTLY CRUTCHED.**

This sheep has been shorn too high over the tail and too wide at the buttocks which is unprofitable and relegates too much good wool to crutchings. It will be noticed that the wool has not been removed from the hocks and legs which will become stained and dirty and attractive to the fly.

Remember woolly hocks are excellent dung catchers!

Note the pockets and cover provided by the roughly shorn unbevelled edge.

Shearing too high over the tail, which appears to be a common mistake, is costly and unnecessary. The sheep does not throw the excreta and urine up over the back!

Compare with Fig. 15.





**Fig. 31.—UNDERCRUTCHED.**

**(WRONG)**

This illustrates typical undercrutching which is also common practice. The sheep has not been shorn high enough above the tail and the crutching is much too narrow at the buttocks. Note the wool which has been left on the right hock by comparison with the clean left hock.

Compare with Fig. 15.





**Fig. 32.—OVERCRUTCHED.  
(WRONG)**

This illustrates an overcrutched sheep that has had too much good wool removed through shearing too high and too wide over the tail and the buttocks. Despite this waste of fleece wool no more protection has been achieved than if the sheep had been correctly crutched.

Note the ragged unbevelled edges that can harbour maggots.

Compare with Fig. 15.

**Fig. 33.—SORTED CRUTCHINGS.**

The crutchings from the sheep shown in Fig. 32 have been sorted into two lines as illustrated. It would be more profitable to have obtained a *fleece* price for the heap of wool on the right, plus extra fleece weight, by leaving this wool on the sheep.





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