

Like doing 47 pedicures in a sauna

By Ted Brown
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A Ted Bit

Every once in a while, The Sidekick has an ambitious attack.

It's one of those times we're together, and she says, out of the blue, "Let's get something done."

Now don't get me wrong, I do appreciate when she wants to help, and she is a great help.

It's just sometimes her timing ain't great.

The latest strike of ambition occurred last weekend, when she decided, out of the blue, that we're long overdue trimming the sheep's hooves.

We're also behind on shearing them, but with the recent heat waves, it's simply been too hot to tackle that job. And to be honest, trimming their hooves is a close second to being too hot.

But Sunday the weather did moderate, and she was quite persuasive that it was cooler in the barn than it was outside. She had a point there. So we decided to tackle the task.

Now trimming sheep's hooves is sort of like doing 47 pedicures, while standing in a sauna, with the animal kicking the hell out of you.

It's hard, backbreaking work, and the sheep are not in the least bit cooperative.

We had Hamish herd them into the barn and we moved our tilt table in line with the sorting chute, where the sheep come through in single file.

The tilt table is a fine piece of Mennonite designed equipment, which consists of a crate that the sheep walk through, and stop when their heads lock in the head gate, holding them in place.

Once they are secure, I step on a pedal on the floor, and the table rolls up, turning the sheep on her side, with her feet at waist level for easy access.

Once the sheep is on her side, the floor of the tilt table can then be swung out of the way, and the sheep's hooves are right there, ready to be trimmed.

Now as convenient as that may sound, there is one aspect of those feet sticking out like that-

they're free to kick.

And being at waist level - well, you know what else is slightly below waist level.

And one must be very vigilant about when those feet kick, or one could be the recipient of a well-placed kick, and instantly become a boy soprano.

So that's a safety tip we always keep in mind.

Now when we start hoof trimming, it's a given that we must do the entire flock once we start. There is no way of identifying those who were done, and those who weren't, without putting through the sorting chute again.

So we started, and things were going okay.

In a perfect world, the tilt table would function like a well-oiled machine - which it does.

But we're dealing with sheep, who seem to have a knack for putting a foot out through the wrong place, or some even turn over while in the tilt table.

Like a pedicure, sometimes the hoof trimmers hit a tiny vein in the hoof, causing it to bleed a bit.

And there's the occasional animal who refuses to enter that tilt table.

Pushing an animal weighing about 160 lbs., with a low centre of gravity through the tilt - well that animal comes close to winning. I finally put a halter on her, and led her through.

We managed to win with all the ewes in the flock, trimming their hooves, checking their eyes and body condition - we finished after about three hours.

Later that night, when The Sidekick and I struggled and groaned as we tried to get up off the sofa, after watching TV for a couple hours, I'm not sure we did win.

One good thing: I don't expect The Sidekick to have another ambition attack for a few weeks.

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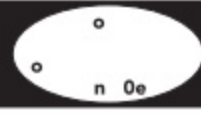
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