

Double, Single or Suri that is the question?

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Have you been confused when you look at the entry form to enter a fleece class, or questioned why your entry is moved to a different fleece division by the judge? One question I am asked over and over is what type of fleece does my llama have? One judge will put them in a double coat class and the next show they will be moved to a single coat class.

Here is some helpful information to assist you in determining what type of fleece your llama has and help you gain a better understanding of fleece types and fleece characteristics. I will share several experiences from my own herd in hopes you will look at your llamas in a different way as there are no absolutes. As you exhibit or use your fleece let it be a learning experience as there is always something new and exciting to discover.

Judges will sometimes combine classes if entries are low or move a fleece to another division. A shorn fleece can present differently than a fleece still on the animal shown in the fleece-on class. Grooming and products can affect the look and feel of a fleece as well as the weather on that day. Is it raining and damp or dry with static? At one show Blackie is in double coat and then next week Blackie is in single coat - WHY?

- The Tweener as we sometimes refer to a fleece that does not quite meet a specific criteria.
- A silky will have many characteristics of a suri but will lack the weight and cool feel.
- Where would the fleece do best in this particular show looking at the majority of characteristics?
- When I pull guard hair, are they thicker and more course, can I really see the difference, how many do I see? Does the fleece have a scratchy feel and would I want it next to my skin?
- Does the fleece have loft (fluffy) or does it lay flat against the skin with straight fibers?
- This fleece feels warm but has all the characteristic of a suri. Is the llama hot or stressed?

Today Jane is showing Brownie in the suri halter class and the fleece judge has put him in the single coat class, CONFUSION, Yes!

Fleece judges will examine your llamas fleece and decide which division most fits the characteristics that are exhibited that day. A very specific judging criteria has been developed to evaluate each part of the llamas fleece that have a direct impact on the finished products that will be produced. For example double coat fleeces might be more appropriate for rugs, outer garments, purses. Single coat and silky fleeces are better choices for sweaters, garments due to softness and suri has very high luster and a natural drape for fabrics that have been woven.

So which is best, double, single or suri? The answer is only with the holder of the fleece and the intended use. Each type will have a specific use from finely spun yarn or felt for fiber arts projects. You may not have a show fleece that you want to exhibit but you have a usable fleece that has been produced by your llama. It is important for you as a fleece user or seller of fleece products, to

understand the good and bad traits and how each affects your yarns, felt or items made from your fiber.

Let's look at a few unique examples.

I have a beautiful black silky female. As a juvenile I showed her as a suri in halter, walking and shorn fleece classes. She had a very typical suri type fleece with very high luster, no crimp\crinkle and a well defined lock structure. After her first shearing I checked the re-growth on her barrel I was very shocked. Crinkle, do I see crinkle, yes. Now I have a llama with a fleece that exhibits a **straight suri** type locked fleece on the hips and shoulders and a very different type fleece on the barrel. So I now show her shorn barrel in single coat and she is not shown in walking as there is no consistency in the blanket of her fleece.

Our next example is a 9 yr old gelding that has a fleece with a very consistent wavy architecture (the natural arrangement of locks that appear the same throughout the fleece). This llama has some guard hair (medulated fibers) that I can pull. They are very close to the same fineness as the rest of the fleece. They are straighter and the undercoat has a small amount of crinkle throughout. I have always entered this fleece in the double coat division because of the guard hairs that are longer in each lock and I can easily pull them. In the 9 years of showing this fleece it has been left in double about half the time and moved to single in some shows. This llama has received multiple grand champions in both divisions.

Black male very fine, lots of consistent crinkle throughout his fleece. Nice hand (touch) that feels like silk. Very little lock structure and he does have guard hair that is equal in fineness to his undercoat. He almost has the puffy lofty feel. This llama has always been shown in a single coat division.

Paint female with extreme density, curly consistent locks, style/architecture, crimp, and fineness. This girl had won three grand champions and two best in show in her first three shows. Now we go to the next show and she scores very poorly. Comment on score card, weak and breakage in fleece. I checked her fleece and yes it is pulling out, wool break! This llama had a very stressful time and the fleece had been affected. We had to body shear her and start over.

In the fourteen years I have exhibited our llamas fleece I have experienced the same questions, disappointment and joy as you. As a fleece judge I continue to learn with each show, clinics and by just talking to the exhibitors. Again if you have any questions please talk to the fleece judge after the show and they will explain how they evaluated your llama that day. Attending a clinic or fleece workshop is a good way to learn about llama fleece and become acquainted with others who share your same interest.

You can visit the ALSA and ILR-SD websites that will provide you with information on fleece judges in your area as well as criteria for fleece judging, score cards and fleece descriptions to help you understand what the judge will be evaluating.

Remember you don't have to exhibit your fleece at a show as there are so many ways you can enjoy and make memories from that special fleece that warms your heart.

If you have any questions please call me
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Double

Fleece exhibits two very distinct fleece types. A soft lofty (puffy) undercoat with crimp or crinkle fibers that provides warmth and guard hair (medullated fibers) that protect from debris, rain and snow. The double coat usually has blunt or triangle type locks that have substance when squeezed. You can feel the density of the lock when you squeeze it between your fingers. The longer medullated fibers will pull out easily. In most of the fleeces I have examined with a double coat the guard hairs will be a darker color and can easily be seen.

Single

Fleece exhibits one discernable fiber type with little difference between the undercoat and the outer layer. The medullated fibers (guard hair) appear about the same length and thickness as the undercoat. The locks produce a more defined lock structure than your typical double coat. The fleece can have crimp/crinkle in the undercoat or be straight. The fleece has loft (puffy), luster (brightness) and a silky hand (touch). The fleece will feel warm and have less weight than a suri fleece.

Suri

Fleece exhibits a distinct lock structure from skin to tip, straight without evidence of crimp or crinkle. Fibers are grouped in a defined lock structure that lies close to the body with a high density weight. Sure llama fiber has high natural luster and a cool slick touch.

***Classic Coat**

- (1) Guard hair is the primary feature
- (2) Minimal visible undercoat
- (3) Undercoat of 2.5 inches or less
- (4) Shoulder and blanket fiber of same length and density
- (5) Coat may be brushed or shorn

***Double Fleece with Crimp/Crinkle**

- (1) Two discernable layers of fiber
- (2) Guard hair is stiff and coarser
- (3) Undercoat is soft and shorter than the guard hair
- (4) Crimp/Crinkle in the undercoat
- (5) The fleece has loft (feels Puffy)

***Single Fleece with Crimp/Crinkle**

- (1) One discernable fiber type
- (2) Little differentiation between guard hair and undercoat
- (3) Fleece has crimp/crinkle
- (4) The fleece has loft.

***Single Fleece without Crimp/Crinkle**

- (1) One discernable fiber type
- (2) No crimp/crinkle**
- (3) Distinct locks
- (4) The fleece has loft.
- (5) Lower density/weight than sure

***Sure Fleece**

- (1) Individual, distinct locks
- (2) No crimp/crinkle
- (3) Cool, slick hand
- (4) High luster
- (5) High density/weight

*Re-printed from the ILR-SD fleece guidelines