

# Bluefaced Leicester Breed Standard

*Describing Traditional White, and Natural Colored Bluefaced Leicesters*



## HEAD

The Bluefaced Leicester should have a broad muzzle, a good mouth (no overshot or undershot mouth), a Roman nose, bright alert eyes, and long, erect ears with a V-shaped earset. The cheeks should be deep with a good width under the jaw, and across the throat area.

Eye color will vary from pale gold to brown, depending on the color of the animal. On a white animal, the color of the head skin should be dark blue showing through white hair. There should be no wool on the face, head or cheeks. Wool may grow right up to the throat area, especially in winter. Both sexes are polled.

## BODY, HINDQUARTERS & LEGS

There should be a good length of neck laid into broad shoulders. The neck set is high, with the base of the neck coming out of the shoulder assembly at a more vertical angle.

There should be a good "spring of rib" in the barrel with no tendency towards "slab-sidedness." The chest should be deep and wide, and there should be no tendency towards a "pinched girth" (or extremely narrow heart girth area).

The Bluefaced Leicester is known for its long, strong back; it should be level from front to back, with no significant dips (or a "rough join") either in front of the shoulder, just behind the shoulder, or at the join between the back and pelvic girdle (in the loin, or sacro-lumbar region). The shoulders should be broad and well-rounded, with the shoulder blades meeting very close together at the withers.

Despite the length of the back, there should be no tendency for the back to sag (or "sway") across its length. The topline should flow smoothly from the neck to the dock. The Bluefaced Leicester is known for its very long loin, and the general appearance is that of a long body shape.

The hips should be level and wide, with broad and deep thighs. Overall, the hindquarters should be deep with good angles from the hip to the hock. Extremely shallow/narrow hindquarters, and extremely straight rear leg angles (or "post legs") should be avoided.

The legs should be clean, straight, well-positioned, and have good bone; they should be neither too fine, nor too heavy. Good leg placement and angles also promote smooth and correct movement. Leg joints should appear smooth, with no tendency towards coarseness (or "knobby" joints).

There should be no evidence of low ("soft" or sagging) pasterns, an extremely steep and upright hoof structure ("club" or "goat foot"), or splayed feet (splayed toes). There should also be no evidence of leg faults ("over at the knee," "calf knee," "knock knees," "pigeon toed," "toed out," "cow hocked," etc.).

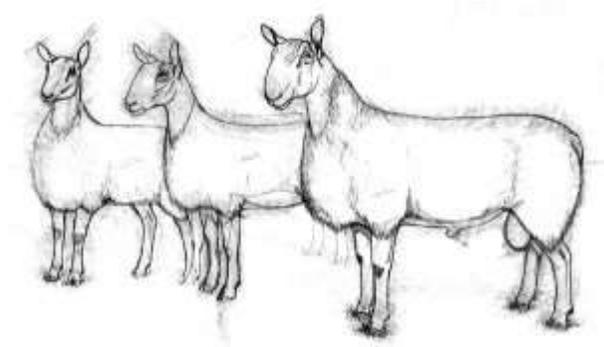
The belly and the legs below the forearm and the hock should be free of wool. Hooves should be black or dark.

**Rams:** Testicles should be free of wool, well-developed, and hang down a distance from the body.

**Ewes:** Udders should be free of wool, and show evidence of two good teats. In addition, if there is udder development, it should be “tight” (meaning not grossly large or pendulous; well-attached at the udder floor and carried closer to the body), well-formed, and balanced.

Again, the mature Bluefaced Leicester will carry no wool on its face, head, cheeks, belly, legs, scrotal/vaginal, and udder areas.

## OVERALL APPEARANCE OR DEMEANOR



The overall appearance is of an alert animal with a bold carriage, purposeful stride, and commanding presence. Rams have a proud bearing and masculine look, and the ewes exhibit a feminine look.

The general appearance should be one of fitness and vigor, as this is a very athletic breed of sheep. Breed type plays an important role in the Standard, judging, and scoring.

## COLOR

All purebred Bluefaced Leicester sheep are permitted in the Registry regardless of color: white or natural colored. Although moorit has not yet appeared, it will also be accepted. (Please refer to the Rules for Registration, Section 4.)

**Natural Colored:** Although the Bluefaced Leicester is predominately a white wool breed, it does carry a recessive black gene and natural colored lambs do appear. Natural colored Bluefaced Leicesters can range from almost solid, to dark animals with patterning (lighter areas of hair and/or wool) on the face, legs, saddle, and other areas. There should be no distinct (sharply defined) white spots in the colored wool on the body. These sheep are registered as “Black Patterned”. (BP)

An additional recessive color pattern, formerly recorded as "BP" without recognition of its distinctly different distribution of color, has now been formally recognized in the breed in 2020. Black Silver(BSi) lambs born will have silver/pewter colored body, black socks/legs, black ears, muzzle and eyes with varying amounts of light markings on these points. As yearlings, their wool will fade to off-white and will appear off-white in subsequent years with points retaining varying amounts of dark markings, most commonly around the eyes, muzzle, inside of ears, and on the legs. Although their wool may appear nearly white, these Bsi sheep are considered to be natural colored sheep.

**White:** The ideal white Bluefaced Leicester has dark blue pigmented skin and white wool. On individuals with dark blue skin, the blue coloration shows through white hair on the head, and the insides of the ears are solidly dark. The pigment is also noticeable on the body skin itself (underneath the wool), on the upper parts of the legs, neck skin, and belly.

Small black spots are permissible on the face, ears, neck, and legs. Lips and nostrils are preferably black, but mottled grey is acceptable. There should be no distinct black, dark red, or dark brown spots in the wool, on the body. There should be no rust-colored hairs, or dark red or dark brown spots/speckles anywhere on the legs or head.

## **WOOL**

On both white and natural colored Bluefaced Leicesters, the wool should be tightly purlled, fine, dense, semi-lustrous, and when parted, it should open cleanly to the skin. There should be an even, consistent fleece coverage on the body, and the fleece should be free of hair and kemp. There should be no tendency for the main body of fleece to “peel” (the fleece breaking and sloughing off).

The Bluefaced Leicester is classified as a Longwool breed with a staple length of 3-6 inches, a fleece weight of 2½-4½ lbs., and a fiber diameter of 56s–60s count, or 24-28 microns. It creates high-quality semi-lustre yarns with soft hand, beautiful drape, and excellent dyeing properties.

## **SIZE, STATURE**

The adult Bluefaced Leicester has one of the largest body weights of the British breeds. In spite of this size, when mated to the smaller Hill-type ewe, the ewe is able to carry and lamb its crossbred progeny without the slightest difficulty.

A ram at maturity should weigh 200-250 lbs., with some individuals nearing 300 lbs. Rams have an excellent disposition and are quite manageable despite their size. Ewes will usually weigh 150-175 lbs. at maturity, with some individuals nearing 200 lbs.

This breed should have good bone and muscling to support their athletic build, shape, and style. The breed should not be too slender or “light” in build or character, nor over-muscled and too heavy.

## **LAMBING PERCENTAGE**

The Bluefaced Leicester is the most prolific of all the native British breeds. It is common for registered flocks to achieve lamb crops of 200% to 250%. The ewe has the milking ability to support these multiple births. They typically give birth and nurse their lambs on well-structured udders with great success.

## **FINAL NOTES**

Although this breed originally descended from very similar stock, today’s Bluefaced Leicester should not look like a Border Leicester. There are many unique and distinctive characteristics that separate this breed from the Border Leicester breed.

Also, it is important to note that the breed standard here is referring to the “Traditional” or “Classic” Bluefaced Leicester (in white), not the “Crossing Type” Bluefaced Leicester. The “Crossing Type” BFL took a foothold in the UK during the late 1990s through the turn of the new century, and it currently has a strong following among many breeders. Some UK breeders have both types on their farms and keep the flocks separate.

The “Crossing Type” is typically recognized by its bold patterns of spots and speckles in dark brown, dark rust brown, and/or dark grey on the head and legs (it is also a white sheep). These sheep do not fit the standard for the US BFL as described above.