

Classic Style Working Llamas

By Niki Kuklenski | JNK Llamas

T rue classic llamas are a beautiful and wonderful rare treasure. Often what are actually lighter woolled llamas are mislabeled as classics, but are not. For some people it is hard to understand the differences between them and the light wool llamas. In the last few years, classic llama classes have become available at shows and some of them are combining light/medium wool classes. This combining of the two wool divisions is working quite well. Many of the lighter woolled llamas were actually borderline medium or medium woolled animals and fit much better with this combination. The classic llamas are obviously different and do fit better in a class by themselves. To better understand the classic llama, I have added this definition from the ILR Classic Focus Group page www.iwantallama.com/Classics/default.aspx

The evolution and refinement of a short and functional coat type clearly distinguishes today's Classic Llama. The Classic llama has emerged as a measurably distinct phenotype that can be reliably reproduced. The term "Classic" is now in use internationally to identify this distinct llama breed type. The fundamental attributes that most clearly identify a Classic llama include:

- A distinctly double-coat with abundant guard hair over the entire body; Are notably sparse-coated (not dense);

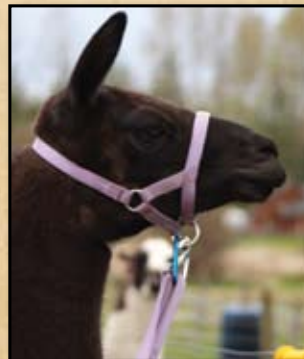


- Combing is a practical method to assess coat density. Classic llamas released dead undercoat fibers can be



easily combed out and when combed out, Classic llamas have the appearance of being almost entirely guard hair; the undercoat is then often only visible at the front of the neck where guard hair is naturally minimal;

- Underwool that molts seasonally; (see picture example for #2 above)
- Short neck wool often with a distinct "mane" of guard hair;



- Classic llamas have short hair (not wool) on their faces, ears and lower legs, and a large "window" of short, smooth hair on either side of their sternum. The lower leg hair may be either "smooth" (straight) or "rough" (wavy, kinked, or with curl).

- The length of guard hair on a classic llama can vary from 2 to 12 inches but more commonly falls in the 3 to 9 inch range. Classic llamas also commonly fall into two categories based on guard hair length. That this distinction exists does not mean there is



a requirement for the animal to be classified as one or the other as a range of guard hair length exists that still distinguishes a llama as classic. The length of wool fiber beneath can vary from approximately 2 to 5 inches.

(This criteria was obtained from the International Lama Registry Website)

For some it is hard to understand why you would define a type of llama by coat type only. It is important to know that first and foremost, classic style llamas are working animals. Animals meant to pack, drive and do other work that some types of llamas would not be as well suited. Every person who utilizes these animals has a different expectation and need of their llamas (think of how varied peoples shoe choices are). Some are happy to pack a few miles down the road on flat trails and camp. Others need to have llamas that are able to cover many miles in a day. The need of the owner determines the type of animal they seek and use. Because of this, the focus group for the ILR decided that they would go no further than defining a classic llama by coat type. It is up to the owner to ferret out what works for their individual needs.

Think of a classic coat like you would a Labrador or Golden Retriever dog. They do shed seasonally and this shedding undercoat easily pulls or rakes out with little work. This effort leaves behind a nice, short, shiny coat. If the llama does not release this undercoat easily, it is not a classic. This is very



important to understand if the animal truly is classic or a light/medium wool.

The classic coat is important for many reasons. The course guard fiber of the coat not only helps to keep debris off the animal, but it also protects and insulates the llama from weather cold or hot. As pack animals, the classic llamas need to be able to maintain their

temperature in rain, snow and heat.

Another easy way to determine a classic llama from other wool types is the tail. Most true classics have a very sparse and thin tail. When individuals have sheared their light/medium woolled llamas to try and get them into this class, the tail has been the tell "tail" sign. You do not see classics with bushy and full tails.

Grooming classics can be easy if you have the right tools. I prefer to



start with a stiff bristled slicker brush, then I use a short-toothed rake and I finish with my long toothed rake. I work on a small area and move from the shoulder to the rear end to remove all the shedding undercoat. You can see



the distinct difference as you work through the coat and the undercoat is released, leaving the shiny guard fiber behind. Many



of my classics lean into the rake and even bite the air as I groom them. It is important to groom them regularly as you do not want to have your animal not be comfortable when you put on a pack or do other hard work. Re-

member too not to groom them completely in the Winter as they can and will get cold depending on where you live.

Personally, I love my classics and the ease of maintaining them. True classic llamas are hard to find and still harder to find with good conformation and pedigrees. If you were interested in learning more about them, I would encourage you to go on the International Llama Registry page listed above.

Biography-

Niki Kuklenski and her husband Jeff are very involved with all aspects of owning llamas. They own two ALSA Elite Champions, several ALSA Performance Champions and the 2003 ALSA National Performance Champion. Additionally, they have three Delta Society Therapy Llamas and two PLTA Master Packers. They also own their own classic breeding herd that is proven on the trail and in the showring. Niki is a 4-H leader, ALSA/ILR Judge and high school substitute teacher. Niki and Jeff drive, show, pack, therapy work and educate with their llamas. Niki's passion is llama history and memorabilia. She spends most of her free time tracking down old pictures and llama owners to help preserve our industry's history.



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