



A Successful Year at UK Alpaca

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Fashion student Jennifer Edelston made headlines at the prestigious Mittelmoda international fashion design competition in Italy in September with her designs using yarns from UK Alpaca. She was one of just two British finalists in an international field of twenty-five who were selected from 700 applicants. Jennifer had already won the Best Commercial Collection at Kingston University and she was flown out to Italy to see her clothes featured in a catwalk show and came home with one of the awards. Following on from that success the collection is also being shown at the Milan Fashion Week and at AltaRoma in Rome. Patterns for her stunning little jacket made from the natural parchment UK Alpaca yarn will be available later in the year at www.ukalpaca.com.

Our fully worsted yarns for 2004/2005 came in five natural colours, four dyed colours and a baby alpaca/silk blend and have sold exceptionally well, in fact they have virtually sold out. The new colours for 2005/2006 are now available and are a vibrant range of moss, mustard, sapphire and rose. The naturals – parchment, fawn, chocolate and black remain the same with the addition of a silver grey and, of course, the baby and silk blend.

The yarns are sold on line, by mail order and into knitting shops via our newly appointed agents who cover the whole of the South West of England. It is our intention to appoint other agents to cover the rest of Britain during 2006. Our new range of patterns, some designed specially for us by Sasha Kagan, are now on the market and have resulted in extra sales of yarn.

UK Alpaca became a limited company in January 2005 and has four directors, John Arbon, Chas Brooke, Rachel Hebditch and Juliet Sensicle. Its aim is to be the specialist producer of alpaca yarns in Europe. The company buys fleece from British alpaca breeders and manufactures fully worsted hand knit and commercial yarns in the UK. The commercial yarns that are used for machine knit end products have also sold well, and we were particularly pleased to fulfil an order for three hundred kilos of sock yarn from one manufacturer. Orders for bespoke yarns spun from our tops have also been taken recently including one for knitwear for the designer Donna Karan.

The boom in hand knitting has meant that there are now two thriving, modern, knitting magazines that have given us some excellent yarn reviews. There are a lot of very big knitting shows as well and UK Alpaca is taking a stand at two of these – one at Alexandra Palace in London and the G-Mex Centre in Manchester. Stitch n Bitch is a group that has got a lot of young people hooked on knitting, and one of their founders

Dorret Conway, gave a series of masterclasses on hand knitted socks at the NEC using our yarn.

The barn at our farm near Tiverton in Devon is now filling up with our third fibre collection. Since December 2004 we have collected and graded over six tons of alpaca fibre. This year we have set up a series of collection centres where growers can drop off their fibre, details of those are on our website. We have three grades, baby which is normally under 21 micron, fine, where the majority of animals sit at between 22 and 26 micron and coarse and this year we are paying £7.50 a kilo for baby, £4.50 a kilo for fine and seventy five pence for coarse. Although the micron counts are important, the fleece is graded according to its handle and thus is a 'hands on' job. The coarse fibre is in storage whilst we seek sales for our new rug yarns that are 50% alpaca 50% British wool and explore other promising avenues.

It works like this – once all alpaca fleece from each breeder is graded, a tally sheet is sent out to them with the weights and grades of the fibre submitted that we wish to buy. The grower sends UK Alpaca an invoice and we send them a cheque. Anybody who sells us fleece can buy back yarn at wholesale prices without a minimum order quantity, if they wish.

All UK Alpaca's yarns are processed and spun in the UK to the highest quality to provide a uniform, soft, lustrous worsted spun yarn. We produce double knit yarns in natural un-dyed alpaca shades blended with fine British bluefaced Leicester wool, to provide extra volume and spring to the alpaca. We dye some of the parchment and fawn yarns to produce our range of colours. And for the ultimate in luxury knitwear we produce a natural coloured ultra soft alpaca yarn, made up of baby alpaca and unbleached Tussah silk.

We are utilising the worsted spinning system, which is best suited to alpaca fibre because of the fibre length. This produces a strong, lustrous, smooth and fine yarn, ideal for use in knitwear. The yarn is spun on a ring spinning system in either 100% alpaca or as a blend with wool or nylon dependent on the performance requirement of the yarn. For general knitwear we are adding wool when possible to stop any migration and to produce a loftier, bouncier yarn. The wool enhances the qualities of the alpaca whilst producing good wear resistance. For rugs we are using a 50% blend with coarse grade British wool to eliminate shedding of fibres and to provide good wearability without losing the soft feel of the alpaca. To maintain good yarn stability, the yarns are generally produced as two single strands folded together and then autoclaved (subjecting the yarn to high pressure) which sets the fibres in place in the yarn and stops distortion in the final product. This process also improves stability and the shape of the final product.

UK Alpaca is determined to help create a viable alpaca fibre industry in this country by producing the best yarns from the fleeces of animals bred here. We invite you to support that aim by selling us your fleeces. The success we have in the market place will bring increased returns to alpaca breeders with better prices paid for their fibre in the future.

If you would like to sell your alpaca fibre to UK Alpaca we would be delighted to buy it. Please visit our website or talk to Rachel Hebditch on 01884 243579 or John Arbon on 01598 753644.

UK Alpaca's website is www.ukalpaca.com