

2013 Back to Back Wool Challenge by the Spinning Knitwits

Held at Tocal Homestead, 9 June.
By Maureen King, Newsletter editor

And they're off ...



And so begins the 2013 Back to Back Wool Challenge by the Spinning Knitwits. As soon as the Shearer makes the first cut the race against the clock begins.



The fleece is handed around (untreated in any way), as everyone is put to spinning. The beginning pace is frantic, the concentration is fierce as they all spin to get yarn to be plyed for the knitting to commence.



Once the assessor says the word, the spun yarn is given to the pleyer who plys then winds into a ball and passes the ball to the first knitter to get them on the way. The task then is to get the front and back knitters going as these will take the longest, to build up a supply of plyed yarn ready to go, so that the sleeve knitters can also get going – a massive juggling act.

Added to the mix, is the demands of the media (NBN) wanting an interview while still working.



Since the beginning of the Wool Challenge, all money raised goes towards Cancer research. To help raise money for the Spinning Knitwits, the Newcastle Spinners and Weavers organise a “trading table” where it is possible to buy all sorts of hand made items – some from hand spun yarn as well as commercial yarns.



There is always an impressive array of items on offer and this year was no different – hats, gloves, jumpers, plants. Downstairs the walls were decorated with quilts done by the Patterson CWA, some of which were also donated to children in hospital and upstairs there was a display of art work by Dungog Art Society.

This was my first year at this event and it was amazing how many people there were right from the beginning. Through the day the number of people grew until there was standing room only.



To help these most valuable of guests pass the time there were several activities which were for the participation of those present as well as demonstrations of "yarn" skills.

Activities for the day available for participation included getting people to help in the knitting of a scarf using wool provided. It began with casting on 20 stitches, choosing a colour of wool and what sort of stitches and knitting some rows before passing onto the next person. It was great to see some young knitters as well as some experienced knitters giving this a go. Thank you to all who contributed.



Another activity was a "fastest knitter" competition, which was conducted several times to give spectators a feeling of the pressure the B2B participants were under. Casting on 25 stitches and completing as many rows as possible in 5 or 10 minutes. Winners of each section were presented with a certificate from the Guild. Some of the winners were Sylosz Jane, Emily Barski, Betty Sexton (a past member of the Guild).



Amelia from Newcastle - well done!



Around the room the demonstrations included bobbin lace making from representatives from the lace Guild (including Jewel Moore), rag rug making (Marion Riley), drop spindle (thank you to Gayle Charters), weavit squares (Maureen King) and Marley demonstrated on her wheel most of the day.



Bobbin lace making



The finished beanie was auctioned off, and was bought by a very generous Pauline Swan from Murrarundi.



Gayle in action

Gayle had several different drop spindles available for people to try their hand.

As an added highlight, there was a Back to Beanie conducted as well. For this raw wool was brought along, spun and knitted into a beanie as fast as possible. The team consisted of Marley Critcher, Linda Sherbon, Jayne Carruthers, Krista Thompson, Margaret Dorn.



This activity gave an insight into what was going to come in the final leg of the jumper – the sewing up.



A large number of Guild members were on hand to chat, answer questions and generally promote the crafts on display.

Visitors were entertained by a mixed group of volunteer musicians, who performed lots of different styles from instrumental, to group, duets and solos. Some of them were members of 'Cedar Arm' who donated CDs to raise more funds for cancer research





The special raffle which is put together especially for the day, went so well that extra raffle tickets had to be bought (winners mentioned earlier in the newsletter).

Trevor also demonstrated the art of blade shearing later in the day, and one could only sympathise with the sheep losing their woolly jackets on what is shaping up to be a cold winter.



The event was again MC'd by the Guild's president, Kerrie Franklin, who did an excellent job of letting people know what was going on.



Our thanks also go to the Friends of Tocal for catering food and drinks on the day as well as a BBQ and to Tocal for providing a wonderful venue and organisation.

Then, the final countdown. Everyone was trying to hold their breath to see what the time would be. The tension built as Kris tried to finish off the last of the knitting around the neck while the seams were being done and others in the team looked on.



The sewing up



Sewing while the knitting is done

The number of spectators had grown during the day until the final moment when the team stood with Trevor wearing the finished garment in 6 hours 27 minutes



The 2013 team with finished jumper