

Robyn Betts
Jaegar Alpacas, VIC

... comes from the Latin word for fleece

Velieris Pty. Ltd. has been operating in Victoria as an alpaca carpet manufacturer for just over two years, supported by a philosophy of natural colours, environmental awareness in manufacturing and promoting the qualities of alpaca fleece. This article is the result of an interview with Ed Holman, Operations Manager and Robert Arduca, a Director with Velieris.

Velieris Pty. Ltd. put itself on the map for the Australian alpaca and natural fibre industry when it successfully tendered for the CSIRO small fibre scour. The anxieties within Australia's raw and natural fibre industry about the future scouring of small lots of natural fibre have been allayed with Velieris securing the scour, and working with the industry to set up a commercial system enabling fibre processors to utilise the scouring service.

This company's support for fleece growers (alpaca, angora, coloured wool, cashmere and ultra fine wool) will enable Australia's rare and natural fibre industry to continue its slow but consistent growth on the international textile stage.

The re-commissioning of the scour, to be completed before the end of 2009, will also support the Velieris company's aim to have a complete vertical manufacturing process enabling raw and greasy fleece to be processed into carpet within a single operation and site.

In accordance with the philosophy and aims of this carpet manufacturing company, alpaca fibre (huacaya) is blended with wool and minimal synthetics to produce both cut pile and loop pile carpets and rugs. The product development process has introduced the unique qualities of alpaca fibre to design natural coloured carpet and to enhance the 'feel' of the carpet – there is no getting away from that soft handle of alpaca fibre.

The alpaca fibre's high level of abrasiveness compared to wool increases the carpet's durability and maintenance. This provides an environmental alternative to using synthetic fibres for this purpose.

The blending of the natural and pure colour of alpaca fibre means that the colour range of the Velieris products – blue-black, grey, rusty reds and browns, white and beige, are produced without the introduction of a chemical dyeing process.

Currently Velieris is using strong (over 30 micron) white and coloured huacaya of between 100-150mm in length. This fibre is primarily accessed from Peru but Velieris are very keen to source Australian supplies and suppliers. The criteria for the fibre is specific for quality carpet and rug production and this could present the Australian alpaca industry with a problem because the current emphasis is on breeding fine, soft handling fleece. These issues are similar in all natural fibre industries. In Australia and New Zealand specific breeds of sheep produce fibre that is appropriate for the carpet manufacturing process.





There are opportunities for Australian alpaca growers and breeders who do have strong-fleeced animals to seriously consider developing their herd's fibre characteristics to meet an increasing and continuing demand for Australian strong alpaca fibre in a range of colours.

Velieris is prepared to buy raw fleece directly from growers which meets its specific manufacturing requirements. It could therefore be possible for alpaca breeders to work together to identify and provide a suitable fleece product in required quantities, for the alpaca carpet industry. It could be possible to develop a focus whereby strong micron fleeced alpacas could be shorn every 18 months to achieve the required fibre length and to develop a real commercial potential for these animals.

Suri alpaca breeders need not feel left out. According to Ed Holman, the Velieris company is intending to research and test the inclusion of suri alpaca fibre within their carpet manufacturing process. Suri alpaca fibre does have a disadvantage of being a slippery fibre which can encounter processing difficulties. However, the fibre also has advantages of fibre length (growing over 110mm in 12 months from second plus fleeces), lustre – even in strong micron fleece, and handle. These qualities are all relative to strong micron fibre and to the carpet production process. Coloured suris also complement the Velieris goal to produce and blend natural colour fibre.

Velieris is manufacturing, in Australia, an Australian product for the local and international market. The company's aim to utilise alpaca fibre – both huacaya and suri – to support Australian alpaca breeders and to have a complete on-shore operation, provides the Australian alpaca industry with a future to use and value strong fibred and coloured alpacas. Commercial partnerships between Australian alpaca breeders and Velieris provides an economic value for the production of a high quality product from alpacas that up to now the industry has regarded as redundant.

For more information email: www.velieris.com 🐫

This article was first published in *Alpacas Australia* magazine, Issue 59, Summer 2009 and is reproduced with permission of the author and the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd.

