



Why are alpacas usually shorn laying down, and llamas standing up?

By Tina's Trims

I get this question All. The. Time.

Let's discuss. Keep in mind you do not have to read this. It won't hurt if you do. This is my take on the subject, and there are other opinions out there as well, but this one is mine.

Alpacas and llamas do not exist in the wild, they're descendants of the guanaco and vicuña, domesticated by indigenous peoples. Llamas were developed for pack animals and for meat, alpacas for their fleece and meat.

Because people used llamas for packing, they were desensitized to us essentially, working beside humans.

A llama can very seriously hurt you; they can use their neck to make you lose balance, and then stomp on you. They can bite, and that can be nasty. Because of this, animals that showed too much aggression were likely used for meat instead of making more llamas, and over time as with most things, nasty behavior or extreme aggression were sort of bred out of what we have today, resulting in a more mellow animal than its wild cousins.

Alpacas on the other hand, are not a working animal. They're smaller and can't haul anything, so they didn't become domesticated working beside humans, and kept much more feral qualities. Herds didn't need to be social or "tame" because they could be restrained effectively for shearing once a year, and using an animal for meat didn't require it to be trained for anything. Wild herds of vicuña used to be herded through funnel traps and shorn every 4 or so years for their fiber.

Let's move into modern day, going from farm to farm shearing. Why does a shearer usually lay down an alpaca, but shear a llama standing?

Alpacas, even today, aren't a working animal. Yes, they can be shown, yes, they can be halter broke, and yes you can do obstacle courses with them and all kinds of things, but only a small percentage of people do.

If you aren't in that group, likely your alpaca wants nothing to do with the complete stranger, who isn't even the human who is here every day, that's got loud buzzing things. Your alpaca wants away

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from all that nonsense. So, to prevent your alpaca from injuring itself, or myself in its attempt to get away, we choose to lay them down, restrain them, shear them, and release them. This takes very little time, on average maybe 10 minutes start to finish. This is much faster and way less traumatic than rearing, bucking, kicking, biting, fighting and farting.

Llamas. Being bigger and a working domesticated animal for so long, usually llamas can be convinced to be semi cooperative. Not always, but usually. Even if it's not willingly cooperative, there are a couple tricks to convince them to stand mostly for shearing. Laying a llama down is a lot harder than an alpaca. Takes a lot more time, more effort, requires more people, more space. Not ideal, and more traumatic than a bit of dancing.

What can YOU do? You, as the owner and advocate for your animal? Whether it's a llama or an alpaca, you can know your animal.

What is your routine?
How do you interact?

Animals like routine. How things happen every day. Shearing day is scary.

Let's set a scene. Jane Doe has 6 alpacas. Every day at 8am Jane walks from the house to the barn singing to her alpacas. She opens the door, pets the cat, and begins scooping grain into her bucket, and loading hay onto her cart, all the while the alpacas have run straight into the barn, and are gathered around their feeding station.

Jane feeds them, observes each face and body, touches necks or noses- whatever her alpacas allow, makes note of anything odd and continues about her day. Periodically Jane counts the alpacas through the day, and laughs as they prunk and carry on with alpaca antics. They are very accustomed to Jane's singing and laughter. It is a good life.

Jane called the shearer and got onto the spring shearing run, and her day has arrived. Because this is new to her, she does not go to the barn at 8am, but rather waits, after all, the shearer will be here at 9.

By the time the shearer arrives, the alpacas are looking for Jane. Nervous, a little hungry. Instead of Jane singing, she walks to the barn talking with a stranger. The cat is grumpy, and hisses today. Jane begins the grain and hay, and the alpacas have run to their feed station, except the oldest has decided not to come inside today, too many strange factors. Also, as the shearer begins setting up the other alpacas get nervous. Jane has already walked out into the paddock to try to close the barn door so the alpacas are locked inside. 2 of them bolt out before she gets the door closed all the

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way. They have several acres of pasture, including little streams and some trees, and they run to the farthest corner.

The remaining alpacas in the barn are now very anxious, as the leader is outside, and there is a stranger in the barn, so they humm and dart around their pen.

Jane's day has just gone south quickly, but why?

Because she broke routine. Shearing is always a strange event, it happens 1 day out of 365. In Jane's case, were the shearer in the scenario myself, I'd have informed Jane of the need for the animals to be penned before my arrival. In this particular scene, Jane ideally would have gone out at 8 to feed, and locked the alpacas in the barn. They still would have been nervous when the shearer arrived, but they would all be together, and contained in a workable space. Of course, they still get nervous and scared, but now it can be handled quickly, and be over much sooner than chasing scared alpacas around a pasture, or the shearer leaving.

What else can you do?

Work with your animal. I don't mean train it to do tricks. I mean work with it, feed it in an area you can contain it in. Contain it there. Even if it freaks out a bit, work with it. Lock it up for 10 or 15 minutes while it eats, do nothing, and let it go, but work with it, consistently, not just once. This doesn't apply just for the shearer. This should apply for any reason you might need to interact. The vet. Because you're mowing your field. Because you need to evacuate. Because it's sick and needs tending. You should be able to contain your animals, even if you can't touch them.

What if you don't want your animal to lie down for shearing?

Work with it. Every day. Get it used to being touched all over its body, especially its legs. Work with it so it doesn't rear, or buck, or lunge, or kick while strange things touch it, as all these things are dangerous while shears are running. Animals with training and exposure are a great pleasure, but it's hard to get them to that point, because it takes consistency and repetition. It does not come from 1 day out of 365 with a complete stranger. YOU have to do that work if you don't want restraints used on your animals.

"But it looks barbaric" - I assure you it's not. What is barbaric is the beating a human body can take from an alpaca. I know there are a ton of methods, each shearer uses a different one, and usually it's because they have found it works for them. For me, I have a team. I do lay alpacas on the ground and tie them for shearing unless they're very much used to it. I have no problem going slow and working alongside YOU if YOU are working with your animal.

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To be honest, when I see the keyboard warriors and trolls with their comments of how brutal shearers are, how it didn't have to be that way, I just sort of know in my heart, they've never been in a shearer's position before.

To wrap up, I hope that shed some light on the different decisions for restraints for shearing. If you've read this far, thank you for hanging in there. You didn't have to, but I sure appreciate that you did. Stay safe, hug your mama if you got her, and don't forget your hat.

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