

"I'm really working towards the shears from the start of the new year. There's shows every weekend — sometimes two or three a weekend."

This year he won one show, had eight seconds and three thirds at places like Rotorua, Hawera, Stratford, Whakatane, Apiti, Levin, Marton, Pahiatua and Fielding.

One of the big pre-shears competitions in the lower North Island is the Golden Circle which includes Feilding, Levin, Waverley, Rotorua, Pahiatua and Taihape. This year Pivac came second. Last year he won it. For coming second he won a suit case, blankets, sheets and towels.

On January 23 last year he and Alan Donaldson were involved in setting the unofficial four-stand, nine-hour-day shearing record of 2,519 ewes. The record was to Wool Board standards but since then shearing record rules have been altered so the record is no longer official.

Pivac shore his highest tally that day: 630 ewes.

"I had hardly worked for two and a half weeks. I was doing about a day a week. I just wondered how my stamina was going to hold out."

On the day there were about 500 people in the shed plus four Wool Board judges and a referee.

"I lost three quarters of a stone. It was the hardest day I have ever done."

At the end of the competition outsiders said some of the shearing was below standard but it evened-out because some was just above standard. The shearers disagreed.

"That's another reason why it was satisfying for Alan and I to come first and second in the Golden Shears. It proved a point."

He said the pressure of the Golden Shears began with the new year. The hopefuls started thinking about getting ready for the March event.

This year 162 people entered the open. Twenty seven six-man heats were run to find the 24 quarter-finalists. Competition in the heats is difficult because shearers are vying with the whole field, not just competitors in their heats.

The heats are held on Friday, starting in the morning.

"I'm very nervous before the heats. You've got to do everything right just to qualify."

The New Zealand team captain, Jack Dowd, failed to qualify for the final after he cut a tit and cut a sheep badly.

"It's not difficult to do. You are that tense and you are trying to make no mistakes and that's when you make them."

The quarter finals are held that night, which left 12 shearers to contest the semi-finals on Saturday morning for a place in the final.

On the Friday night Pivac was nervous. He hardly slept and was up in the

middle of the night cycling round Carterton.

He was still nervous after making the finals and, he says, friends told him he was still on edge hours after the final finished. The final was shorn before a crowd of 2,200, a full house.

"In the final you just try and go as fast as you can and do your best. Your mind is just on what you are doing."

The final is accompanied by a live commentary. Pahiatua shearing gear retailer Dave Wolland tells the audience how the shearers are going, who finishes each sheep first, times for individual sheep and some history about the shearers.

Pivac said it was impossible to listen



to Wolland for most of the contest and so it was difficult to tell how the others were doing.

"I tried to get my mind on what he was saying, but it's not easy to do. I know it sounds easy but it wasn't for me. I was concentrating on going fast and shearing properly."

Though the pressure is intense, Pivac believes it is healthy. "It's good for you, I reckon." And while there was intense pressure to shear faster, quality had to be maintained.

"You know when you are shearing rough and you just can't afford to shear

rough."

He said the pressure did not compare to the pressure before a rugby game.

"I haven't played any big rugby games but I played in a club final (for Carterton) and it's different. In rugby you have got other guys you can depend on. If someone makes a break there are other guys. In shearing you are on your own — it's a sole thing."

And Pivac likes it that way — "there's no one else you can blame."

Though Pivac runs his own gangs, he still shears himself. He does it because he loves shearing — and because he likes to be fit and healthy — "it's a good life."

Shearers earn \$56 for each hundred sheep and when things are going well Pivac says he shears about 350 a day.

With a four shearer gang go five shed-hands, a presser and a cook. The shed-hands earn \$7 an hour, the presser \$8 an hour and the cook \$58 a day.

The shearing year for Pivac starts about October with the main shear — it really gets going in January. Then in March there is shearing in Whangarei and comes back to Wairarapa in June and July for crutching. The rest of the year is fairly slack and he usually finds other work.

He has shorn throughout New Zealand, with the exception of Coromandel and the West Coast of the South Island. And he has shorn in the United Kingdom and Europe.

Shearing has given Pivac a challenge in his life and a far better income than most people. But it has its bad side. People tend to think of shearers as drunken louts. Also the job depends on the weather and when it rains there's no work.

"When it's raining you just pay for all the food they eat and the cook and sit and wait. If you can go home you do."

There is also much competition between run-owners for sheds.

"Everyone else is trying to get them. You can't trust some people, they will tell a cockie that you have moved on."

When Pivac started running his gang he found the organisation difficult. If one person did not turn up it threw everything out.

Now it runs pretty smoothly but the bottom line for Pivac is still the competition: Competition against fellow members of the gangs; competition against other top shearers when they meet up on farms; and competition in the shearing contests.

The ultimate goal is the Golden Shears and each year top shearers fail to qualify.

Pivac describes what it is like to miss the final: "It's a feeling I don't want many times. You have lost something you really want. It rips up your guts — its like you're just about to the top of Mt Everest and you get a heart attack."