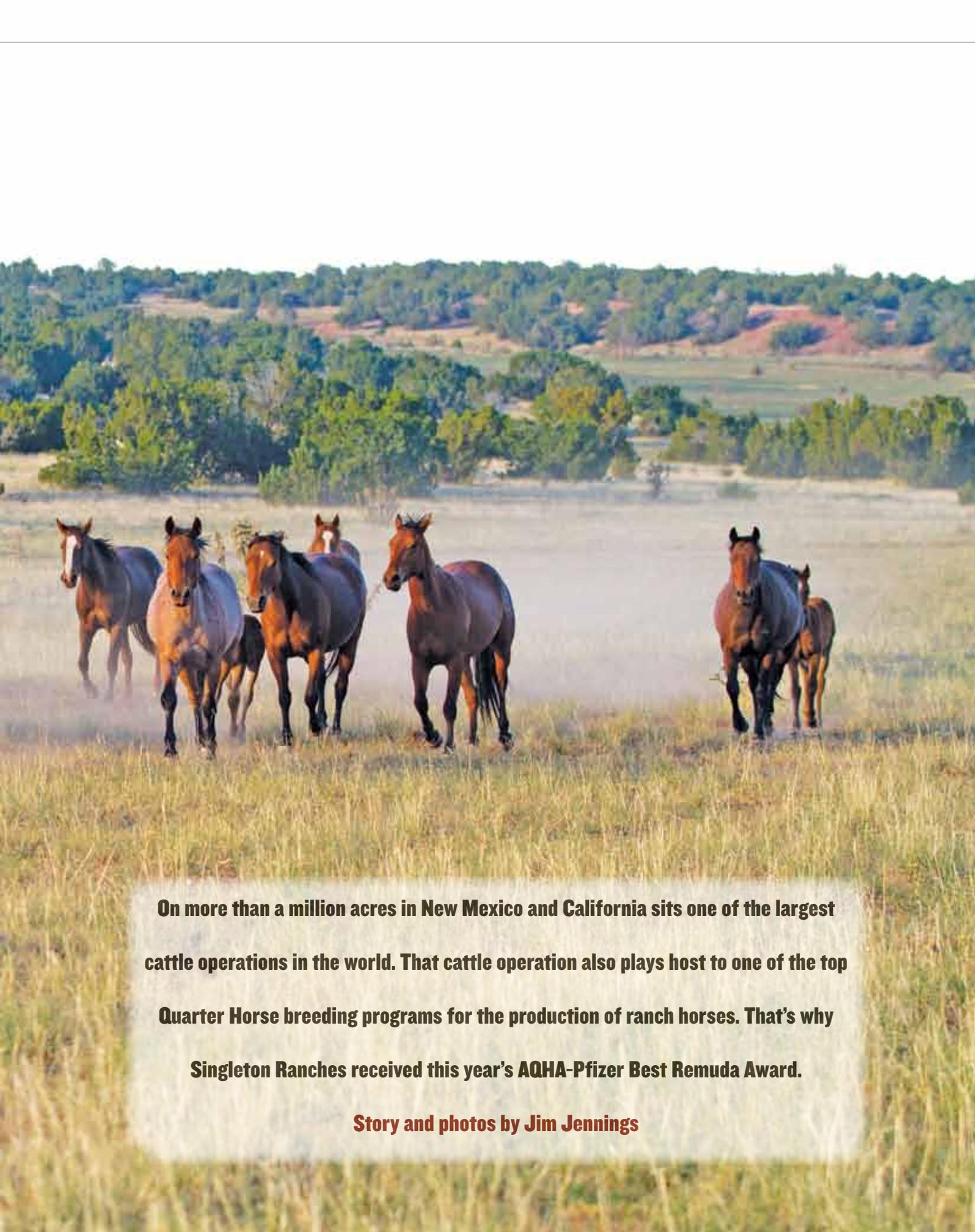


The Heart *of* It All





On more than a million acres in New Mexico and California sits one of the largest cattle operations in the world. That cattle operation also plays host to one of the top Quarter Horse breeding programs for the production of ranch horses. That's why Singleton Ranches received this year's AQHA-Pfizer Best Remuda Award.

Story and photos by Jim Jennings

WHEN HENRY SINGLETON BOUGHT THE 81,000-ACRE SAN CRISTOBAL Ranch, south of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the mid-1980s, people familiar with Henry had to wonder what was going on. That purchase didn't fit the pattern of businesses that Henry had been buying. Having earned three degrees – including a doctorate in electrical engineering – at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and co-founding Teledyne Inc., one of the country's most successful conglomerates and engineering firms, Henry was known more for his financial wizardry than for his knowledge of ranching. But what a lot of people didn't know was that Henry Singleton had been born and raised on a ranch just north of Fort Worth, Texas, and right after high school, he attended for two years what was then the North Texas Agricultural College at Arlington. Henry was returning to his roots.

Once Henry made the decision to get back into the ranching business, he kept going. Within a 14-year period, he had purchased 28 other ranches in New Mexico and three in California, making Singleton Ranches the largest cow-calf operation in New Mexico and the sixth largest in the United States for total acreage. Henry died in 1999, and his children now operate the ranches, which include more than 1 million acres. Henry's son, Will, is CEO of the Singleton Ranches operation.

The ranches as a group are divided into three working divisions: the California division, the New Mexico division and the horse division, the latter of which is based at the original ranch, the San Cristobal. The California division, with approximately 100,000 acres, is comprised of three ranches, the Peachtree and Topo ranches in the Salinas Valley, and the River Island Ranch, which is in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

The New Mexico ranches, in addition to the San Cristobal,

are the Pecos, Conchas, Lobo, Bojax, Moon, Lazy 3 Bar, Trigg, Agua Verde, Perez and Bar Y. Most of these ranches go back in time to prehistory, and petroglyphs and artifacts from ruins of Indian pueblos that date from the 1100s to the 1600s can be found in many areas. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 that forced the Spanish out of New Mexico began in part at the San Cristobal Pueblo, which was located on the ranch named for it today.

In addition to the three main divisions, the New Mexico ranches are further divided into three units, with each of the units having a general manager. Jeff Bilberry runs the Aqua Verde, the Lobo – which now includes the Perez – and the Bojax, while Alex Carone is responsible for the Trigg and the Conchas-Pecos division, which includes the Moon, Lazy 3 Bar and Bar Y. Most of the 12,000-15,000 mother cows Singleton Ranches own are on those two major New Mexico divisions. Grant Mitchell is in charge of the San Cristobal, which, in addition to running approximately 500 mother cows and another 400-500 yearlings, is where the horse operation is headquartered.

In California, two general managers, Ty Burk and Billy Whitney, oversee those ranches. The three California ranches run a few thousand mother cows, but those ranches are used primarily for the development of yearling steers. Some yearlings are pastured on all the ranches, but the majority are in California. In a good year, Singletons will graze up to 40,000 yearlings.

All of the ranches have been cattle ranches since before records were kept – several of them were actually Spanish land grants – and the tradition of working cattle with horses has been maintained through the years. Those traditions are indicative of the area where the ranches are located. The California cowboys reflect the customs of the

The three New Mexico ranch managers are, from left, Jeff Bilberry, Alex Carone and Grant Mitchell.





The rugged beauty of the white bluff in the background has appealed to numerous movie directors and has appeared in a number of Western movies that were filmed on the ranch.

old Spanish vaqueros, with their rawhide riatas and other tack, and, as is common in that area, they head and heel the calves for branding.

On the New Mexico ranches, the calves are heeled and dragged to the branding fire – which is traditional for the Southwest. But on all the ranches, in California and New Mexico, the cattle are gathered, sorted, moved, doctored and tended to from horseback.

The horses have always been an integral part of Singleton Ranches, but about 18 years ago, a conscious effort was made to upgrade the horse herd. Prior to that, Singletons owned approximately 100 broodmares. About 30 of those were kept at the San Cristobal ranch, under the direction of ranch manager Harper McFarland, who worked on the ranch for more than 50 years under four different ownerships. The other 70 or so were at the Bar Y, which was managed by longtime Quarter Horse breeder Leroy Webb. Then, Dr. Bob Patterson, who became the ranches' overall general manager, and Harper purchased 16 mares of predominantly Doc Bar breeding from the Montgomery Ranch near Crowell, Texas. All those mares had foals by their side, primarily by Pajarito Doc by Dry Doc and Sonitas Smoke by Freckles Smoke by Jewel's Leo Bars. Then some stallions that were also Doc Bar-bred were purchased and crossed on the new mares, as well as on those that were kept from the original broodmare band. One of those was Thorn Doc Lena by Doc O Dynamite, which the ranch used for a number of years with some great results.

This cross was producing a good ranch horse, but they decided to do more. In 2000, Dr. Patterson purchased, for the ranch, the stallion The Hot Express. By Zan Parr Express, The Hot Express was an AQHA Champion who had earned Superior awards in reining, heeling, tie-down roping and working cow horse, and had placed at the AQHA World Championship Show in all those events. He was obviously a cow horse and appeared to be just what the ranches needed to further develop their ranch horses.

With the purchase of The Hot Express, the broodmare band was cut to about 35 mares. Then all the mares and stallions were consolidated at the San Cristobal ranch, and a top-quality breeding and training facility was built.

During the next few years, other top stallions were added to the breeding barn. In 2001, Singletons purchased Bit Of Heat by Hollywood Heat out of a daughter of Zan Parr Bar. He was shown by Bobby Lewis to Superior awards in both heading and heeling.

In 2003, Dr. Patterson purchased for the ranch the 2-year-olds Dualwithme by Dual Pep out of a daughter of Smart Little Lena and Timber Cat 101 by Doc's Hickory out of a daughter of High Brow Cat. Dualwithme was sent to Bobby Lewis to train and show, and in 2005, he was the AQHA high-point cutting horse of the year. Timber Cat 101 was shown primarily by then-ranch trainer Terry Riddle, and he earned money in National Cutting Horse Association competition. When these two stallions were retired from the

Some of Singleton Ranches' land can be quite rough and requires horses with good feet and the ability to maneuver through the arroyos and canyons.





In New Mexico, all the calves are heeled and dragged to the branding fire.

show arena, they were both returned to the ranch and became part of the breeding program.

In 2007, A Smooth Edition by Smooth As A Cat out of a daughter of Doc Quixote was purchased out of the NCHA Futurity yearling sale. He was sent to Boyd Rice to train and show, but was injured and returned to the ranch.

Of these stallions, all but Bit Of Heat, who was sold in 2006, are currently in use as breeding stallions on the ranch today.

Singletons were making a major revision to the remuda during this time, but it didn't include just stallions. In 2004, the ranch bought Soft N Shiney, a daughter of Shining Spark, and ARC Shining Please, a daughter of Chic Please, out of the National Reined Cow Horse Association Select Yearling Sale, held during the Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno. Soft N Shiney was trained and shown by Robbie Boyce to become a finalist in the 2006 Open Snaffle Bit Futurity, and ARC Shining Please, under the direction of Bob Avila, also earned NRCHA money but missed the open finals of the Snaffle Bit Futurity by one-half point. Both of these mares are in the broodmare band today.

In 2005, the ranch purchased, from the NRCHA Select 2-year-old Sale, Smart Crackin Chic by Smart Chic Olena, and from the yearling sale, Linda Boon Boom by Peptoboons-mal. Under the direction of Todd Crawford, Smart Crackin Chic was the 2006 NRCHA Open Snaffle Bit Futurity champion and has lifetime NRCHA earnings of more than \$215,000. Linda Boon Boom was sent to the NCHA Futurity but didn't make the finals. The next year, Little Lena Nitro by Nitro Dual Doc was purchased in the yearling sale at the NRCHA Futurity. She, too, was sent to the NCHA Futurity, but didn't make the finals. In 2007, the 2-year-old Night Time Dancer by Boonlight Dancer was purchased at the NRCHA Futurity, and former Singleton trainer Terry

Riddle showed her to some success in NCHA competition. Today, all four of those mares are in the broodmare band.

Harper McFarland, who is now deceased, retired in 1999, and Dr. Patterson resigned from Singletons in 2005. That's when Grant Mitchell was promoted to manager of the San Cristobal division and, as such, was placed in charge of the horse program.

Grant is continuing to upgrade the ranch's remuda, and in addition to the four stallions that are in use on the ranch today, he breeds some of the better mares to outside stallions that have been proven either in the cutting or cow horse arenas. These stallions include Boonlight Dancer, One Time Pepto and Metallic Cat, among others, and are bred via shipped semen.

The mares that are bred to ranch stallions are divided into bands, with each band turned into the pasture with one of the stallions. All mares foal in the pasture, and the foals are not handled until they are weaned in the fall. Shortly after weaning, they are halter broken and handled daily for four to five days. During this time, they become accustomed to being led, tied up and having all four feet picked up. After this period of their training, the foals are turned out into a 15-section pasture and they are not handled again until early in their 2-year-old year.

"We want them to mature in that pasture," Grant says, "become accustomed to those rocks, the brush and the arroyos, because that's where we're going to use them when they become saddle horses."

As 2-year-olds, they are ridden by the cowboys on the San Cristobal for 60-90 days, during which time they are exposed to all facets of being a ranch horse. They are not ridden hard, but they are used to gather pastures, sort cattle in the pens and drag calves to the branding fire, all things they will have



Heeling calves at a branding is one of the first jobs introduced to the 2-year-olds as they are trained to become ranch horses. Then, as finished horses, they can be depended upon in all situations.

to do as mature ranch horses. At the end of this period, they are distributed to the 40 or so cowboys who work on the other ranches, and those cowboys will finish the horses' educations.

As a rule, mares are not ridden for ranch work, but all the fillies go through the same breaking process to determine their suitability for the broodmare band. Those fillies who are thought to be exceptional in their athletic abilities and who show an aptitude for cow work may receive further training and be pointed to the show arena.

"The criteria for making the mare band is tough," Grant says. "We want our mares to have a good disposition, a lot of heart, strong bones, good conformation and cow sense in the hopes that they will produce the type of horses we are looking for."

Singleton horses have made names for themselves. SCR Timber Flit, a daughter of Timber Cat 101, was the 2010 American Stock Horse Association reserve champion for the state of New Mexico, and SCR Crackin Light, by Boonlight Dancer out of Snaffle Bit Futurity winner Smart Crackin Chic, was the 2011 ASHA world championship futurity champion.

Earlier this year, San Cristobal trainer Kiowa Cranson rode SCR Crackin Light to the reserve championship in the open



Good ranch horses that can maneuver through and push cows out of the cholla cactus and cedar and mesquite brush are a must for Singleton Ranches.

and limited open divisions of the first AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge, held during the Fort Worth Stock Show. In August, in Rapid City, South Dakota, at the second Ranching Heritage Challenge, Kiowa and SCR Crackin Light were the reserve champions in the limited open division.

Singleton Ranches also qualified for the World Championship Ranch Rodeo in 2008 and 2009, and this year won the Coors Ranch Rodeo in Amarillo.

In 2010, a number of AQHA members had the opportunity to ride some of the Singleton horses. The San Cristobal hosted, for Singleton Ranches, the first Legends of the American Quarter Horse Trail Ride, sponsored by the American Quarter Horse Foundation. Grant, with the assistance of the other New Mexico ranch managers, Jeff Bilberry and Alex Carone – both of whom brought horses for the riders – led the group across the ranch.

The trail riders got to visit first-hand the site of one of the ancient pueblos, see some of the petroglyphs left by the ancient ones and visit some almost historic movie sets. A number of movies have been filmed on the ranch during the past years, and some of the sets are still there. The group rode through

what remains of the movie sets from John Wayne's "The Cowboys" and from the most recent version of "True Grit."

In addition, Foundation trail riders assisted the ranch cowboys with branding a group of calves, and some of them, for the first time, heeled and dragged calves to the branding fire – from atop Singleton horses.

Henry Singleton loved the ranches and thought that the greatest reward was "just being out in the country, the association with the land, and have it in turn take care of the people who work it." With that in mind, he built one of the largest cattle operations in the world. But Grant carries it even further. He says, "Behind our success in the cattle industry is our remuda. In fact, without our remuda, our cattle operations would not be possible. We depend on our horses every day. The horses and cowboys of our operation are truly the heart of it all." ❏

Jim Jennings is the retired AQHA Executive Director of Publications. He lives another life now, going to ranches when invited, and sometimes writing stories about them. Singleton Ranches will receive the AQHA-Pfizer Best Remuda Award in November during the World Championship Ranch Rodeo in Amarillo.