King Ranch

Fast Facts
• The Running W brand represents the Ranch around the world, but no one is certain what the story of its origin is and why it was selected to represent the ranch.
• The King Ranch has sold horses to ranches around the world.
A native of New York and a steamboat pilot and captain by trade, Captain Richard King came from Florida to Texas and the Rio Grande in 1847 for Mexican War service. With a partner, King formed a small shipping enterprise and began investing in lands in Cameron and Nueces counties. During the spring of 1852, he traveled from his home in Brownsville to Corpus Christi. King’s party crossed the Santa Gertrudis Creek and realizing the potential the land could provide for a livestock operation, King and a partner purchased their first tract of land, the 15,500-acre Rincón de Santa Gertrudis. In 1854, they purchased the 53,000-acre Spanish land grant, the de la Garza Santa Gertrudis. These two purchases formed the nucleus around which the future holdings of the King Ranch would develop.
As Captain King began to buy and sell cattle and horses, he frequently took buying trips into Mexico. In 1854, he came upon a small Mexican village and purchased the available stock. He also invited the inhabitants of this community to come work for him back in Texas. From these people, King learned the vaquero tradition. Calling themselves los Kineños, or King’s men, the descendants of these original villagers from Mexico have formed the core of King Ranch’s work force ever since.

In the early 1850s, Captain King married Henrietta Maria Morse Chamberlain. Together they made Rancho de Santa Gertrudes, known today as King Ranch. The King’s youngest daughter, Alice, was the only one of their five children to remain at the ranch. In 1886, she married Robert Justus Kleberg, a young attorney from Corpus Christi. Their descendants continue to own and operate King Ranch today.
One of Captain King’s most important contributions was his vision to improve his cattle and horse stock. King began to transform Longhorns and wild horses into the finest cattle and horses in Texas. Scientific upbreeding programs have been hallmarks of King Ranch since its inception, and they continue to show results.

King Ranch’s renowned livestock breeding programs created the superior Old Sorrel line of Quarter Horses and a Thoroughbred program which produced, in addition to many stakes race winners, a Triple Crown champion. The Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred programs trace back to 1916 when Old Sorrel was purchased. He became the foundation sire that made the King Ranch famous as a breeder of champion Quarter Horses. He possessed all the traits that were needed in a ranch horse and could pass them on to future generations. In subsequent generations, these horses were bred back to King Ranch mares, producing a remuda that became the prototype for ranches around the world.
As an outgrowth of its Quarter Horse program, the ranch became involved in competition cutting, and within a decade, the King Ranch established a dynasty of champion cutting horses led by the stallions Dry Doc, Mr San Peppy and Peppy San Badger.

In addition to the influence that the King Ranch’s Quarter Horse program has had in the United States, in the early 1950s, the King Ranch began to export some of their Quarter Horses to countries around the world and very quickly built a reputation on their superior bloodlines.
The King Ranch remains dedicated to protecting their cultural and genetic legacy, as well as producing the finest working Quarter Horses possible for their Kineño cowboys. Their focus is not only on producing superior horses with outstanding pedigrees, conformation, disposition and athletic ability, but also horses that can meet the physical demands of working cattle.