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The King Ranch

Condensed by A. M. Orum, Class of 1941, from the article, The World's Biggest Ranch, Fortune, December, 1933, p. 49.

IN THE southernmost tip of Texas—the point that juts down into Mexico along the Gulf—lies the King ranch, the largest cattle ranch of its kind in the world. The heirs of Captain Richard King now rule over a domain of 1,250,000 acres—an estate worth $22,000,000. It is so big that there is a full month's difference in seasons between the southernmost boundary and the northernmost tip. It is so large that the cars carry compasses to navigate from pasture to pasture and always go out in pairs lest they have a breakdown fifty miles from nowhere. So vast is the ranch that cars run out of gasoline between settlements and must replenish their tanks enroute from the numerous ranch-owned filling stations located at strategic points on the King domain.

Three Parts

Few northerners realize the ranch, rather than being in one solid piece, is divided into three tracts of land separated from each other by thousands of acres of Texas prairie. One thousand five hundred miles of wire fence subdivide the ranch into 135 pastures. Neither a nail nor staple is used—the six foot galvanized fence is wired to mesquite or cedar posts placed at sixteen foot intervals. The cost of the fence is $375 a mile. It is built at the rate of eight miles a month. Located at strategic points are some five hundred gates built at a total cost of $12,500. An eye-opener for the tourists is the range called the "Little Pasture"; it is 6,000 acres large! They run from this tiny bit up to three major pastures each containing 65,000 acres.

Equally important in the raising of cattle and horses on the King ranch is water. The water on the ranch comes from 345 wells. Eighty of these flow of their own volition into little reservoirs which supply concrete troughs. Over the balance stand windmills—265 of them. Five crews of three men each, using specially fitted light motor trucks, are needed to take care of the windmills.

Efficiency in handling the 125,000 head of cattle on the King ranch depends largely upon having good cow ponies. The ranch under the management of Bob Kleberg II, grandson of Captain Richard King, has done a grand job in the development of a good Texas cow horse. The requirements of a good cow pony are manyfold, but above all they must have the attribute known as "cow sense", an instinctive knowledge of what a cow is going to do next and how to help or hinder her.

The Quarter Horse

Spanish horses descended from the Arab horses brought here by Cortez were first used on the King ranch, but the strain was allowed to degenerate. Fortunately, Bob Kleberg replaced them with a superior crossbreed. About twenty years ago he found an ideal quarter horse stallion. A quarter horse is a Texas steed so named because he can run like blazes for a quarter of a mile, after which he suddenly and ingloriously folds up. This quarter horse stallion was used to breed fifty thoroughbred mares. The results were excellent, and since then the same balance of blood has been used in the King crossbreed.

The horses are bred in two sizes; small for brush work, and medium for prairie use. The breed is distinguished for its speed (from the quarter horse) and its stamina (from the thoroughbred). King horses have sloping shoulders (which keep the saddle well back and make bet-
ter for sudden turning), a short, silky, sorrel-colored coat which will not dis-color in the sun, heavy quarters, and a long muscular neck. The horses look like show polo ponies, and many are sold for this purpose.

Although the King ranch has gone far in the development of cow ponies, the Klebergs believe there is always room for improvement. Their hope is to develop an all-sorrel breed of horses which will resist a mysterious affliction known as sandburn. This pathological condition is thought to be caused by a corrosive alkali in the prairie sand that scalds the hide.

Cattle Breeding

The breeding of cattle is the oldest and still the most important function of the ranch. The King domain has 125,000 cattle of its own breed—the Santa Gertrudis. This is the first and only breed of cattle originating in the United States. They are three-eighths Brahma and five-eights Shorthorn, a ratio that seems to give the best balance between the beef qualities of the Shorthorn and the hardiness of the Brahma.

The breed came about in this way. The Klebergs have been great cattle breeders ever since Robert the First succeeded Captain King in 1885 and began to replace the native Texas Longhorns with Herefords and Shorthorns—British breeds which were larger, fatter, and generally superior as beef cattle. In 1910 a friend of the Klebergs gave them an enormous black bull that was half Shorthorn and half Brahma. In the fall of 1918 they took a herd of his offspring and compared them to a herd of pure-bred Herefords. The Brahma-blooded cattle were not only better than the Herefords, but were the best range animals they had ever seen on the place. The next year Bob Kleberg made preparations to establish a new breed, the Santa Gertrudis. Fifty-two of the finest three year old purebred Brahma bulls were purchased and crossed with the ranch's finest purebred Shorthorn cows. They chose the best of the resulting heifers and mated them with the best of the resulting bulls. After three years of such breeding they found that the best of the first cross bulls—and indeed the best range bull they had ever had—was the now famous Monkey, so named because of his gentleness and curiosity as a calf. His offspring proved themselves to be such superior animals that the entire business of carrying on the new breed was left to the prepotent Monkey clan. By a complex process of breeding Monkey's sons and grandchildren with Monkey's daughters and granddaughters, followed by in-breeding and line breeding, the Klebergs finally arrived at the present Santa Gertrudis breed.

Santa Gertrudis Breed

The Santa Gertrudis is a healthier breed, grows larger, fatter, and heavier under Texas range conditions than the British breeds. The calves do better and mature more quickly. Under the same range conditions purebred Hereford calves weighed 460 pounds apiece and the Santa Gertrudis calves 580 pounds each. The King ranch gets calf crops of 85% from their Santa Gertrudis herds as against 70% from their British breeds of Herefords and Shorthorns. In the Santa Gertrudis cattle certain undesirable characteristics of the Brahma disappear; these include white color, coarse-grained meat, drooping rump, large shoulder hump and wildness. The Brahma's skin has an oily secretion which repels flies and fever ticks; thus, to a certain degree Santa Gertrudis cattle are resistant to Texas Fever. The King ranch, however, dips all of its cattle periodically.

The Klebergs plan to carry out a similar system of breeding with the Africander breed of South Africa and the British Herefords. Since the Africander cattle are a deeper red than the Santa Gertrudis, they should be more popular with the cattle buyers. In comparison to

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is hindered or rickets may develop in an animal even in the presence of vitamin D and minerals.

The appearance of splints, ringbones, and other diseases of the skeleton of foals, weanlings, and yearlings that have not been subject to the rigors of training are due to faulty calcium metabolism, beginning usually before the foal was born and continuing through the period of growth and development.

If the young horse does not show pronounced signs of faulty mineral metabolism such as splints and ringbones, the attachments of muscles, ligaments and tendons to the bone are so insecure that just as soon as the horse is put into training or is allowed to run in the pasture he goes wrong.

It has been noted that on farms where a program of parasite control and treatment has been in effect, and where brood mares and growing stock have received properly cured legume hay and an abundance of sunshine these diseases do not occur. In this connection remember that living plants or fresh green pastures are generally considered to be entirely free of this vitamin. Natural foods that contain vitamin D are of animal origin. Only hay cured in the sun contains vitamin D. Exposure to the direct sunlight is the principal source of this vitamin.

**Vitamin E**

Vitamin E is called the anti-sterility vitamin. There is some evidence that cattle and horses might suffer from a lack of this vitamin. It is found in concentrated form in cottonseed oil and wheat germ oil, bran, linseed meal, and green forage.

The importance of nutrition in prevention of diseases in animals must not be overemphasized, for highly destructive bacteria may invade the body and produce disease despite the care and attention it may have received. Likewise parasites may invade the body and destroy an animal that has received the best of care and attention so far as feeding is concerned.

A proper combination of the following constitutes the ideal ration for horses:

- yellow corn
- oats
- wheat bran
- linseed oil meal
- properly cured alfalfa
- clover
- heavy clover and timothy mixed
- lespedeza
- bluegrass pasture

This diet, together with plenty of sunshine and systematic parasite control, will go far in the development of the perfect horse.

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RANCH—

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the Santa Gertrudis, the Africander breed is larger and easier to handle.

**Spay Heifers**

The King ranch is one of the few ranches that practice spaying their heifers. About half of the heifers, the best ones of course, are selected for breeding purposes. The balance are spayed when about one year old, thereby eliminating poor offspring and overproduction of calves. The spayed heifers also grow fat more rapidly. The ranch veterinarian spays the heifers in the Argentine corral—a prize exhibit. From a raised platform and with the aid of a score of levers its operator can castrate, spay, dehorn, doctor, and brand the animals that pass below him so fast they do not know what has happened to them.

Cattle pens are elaborate mazes of wooden fencing surrounding the Argentine corral. Into one end is driven a thousand head of cattle pressed through like sausage meat going into a grinder. And, like sausage meat coming out, ribbons of them flutter into the fanning pens. They are sorted by swing gates, dexterously operated from above—steers in this pen, spayed heifers in that, old cows in another, young bulls in a fourth. Or they may all go plunging down through the dipping vat. Or each bull may pause,