

# Uniquely Singleton

Singleton Ranches, an agricultural conglomerate holding more than 1 million acres of land, has taken aim at a smaller piece of real estate—the show pen.

By MaryAnna Clemons



The acreage that defines Singleton  
Ranches includes vast holdings in  
New Mexico and California.



**W**hen trainer Todd Crawford won last year's Snaffle Bit Futurity on Smart Crackin Chic, Singleton Ranches was a relative newcomer to the horse show world. The ranching enterprise, however, will never be unknown in those circles again.

Headquartered in Lamy, New Mexico, Singleton Ranches closed out 2006 as the leading owner of reined cow horses for the year, with earnings totaling \$152,334. Additionally, their mare Smart Crackin Chic—sired by Smart Chic Olena and out of Kwackin, a daughter of Dual Pep—topped the list of highest-earning cow horses.

"She just seems to be a show horse," Crawford says of the flashy sorrel. "She's got lots of cow and a real even-keeled mind. The Singletons are also great to work with."

Crawford, of Blanchard, Oklahoma, seasoned Smart Crackin Chic with an \$8,065 reserve open championship at the August 2006 Big Show in Waco, Texas. Just a month later, the National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity title added \$100,000 to their coffers.

And because Singleton Ranches purchased Smart Crackin Chic through the 2005 NRCHA Select 2-Year-Old Sale, there was an added sale incentive of \$24,125 awarded to the mare as the top-advancing horse in the open futurity finals.

But Crawford wasn't the only big gun to spur a Singleton horse to success last year. Texas horseman Robbie Boyce was riding for the multifaceted agricultural company, as well. The ranch's "other" Snaffle Bit finalist was Soft N Shiney, sired by Shining Spark and out of Miss Softwood by Doctor Wood. The bay earned \$12,500 in Reno and was awarded \$3,369 for finishing in the open top five at both Waco and the Southwest Reined Cow Horse Association Fall Futurity.

Also campaigned in the Singleton colors was ARC Shining Please, by Chic Please and out of Shining Summer by Shining Spark, who was trained and shown by Bob Avila of Temecula, California. The buckskin mare was a finalist at the 2006 National Stock Horse Association Futurity in Fresno, California, and earned preliminary go-round money during the Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno. She missed being an open finalist in Reno by a mere half-point.

Singleton mares have added to their show horse archives by earning a combined total of \$61,903 this year—bringing their owner's

official Equi-Stat total to \$215,654 through March of 2007.

The way his family has pursued these good horses would have pleased the Singleton Ranch patriarch, Dr. Henry A. Singleton. The founder of Teledyne, Incorporated, a leading provider of technological components, Singleton loved ranching and good livestock. And, fortunately, since the doctor's death in 1999, his five children have continued to run the ranching operations and to enhance their father's vision. Caroline, Singleton's wife of 57 years, was also actively involved in the ranching business until her death last summer.

Henry Singleton's goal was to purchase and cultivate historically important land that would support his family, the ranching fami-

Entering the military during World War II, Singleton worked for the Office of Strategic Services. He later returned to MIT, completing his doctorate in electrical engineering in 1950.

After working briefly at General Electric, Singleton became a participant, along with a group of engineers and scientists, working for Hughes Aircraft. It was there that he gained a reputation as an innovator of electronic and robotic systems. By 1958, he had worked his way to the position of president and general manager of the electronics equipment division of Litton Industries.

Singleton co-founded Teledyne in partnership with George Kozmetsky in 1960, and the company grew into a multi-billion-dol-



Smart Crackin Chic, shown with rider Todd Crawford, topped the 2006 list of highest-earning cow horses.

lies that worked for him, and give his own children a legacy of land, cattle and horses of which they could be proud.

### Dr. Singleton, I Presume

The acreage that defines Singleton Ranches includes vast holdings in New Mexico and Central California, but Singleton's life began in 1916 in rural Haslet, Texas.

As a young man, Singleton attended the U.S. Naval Academy and furthered his education by earning his bachelor and masters degrees in electrical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

lar business that is now a leading supplier of sophisticated electronic components, instruments and communication products.

But Singleton's business savvy was not limited to the electrical engineering field. His passion for ranching and ranch country led him to purchase historic ranchlands and to establish cattle operations throughout them.

His first purchase in 1986 was of one of New Mexico's most historic ranches. Located between the Ortiz Mountains, Cerrillos Hills, Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the Jemez Mountains, lies the archeologically important Galisteo Basin, where the 81,000-acre San



ANNIE LAWBERT

The Singleton Ranches are home to the workers who operate the cattle and performance horse divisions.

Cristobal Ranch has operated for some 400 years.

Under blue skies approximately 300 days of the year, the San Cristobal acreage has been occupied by the ancient Paleo and Anasazi Indians, as well as by the Spanish conquistadors. Today, the land, which is only about 15 miles from Santa Fe, is home to the ranch families who operate the San Cristobal's cattle and performance horse operations.

In honor of tradition, the Singletons have habitually kept the historic names of all their holdings. In New Mexico, the San Cristobal to the Aqua Verde, Bar Y, Latigo, Conchas,

Bigbee/Lobo, Trigg, Bojax and Dunlap/Perez ranches all carry their original appellations. Dr. Singleton bought 29 New Mexico ranches over a 14-year period. In addition to more than 1 million deeded acres, there are 165,000 acres leased from the state.

Grant Mitchell has been employed by Singleton Ranches for approximately nine years, working his way up to his current position as San Cristobal's ranch manager and taking charge of the performance horse division. Mitchell resides on the ranch with his wife, Connie, and their young sons, Trey, 6, and Sterlin, 2.

Alex Carone and Jeff Bilberry manage the balance of the New Mexico ranches. They tend 9,000 to 11,000 mother cows, and, on years with plentiful grasses, there have been as many as 12,000 to 15,000, along with a substantial number of yearlings. Singletons often keep their calves until they are yearlings and add stockers on good feed years.

These properties have given Singleton Ranches the distinction of being the largest cow-calf operation in New Mexico and, including their California ranches, among the top five ranching operations in the United States.

The Salinas Valley in Central California runs along the San Andreas fault, not too far inland from the Pacific Ocean. There, the Singletons own the historic Peachtree and Topo ranches—a combined 90,000 acres (approximately 45,000 acres each) of land conducive to growing yearling cattle. Both ranches were once part of the Mexican San Lorenzo Land Grant of 1842.

Bill Whitney, who manages both operations, is familiar with the area, having grown up in a ranching family nearby. Because of several drought years, the Peachtree is down to about 500 cows and 4,500 yearlings, while the Topo supports 500 cows and 8,500 yearlings. Whitney, his wife, Karin, and nine full-time cowboys and their families live on those ranches.

Several hours southeast, snuggled into the foothills of the Sequoia National Forest above the San Joaquin Valley, lies the Singleton's River Island Ranch. Ty Burk, with the help of his wife, Nicole, manages more than 10,000 acres that roll around and beyond the old Butterfield stage stop and the cow town of Springville. The job is a natural for Burk, as he is the fifth generation of a family whose members have all made their livings solely working as cattlemen.

River Island runs 400 mother cows and approximately 1,500 stockers, with those numbers dependant on the availability of good grass. The Burks are well mounted on their own performance-bred horses. Both are currently riding 3-year-olds purchased from cow horse trainer Russell Dilday in nearby Porterville.

## Better Horseflesh

The Singleton's equine breeding program originated from the need to mount their many cowboys on strong, dependable horses. That the program has worked is evidenced by

Singleton Ranches being presented the New Mexico Best Remuda Award in 2004. At the New Mexico State Fair Rodeo, where they accepted the honor, 20 Singleton cowboys sat astride Singleton-bred horses during the ceremony.

According to Mitchell, several men have been instrumental in guiding the Singleton Ranches' horse operation toward new goals in the show pen. Bob Patterson, former general manager of all the Singleton Ranches, took a large step toward upgrading the equine population before he left to work for Wagonhound Land & Livestock in Douglas, Wyoming.

"Harper McFarland [now deceased] ran this ranch for 50 years," Mitchell explains. "The ranch changed ownership about four times under his management; he ran the San Cristobal until he retired in 1999. He also managed the horse program and upgraded it to keep our cowboys well supplied with horses.

"Leroy Webb ran quite a few of the mares," Mitchell adds. "He ran a bunch of the mares at the Santa Rosa division [Conchas Ranches]. There were nearly 100 mares at one time, part here at San Cristobal and part at Santa Rosa. Everything has since been moved here and we have downsized to about 50 registered mares."

Patterson, who now resides in Texas, researched and purchased the two stallions that stand at the horse division in New Mexico, Dualwithme and Timbercat 101. Both horses are lightly shown 6-year-olds, and were purchased at the National Cutting Horse Association Futurity Sales as 2-year-olds on cattle.

Dualwithme is a son of Dual Pep and out of Cowstruck by Smart Little Lena. He was bred by the Oxbow Ranch of Weatherford, Texas.

Shown mostly by Bobby Lewis, Dualwithme earned an AQHA Superior rating in cutting. In 2006, he won high-point AQHA junior cutting honors and finished 10th at the AQHA World Show in junior cutting. He also qualified for the World Show cutting this year and will be shown by Lewis.

Phil and Mary Ann Rapp, also from Weatherford, bred Timber Cat 101. By Doc's Hickory and out of Cats Full Measure, a champion daughter of High Brow Cat, the bay was shown in cutting classes by Terry Riddle, Jerry Lucas and Bob Patterson.

Working toward goals planned roughly five years in advance, the breeding and performance aspects of the Singleton's horse project are gaining momentum. The plan is a growing, flexible entity designed to add good horses to



Singleton cowboys settle cattle after a morning gather at River Island Ranch in California.



River Island Ranch manager Ty Burk prepares to ship weanling cattle as his wife, Nicole, waters their cow bred 3-year-olds.

the remuda, while sending the better mares to the show pen with respected trainers.

The young mares are culled with a critical eye, according to Mitchell, and the keepers are generally aimed at the cow horse and cutting disciplines. Horses are marketed all year, either through sales or via private treaty. Purchased prospects usually come from auctions such as the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Select 2-Year-

Old and NCHA Futurity Sales.

"There are 35 to 40 Singleton cowboys in New Mexico who all want five to eight geldings," says Mitchell. "We wean between 30 to 35 horses every year. Unless they are terribly promising, all the geldings go to the ranch cowboys. The mares—even the better ones aimed at the show pen—get broke and ridden the same as the cowboy horses early on."

## Family First



Singleton cowboys often ride through ruins dating back from 300 to 1,500 years during their work day. They ride past Indian pueblos, ancient petroglyphs and across land that holds the remains of old Spanish forts and missions. The Singleton family and their employees are fiercely proud of their present lifestyle and their efforts at preserving the past.

And in an era of broken promises and downsizing, employer/employee relations at Singleton Ranches are of the old school, where respect and work ethic are still appreciated.

The emphasis on family life is a welcome addition to this workplace, too. Singleton Ranches provides their hired help with ample housing, horses good enough to shorten a lengthy gather and plenty of beef in the kitchen. The return comes from some 30 families with loyalty for the brand they ride.

Alex Carone is a general manager of 750 sections, or roughly 500,000 acres, in New Mexico. He has worked for Singleton Ranches for more than 11 years and can still say, "I'm just really proud to work here."

Horse division resident trainer Terry Riddle is also high on his bosses. He appreciates being a part of protecting historically important lands, cultivating well-bred, useable horses and receiving support with family issues.

Sizing up his thoughts on working for Singleton Ranches, Riddle notes, "There's just not one bad thing here."

Ironically, the younger hands often pass their more-seasoned horses along to the older cowboys.

"Some of the ranch geldings are sold to the general public and we have donated a few to some of the hippotherapy groups," Mitchell says. "All cowboys have their special horses that they're going to keep until they die; they just don't turn loose of them.

"We'd like to show all the mares and get black type on them before putting them into the mare band. We know how good some of these mares are [from using them], but the black type is all that shows up on the pedigree page."

The current show mares have been bred, which should jumpstart their genetics into the horse program. Smart Crackin Chic was bred twice—a Shining Spark embryo was sold, while the ranch is retaining a Boonlight Dancer embryo transfer. And while 2008 breeding decisions have not been confirmed for Soft N Shiney and ARC Shining Please, the mares currently have embryos by Sophisticated Cat and Light N Fine, respectively, in recipient mares.

"For 2008, we sold one of [Smart Crackin Chic's] embryos that will go to High Brow Cat or Peptoboonsmal," says Mitchell. "We plan to keep a One Time Pepto."

Crossing their 40-plus broodmares with qualified stallions and handling outside mares keeps everyone at the horse unit busy. Fortunately, local veterinarian Stuart McCall handles the actual medical care for the facility, where all breeding is done by artificial insemination.

"It's still a process," Grant explains of Singleton's breeding program. "We're trying to build on our black-type mares for really good babies. You have to have a really good mom to have a great baby, and we want our program moving forward genetically. We're crossing some of our better mares with some of the best-producing stallions out there."

## Workin' Class

Young horses are started for the Singletons by ranch trainer Terry Riddle, who is no relation to the NCHA trainer of the same name. A three-year employee of the ranch, Riddle is assisted by Ty Crotwell.

All the horses get a real education in "Ranch 101" no matter what their future holds, according to both Mitchell and Riddle. They are used for gathering, dragging, sorting and anything else that needs to be done at the ranch. It is all part of the training process.

"That is an important step for us," says Mitchell. "It makes the horses grow up so much faster. You can just see them—we start them, make a big circle on them, let them get out and go, and when they come back they are just a different horse, a lot more mature in a hurry."

A "big circle" is ranch-speak for covering a lot of ground. There are no ATVs or mechanized equipment of any type used to gather Singleton Ranches' cattle.

"We've got lots of 20- and 30-section [12,000- to 18,000-acre] pastures," Mitchell explains. "The younger guys will ride the perimeter of that pasture, the outside or big circle, and kick cattle off the fences to guys making a smaller loop inside of them. The outside horses are usually the younger ones, and they go 15 to 20 miles pretty easy."

That hard work must make the horses' eventual show duties seem effortless. Riddle is the main ranch employee who shows in the reined cow horse and cutting events. His Snaffle Bit Futurity entry this year did not make it to Reno, but more than likely will be shown as a 4-year-old at NRCHA major aged events. And, Terry has Linda Boon Boom, by Peptoboonsmal and out of a daughter of Smart Little Lena, showing at the NCHA Futurity.

San Cristobal Ranch in New Mexico was Dr. Henry Singleton's first purchase.



JOHN BRASSEUX

“Our main emphasis is on the cowboys’ horses,” says Riddle. “All of our 2-year-olds are raised in rough country. We take them to the round pen and arena for 10 days, and then we go outside with them. Every gelding is started with the intent of going to a cowboy.”

The Singleton Ranches’ remuda employs 200 to 300 geldings in total, with the number of horses allotted to each hand in a state of flux. The cow hands’ personal preferences often dictate the number of mounts for each.

“We are all real proud of our stallions’ genetics,” says Carone, who has managed more than 500,000 acres of Singleton cattle country for 11 years. “The offspring that make it out here to our cowboys are good. We use horses for every part of our business, so that is really important. And Terry is a top hand, as is everyone that works here.”

Even the stallions are used for ranch work or shown when not preoccupied during the breeding season.

Riddle, along with many of the ranch cowboys, enjoys competing as a change of pace. He has done well with SCR Whiskey Sunshine, a daughter of Paddys Irish Whiskey and out of

Sonitas Sunshine by Sonitas Smoke. The mare won the ranch horse competition at the famed New Mexico Championship Ranch Rodeo in Roswell in 2005. That same year, Riddle rode the mare to a third-place finish in the ranch horse division at the World Championship Ranch Rodeo in Amarillo, Texas.

Multiple cowboys are riding Singleton

**“The offspring that make it out here to our cowboys are good. We use horses for every part of our business, so that is really important. And [ranch trainer] Terry [Riddle] is a top hand.”**  
—Alex Carone

horses at major roping and ranch horse events with success.

“We go to whatever event is closest,” Mitchell confirms with a laugh. “We’re so far from everything, it’s hard to get anywhere.”

Jeff Bilberry’s daughter, Tori, took a Singleton Ranches-bred horse to college at New Mexico State. After doing well in high school rodeo, the gelding and Tori have been consistent winners in goat tying and breakaway roping at the college level.

The Singletons host several clinics each year at San Cristobal. Bob Avila, Les Vogt, Andy Adams and others offer their expertise in cutting, reining, cow horse and ranch versatility annually, and it doesn’t take much arm twisting to coax the ranch into putting on a cutting now and then, either.

Mitchell, Riddle and their protégés care-

fully scrutinize Singleton horse flesh from a different angle.

Analyzing a horse’s mindset and closely evaluating conformation is more important to them now than ever before.

“We’re trying to go for better pedigrees and learning more and more about the mare’s offspring and showing abilities,” Mitchell confirms. “It’s really a team effort and we’ve gotten good advice and help from people who are very knowledgeable about good horses.”