



"What is a production sale": There are different kinds of sales from which to purchase a horse – consignment, dispersal and production. Learn more about production sales as two South Dakota families prepare for their annual events.

*Ranch horse sales  
are a foundation  
of the industry.*

**By Richard  
Chamberlain**

*IF THERE IS ONE KIND OF HORSE THAT IN the public mind represents the American Quarter Horse: It's the ranch horse, the horse of the cowboy.*

*Many of the best of that kind come off ranches that are AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders.*

*Ranching Heritage Breeders embody the longevity, integrity and honesty of the ranching tradition. Members breed and raise the ranch-type horse, which remains at the core of AQHA and epitomizes the breed's versatility.*

# A Solid *Ride*





ANDREW HANCOCK/  
COURTESY OF THE FOUR SIXES RANCH

*Among other qualifications, participating ranches must be members of AQHA, the ranch must have received at least an AQHA 10-year breeder award, the broodmare band must comprise at least five Quarter Horse mares that are used to produce the remuda, and the remuda must consist of Quarter Horses used primarily to work cattle on the ranch.*

*Foals raised by Ranching Heritage Breeders are eligible for nomination to the Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges, competitions that highlight the versatility, soundness and willing attitude of ranch-born and -raised Quarter Horses.*

*The Ranching Heritage Breeders program recognizes AQHA's ranching members who have steadfastly maintained the ranching tradition by raising horses for working cattle. Through a series of ranch horse competitions, the Ranching Heritage Challenge increases demand for*

*ranch horses by providing opportunities for ranches and horse owners to compete for significant purses in unique ranch horse competitions.*

*"We in the industry have to be honest, because one bad horse deal costs you more than you might realize," says Stan Weaver, chairman of the AQHA Ranching Council. "If you're selling horses and you're in this business to stay, you have to be really honest. That's what we stress as Rancher Heritage Breeders: To become a breeder, you have to have integrity — that if something goes wrong, you'll stand behind your horse and make any adjustments needed. You tell the truth about your horse. You have to have pride in your program, you have to be honest, you want people to like your horses, you want people to buy them and you want them to come back. It's just good business and good for the industry when we're all that way."*



## Need a horse?

HOW ABOUT A GOOD, SOUND, WELL-BROKE GELDING IN THE prime of life? One that has been through the mill, seen it all and can do it all?

You might find just what you're looking for at a ranch sale.

"A good finished gelding is what's really in demand right now," says Stan Weaver, who ranches at Big Sandy, Montana. "When people are looking for horses, like trail horses or just riding horses but even arena horses, that's what they're looking for – the ranch horse, something that's been used on the ranch, been down the road a little bit and seen everything. They're not like the horse that's just had 30 days riding in an arena but never got outside. These ranch horses, after three or four rides, are outside, and once those horses have been used on the ranch for two or three years, they are starting to get pretty seasoned. They've seen it all, they've done it all. They see something strange and they won't blow up. That's why they're so popular right now, that's why they're selling so well and that's why the ranch sales are doing so well."

The chairman of the AQHA Ranching Council, Stan, 62, and his wife, Nancy, have been breeding American Quarter Horses in their own name since 1980. But their roots in ranching go much deeper. Born and raised on the ranch, Stan is the fourth generation of his family in the Big Sky Country, where their brand was recorded in 1888, before Montana became a state. With about 15,000 acres deeded and other land leased, the Weavers run about 90 mares and 550 mother cows, and conduct a production sale each year the third Saturday of September.

"Ranchers are kind of the backbone of the industry, ranch horses are the backbone of the breed, and ranch sales have become the backbone of the business," Stan says. "Ranch horses, to a great extent, are what people envision when they think of a Quarter Horse. The reason that the horses are so popular is because they have seen everything, they've done it all, they're gentle, they're the ones for people who are looking for just a horse, whether it be for themselves or their kids or someone else. They're the horses that people are looking for nowadays."

## Sale Horses

ONE OF THE LEADING AUCTIONS IS ON THE BURNETT RANCH'S fabled Four Sixes Ranch at Guthrie, Texas, which had its first ranch sale in 1996 and now conducts its annual Return to the Remuda sale in partnership with the neighboring Pitchfork Land and Cattle Co., Tongue River Ranch and Beggs Cattle Co. This year's sale is in October, with demonstrations on October 10 and the sale on October 11.



Demonstrations at many ranch horse sales let buyers see the sale horses in action.

The "Sixes" each year offers horses at various Quarter Horse sales, including racing prospects at premiere auctions such as the Ruidoso Select and Heritage Place sales. Another sale featuring the Sixes' working ranch horses is the Legends of Ranching Sale each April at Colorado State University, in which the ranch is one of those providing young horses to CSU students, who then train and prep them for the sale.

"We get people who just want a good horse to ride for recreation, whether it be horseback riding, trail riding, weekend riding," says Four Sixes Horse Division Manager Dr. Glenn Blodgett, who is also a member of the AQHA Executive Committee. "We get people who have a small ranching operation and need a horse to support that. We get people who buy some of the young fillies to make broodmares out of them – some of them make broodmares out of them right away, some might ride them a little bit and even make show horses out of them for a while before they make broodmares out of them. These ranch horses are all-around, versatile-type horses. They have seen it all, they've done it all and they fit a lot of different situations."

They encountered those situations in the Sixes remuda. Each cowboy has a string of horses assigned to him alone, and each string includes young, green horses and older, seasoned horses.

It's the same in the sale.

"We've always have a group of younger horses and a group of older horses in the sale," Dr. Blodgett says. "We usually have a few geldings from, say, 7 to 15 years of age, seasoned geldings that have been used all over the ranch and everything has been done on them. Then we always have a few younger geldings and fillies, from 2 to 4 years of age. They wouldn't be nearly as broke and seasoned, and wouldn't be for novice-type riders, but they are off to a good start. We try not to ever put anything in the sale that has a problem – at any age."

Deciding to keep or sell a horse usually is up to the individual cowboy.



At the Legends of Ranching Sale each April at Colorado State University, a number of ranches contribute horses to CSU. Then students train and prep them for the sale.



“We try not to ever tell our cowboys, ‘We want you to sell a particular horse,’ ” Dr. Blodgett says. “We always ask them, ‘Do you have any in your string that you want to put in the sale this year?’ Sometimes they do, sometimes they don’t.”

Once the decision is made to sell, the horse’s abilities are demonstrated to the public.

“We always try to demo them the day before, and each horse is demoed by the cowboy who has been riding him,” says Dr. Blodgett. “People get a chance to see the cowboys ride them, and they can talk and visit with them, hear about what they’ve been doing and so forth.

“We try to show them as many different ways as the cowboys riding them want to. At a minimum, the demo involves kind of a dry working pattern in an arena, with some lead changes, loping circles, stopping and turning around, and some of the horses will work a cow out of a herd. Some of the horses have been teamed roped on, and the cowboys demonstrate that. If they’ve just been pastured roped but haven’t team roped, they might just rope on them, stop them and turn them loose. The younger horses – the 2-year-olds in particular that have only had 60-90 days riding – are usually just shown in a dry pattern.”

That’s in Texas. Up in Montana, Stan’s grandchildren are the sixth generation to ride horses under the Weaver family brand, and the whole family – Stan and Nancy, their adult daughter and two sons, and a grandson (“who is really active, really likes the horses”) all contribute on the ranch and at the sale.

“We start our horses in the fall of their 2-year-old year, then we ride them through the spring of their 3-year-old year,” Stan says. “Then about the first of June or so, we decide which horses are going to be in the sale, and those horses are all we ride ’til sale time.

“Our horses typically are 3-6 years old – 6 is kind of old for us,” he says. “We don’t keep them too long because we’re

turning them over all the time. We don’t train them for any specific thing, like to be an arena horse or a barrel horse. We just give them a good foundation. We work cattle on them, we sort pairs on them, we pasture rope on them, drag calves to the fire on them. We try to expose them to everything and put a good handle on them.

“And then we sell them,” Stan says. “We turn them over every year. We’ve had horses go just about everywhere – we had a horse that went to the College National Finals as a bulldogging horse, had quite a few that that are rope horses and we’ve had one that became an AQHA Champion.”

That would be Ima Tuf Missy, a 2004 black mare by Ima Tuf Lena, who was an AQHA all-around high-point mare and high-point junior horse, reserve world champion heading horse, showed at the AQHA World Championship Show in heeling and barrel racing, and last August moved to Brazil.

“People buy a lot of our horses just to be trail horses,” Stan adds. “That’s why we don’t try to do any one specific thing with them, just give them a good foundation, and then whoever buys them can go on with them and do whatever they want.”

Last year was the Weavers’ 18th sale.

“And we’ve sold to all 50 states, seven Canadian provinces, South Africa, Australia, Germany, Sweden – all from our sale in Great Falls,” he says. “For us, it’s a good little business. We need the horses, we raise them, we know the horses, we use them and we’re always turning them over. It’s just another form of diversification of the ranch.”

## The Buyers

AS RANCH SALES HAVE GROWN IN POPULARITY, PEOPLE HAVE come from ever farther and wider – or watched and bid by phone and Internet – to the Weaver sale, the Four Sixes sale and other AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder sales. Those include the Zollinger Ranch at Oakley, Idaho, and the Pitzer Ranch at





Ericson, Nebraska, where Howard Pitzer developed Two Eyed Jack into one of the breed's most dominant sires.

"We sell a lot of horses to guys who do a little day work and help their neighbors, but most of them probably have another job somewhere else," says Pitzer's grandson Jim Brinkman, who at the 1978 AQHA World Show showed Vickie Lee Pine to the title as the first AQHA Superhorse and now manages the family's ranching operations.

"They do a little trail riding, go to some rodeos and jackpots and that sort of deal, kind of a semi-hobby cowboy. An awful lot of our horses go to ropers anymore, too. The ropers, team penners and barrel racers are strong and take a lot of horses. There is so much money in that now – team roping gave away something like \$34 million last year and there's a division for everybody. Team penning and barrel racing are the same way. They've become real big markets."

Jim notes that a lot of ranchers today use pickups and four-wheelers for their ranch chores, and save their horses primarily for weekend ropings and other hobby pursuits. But there still are those ranches where horses fill their traditional role and those ranchers who value and work ranch horses.

"I buy nearly all the geldings we use," says AQHA President Johnny Trotter, who ranches in the Texas Panhandle and finishes cattle in his 125,000-head Bar-G Feedyard at Hereford. "I buy all kinds of horses – to go to the arena with, to go to the feedyard with, to go to the ranches with. The main thing I look for is a big kind eye, a good shallow mouth and the points that make good horses, like big flat bones, with no bumps or blemishes that are going to hurt them. Not to say that we don't buy some with a skinned mark, a scar or something like that, but nothing on the knee or ankle that is going to cause problems. We want a good, solid, stand-up, stay-sound kind of horse."

"So it's down to the individual. You look at the breeding and where he comes from. You want the horse to watch a cow and have some speed. But you've got to look at the individual."

And the best time and place to see the individual is before he comes into the ring.

"I always look at them before they get to the sale arena," Johnny says. "You've got to get there in time to look at everything. Attitude has a lot to do with it. When you walk in and be with a horse, you can tell what he's going to be like, whether he's going



COURTESY OF THE FOUR SIXES RANCH/ANDREW HANCOCK

to let you catch him, whether he's a bronc or whatever. You can tell pretty quick moving them around how they're going to be."

Finally ...

"I look at the ranch and I put a lot of emphasis on who's been riding them," he says. "Every cowboy has a history with horses and how he gets along with them. It makes a lot of difference, especially with 2-year-olds, on who started them."

But what do you do if you are not well acquainted with specific cowboys, or for that matter, with ranch sales in general?

"I'd recommend you get with somebody who's going to be there and you can trust, somebody who could help you," Johnny says. "You're not looking for a horse trader – you want somebody who will level with you and help you find what you need."

And ultimately, that's the key.

"The typical person who buys our horses lives on the edge of town, has three or four horses and is a weekend rider," Stan says. "We try to talk with each of our buyers and find out what they want and what they expect. If you find out the level of the horse rider, then you can usually put them with the right horse. You don't want to put a novice or someone like that on a horse that maybe doesn't have quite the training or seasoning."

It works for them. The last three or four years, 84 percent of the Weaver-bred horses have gone to repeat buyers.



COURTESY OF THE FOUR SIXES RANCH/ANDREW HANCOCK



"Maybe they don't come back every year, but they'll buy a couple colts, ride them for two or three years, sell them and come back and buy a couple more," Stan says. "We have a real good clientele. It's a source of pride, and we really work at it."

"It's still important to have an attractive horse that's functionally correct, that has good feet and legs, and not a bronc," Jim says. "That's what everybody wants now. If you're selling horses at a ranch sale, you're not going to top the market – you're not going to get the kind of money you get at the futurity sales. But you can sell that good horse consistently, every day of the week to every other guy who comes in, and he'll have a home for life."

"They get that good rope horse, that good trail horse, whatever, and they'll keep him," Jim continues. "It's a real solid market. It's like selling half-ton pickups – everybody would sure like to have one if they don't already have one, and if they do have one, they're looking for another one. It's really the hobby guys who are our market anymore, the guys who use horses as a hobby. It's a real solid market."

The Pitzer Ranch has a couple sales each year, including a spring sale each April and a fall sale in September. The ranch's offerings run the gamut: young and older geldings, broke mares, broodmares, studs, yearlings, etc.

"Usually in the fall, we'll have roughly 550-600 head in the total mix," Jim says. "At our spring sale (April 25-26), we sold 278 head for a \$5,178 average. We sold 141 geldings for an average of \$7,264, ages 4-14 mostly, and of those, we probably roped on 130 of them. I

# 2014 AQHA RANCHING HERITAGE BREEDER SALES

## July

12

**Babbitt Ranches Annual Colt Sale**  
Flagstaff, Arizona

## August

30

**Lopez, Meyer, Lauing Production Sale**  
Faith, South Dakota

## September

5-6

**Pitzer Ranch Fall Sale**  
Ericson, Nebraska  
[www.pitzerranch.net](http://www.pitzerranch.net)

6

**Open Box Rafter Ranch**  
Rapid City, South Dakota  
[www.rafterranch.com](http://www.rafterranch.com)

13

**Wagon Wheel Ranch**  
Lometa, Texas

14

**Raymond Sutton Quarter Horses**  
Gettysburg, South Dakota

20

**K2 Ranch (Killian Quarter Horses)  
and Walker 4W Quarter Horses**  
Ozark Foundation Breeder's  
Association's 14th Annual  
Production Sale  
Midway, Arkansas  
[www.ofbahorsesale.com](http://www.ofbahorsesale.com) or  
[www.killianquarterhorses.com](http://www.killianquarterhorses.com)

don't mean every one of them were haulable, but they were in various stages: Some were green-started and some were ready to go wherever you wanted to go, anywhere. There were a number of older geldings that have been there and done it all; horses that were 12 years old and ready to haul would bring \$20,000 or better just because they're ready."

## At the Sale

SO YOU'RE AT THE RANCH SALE. YOU'VE studied the catalog, looked at the horses in their pens, watched the demos.

The first horse comes in the ring, the sale is on.

"At our sale, the average price on a younger horse is \$5,000-6,000 and the average price on the older horses is \$7,000-8,000," Dr. Blodgett says. "Those are averages. We've sold some geldings really, really high, and have sold some fillies and stud prospects really high, too."

Now we're talking auction here, where the final price is determined by what anyone else is willing to pay.

So, yeah, that prospect you're looking at might not go quite as "cheap" – quote, unquote – as you might have hoped. On the other hand, it's just as likely to go even cheaper.

Either way, when you take in the total package – good, sound, well-broke, prime of life, been through the mill, seen it all, does it all – that just might be the best bargain you'll ever have the good fortune to find in a saddle horse. ☐

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