

The First Family

Condensed version of Chapter 4 from the new book
King P-234, by Frank Holmes.



Queen H, a 1936 sorrel mare by Dan and out of a Nail Quarter mare, provided the distaff power for the first great King cross.
Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal

At the time AQHA was formed in the spring of 1940, King was an 8-year-old. One of the first orders of business for the new association was the creation of organized horse shows. Although King was an aged horse, Jess Hankins felt compelled to test the waters with him in sanctioned competition and showed him at halter five times.

On July 4, 1941, King placed second to Dexter P-193 in the aged stallion competition at Stamford, Texas; on October 2, 1941, he was named the champion aged stallion at Abilene, Texas; and on October 26, 1941, he placed second to Little Joe Jr. P-430 in the aged stallion class at Eagle Pass, Texas.

In March of 1942, King placed second to Red Jacket P-255 at the Southwestern Livestock Exposition and Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth, Texas. Later that same year, he put the wraps on his brief halter career by being named the grand champion stallion at a show in San Angelo, Texas.

King was also entered in several performance competitions.

At the 1941 Abilene show, he was named the champion stock horse. At the 1942 Southwestern Livestock Exposition, he won a reining go-round, placed second in the reining finals, and

second in the cutting.

From the very beginning, however, it was apparent that King's true calling was not as a show horse, but rather as a sire.

Even prior to the formation of AQHA, King P-234 had put a number of get on the ground that went on to make solid contributions as performers and/or breeding animals. Among them were two sons—King April and King Gotch—and two mares—Clyde Sis and Dipsydoodle Milligan. These four individuals were joined in short order by three additional sons of note: King Joe, Cuellar and Jess Hankins.

Together, these horses secured King a solid rating as a top regional sire. What was needed now was a second, better set of horses to propel King into the national limelight.

In the spring of 1941, a small bay filly was born that would set that ball in motion. Bred by J.O. Hankins of Rocksprings, the filly was the first of several full siblings to result from "El Primero Dorado Cruz," the first golden cross.

J.O., born on November 22, 1917, was the third and youngest of the Hankins boys. Like his brothers before him, he opted early on for a farming and ranching lifestyle.



Here is a rare, never-before-published, shot of King P-234 in his prime. Although the exact date and location of this photo are unknown, the show ribbon affixed to King's halter narrows the date to 1941 or 1942. Courtesy American Quarter Horse Heritage Center & Museum, Amarillo, Texas



Duchess H, a 1940 bay mare by King and out of Queen H, was the earliest representative of "El Primero Dorado Cruz" – the first golden cross.
Courtesy AQHA Heritage Center & Museum

To begin with, J.O. farmed with his father, J.L. Hankins, in the Abilene, Texas, area. In 1935, at the age of 18, he bought a ranch 20 miles northeast of Rocksprings. For several years, he and his wife, the former Velma Clark, continued to maintain an Abilene residence and commute back and forth to the Rocksprings ranch. In the late 1930s, the young couple relocated to the southern location.

In the winter of 1939, J.O. decided to follow the lead of his oldest brother and get into the Quarter Horse business. In the hunt for a young broodmare prospect, he and his father attended an Abilene auction.

J.O. was bidding on a young mare when a local farmer named Hay—who knew the elder Hankins—approached him and said that he had a nice filly he would like to sell. His asking price was \$100, a pretty steep amount at the time.

J.O.'s interest was aroused though, so he said that he would look the filly over the next time he was in town. A month later, the younger Hankins drove up from Rocksprings, collected his father and continued on to the Hay farm.

Once there, the Hankins duo was treated to the sight of a 3-year-old, blaze-faced mare of exceptional quality. Still, \$100 was a lot of money to give for a Depression-era horse, so J.O. told Hay that he would think the matter over and get back to him within a couple of days.



Sold to B. A. Skipper Jr. on Longview, Texas, Squaw King displayed great potential as a cutting horse. Skipper's death in a 1962 airplane crash, ended the talented stallion's budding show career. Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal

At that point, J.O.'s father spoke up and told Hay that he could consider the filly sold, that if his son didn't take her, he would.

"After my dad said he would take her," J.O. later recalled, "I knew I had to have her. My dad wouldn't give \$100 for a horse unless it was a good one."

"Queen," the object of the Hankins' interest, was a 1936 sorrel mare by Dan and out of a Nail Quarter mare. Dan was, in turn, a 1920 sorrel stallion by Weatherford Joe Bailey and out of June Bug by Harvester (TB). Weatherford Joe Bailey, like so many other good horses of that day, was a line-bred descendant of Old Billy and Piasana. The Nail Quarter Mare was of unknown breeding.

Queen, who was subsequently registered with AQHA as Queen H, was in foal to a Percheron stallion at the time of her purchase. She gave birth to her half-draft foal on April 19, 1939, and was bred to King P-234 eight days later. On April 24, 1940, she foaled a bay filly that was—to say the least—something of a disappointment.

"[She was] the ugliest thing I had ever seen," J.O. said. "I was ashamed for anyone to see the dang thing and offered to take \$75 for her. But nobody wanted her. Later on, when she had filled out a little, you wouldn't hardly have known her.

"In July, I took her to a colt show in Kerrville and she placed first in her class. The following July, I took her to Stamford, and although only a yearling, she was named Grand Champion Mare. I called her Duchess H."

Queen H was re-bred to King in 1940 and gave birth to a second sorrel filly on April 19, 1941. J.O. named her Squaw H, after Coke Roberds' famed Peter McCue daughter, "Old Squaw," and immediately began preparing her for a show and racing career.

"I broke her to the saddle right here on the ranch," J.O. said. "My wife first rode her bareback while I led her around. Then I rode her about the ranch for about two months before I started training her to run. For that purpose, I took her to Jess Barker at Sonora 20 days before the Eagle Pass meet that year [1943]."

At Eagle Pass, Texas, Squaw H was raced twice and recorded one win and one second. The following spring, she made two starts at Cowboy Park in El Paso, Texas. After winning her first race there, she was matched in a second contest against a field that included Shue Fly—the reigning Champion Quarter Running Mare. Shue Fly won the 340-yard sprint, with Squaw H finishing second by a half-length.

After the El Paso meet, Squaw H was trailered home to the Hankins ranch and turned out on pasture for several months. Taken back up in early fall, she was sent to Blain Speers for conditioning.

One month later, Speers entered the mare in the Quarter



Joe Hank, a 1954 bay stallion by King and out of Queen H, was first golden cross's sole AQHA Champion performer. Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal

Mile Championship at the 1944 New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque. Pitted against the formidable Shue Fly and equally dangerous Queenie, she managed to eke out a third-place finish.

From Albuquerque, Speers hauled Squaw H to the Eagle Pass fall meet. Matched against the good Flying Bob daughter Rosedale in a 350-yard affair, she won it handily. Then, on October 29, 1944, the Hankins mare ran what is generally conceded to have been her best race. The occasion was the Eagle Pass Derby, and the distance was 440 yards. At the finish line, it was Squaw H by a nose over a deep field of horses that included Chovasco (Maggie), Punkin, Queenie and Jimmy.

In the 1945 World's Championship Quarter, held at Rillito, Squaw H finished second by a head to Queenie—the 1945-46 Champion Quarter Running Horse. Shown at halter in the big Tucson Livestock Show, the race-fit mare was named the grand champion model cow horse mare.

In seven racing seasons—1943 through 1949—Squaw H made 19 official starts. Competing at distances ranging from 220 to 440 yards, she notched seven firsts, eight seconds and two thirds. In her last race, run in March of 1949, "Squaw" won the 250-yard Tucson Speed Stakes over Leota W, Miss Panama and Wagon N. Her time of :13.6 established a new world's record for mares and was only one-tenth of a second off the overall world's record.

Although Squaw H was not the first of the King horses to achieve success as a performer, she was without a doubt the first to attain superstar status. She was also unique in several other

ways.

To begin with, she was a dyed-in-the-wool Billy horse who, without the benefit of any Thoroughbred blood, met and defeated the top “hot-blooded” racehorses of her era.

Secondly, she was a Quarter Horse with classic “bulldog” conformation who also managed to qualify as one of the breed’s first AAA-rated sprinters.

Finally, and more important in the over-all scheme of things, Squaw’s stellar show and racing achievements focused national attention on the King P-234 family of horses in general, and the King/Queen H golden cross in particular.

And that cross was just firing up.

Hank H, a 1942 sorrel stallion, was the family’s next addition. One of the best-looking King horses of all time, Hank H went on to achieve success as a show horse, racehorse and sire. He will be profiled in a subsequent chapter.

Flapper H, a 1944 chestnut mare, came next. Unlike her three older siblings, “Flapper” was not shown or raced. Used primarily as a broodmare, she was the dam of Hard Twist II, a Register of Merit racehorse; and Flapper’s Breeze, an AQHA

Champion.

Booger H, a 1945 chestnut stallion, was the fifth member of the King/Queen combine to be foaled.

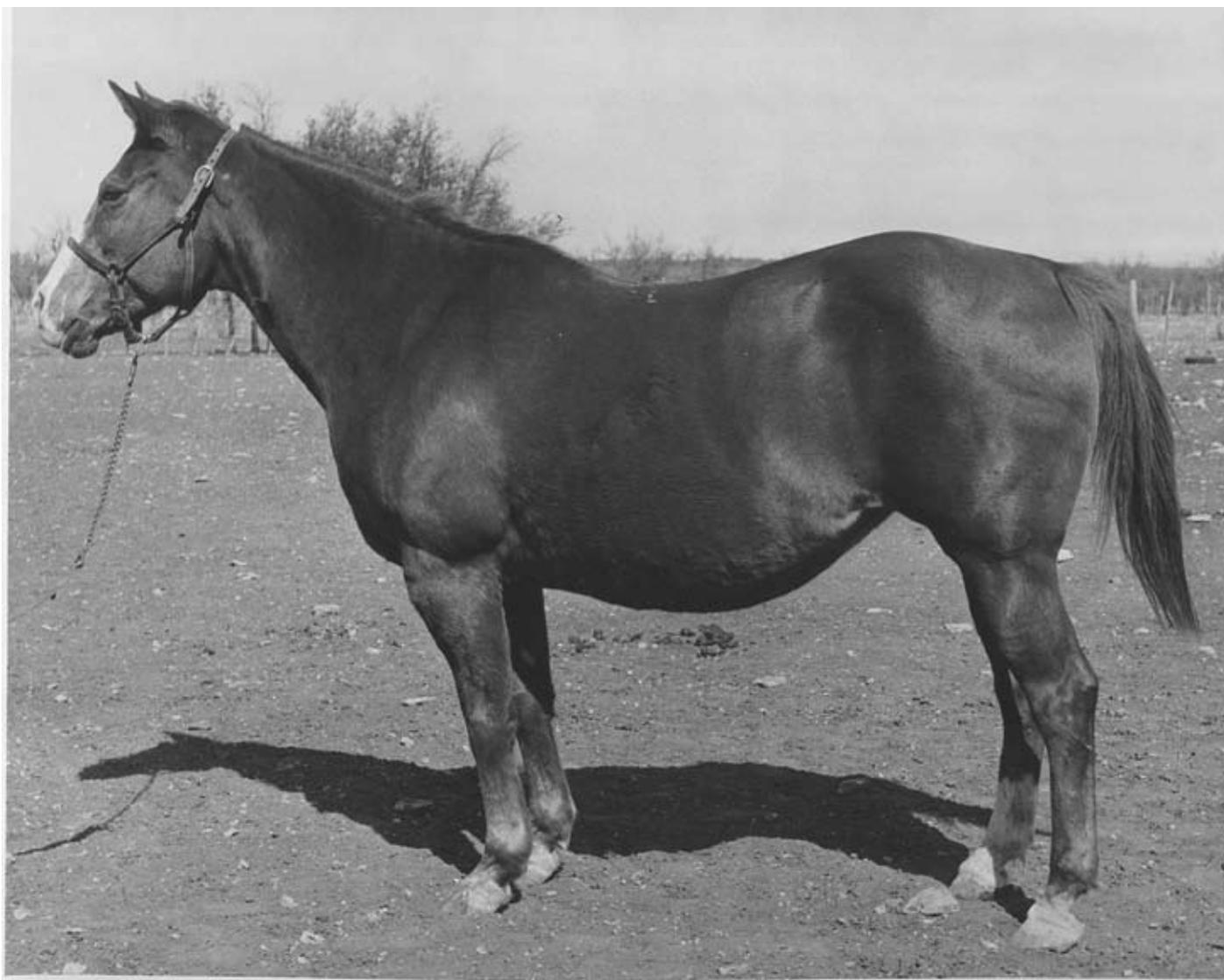
By the late 1940s, King and the Hankins brothers had turned Rocksprings, into something of a Quarter Horse mecca. Horsemen from throughout the land flocked to the Texas Hill Country in search of King-bred horseflesh.

The Californians were among the first to tap into the Hankins-bred mother lode.

In late 1941 or early 1942, Channing and Kathy Peake, Lompoc, California, imported El Greco to the Golden State. A 1940 chestnut stallion by King and out of Old Sugar, El Greco was the champion aged stallion at the 1945 Pomona, California, show. This event was the first AQHA-approved horse show ever held in California.

In 1945, in response to the growing demand for their horses, the Hankins brothers began holding their own auction sales. The third such auction took place on October 25, 1948, when the brothers offered 32 head of “Little Joe-bred” horses.

Booger H, then a 3-year-old, was the high-selling horse at



At the time of her death in 1960, Queen H was one of the breed’s leading producers of race ROMs.

Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal

\$1,500; Dan Traveler, a weanling colt by Joe Traveler and out of Flapper H, was the second-highest-selling horse at \$1,100; and Little Duchess H, a 2-year-old mare by King and out of Duchess H, was the third-highest-seller at \$900.

Booger H was purchased by Perry Cotton of Visalia, California, and promptly re-sold to Katy and Channing Peake of Lompoc, California. The Peakes, who by this time also owned the legendary Driftwood, would go on to campaign Booger H as a racehorse. From 23 official starts, the chestnut stallion recorded eight wins, seven seconds, five thirds and a AA race rating.

After his racing career was over, "Booger" was sold back to Cotton and retired to stud. Used lightly as a breeding animal, he was the sire of two AAA racehorses—Ocean Mist and King Booge—and four AQHA Champions—Jericho Lark, Booda Bar, Boomer Isle and Cue Stick.

After Queen H foaled Booger H, it was six years before she was re-bred to King. In the interim, she was bred to Joe Traveler, Joe Moore, Hygro (TB) and Balmy L. These breedings resulted in four additional race Register of Merit qualifiers: Pale Face H, Miss Della Moore, Hygro Jr and Queen Cheta.

Between 1951 and 1955, Queen was bred to King four times. These breedings resulted in Your Highness, a 1952 chestnut mare; Joe Hank, a 1954 bay stallion; Queen Dawn, a 1955 bay mare; and King's Queen Ann, a 1956 black mare.

Your Highness was sent to the track, where she became her dam's eighth race Register of Merit qualifier. Retired to the broodmare band, she became a AAA race producer.

Joe Hank was groomed for a show career and, in 1964, became the only one of the full siblings to earn an AQHA Championship. Retired to stud, he became an AQHA Champion and Superior Performance Horse sire, as well.

Queen Dawn was also conditioned for a show career and earned 11 halter points. Retired to the broodmare band, she, too, became a AAA race producer.

King's Queen Ann, the last of the King/Queen H family, was not shown. Retired to the broodmare band, she produced one AQHA point earner and two NCHA money earners.

In the fall of 1960, Queen H, the original "King Maker," gave birth to her last foal. Several days later, on October 2, she quietly lay down and died. The foal, a chestnut colt sired by King Command, was named Queen's Last and raised with the help of a nursing bottle and several milk goats.

Queen H's death signaled the end of a crucial early chapter in the King P-234 story. Together, the sorrel, blaze-faced mare and the mahogany bay stallion forged one of the American Quarter Horse Association's first golden crosses.

In retrospect, it might also have been one of its very best.

Frank Holmes has been penning horse-related feature articles and historical books since 1965. As a former staff writer for 'Western Horseman' magazine, Frank co-authored volumes 2 through 6 of the immensely popular 'Quarter Horse Legends' book series.

For information on his books please see page 44



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