

FORT WORTH Faithful

Opportunity, added money and family heritage drew exhibitors to the Fort Worth Stock Show.

By Jill J. Dunkel

After 24 solid days of various of equine competition, the Fort Worth Stock Show came to a close on Feb. 4. During that time, 5,168 entries vied for added money, points and titles under many multi-judged formats. The big turnout can be credited to the lure of showing in Fort Worth, Texas, the chance to promote a string of horses and the opportunity to compete and practice in the same arena where other big name events are held.

The Stock Show began with one of the largest events, Ranching Heritage Weekend, which included American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) Versatility Ranch Horse, Ranching Heritage, Ranch Riding and National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) events. Almost 1,900 horses strolled through the barns during the three-week-plus event, with the Quarter Horse show drawing the most entries.

“We had a great show,” said Lauren Lovelace, who just completed her first Stock Show as Horse Show Manager. “We were down in a few areas, but we were up in others entry-wise. It was a good show. Versatility ranch horse entries are continuing to grow tremendously. Reining and cow horse were also up a little bit.”

As one of the largest divisions, versatility ranch horse grew from 154 entries two years ago to 300 entries last year, and ballooned to 464 in 2017. Lovelace tweaked the show schedule to accommodate the interest in the event. The popularity of ranch riding and the AQHA’s Ranching Heritage program has also added numbers to the show.

Family legacy

The appeal of the ranching events spanned from weekend riders to ranches wanting to promote their breeding program. Rob and Peggy Brown’s family brought a wide variety of horses to the Stock Show. The Browns ran the R.A. Brown Ranch in Throckmorton, Texas, for decades and now enjoy watching their grandchildren compete under the ranch’s banner. Their son, Rob A. Brown, of Stinnett, Texas, and his family brought 12 horses to the Stock Show this year and participated in the AQHA Ranching Heritage Program, AQHA and NRCHA cow horse events, and the Best of the West Ranch Rodeo.

The family has a rich history participating at the Stock Show, and that history, as well as opportunity, keeps them coming back.

“From early on, my great grandfather, R.H. Brown, was good friends with W.R. Watt Sr., and the Brown family has always been involved in the Stock Show,” Rob A. said. “We’ve had a box at the rodeo since they first built the coliseum.”

Rob and Peggy showed steers as kids in the 1940s when the Stock Show was first relocated from the Fort Worth Stockyards to the Will Rogers Memorial Center that is used today. Rob A. also spent his youth showing steers at the show.

“I have memories of our families spending a week or longer at the Stock Show when I was growing up in the 1960s,” Rob A. said.

Bringing horses and cattle to the Stock Show was a way to reunite with friends and also promote the Brownses' horse and livestock breeding programs.

His family's history with the Stock Show spans many generations, not only with people, but also horses. In 1961, Rob showed Nell Ray to win the 2-Year-Old Mare class out of 89 mares. Her legacy lives on, as many of the horses the Brown family showed at this year's Stock Show trace back to Nell Ray.

Although winter isn't the ideal time to be gone from the ranch, events at the Fort Worth Stock Show like the Ranching Heritage Program keep the Browns returning to the show ring.

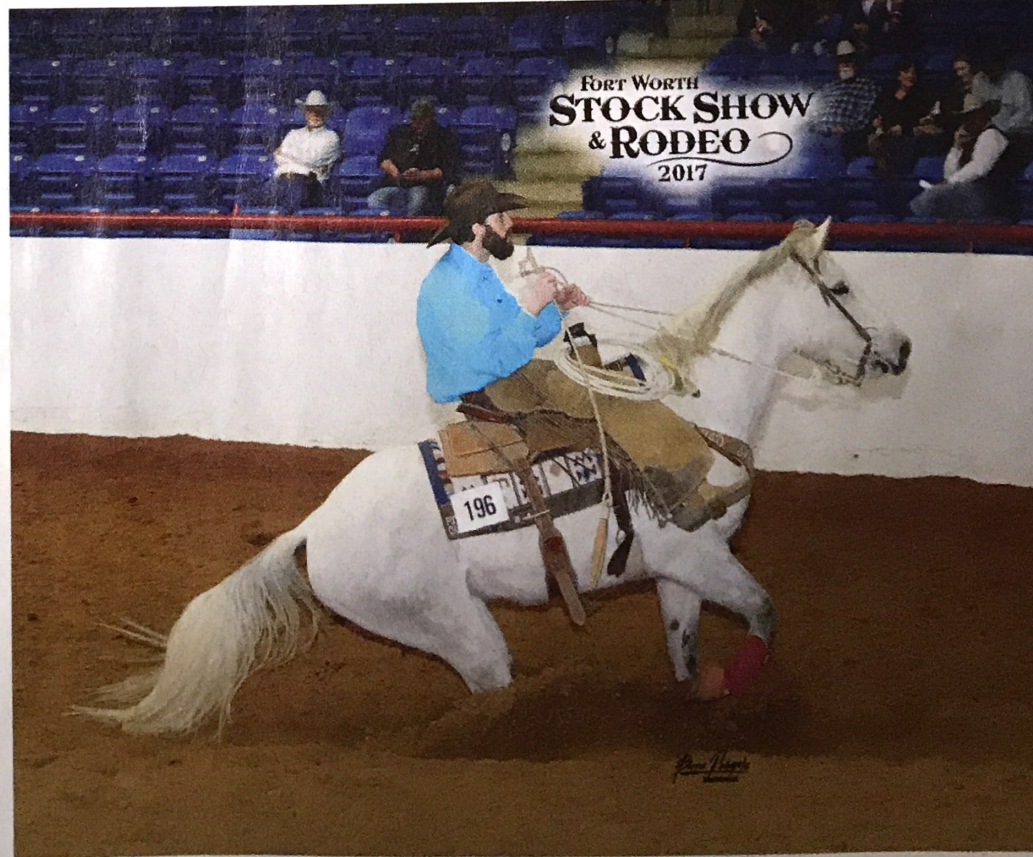
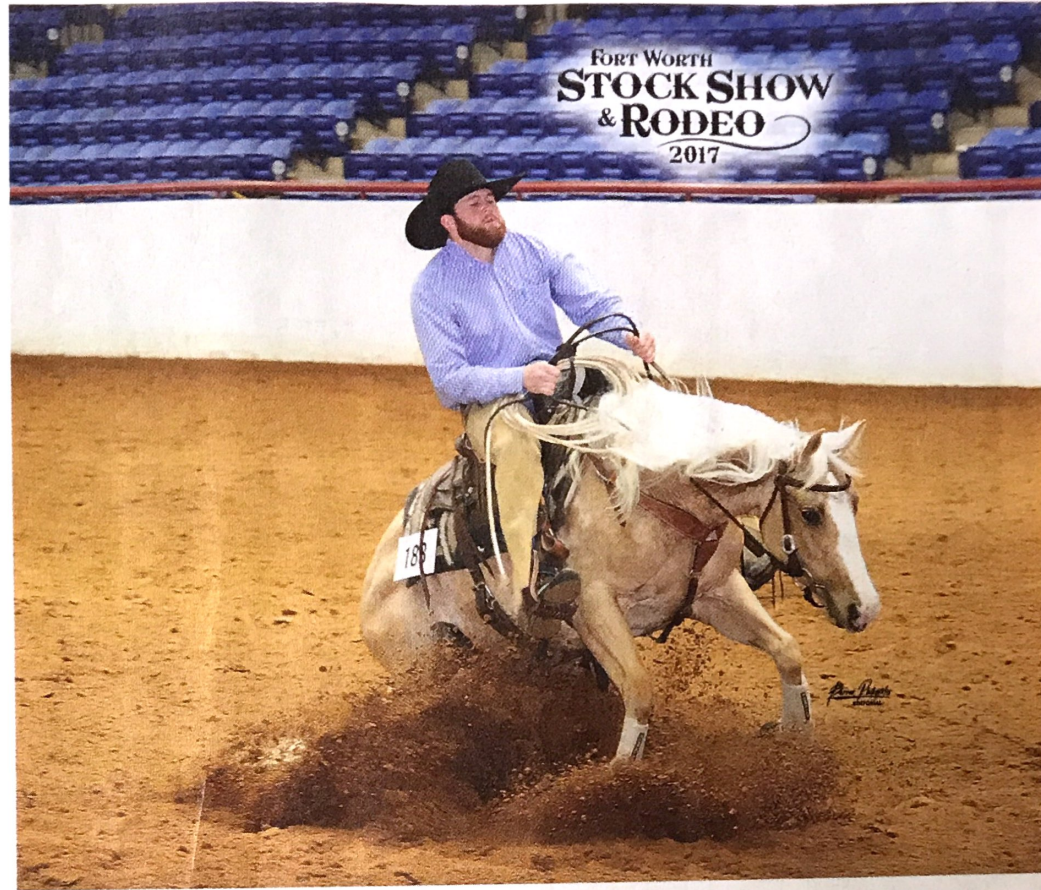
Rob A.'s son, Myles, showed in the first Ranching Heritage event at the Stock Show years ago, and although he didn't have much success then, it lit a fire that would propel him to learn more about the craft and ultimately succeed in the show ring.

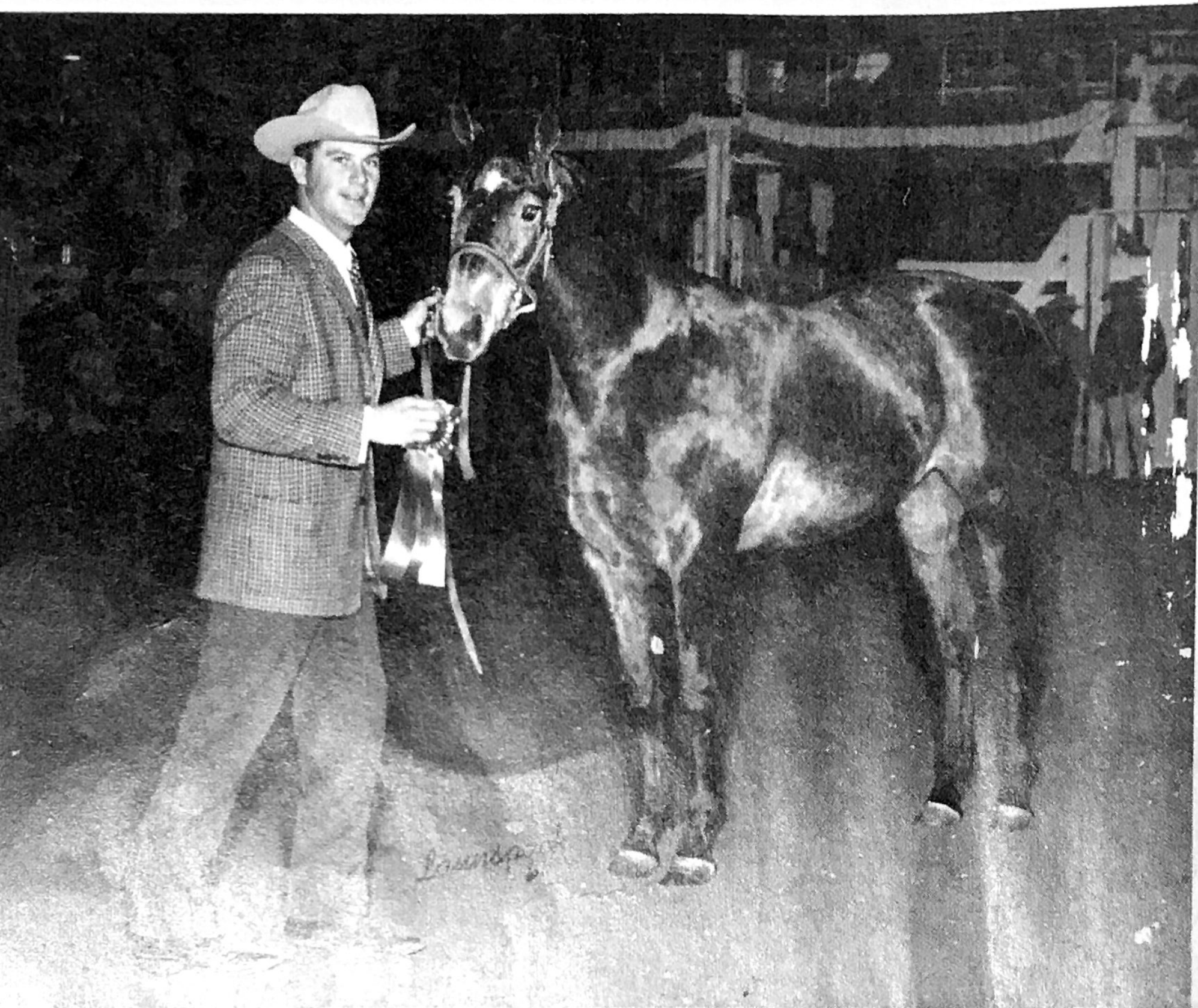
"He went to asking more questions, seeking advice from others, and now he's decided it's his passion in life," Rob A. said. "Myles is the one who really encouraged everyone to show at the Stock Show."

Myles rode Royalrock HancockRAB (PG Shogun x Driftin Gray Eddie x Hesa Eddie Hancock) to finish third in the Amateur Ranching Heritage Challenge, and then rode the gelding to Top Hand honors in the Best of the West Ranch Rodeo the next two nights. Others who rode homebreds successfully in the ranching heritage challenge included Myles' cousin, Lanham Brown, who rode RAB Go Pep Hancock (Gold Peppy Freckles x Mis Smooth Hancock x Hesa Eddie Hancock) to a fourth-place finish, and Myles' brother, R.A., who was fifth on Two Gold Hearts RAB. In the Open 5- & 6-Year-Old, Myles was Reserve on Ima Wynna RAB (PG Shogun x

(top right) Lanham Brown rode multiple horses in the Ranching Heritage classes, including Sparks Smart (Genuine Masterpiece x Chics Pretty Tari x Smart Chic Olena), a 4-year-old mare bred by Wagonhound Land and Livestock, to finish fourth in the Open. Lanham was one of several from the Brown family competing at the Fort Worth Stock Show.

(bottom right) Family and equine bloodlines run deep with this duo. R.A. Brown is the fourth generation of the Browns to be involved with the Stock Show. He finished in the top five of the cowboy class on Lexy Hancock RAB (Hesa Eddie Hancock x Shesa Eddie X Lady x Flying X 6). Four generations back in the mare's pedigree is Nell Ray.





Right On Eddie RAB x Right On Tivio).

Eddies Lacy RAB (Hesa Eddie Hancock x Shesa Eddie X Lady x Flying X 6), one of the descendants of Nell Ray, was second in the Open 4-Year-Old with Myles, and Lexy Hancock RAB, another Nell Ray offspring mare, was fourth in the Cowboy division with R.A. Siblings Lydia and Amanda Brown also showed in the ranching heritage events.

Diversity & opportunity

Reined cow horse trainers Lee and Ashley Deacon, of Marietta, Oklahoma, brought a trailer full of horses to the Stock Show. For the Deacons and their clients, the show offers a wide variety of events and the chance to practice in the same arena just weeks before the NRCHA's Celebration of Champions.

"The stock show is a great place to get our horses out," Ashley Deacon said. "We entered about everything we could. I think we went back and forth five or six times."

(left) Rob Brown showed Nell Ray to the title of Champion 2-Year-Old Mare in 1961 at the Fort Worth Stock Show. The class had 89 entries.

The couple and their clients showed in the NRCHA and AQHA cow classes, reining, versatility ranch horse and ranching heritage.

“It’s the first show of the year and it’s the same pen we will show in at the Celebration of Champions. Plus, the added money and low entry fees are great,” Deacon said.

“Lee showed Seven S Corona [Very Smart Remedy x Seven S Zans Fancy x Seven S Zanaday] on the first day in the ranching heritage for money, and then was able to go back two days later and school in the cow horse to get ready for NRCHA. The variety of the events there is a huge draw.”

The ranching heritage challenge boasts \$15,000 of added money, and many other events pay premiums, too. Despite the challenges of showing at the Stock Show, like having to park trailers far from the arena, the benefits of the show make it worthwhile.

(right) Royalrock Hancock RAB proved his worth in the show pen and in the Best of the West Ranch Rodeo. Myles Brown rode the gelding to win Top Hand of the rodeo and also showed him to a third-place finish in the Amateur Ranching Heritage class.





“There are a few hoops to jump through to show there, but they do a great job putting up the money for the classes,” Deacon said. “We also had customers showing in nearly every class. We had a youth showing for four days, and some of our customers decided to try the versatility. They really enjoyed it.”

Lovelace said show management understands it’s not like a regular weekend show.

“There are challenges coming to our event. But to offset that, we try to be as hospitable as we can,” Lovelace explained. “We have a hospitality room with juice and coffee every morning, and a greeting committee equipped with golf carts that helps exhibitors unload their trailers into tack stalls.

“We try to keep it affordable and try to do things to help exhibitors to keep them coming. Hopefully that outweighs the challenges of showing here,” she said.

“Our customers loved it,” Deacon added. “And it offers a wide variety for everybody.” ★

Trainers Lee and Ashley Deacon competed in the cow horse, reining and ranching heritage, and had customers who showed in the versatility ranch horse at the Fort Worth Stock Show.