

CALIFORNIA

Louise Hanson, 92

Still running the ranch.

At an age when most people are just trying to make it through the day, Louise Hanson is running the 14,000-acre Las Cruces Ranch in Santa Barbara County, Calif. Up before five a.m., she's had breakfast and fed the barn cats before she meets the hands to start the hard work at seven.

"I feel so fortunate," she says, "to be able to be a part of our nation's food chain, and to be born in America. There is nothing I like more than to be out on the ranch among my cattle."

Born Dec. 30, 1914, on the Moulton family's 21,000-acre El Toro Ranch, Louise learned to ride and rope at an early age. "As a child," she says, "I always felt so important when our foreman let me part out the fat steers for market or cull heifers for replacement. I was into everything—teams, saddle horses, cattle, farming."

When she was about five years old and her sister Charlotte was 10, her father bought them a beautiful sorrel pony, complete with wicker-seated pony cart, from the parade entries at the historic Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade. Louise named the sorrel Dickie, and he was with her for many years, even teaming with a gentle mule named Kitty to pull buggies.

Tutored through grammar school by a governess, Louise followed Charlotte to Pomona College, graduating in 1936. She then enrolled at what was then the Davis Ag College (now the University of California Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences), where

she studied agriculture and business.

"Then," she says, "before settling down to full-time ranching, I traveled to the Orient, Hawaii, Panama, New York, and Boston."

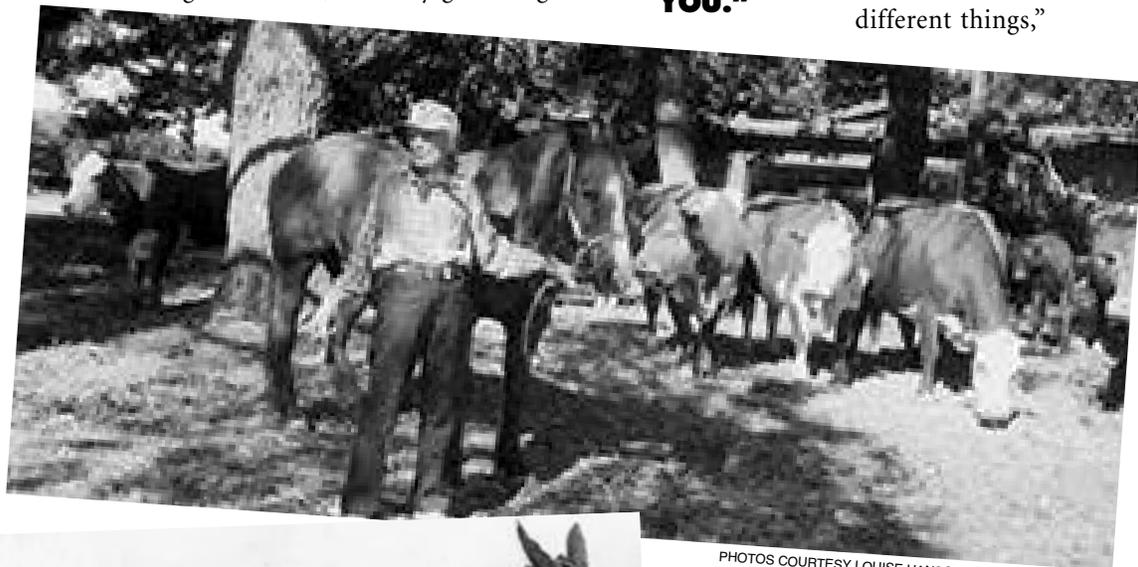
Why those particular places? "Because my sister went to Europe," she chuckles. "I wanted to go the other way." Following her grand tour,

Champion, I bought him. At times we didn't need that particular breed, or I personally did not care for that particular bull, so I did not bid on him. The whole Moulton family would be there for the sale, so it was a nice family gathering.

can even see an occasional missile being fired from the nearby Vandenberg Air Force Base."

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A back ailment finally forced Louise to stop riding, but she drives her truck to oversee all parts of the ranch operations. "You have to do different things,"



PHOTOS COURTESY LOUISE HANSON



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Louise Hanson with her cattle and horse, 2007.

► Louise, Top and dog Buttons, late '20s. ► Louise and friends with Kitty the mule and Dickie the pony, "an unlikely pair."

Louise showed horses in western classes for a few years and managed the El Toro Ranch.

Married three times ("I buried 'em all," she says.), Louise moved the family cattle from El Toro to the Las Cruces Ranch in 1972 with her third husband, Ivar Hanson. "For many years," she says, "I was buyer number one at the San Francisco Cow Palace bull sale. If I liked the Grand

For years, I donated the cattle at our annual local stock-horse show for their cattle events."

Although she lost her third husband to a tractor accident in 1979, Louise has remained committed to the Las Cruces Ranch. "This ranch is surrounded by the Santa Barbara and Santa Ynez mountain ranges," she notes. "And with the Gaviota coastline, it gives us spectacular views. We

she says, "to adjust to what nature brings to you." The last year nature brought drought, but Louise has seen everything by now, and is not daunted by it.

"We farm some barley and we used to thrash it and sell the seed, but now we bale most of it for the cattle, or windrow it and leave it for the weaners or to fatten the steers for market. There's always, always plenty to do on the ranch, and that's what I wanta be doin'!"—Steve Thompson