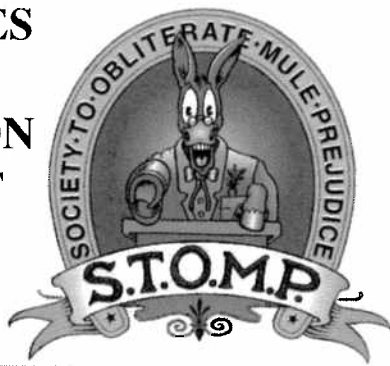


SURFBOARDS, SADDLES AND A STRANGE CONNECTION IN THE HIGH DESERT

By Vic Otten,
Rancho Palos Verdes, California



At first it did not make sense. I was standing in legendary saddle Maker Gary McClintock's booth at the 2007 Bishop Mule Days, admiring the fine leatherwork and watching a copy of the yet-to-be-released documentary *Corazon Vaquero*. There were saddles, chaps, reins, spurs, headstalls, and halters..... all meticulously handcrafted in a western tradition that has almost been forgotten. I was in the midst of a true legend in the saddle world.

I was looking for a saddle to fit my mule, Diamond. She is one of those 'hard-to-fit mules' that is big, has a long back, has no real withers, and is narrow in the front. The

mule saddle I had been using was just not working, and I needed a saddle fast. Unfortunately, McClintock had already sold the few stock saddles he had by the time I arrived at his booth. As it would take up to a year to get a custom saddle from McClintock, I was totally out of luck.

Oddly, on a shelf in McClintock's booth was a book called *Dale Velzy the Hawk*. The cover of the book was a painting of a man wearing a cowboy hat with a surfboard under his arm. What was it doing here? It seemed totally out of place. We were several hundred miles from the ocean, at the biggest mule event

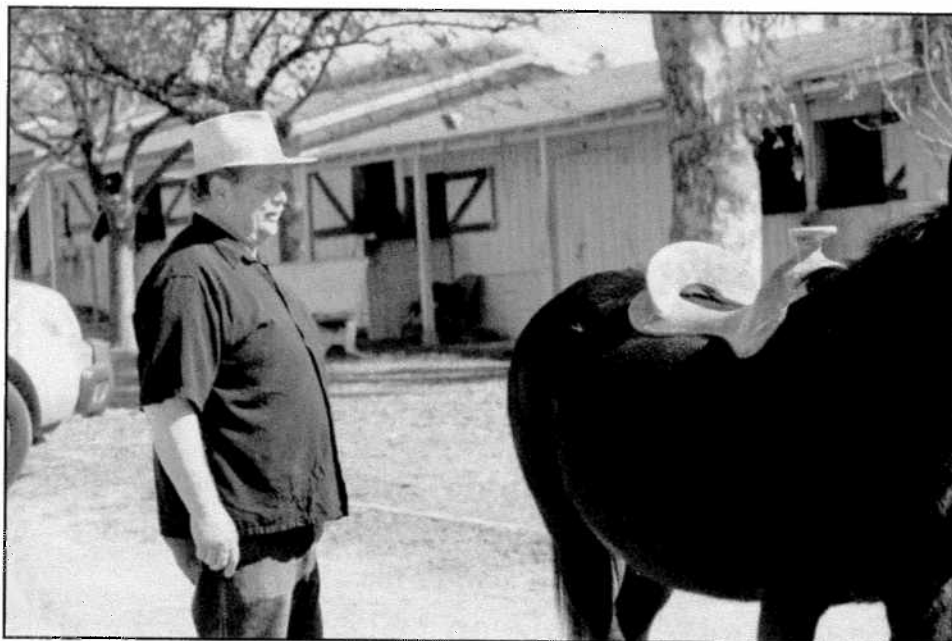
in the world, and there was a book for sale about Dale Velzy. Other than me, who up here would even know who Dale Velzy was? Probably no one.

I grew up on the beaches of Southern California where Dale Velzy was a household name among surfers. Velzy was one of the original surfboard builders in the United States, starting in the late 1940's in Hermosa Beach and eventually owning several retail stores. On a much smaller level, I am also a surfboard builder. To many of us surfers, the boards that Velzy made were handcrafted works of art.

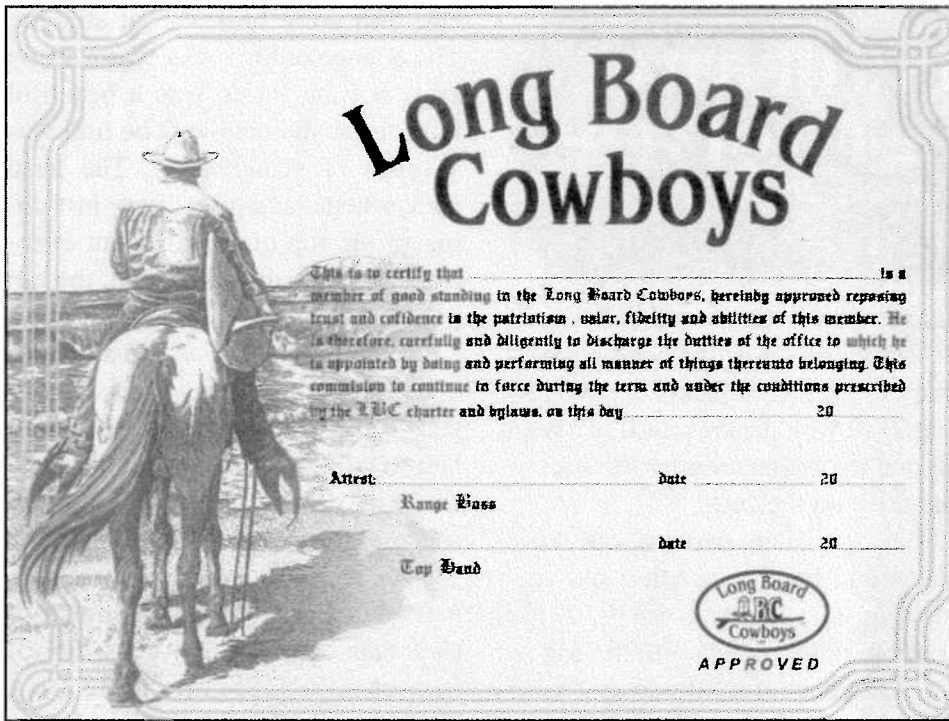
As I learned from a short review of *Dale Velzy the Hawk* while exploring McClintock's booth in 2007, apparently Velzy also loved horses and embraced the cowboy lifestyle. My memories of Velzy were his colorful personality and sense of humor. First-time visitors to his home in San Clemente would often be sent on a fake errand to the side of the house, only to get chased by a territorial goose named "Goose". Velzy really found that amusing.

But, what was the link that bought Velzy to Bishop?

Most of you probably already know who Gary McClintock is.... master saddle maker, California historian, author, and friend to the mule. One of those really unique individuals who will take time out of his busy schedule to share his knowledge about saddle making and just about anything you want to talk about. He is a people person.



GARY McCLINTOCK fitting the saddle tree to the author's mule



A COPY OF a Long Board Cowboys certificate

McClintock was born in Santa Monica, California and was a surfer. He was about 13 years old when he first met Velzy, who was in his 30's at the time, at a shop in Venice Beach. Their paths would not cross again until years later.

McClintock started building saddles in 1973 after attending the Dewitt and Hendrickson School of Saddlery. Over the years, he honed his craft by spending time with clinicians such as Pat Parelli, Pat Puckett, Leslie Desmond, Jerry Tindell, Jo Walters, Len Rudd, R. E. Smith, Lee Graff, Mike Barrish, Dutch Venerendorf and Jimmy Flores, exchanging the ideas related to saddle design and fit in an effort to build functional saddles that are comfortable to the rider and his mount.

In 1993, McClintock started an event called 'Vaquero Days', which is held on the third weekend

of October every year in Descanso, California. Vaquero Days is an event designed to honor the ranching heritage of California and Mexico, and the people who are part of that tradition. It is a celebration that showcases the rich heritage of the cowboy lifestyle of the west. (Information about the event can be found at www.vaquerodays.org)

It was at the Vaquero Days Celebration where McClintock's and Velzy's paths would again cross, leading to a close friendship that would last until Velzy passed away in 2005.

During the years that followed, the two would trade surfboards for saddles. They would also participate in an organization called the Long Board Cowboys, which was formed during one of the early Vaquero Days Celebration. The founding members included Gary McClintock, Bruce King, R. P. Kidd,

Bruce Hammer, Mouldenhauer and Dale Velzy. The organization was started to bring people who enjoy the cowboy and surfing lifestyles together.

At the 2007 Bishop Mule Days Celebration, I asked McClintock the reason he had a book about Dale Velzy in his booth, and he told me the story. I shared with him that I was a surfboard builder and wannabe cowboy and we became friends. As it turns out, there are people who enjoy both surfing and the cowboy lifestyle, and it is not that strange to find a book about a surfboard maker in a saddle shop in Bishop, California.

Information about McClintock Saddle works can be found on line at www.mcclintocksaddles.com.

PLANNING A SHOW OR MULE EVENT

Advertising in *Mules and More* is easy.

Discounts for non-profit organizations.

Just give us a call at 573/646-3934 and we can set your ad up for you!

Office hours:
8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. (CST)
Monday thru Friday

