

Meliton's Saddle
on display at the Camarillo Ranch was a
gift from Carmen Camarillo



Meliton Ortiz
March 10, 1919-July 19, 2010

Meliton Ortiz loved life on the Camarillo Ranch and being with people and horses he cherished. His early attachment to horses began during his boyhood when Adolfo Camarillo shared his knowledge, skill and fascination with horses. It is difficult to imagine Meliton without a horse and saddle. Many fortunate docents and Ranch staff learned first-hand from Meliton about life on the Camarillo Ranch. He was always generous with his time and knowledge. Docents were honored to celebrate his birthday at the March docent meeting with specially prepared favorite foods and snacks. The highlight was listening to his entertaining, humorous and enlightening Ranch tales.

Meliton's understanding of horses, their needs and care as well as training horses and

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riders are legendary. He passed along his knowledge and work ethic to countless equestrians. Every job was done to the best of his ability. His hard work and dedication were appreciated and rewarded. Meliton was given two of the finest saddles noted for quality leather and decoration. Both were from Jedlicka's in Santa Barbara. For purposes of clarification, they are referred to as the Clark Saddle and the Carmen Saddle.

Sheriff Bill Clark wanted to give Meliton a special thank you gift for doing a special favor. The other saddle was a gift from Carmen Camarillo and is on display at the Camarillo Ranch. The Clark Saddle is at the McAvoy home where Camarillo White Horse Paloma II lived. Illness in the McAvoy family necessitated having someone care for the mare, but not just anyone. Meliton cared for Paloma II daily. Eventually the Clark Saddle became part of their routine that only ended with Meliton's death. Paloma II mourned Meliton's passing. For many months she watched and waited for his return.

This iconic piece of Ranch history was essential equipment. The classic western saddle not only offered Meliton support and balance, it also gave protection and comfort to his horse. Traditionally the Western saddle has been used primarily for work. It has a roping horn on the pommel to facilitate the roping of cattle and equipped with tie-downs to hold ropes and other items. Meliton was a champion bull rider and team roper. In 1972, he and son Rey won the prized buckles for team roping at both the Santa Barbara Fiesta and the Ventura County Fair.



Meliton Ortiz and Paloma II (owned by Laura McAvoy)



Meliton Ortiz and Paloma II (owned by Laura McAvoy)

Creating a Custom Saddle for Meliton

Meliton was a large man (although at that time in his life, he may have been thin). Saddles can range from a 13-inch **seat** (for young/skinny people) to a 20-inch seat (for a larger rider). Meliton would be about a 16-inch seat. When he was younger, he was maybe a 15-inch seat. You measure the seat by taking a tape measure from the back of the saddle horn to the front of the **cantle** (the part that your backside rests against).

Also, saddle seats can be quite plush and padded. Meliton's saddle looks like it has minimal padding, but it does have a rough-out leather seat (the smooth side of the leather is face down and the unfinished side is up – this makes it less slippery and easier to stay in the saddle).

Were the style of the saddle and leather for it selected by Meliton? Meliton probably spent some time going over how he wanted the style, and perhaps looked in a pattern book for the hand tooling design (for the carving on the **saddle fenders**). Mr. Jedlicka would have known which leather to use – it is 1/8 inch thick (maybe a little thicker for “saddle leather”). But I'm sure there are different qualities (depending on the tanning company), and Jedlicka's used only the best.

Style: Meliton would have asked him for a roping saddle. It is a certain style with a low cantle in the back so that when you jump off the horse, you can throw your leg over easily and quickly. Meliton's cantle has a **Cheyenne Roll** (where it is turned down in the back). This is common in roping saddles. The **pommel** (or the front portion) to the left and right of the saddle horn is round and not very wide, so it doesn't get in the way of the rope.



Saddle Horn: The stem of the horn is very thick in diameter (perhaps 2-½ to 3 inches thick), and definitely is a roping horn. It has to be strong when you are running a horse at 25 miles per hour – and then skid to a stop with a 200-to-500-pound calf at the other end. The horn has a rope that has been “**dallied**” (wrapped around the horn once or twice). You don't want the horn to break. I also would expect Meliton's saddle to be built on probably an oak wood “**tree**” (**skeleton of the saddle**) wrapped

in bull hide before the saddle leather goes on it.

Saddle stirrups: Roping stirrups (which can be quite heavy) are wide stirrups so that you can step off the horse fast with plenty of support.

The weight of the saddle: Usually, in those days, the heavier the saddle, the better it was made because it would have a bull hide saddle tree and good quality leather (perhaps 30 to 45

pounds). Cheap saddles were very light (the tree may not have been wrapped). These days, I would want a cheap leather saddle so that I could lift it up on the horse. Cowboys don't have that problem.

The **cinch** (also called a **girth**) is a piece of equipment used to keep the saddle in place. It passes under the belly of the horse and is attached to the saddle on one side by a double-stationary strap, and on the other side by a long **billet** which is passed through the brass cinch buckle several times and pulled up as tight as needed to secure the saddle. Now the saddle is "cinched up."

Docent Information Program
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