Test and Evaluation Results

of

Wilson Combat/Steve Woods V1 Pro Fixed Blade Knife

by

Kevin Hutchison

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Every year, scores of amateur explorers seek the solitude and grandeur of Mother Nature. Unfortunately, many have to be rescued because they were not prepared to deal with contingencies that befell them. While it can be inspiring to bask in the glory of Mother Nature's splendor, the inexperienced tend to lose sight of the fact that she can also be unforgiving and sadistically cruel. Mercy does not exist in the wild.

Most people rescued are fortunate: they walk out of the danger zone under their own power. Some have to be carried out, others are carried out in bags, and others never make it out at all. Often, these events are orchestrated by the fact that the participants have neither the equipment nor the skill to deal with the unexpected.

While the scope and quantity of preparatory equipment is often dependent upon one's mode of transportation to and from the intended destination as well as the inherent nature of that destination, there is one item that must, without fail, always be part of one's gear: a high-quality knife. If you are ever foolish enough to enter the wilderness without a good knife, well, bears and other carnivores have to eat, too. Such is survival of the fittest.

**INITIAL IMPRESSION**

While many fixed blade knives extract nothing more from me other than a disinterested yawn, this knife will bring a smile to the face of even the most skeptical. Its physical appearance and appeal are captivating.

The blade is substantial and authoritative. It appears distinctly capable of making short work of the toughest jobs. The blade is heavy but is well-balanced and can be wielded easily. The cutting edge is viciously sharp. The tip, while not particularly sharp or pointed, should pierce well. The blade is coated with Wilson's famous Armor-Tuff finish, well known for its properties of protection and durability. The finish is uniform and smooth.

The G10 scales seem rock-solid and fit the tang with precision. The overall fit and finish of the components is first-rate. Complimenting this intriguing knife is a Spec-Ops Combat Master Sheath, itself the pinnacle of practicality and quality.

Although the creating bladesmith has described this knife to me as a camping tool, I feel that it could easily be used for a number of other purposes, such as general survival, tactical, military, and countless field-related functions.

**HANDLE**

The handle consists of two panels of G10. G10 is an epoxy-filled composite reinforced with glass fibers. The result of this conglomeration is a highly durable material that is impervious to the elements, including many acids and oils. The panels are available in three color combinations: black, green/black, and gray/black. The panels also provide a palm swell for additional gripping ability along with finger grooves. Finger grooves that are too pronounced can limit the positions with which one may comfortably hold the knife. The groove for the index finger is spacious and substantial. It will not interfere with the specifics of one's individual grip. The remaining grooves are extremely shallow, which I feel is an ideal combination. These will enhance the stability of one's grip yet will not limit one's own unique gripping style.

The fit of the grip panels to the knife's tang is superb. They conform beautifully to the tang's dimensions, clearly indicating quality production. It takes time and precise effort to successfully attach grip panels. No effort was spared here. The panels are adorned with two round metal medallions. The left panel displays the bladesmith's crest while the right side is that of Wilson Combat.

Both panels are securely attached to the tang with two Torx screws on each side. Red Loc-Tite was used to enhance each screw's gripping ability. Removing the panels is not recommended. Red Loc-Tite is well-known for providing a gorilla-like hold. There is literally no need to remove a grip panel, and doing so will be a difficult endeavor.

The length of the panels measures approximately 5.25". At their widest point, the combined measurement is about .865". The grips feel good. They are substantial enough to allow a comfortable grip, without being too large or small. I had several people with varying hand shapes and sizes hold the knife and provide their candid thoughts about its feel. Everyone responded with positive comments.

There is one issue involving the handle that I feel needs to be addressed. The edges where the vertical and horizontal sections of the handle meet are sharp, too sharp. This is an uncomfortable situation that needs to be corrected. This would be a very easy and simple fix. The edges in question simply need to be rounded (dehorned).

Summation: Overall, the panels are extremely well designed and manufactured. Their fit and finish is superb. The knife feels very good in the hand.

**BLADE**

The overall length of the knife is right at 11.25". The blade itself measures 6" and its thickness is .220". The vertical distance from the cutting edge to the spine is a tad over 1 1/2" at its tallest point. This is one solid piece of steel. The blade is a clip point, offering an enhanced level of control when piercing and/or slicing.

The blade is made of CPM 154 steel. Crucible Particle Metallurgy (CPM) 154 steel is a product of Crucible Industries of New York. Essentially, this is a process whereby molten metal is rendered into a powder-like substance and is then transformed into a material that can be used for various purposes. While there is no individual blade steel that can legitimately be described as 'best', CPM154 is recognized as being premium blade material.

This blade is hollow ground, which is one of several styles of grinds available to bladesmiths. Probably the most significant aspect of a hollow ground blade is that this process creates an extremely sharp cutting edge. The black coating on this blade is Wilson's Armor-Tuff, a product widely known for its ability to protect the steel beneath. This is the same iron-clad coating used on their firearms.

The Rockwell Hardness level of this blade is in the 58-59 range, which is where I personally like to see such knives. Simplified, the Rockwell Scale is a scientific measurement that reveals the hardness of steel. This is critical because steel that is too soft may not hold its edge well. If, on the other hand, the steel is too hard, it can become brittle and even break. The Rockwell Scale is important to bladesmiths because it helps them determine which steel is best suited for their desired application.

Among its many other attributes, this knife offers thumb serrations or notches and an exposed tang. The thumb serrations are located atop the spine just in front of the grip panels. They measure 1" in length and are designed to allow the user to comfortably and securely place his thumb upon them while cutting. This will allow the user to apply increased downward pressure while slicing difficult objects without the risk of one’s thumb slipping off the spine.

The exposed tang is another practical feature. The tang extends outward from the grip panels about 1/4" and a hole has been drilled for a lanyard. If one is working over water or elevated positions to such an extent that dropping the knife could result in its loss, and potentially invite one's demise, then being able to attach a lanyard is of critical value.

An exposed tang possessing the mass of this blade can indeed become a useful feature. This portion of the knife is clearly capable of breaking through tempered glass. It can also be used to pound or smash a variety of things limited only to one's imagination, physical environment, and survival requirements. From a military perspective, the tang can also be used to deliver adversaries to the infernal region.

Summation: this blade has everything going in its favor: quality steel, weight, mass, balance, and a razor-like cutting edge.

**SHEATH**

Although I have encountered many fine fixed-blade knives over the years, manufacturers sometimes forget about the other half of the equation: the sheath. I believe that a sheath must be as good as the knife itself. If one is a weekend backyard camper, then the quality of the sheath becomes an issue of insignificance. If, on the other hand, one finds oneself in a position where a good knife is crucial, then the sheath should take a front row seat.

The sheath provided with the V1 Pro is superb. Called the Combat Master Knife Sheath, it is made by the Spec-Ops Brand company. They are an American business producing a wide variety of military-grade gear right here in the States. I have several of their products and have found the quality to be extremely good.

Many manufacturers supply leather sheaths with their knives. A fine leather sheath is a time-honored tradition and can certainly enhance the enjoyment of a finely crafted knife. The problem with leather, however, is that it generally does not hold up well when exposed to nature's elements, such as rain, extreme humidity, mud, and general hard use. A better choice in sheaths for those who need something above and beyond is ballistic nylon. This is a man-made product that is extremely durable, not affected by the elements.

The Spec-Ops sheath is ideal for the V1 Pro. The materials used to manufacture the sheath are very high quality, the workmanship is designed for rugged use, and it possesses a high level of versatility. It can be worn on the belt or securely attached to one's backpack or web gear. There are two belt loops for added security and stability, an adjustable strap secures the handle snugly, the body of the sheath sports a very durable liner to protect and secure the blade, and a covered pouch is attached to the front of the sheath capable of holding a variety of items such as a single or double stack pistol magazine, a Leatherman-style multi-tool, or even a compact flashlight or para-cord. Whomever thought of marrying this sheath to the V1 Pro knew what he was doing.

Summation: the perfect sheath for this knife.

**EVALUATION PROCESS**

At the heart of the evaluative process beats the word “practical.” For our purposes within this forum, practical is defined as any process that the knife under study is reasonably capable of performing. Keeping within practical parameters is crucial in order to reach a conclusion that accurately reflects the knife’s true level of performance and potential. This is a critical step in the evaluative process because I can make a knife appear ineffective by subjecting it to events that I know will damage its tip, the blade, and render the edge as dull as a dead turtle race. Damaging something simply because one can is unreasonable, borderline immoral, and will not provide enough information with which to make an informed decision.

The key is, again, to only subject a knife to activities for which it was intended. In other words, it would be inappropriate to report upon a filet knife’s ability to chop tree limbs. The cause and effect relationship would be grossly imbalanced and would do the reader a substantial disservice.

This knife will be used to cut, chop, dice, slice and pierce a number of items. Some of these procedures meet the definition of abuse and should not be performed as a normal course of action. Doing so might void the knife's warranty and could cause unnecessary and perhaps irreparable damage. What will be revealed herein is not what blade does to the items being tested but what the items being tested do to the blade.

After each detailed and methodical evaluative process, I carefully examined the entire knife for any signs of unnatural wear or damage.

**THE TIP**

The point or tip is the most fragile part of a knife. As previously mentioned, the tip of this blade is not particularly sharp or pointed, but it is backed up by some seriously heavy metal.

I began the process by exposing the tip and cutting edge to an event that certainly must be described as abuse. I took a piece of sheet metal into the yard and laid it on the grass. I then used a rubber mallet to beat the tip and entire blade through the metal and into the ground all the way to the hilt. I repeated the process twice. Aside from causing some abrasions to the blade’s finish, the tip and cutting edge held up well.

We have been in the process of tearing down and removing a wooden fence comprised predominantly of vertical six-inch-wide boards about five feet in height. I used about two inches of the tip and blade to pry numerous boards away from their support structure. Aside from a few insignificant and superficial wear marks, the tip held up perfectly.

Using the same wooden boards described above, I stabbed the tip into them over twenty times. The tip penetrated well and sustained no damage.

I then secured a section of Kevlar body armor to an old and thick catalog. Using as much downward energy as I could muster, I stabbed the knife into the Kevlar several times. It penetrated a couple layers, but not especially well. I believe this was caused by the tip not being as sharp and pointed as it could have been.

To further evaluate the tip’s ability to withstand abuse, I stabbed the knife directly into a two-by-four until the blade stood straight. I then slammed the body of the knife down until it contacted the body of the wood. Doing this several times, the tip churned up a number of chunks of wood, but the tip was not damaged.

Another abusive tribulation involved securing about one inch of the tip and blade into a padded bench vise and exerting physical force in an attempt to see if it would snap. With enough mechanical force, one might be able to break the tip. Using bodily force only, I could not.

In another attempt to see how much the knife’s tip could withstand, I stabbed an old orange ceramic flower pot. The pot broke upon the first impact. I then continued breaking the remaining pieces with the tip until there was little left to deal with. Aside from superficial wear marks, the tip held up just fine.

Using my last few pieces of old picture frame glass, which when combined reached a thickness of around three-eights of an inch, I broke through them all with the tip. It was so easy that it was almost not worth trying. Again, no damage to the tip.

Summation: because knives are designed only to cut soft material, all eight tests met the criteria for abuse, but the tip held up nicely.

**THE CUTTING EDGE**

In an attempt to determine the raw slicing power of this blade, I bought the largest beef roast that I could find. I wrapped the roast with butcher’s twine and then suspended it from the ceiling in the garage. I also laid down a protective plastic barrier on the garage floor to keep the roast useable after testing. The object of this trial was simple: see how much damage could be done with one slice of the blade. With one slashing movement, the roast sustained a massive and deep cut. A similar injury to a living being would have been fatal. Using the knife, I then finished dividing up the roast. This knife will cut.

Kicking things up to an abusive level, I then performed an ice chop test. I used a pan to freeze a block of ice measuring approximately ten inches across and five inches thick. I set a section of plywood onto my porch and then set the ice block on the plywood. I then delivered five heavy blows to the block. I did not have anything to hold the block in place, so after each chop I had to retrieve it for the next one. The block eventually broke up. This was, of course, not the goal. The idea was to see if the solid block of ice damaged the cutting edge. Upon completion, I found no rolling or other signs of edge deformation. For a knife having a hollow grind, this was a nice thing to see. Generally, knives with this type of grind tend to have very sharp, but thin, cutting edges which can render them prone to damage. In this instance, however, I am convinced that the massive amount of steel supporting the edge is what gave it its exceptional strength.

After cutting a seemingly endless number of common household/garage items that one would generally expect any knife to address, I then sliced three aluminum soda cans completely in half – another abusive process.

Having put the edge through some trials that could easily have dulled or damaged it, it was time to see how well it would cut a tough, tropical fruit. The fruit with the toughest hide available at this time is a pineapple. These guys have a pretty tough exterior, and ideally one needs a very sharp, thin bladed knife to dress it properly. Although a bit unwieldy as a food preparation knife simply because of its size and substantial body, the V1 Pro made rather short work of cleaning and preparing our spiny friend. I also used this blade to dress a watermelon, whose hide tends to be rather tough. I then sliced the hide into as many small pieces as I could. For all practical purposes, this knife was as effective as any fine kitchen knife.

Upon completion of these tribulations, the blade reflected a number of scrapes, scratches, and blemishes – as certainly was to be expected. To reestablish the luster of the cutting edge, I coated a number of Q-tips with Semi-Chrome polish and dressed it until it looked good as new. Don’t try this at home. Having one’s fingers in such close proximity to a sharp edge is not a good idea. I then applied Wilson’s Lite Oil onto the blade and worked it in with some four-ought steel wool. This did a nice job of removing many of the abrasions. While evidence of these trials remains, overall Wilson’s Armor Tuff coating did a nice job of protecting the blade.

Summation: without question, this knife’s cutting edge is on the cutting edge of sustained sharpness and durability: two factors that a serious knife cannot compromise.

**WARRANTY**

The bladesmith offers a lifetime warranty as long as the knife is not abused. Simple enough; fair enough. Wilson Combat can re-sharpen the knife should the need arise.

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

When it comes to selecting a knife for field and/or survival related purposes, function and performance must always take a front seat to appearance. The Wilson/Woods VP 1 Pro offers the very best of both worlds. This knife is solid, finely-crafted, well-designed for the field, and is as tough as a Texas Ranger. It also looks great. I am totally convinced that this knife is the top pick of the liter, and I’d be comfortable taking it anywhere.