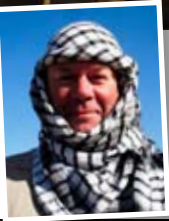


A knife fit for a merc



Private military contractor Rob Hunter proclaims the virtues of a custom-built blade after severe testing on tour in Afghanistan

I first came across custom knife-maker Andrew Jordan several years ago on the internet. We met on a forum where I was posting about some project guns I was working on at the time. Andrew, an avid hunter and outdoorsman who lives and works in the Netherlands, replied to the thread and since then we have regularly kept in touch.

I recently told Andrew that I was working in Afghanistan. He immediately told me I needed a knife that would stand up to the rigours of what I was about to face.

To be honest I had never thought about obtaining a custom knife, due to the cost involved. Like most, I would normally go down the 'shelf knife' route. However, I soon realised that my long-range rifle proficiency had jumped to a higher level when I started to use guns that were purpose-made for me, and at the other end of the scale my boots fitted better due to the custom molded inserts. So I decided to go down the same route and get a knife that was built for me and the job in hand. This decision was made easier due to my having gone through two knives in my first tour of Afghanistan.

It would have been foolish not to invest in a quality tool that might well save my life, and with this in mind I took a look at Andrew Jordan's

website to see what he had to offer. I was amazed at the broad range of skills that had made him a master craftsman in his field – and when the likes of Ray Mears and the Danish Special Forces are past clients, you can be confident that you're not going to be disappointed with the end result.

Steel working obviously runs in Andrew's family; he learned at his grandfather's side from the age of five before taking up the profession himself. After years of studying the art of steel, he started creating his own designs in edged weapons, including medieval arms and armour.

He was accepted as *deshi* (apprentice) to the Kunihiro Kawachi sword makers in Japan, where he spent the next two years before settling in the Netherlands. Andrew has been hand forging blades for over 25 years, and I've lost count of how many titles he has won at blade exhibitions.

The most important part of any blade is the steel, and Andrew mostly uses tamahagane (bloom) steel (15N20 / 1:2842) for his pattern-welded blades, and Ludemann steels for his simpler knives. He makes a full range of knives: folders, utility knives, hunting knives, military blades, collector's blades, Dark Ages saexes and swords as well as European medieval swords – not to mention some of the most beautiful

Damascus patterns I have ever seen.

All of Andrew's blades are hand forged, tempered and finished to the customer's requirements. "I strive for the union of art and craft," he says. "It is not enough for a blade to be beautiful – above all it must be functional." As well as creating blades with multiple zones of hardness (*hamon*) and full tangs, he works on the compression of the steel through the blade and the tang. All of his creations, from the basic pocket knife to the most beautiful Renaissance dagger, are working blades.

Andrew challenged me to try and break my knife, but I had no need to try this as he carries out active quality control throughout the manufacturing process, testing his knives to destruction for



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flaws in the design as well as the steel. While handmade blades are more expensive and slower to make, his view is that you cannot guarantee the structural quality of the steel or the subtle physical characteristics of the blade if you start from a pressed steel blank, as is the norm in mass-produced knives.

Being ex-Forces himself, Andrew had a good idea of the knife he would make for me. It would be in the medium size range – after all, ‘too big’ usually means ‘too heavy’ and also unwieldy, despite what you see in Rambo films. But it would have to have a good thick spine for strength and hold a good edge without being brittle. This meant the steel had to be of a top-quality, solid, one-piece construction with no inessential gadgets to shake loose or fall off. He would finish it with a good non-slip grip.

At 10in total length and with a blade length of six inches, the knife is well-balanced just behind the front guard. The slight serrations on the spine and the gap behind the blade edge allow the knife to be used with the forefinger and thumb forward of the guard for greater control. The grip is Micarta with slight dimples cut into it, which is useful in maintaining a solid grip even in dust and sweat. The pommel has a lanyard hole in it, which I will be using with a bungee cord to attach the knife to my webbing.

One other thing I love about this blade’s shape is that it has a graceful sweeping arc from pommel to point. This is not just aesthetic – it has a purpose. It means the point is directly in line with the centre of the hilt and pommel – so when you strike point first, all of the force is delivered to the point, just where you want it. Placing your forefinger along the spine will prevent initial entry from splitting the gut content when eviscerating deer.

The overall finish is a matt black plasma coating

– I asked for this in case it was necessary to paint it in the ubiquitous sand/beige colour. But when the blade is sheathed, the mottled Micarta blends in well enough for me, and in any case it would be a crime to throw paint at it.

The Kydex sheath is moulded by Andrew to each individual knife – so there’s no slop or rattle – and there is also a reassuring grip around the front guard to keep the knife in place.

Knowing I would be in body armour, Andrew made a second sheath to fit the Mollie webbing – this is belt netting that is now military standard

throughout the world for attaching bits of kit to your body armour or Bergen rucksack. With two sheaths for the one knife, I can just move the knife to either the Bergen or the webbing depending if I am in body armour or not. This also lets me carry the knife upside-down if required.

Andrew also had one other trick up his sleeve: he’d made a small ‘piggy-back blade’ that fits in its own sheath on top of the larger knife. It is only a 4¾in strip plain chisel blade, but it is infinitely useful when a bigger blade is just too big for those fiddly little jobs. However for me it has an added advantage: it is easily concealable in the hand while still having enough blade length to cause damage if required to do so, and with a spine thickness of six millimetres I am sure it’s pretty much indestructible.

At this stage you’re probably saying to yourself: That’s all well and good for a military situation, but what use is such a knife to me? Well I can tell you from years of experience hunting large game that this knife would fit equally well into any hunting scenario. You could do no better for dressing game with this well-balanced blade: complemented by a sweeping curved edge, it is ideal for both skinning and butchery, and will certainly last a lifetime.

Out here in Afghanistan there is plenty of time to compare kit, and with a multitude of nationalities it’s always interesting to see what people bring out to theatre – and, perhaps more importantly, what works and what doesn’t. It is at such times that I get a big kick showing off my custom blade to others and saying, “This was made for me”.

For details on Andrew Jordan custom blades, visit www.jordanknives.com. ■



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