

Test and Evaluation Results
of
Wilson Combat/Steve Woods Combat Utility Blade (CUB)
by
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Introductory Comments

When one combines the mind-numbing quantity of knives on the market with the realization that a tremendous number of knife owners don't understand that a knife is a unique tool specifically designed and crafted for a determined purpose, it's no wonder that consumers frequently end up buying knives that fall short of meeting their requirements. As a result, many knives end up being abused, destroyed or banished to the bottom of tool boxes never to be seen again.

There is no single knife capable of performing every job that a knife could conceivably be called upon to do. If one seeks to obtain the most use from one's blade, one must first carefully evaluate one's needs and then research the knife market in an attempt to locate one whose characteristics seem best capable of achieving those goals. Those who follow this plan will be far more likely to purchase a quality knife that will effectively meet their needs for years to come.

In order for a knife to peak my interest enough for me to take a serious evaluative look, it has to have a tremendous amount of visual character. This does not mean superfluous cosmetics, such as a pretty finish or cute etchings. What I'm talking about are practical aspects such as its physical size, the style and composition of its handle, blade thickness, the style and shape of the point, the grind of the blade, etc. I also compare these features to the nature of its advertised use. In other words, I ask myself whether I think the knife can do the job that its manufacturer claims it can. When I first saw the Wilson/Wood CUB on Wilson's website and compared its physical features as depicted in the photographs to the product description, it quickly grabbed my attention. It is advertised as a Combat/Utility (i.e. general purpose) knife, and because it has a number of features that I personally like in a knife of this style, I knew I had to run it through the ringer.

Overall Initial Impression

Examining the knife nestled within its trim, Kydex sheath was a sight for sore eyes. The sum of its parts magically exceeded the whole. The combination of its style, geometry, balance and symphonic agreement resulted in a totally bad-ass, yet cultured, appearance. It's solid and compact profile was intriguing.

The sheath is well made, compact and slim, and removing the knife was effortless. The knife itself is a beautiful sight to behold. The pictures on the website are nice but don't

do it justice. Combining the concave and convex portions of the spine with its substantial blade, exposed butt, impressive G10 grips and adorable skull lanyard, the physical appearance of the CUB is outstanding. Even my wife who has no interest in such things could not help but declare how great it looks. This is one of the best looking knives I've seen in quite a long time.

Being about nine inches in overall length, the knife is relatively compact. It is well balanced and the G10 handles provide a comfortable and positive grip. The blade's grinds are clear, distinct and substantial, and the bead blasting was nicely applied.

My initial impression could not be more favorable. The knife looks great; it's solid and feels good in the hand – like it's an extension of one's arm. Without question, A+

Sheath

The Kydex sheath with its Tek-Lok belt attachment is strong, well made, slim and is comfortable for concealed wear. To test the strength of the belt attachment I put it on and asked a friend to try and pull it off my belt. He could not. In fact, he lifted me off the ground by the sheath and it held fast.

For concealment purposes, I wore the knife beneath a loose-fitting T-shirt and it stayed very well hidden throughout my daily activities. It was also very comfortable, an extremely critical factor. From this posture, the knife can be rapidly and effortlessly presented for use. In an attempt to achieve an even greater level of concealment, I removed the Tek-Lok attachment from the sheath and installed a polymer loop that I bought from WC a while back, which I believe is still offered. This loop is inexpensive and allows the sheath to be worn inside one's pants, rather like an inside-the-waistband holster. This is the way to go if you want the ultimate degree of concealment.

Even though the sheath does a good job of securing the knife, when I held the sheathed knife in an inverted position and shook it, the knife fell out consistently. For daily wear on the street, I believe the sheath secures the knife well enough. During my recent multi-day venture into heavily wooded land laced with hills, valleys and creeks, I found myself checking the knife every so often just to make sure it was still there. Therefore, for military, field, or survival-related scenarios where losing one's knife could have drastic consequences, I would prefer a quality sheath made of leather or ballistic nylon possessing an additional retention device. Perhaps a sheath of this description could be offered as an optional accessory. I would purchase one in a heartbeat.

Suggested improvements: needs an optional high-security sheath.

Summation: The Kydex sheath is a quality item best suited for concealed carry.

Grade: A

The Handle

The CUB's handle is Wilson's G10 material, an incredibly strong and durable polymer composition. The pattern and texture of this material offers the user an incredibly secure grip. I have Wilson's G10 pistol grips on all my 1911s and they perform with spectacular grace. Not only do the G10 handles on the CUB perform, but the black and blue-gray pattern adds a tremendous degree of visual pleasantry.

I generally do not like manufacturer's logos or other insignia imbedded into knife handles, especially so when the handle is made of antler horn or fine, exotic hardwood. The G10 handles have an inlaid WC logo on one side and Steve Wood's logo on the other. In this case, both logos actually enhance the overall appearance of the handles as well as the entire knife. They lend an air of cultural refinement that works very well. I like them.

The CUB's two-piece handles are attached to the tang with two Torx-style screws on each side so that the user can remove them in order to clean and service the knife and the grips themselves, a great idea. One will need a Torx T20 size driver for this process. When I attempted to remove these screws, however, I quickly discovered that they would not budge. I think they were installed by a thousand-pound gorilla on steroids using an impact wrench. I was afraid that I might end up breaking either a screw or a grip panel. After tremendous effort, I finally got them to cooperate. They should not be this tight. The Torx screws and their bushings are made of aluminum or other similar non-steel alloy, which should provide adequate strength and durability. Although I don't particularly like Torx screws simply because I see no practical advantage to them over traditional hex-head screws, their star-shaped pattern visually accentuates the bold character of the G10 grips.

The tang-to-grip fit is extremely nice. The fit along the top portion of the tang's spine is absolutely flawless. The fit on the bottom side of the tang is good but not as nice, having a small gap measuring about one inch in length on each panel. This gap could allow moisture to accumulate between the tang and grip eventually causing corrosion if not properly maintained. As long as one can remove the CUB's grips for cleaning as intended and does so, this is not a major issue of concern.

The tang and grips have a semi-circular cutout for one's index finger. I normally don't like cutouts and finger grooves on knife handles because they tend, out of obvious necessity, to be a one-size-fits-all feature. In this instance, however, I found the cutout to be very comfortable and useful during all cutting and chopping operations, even though the edges are not specifically rounded for user comfort. This cutout also acts as a lower guard to keep one's fingers and hand off the blade during aggressive actions. It does its job well.

While any knife can be securely grasped while both it and one's hands are dry, many knives fail miserably when one's hands are sweaty, dirty, wet, oily and downright slimy. I purchased a few whole frying chickens, which needed to be cut up for freezing, so this seemed like a great way to begin the evaluation. After totally immersing the knife and

both hands in water, slicing up the chicken was a breeze. My grip was solid and secure. I then poured cooking oil over both my hands and the knife and continued dissecting the birds. Again, the G10 grips exceeded my expectations and offered a firm and secure grip. The blade sliced through the chicken with effortless ease.

Even though the cooking oil phase of the test resulted in outstanding performance, I was still not satisfied. In a five-gallon bucket I combined one gallon of dirt and a couple gallons of water and stirred until the consistency was just right. I then placed the knife into the bucket, shoving it to the very bottom. At that point I reached into the bucket, retrieved the knife and began to chop my way through a solid two-inch tree limb. In spite of the mud covering everything, I did not have to tighten my grip on the knife in order to maintain safe and secure control.

Suggested improvements: Don't allow the Incredible Hulk to install the grip screws.

Summation: These practical scenarios proved to my satisfaction that the style, content and texture of the handle are capable of handling any mission.

Overall score: A.

The Butt

The butt of the knife is exposed, rounded and extends, at its longest point, 11mm past the handle. The thickness of the spine at this location is a very solid 4.5mm. Three holes following the butt's convex formation have been drilled into this area: the first approximately 9mm below the level of the spine, the middle approximately 17mm below the level of the spine and the bottom approximately 25mm below the spine. The diameter of the first two holes measures about 4mm and the bottom 6mm.

I examined the holes for internal burrs and found several. Perhaps the drill bit used was not sharp enough or someone performed this process with undue haste, maybe both. Realistically, most people are not going to be looking inside the holes for any reason. I did simply because it provides an additional insight into the manufacturer's overall attention to detail. For a knife of this price and quality, the burrs are a significant disappointment.

Although I feel the two smaller holes detract from the knife's overall pleasing appearance, they did serve a valuable purpose by allowing me to double-lash the entire knife to the end of a severed tree limb, effectively producing a spear which could be used to gather food and keep wild critters at bay. Granted, one could simply wrap a binding material around the handle and the limb without using these holes, but by first securing the knife to the pole with one's choice of binding through these holes and **then** wrapping the entire handle with binding material, the chances of losing the knife whittle away to the lowest possible level and the strength of the improvised spear will be greatly enhanced.

The bottom hole is great for attaching a lanyard or wrist strap, especially if one is working over water or heights. Dropping an unsecured knife could result in its loss and, inevitably, one's eventual peril.

Exposed butts tend to be designed for military or other tactical applications. The two primary applications are hostile combatant neutralization through physical contact with an opponent's cranial region, and rescue. Applying a practical field test, I used mine to crack open walnuts – it worked wonderfully. While wearing gloves for protection, I also used the butt to smash out the passenger side window of a junked automobile and then cut the seatbelt, simulating a rescue extraction. While this was not an easy task, I had no problem maintaining a secure and safe grip on the handle, and the butt did its job well.

Suggested improvements: Needs a bit more attention to detail/quality control.

Summation: The butt is solid, highly useful, and its holes offer a heightened level of versatility.

Overall Score: B

The Blade & Tang

The blade and tang consist of a solid one-piece section of 154CM stainless steel, measuring approximately 4.5mm thick. I feel this is an appropriate dimension for a knife of this size. If the blade were any thicker, it would make the knife unduly heavy and could lessen its ability to provide fine, exacting cuts. Although my favorite knife steels are 01 and D2, 154CM is a high-carbon stainless steel, essentially meaning that it's durable, will hold an edge well and is corrosion resistant.

When I am evaluating the potential merits of any knife, I look at five basic elements: 1) the type of steel, which we have already discussed, 2) the type of grind, 3) the belly, 4) the point, and 5) the cutting edge. For a tactical, utility style knife, I personally feel that a flat grind is the best way to go. A flat grind as found on the CUB tends to give the knife a strong spine for great durability while offering a cutting edge that is both strong and thin. This, in turn, allows one to make detailed, exacting cuts, such as may be needed for skinning one's dinner.

The thickness of a cutting edge is critical to consider when determining the best use of any given knife. The thinner the edge, the better it will cut. Going too thin, however, will cost one some points for overall durability. On the other hand, an edge that is overly thick will be more durable but will not cut quite as well as a thinner edge. The CUB seems to have taken the middle ground, which I personally feel is a great place to be because one will experience good cutting/slicing ability and have an edge that will hold up well to rigorous use.

It's not at all unusual to see someone test the sharpness of a knife's edge by running it along the length of his arm, shaving hairs along the way. I've done this myself with

many knives over the years and found a great number of them to be razor-sharp. This is not necessarily a good thing, unless you are specifically looking for a knife to shave hair from your arm. The problem with knives this sharp is that they tend to be too sharp for practical purposes, meaning that their edges may not hold up well under real-world field conditions. Out there where it counts, knives have to be sharp and STAY that way. A knife with an edge so fine that it shaves like a straight razor will soon go dull and not be able to perform the jobs you need it to. I performed this very test with the CUB and with a bit of downward pressure it left a few bald spots on my arm, proving to me that it's sharp enough but not so sharp that durability will be compromised.

The next factor I feel must be discussed is the belly. The belly is simply the amount of curve the blade has beneath its point. This is equally important because the amount of belly will determine the purpose for which the knife is best suited. The belly is designed to cut and slash. The greater the belly, the better its slashing/slicing ability will be. Knives with substantial bellies tend to make superb skinning knives, but because their points are reduced as the belly is increased, such knives tend not to penetrate or pierce particularly well. Simultaneously, knives with shallow bellies (such as daggers) tend to penetrate well but don't provide the best results when cutting/slicing. To me, a tactical utilitarian knife should be carefully designed so as to provide maximum slicing/cutting ability and offer a sharp, durable point for penetrating. This is far easier said than done, and many knives just don't make the grade. Based upon the test results to follow, I believe the CUB is perfectly designed to offer the user the best of both worlds.

The final factor to be considered is the knife's tip or point as established by the shape of the blade. The CUB sports a drop point blade, which is superb for general purpose use. Drop point simply means that the knife's point drops below its spine. In addition to making the point quite strong, the drop point offers the user a tremendous amount of pinpoint control, which is why this format is very popular with hunting knives. If one is skinning out a critter, exacting control is crucial in order to avoid cutting into the meat prematurely or cutting an organ which could spoil the end product. For certain ops, instead of holding a knife in a traditional position as though one were slicing a loaf of bread, I like to turn it 90 degrees so that the right grip panel is flat against the base of the fingers of my right hand and then place my thumb atop the left grip. I find this extremely comfortable when making horizontal cuts. When I did this with the CUB, it fit my hand so well that had I drawn a line from the center of my thumb to the tip of the blade, the results would have been a dimension as straight as an arrow. What this gave me was a spectacular amount of physical control over the point and belly. In the practical test, we filleted out a few catfish with such ease and control that we wasted no meat and got the job over with quickly.

During field ops over a period of a few days, I used the CUB for a number of varied and challenging tasks. As already mentioned, I used the butt to crack open some whole walnuts that I had brought along, and turning catfish into filets was a breeze. I am not skilled in the delicate art of field dressing game animals, but my accompanying friend is and he used the CUB to prep a few critters who gave their lives for our sustenance. He

made short work of the process and was pleased with the CUB's performance, citing exacting controllability and ease of piercing and slicing as key attributes.

Chopping through two-inch branches for lean-to shelters was relatively easy. I also severed small, leafy branches to use as roofing material. I then shaved and chopped bark from trees and turned small branches and twigs into kindling for fire. I also cut a variety of binding material such as rope and vines with which to secure the shelter. Additionally, I shaved a tree branch measuring at least an inch and a half of its limbs and sharpened one end, effectively producing a spear-like implement with which one could lance small game or even a fish. Using the pair of holes in the butt, I double lashed the knife to a five foot long branch I had defoliated using the CUB and made a spear. I tried gathering small game and a few fish with it but my skill level left something to be desired. The spear itself was great, however, and in the right hands would make a formidable tool. I was later forced to use this improvised spear to defend myself against the attack of a few vicious watermelons whose ancestors clearly were descended from Genghis Kahn. Although it was an ugly battle, the CUB and I prevailed.

I never recommend throwing a knife unless it has been designed specifically for that purpose. These knives have massive points or tips designed to sustain heavy duty use. Tips of other knives can be seriously damaged if thrown, especially at hard surfaces. I threw the CUB at a large tree a number of times trying to make it stick, which it did more times than not. Those times when it did not stick were not the fault of the tip; it was my fault because I am not a skilled thrower. I also drove the point into the tree enough times using a traditional overhand ice pick grip to give tree huggers a month's worth of nightmares. If I had this on video, I would call it "Nightmare on Elm Tree." After cutting, chopping, poking, prying, throwing and filleting, the CUB remained sharp, the edge sustained no visible damage and the tip was as pointed as it was when it came out of the box. In fact, I later used the tip to dig a substantial and pesky splinter from beneath the skin of my foot.

Except in life-threatening or other critical situations, knives should not be used as pry bars. While helping a friend demolish an old wooden shed recently, I used the CUB to pry some of the slats and boards from the structure's framework. This was not a particularly easy task because older structures like this were pretty well made back in the day. Even though I was a bit concerned about the possibility of over taxing the blade to the point where it or the tip might snap, I threw all caution to the wind and gave it all I could. It held up nicely. Even though I do not recommend using a quality knife as a pry bar, the CUB proved that it can sustain this kind of abuse.

To further explore the CUB's capability to serve as an all-around blade, I put its cutting edge to the test using a variety of other items. I had an old leather strap about ¼" thick that I easily cut into a number of pieces. I also sliced through an old bicycle tire, a heavy canvas duffle bag, a variety of ballistic nylon straps, lawn-chair webbing, parachute cord, ½" nylon rope, bungee cords, heavy gauge nylon ratchet binding and an old automotive fan belt. Because of its thin and strong cutting edge, the CUB made short work of all these articles while retaining its integrity.

Suggested improvements: I have two. First, I would like to see thumb notches or other serrations on the spine beginning about 10mm in front of the handle. These serrations should extend back toward the butt for about one inch. During heavier cutting and chopping operations, thumb serrations would allow an additional amount of purchasing ability.

The second area of improvement involves the spine's ramped peak. My thumb rested atop the peak during a number of operations. I found this rather uncomfortable. Although the peak enhances the CUB's overall physical appearance, its crest is rather pronounced, hence the discomfort. This feature serves absolutely no practical purpose, and I found it to be an annoyance bordering on the substantial side while performing medium and heavy duty tasks. For light-duty tasks, however, the peak was never an issue of concern. If the CUB were capable of handling only light-duty jobs, I never would have mentioned this aspect. Because the CUB can handle some pretty tough jobs, however, it's unfortunate that the peak limits its potential by making the process uncomfortable for certain users. I believe also that the cause of this problem is that the knife is rather small in size and I have relatively large hands. I allowed some people with smaller hands to hold and examine the knife and the majority stated that they would not expect to encounter similar issues.

Summation: In its present configuration, the CUB is best suited for people with smaller hands. It's a compact knife with a lot of heart; it can tackle a number of jobs traditionally reserved for larger knives. By eliminating the peak and adding thumb notches, the potential for maximum versatility can be realized by a much wider variety of people. In spite of this shortcoming, the blade performed flawlessly and held up beautifully throughout the entire test and evaluation process. If I could take only one knife into a military or survival environment, this would not be my first choice. I would opt for a Wilson/Murr Model 5 or 1. That being said, I would absolutely select this knife as a backup, for general camp and field duties, and for tactical applications. It is superb for its intended advertised purpose: tactical and utility work.

Overall score: because of the lack of thumb notches/serrations and uncomfortable peaked spine, I give the blade a B-; with these modifications, a very solid A+.

Tactical Applications

Testing a knife's ability to perform in a self-defense or a military defensive/offensive encounter outside the reality of those environments is rather challenging. In spite of this limitation I was able to perform a few tests which show that the CUB would perform extremely well.

I was invited to a friend's hog roast several days before the event. The timing was perfect. After explaining that I am in the process of performing a T & E on the CUB and needed a test subject to determine its tactical value, he allowed me to take a few whacks

at the substantial pre-cooked pig. After a few thrusting motions to test piercing ability along with some slicing movements, it was very easy to see that the CUB would be a highly effective tool in this environment.

I also used a few watermelons in my tactical T & E. They actually make rather nice test subjects because internally their composition has something in common with humans: they are largely water. With the hide of the watermelon being tremendously thicker and tougher than skin they easily simulate a heavy coat or leather jacket. The point of the CUB pierced the melon's substantial hide thoroughly with little effort. I applied more effort during the slicing/slashing phase of the test, resulting in equally effective results. Another reason why watermelons make good test subjects is that you can eat them afterwards – which we did.

As previously stated, I used the exposed butt of the tang to break out a car window and then cut a seatbelt to simulate a vehicle extraction rescue. Although it took some effort to break through the glass, the CUB got the job done.

For tactical applications where the need for extreme concealment is a priority, the CUB shines like a silver dollar in Brilliant Uncirculated condition. In fact, CUB spelled backwards is BUC (Brilliant Uncirculated Condition). By simply removing its grips, you end up with a skeletonized blade that is so concealable it's scary. Additionally, by removing the Tek-Lok belt attachment from the sheath and installing Wilson's waistband belt loop, this combination provides a tremendous amount of deep-cover concealment and security. I wore this ensemble for a few days beneath a T-shirt and found it to be extremely comfortable and incredibly easy to conceal.

Suggested improvements: The user would greatly benefit from thumb notches as previously mentioned, particularly when used in its ultra-concealment mode with both grip panels removed.

Summation: I am totally convinced that the CUB is capable of serving as a highly versatile and effective implement of self-defense and would be equally at home in the skilled hands of a military operative.

Overall score: A-.

Warranty

Because the product description on your website neither describes nor implies any warranty, I can only conclude that none exists. I feel that the lifetime warranty you offered with the WC/Keith Murr knives was a tremendous selling point and would like to see the same offered for the CUB. I also know that you offered free re-sharpening, another outstanding feature that I would like to see as well.

Price

Although I would love to see the CUB sell for \$299.95 because I feel there is a strong niche in the market for a high-quality custom-made fixed blade knife just like this that can be purchased for under \$300, I feel the CUB at \$349 gives the buyer honest value for the dollar. I don't believe one can purchase greater practical performance at any price.

Final Summation

Like any other fine implement, a quality knife is something to be enjoyed. The better it fits one's needs, the more likely it will see frequent use, and the more it's used the more it will be enjoyed. Because the CUB can do so many things well, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that it is designed primarily for utilitarian purposes. A number of times I found myself comparing this knife to those designed for far heavier tasks. This is the mark of a great knife. It's not too difficult to manufacture a knife that's designed to perform one specific job well. We know what is required to produce a quality skinning knife and we know what it takes for one to penetrate well. These are knives nearly anyone can produce. What's extremely difficult is to produce a knife that's capable of performing a multitude of tasks and doing them all well. Because each aspect of a knife possesses a symbiotic relationship to its other parts, one that can truly do many things well can only be created by one who combines a working knowledge of these variables with highly skilled manufacturing techniques supported by sound quality control.

I gave the CUB a thorough and widely varied workout, many times pushing it beyond the realm of reasonable expectations. During each and every event, it came through with flying colors. It gobbled up everything I threw its way and never lost an ounce of structural integrity. Its tip is pointed, sharp and strong; the cutting edge is fine yet durable; the handle provides the user great security and controllability; the butt is strong and practical; it's nicely balanced; its physical size is compact and the weight is just right.

Although one with large hands may find the CUB less than comfortable during sustained medium to heavy duty use, one who is well prepared will have the right tools for the right job. Therefore, for the harshest field or wilderness survival scenarios I would have two knives: the Wilson/Murr Model 5 or 1 and the CUB for everything else. For deep-cover concealed carry, removing the grip panels will give one a tremendous edge. For all-around utilitarian purposes, this is a jewel. In spite of what I feel are two necessary modifications (removal of the spine's peak and the installation of thumb notches), the CUB is an extremely nice knife that will earn a reputation as a high quality tactical and general purpose blade – and then some. Even though it's small enough to be a puppy, it can run with big dogs and take a large bite. I shall recommend it to my friends and anyone who will listen.