



KNIFE FIELD TRIAL

ProTech TR4



by M. Willson Offutt

The "Tactical Response 4" from ProTech is in the same class as the venerable Spyderco Military model, but one increment thicker and heavier. So robust, it is hard to decide whether to clip it in a jeans' pocket or use the belt pouch which is included. The TR4 is a big fella, but so is my F250 truck which I love and respect. When there is a big job to tackle, don't mess around. The TR4 is the manual folding version of the automatic model, virtually identical in appearance and dimensions. Remove the spring. Add a black thumb stud. Side-step restrictions on automatics.

Visual

Open the TR4 and stare at it. Behold macho cold steel. The saber grind blade is long and wide as folders go, with a non-reflective "stonewash" finish, a graceful curved cutting edge with good belly and a half-length swedge on top. All of this folds into an aircraft grade aluminum handle, notable for prominent finger grooves, plus finer traction grooves, and a non-slip matte black surface coating for a very secure grip. The components are all held tight in place with three shiny torx screws. At the butt is a shiny steel stud to break glass. On the side of the handle, near the opposite end, two flush shiny steel discs 1/4" each: one is the big pivot pin and the other unlocks the open blade but looks just like the pushbutton to open an automatic. Coulda' fooled me. The matching matte black belt clip holds like vice-grips, so if you lose the knife you may feel a draft as you probably lost your jeans' pocket too. The left side of the blade is marked ProTech USA and 154CM. The other side is unmarked. The well-fitted pouch is black ballistic nylon designed to slide onto a 1 1/2" belt. The pouch closes with a full flap and a sturdy plastic clip. The pouch will never come off. The knife will not exit the pouch until you intentionally remove it. This excellent carry system was proven safe, secure and accessible by the original Leatherman, among others, using a snug fit pouch with over-flap and large, stiff security snap. Safe, secure, and accessible determines if it is suitable for rock climbing, skydiving, caving, climbing high into a deer stand, and other dynamic activities, or not. Here, the risk of loss or risk of an accidental wound to person or equipment, rounded to the nearest whole number, is zero.

Venue

The TR4 is not art, and not frail, so it would not occur to me to pamper it. In fact, I increasingly over stress Field Trial knives knowing I have limited time, and will start with a new

one in four weeks or so. So immediately I stab, hack, twist, pry, drop, throw to see what breaks, gets loose or falls off. In this instance, nothing. It is tough. It is designed to withstand strong forces. For example, it will hold up to the rigors of farming which can only be imagined by my comfortable suburban neighbors. The knife is very much in its element farming, because as compared to suburbia, you have to cut tough stuff, and a lot of it. Specifically, I cut open hay bales, bags of feed, bags of insecticide, vet products, all of them packaged to withstand being stacked, dropped, whacked, and rained on. Hay bales used to be 50 pounds, but farmers are moving to super-sized bales big enough to feed a dozen cows. Big enough to crush a man. You may need to apply down-force exceeding fifty pounds, in order to cut thick or tough protective material. You need a large friendly handle and a very stiff blade locked in place, to withstand the loads. Here you have it. This knife does not commit the common sin of too much blade and not enough handle. When farming, you are covering distances and if your knife falls in a hay field, or even a hay storage loft, it is not at all like falling on the oak flooring in your den, where you can hear it, and see it and retrieve it. Farming is not a fire-fight in Afghanistan but it is about as rigorous, and dangerous, as it gets in the lower 48. Weaklings are soon weeded out.

Cuts

The blade steel is 154CM, which is our domestic version of Japanese ATS34, for thirty years the gold standard, only recently surpassed by new high-tech steels which are not without drawbacks. I like the edge geometry and that it readily shaves hair. You expect good edge retention at this price point, and you get it. It is quick to touch up on ceramic rods, to return it to shaving sharp. The blade has no flex. After extensive cutting over four weeks, the usual blade/handle loosey-goosey play found in automatics is absent. ATS34 is rust and corrosion resistant, but living by the Bay has taught me it will not stand up to sea water unless coated or rinsed after use in fresh water to remove salt residue. I just hate when a pretty blade breaks out like a teenager with acne.

Applications

Folding knives dominate dynamic activities and there are basic reasons, mainly Newtonian physics. A well designed folder will never fall open and cut you. Closed, it is a negligible threat. Solid contact with a folded knife the size of a Snickers candy bar may cause quite a

bruise, but no worse. I fell off a cantering horse and landed on a folded knife. I know. You will feel safe and comfortable on a horse, in a tree stand, deep in a cave or simply hiking cross country. The TR4 is not a good option for weight obsessed climbers who own postal scales, but this is a quibble. The TR4 with pouch weighs less than a medium fixed blade knife in a sheath, and more compact. You can get a fire started. You can discourage a mugger or a pit bull. I used it one night to prepare dinner. This knife is overkill in the kitchen, to carry to your office, the mall, and around suburbia. You will use and appreciate this knife in the same places and circumstances as the F250 truck.

Weak Link

I tried to break off the front one inch of the blade, jammed in a crack, and could not do it using one hand. The TR4 is so robust I do not think you can damage it with hand pressure alone. The trade-off is you have a folding knife more than 1/2" thick, and more than 4 ounces. Trivial compared to a handgun. Massive compared to lesser pocket knives.

Conclusion

This is a knife I like to use, mainly because it cuts better and faster than most, and I carried it in my pocket always feeling it was slightly thick and heavy for comfort. Switching to the belt pouch, the issue was completely resolved. In this way, you have a knife as strong as a medium fixed blade, more accessible, and without getting poked by a long handle or slicing through its sheath or otherwise posing a hazard. And you will never lose it. The knife is fairly priced, considering the good design and "Chris Reeve" quality. Oh, by the way, I suspect you can insert one spring and convert to full automatic, but why would this temptation even enter my thoughts?

Data Sidebar

Maker	ProTech Knives, LLC www.protechknives.com
Model	TR-4MA.1
Blade Steel	154CM
Handle length	5.0"
Rc hardness	59 (per maker)
Blade length	4"
Length overall	9.0"
Blade thickness	0.125"
Weight (knife)	4.5 oz.
Weight (sheath)	2 oz.
Made in	California
Retail	\$280