



BATTLE BLADES

FLAGSHIP FOLDER

Newcomer Rob Walker's martial arts-inspired tactical has all the makings of a personal defense blade that separates flash from function!

BY MICHAEL JANICH

Have you ever noticed that some of the best equipment designs are pretty simple and straightforward, while gear that screams "high speed, low drag" often doesn't live up to its look? Similarly, experienced practitioners tend to prefer practical, somewhat Spartan equipment and trust their lives to skills instead of gadgets. This kind of commitment to functional simplicity summarizes the approach of a company called Combative Edge, its founder Rob Walker, and its inaugural tactical knife design, the M1.

Walker's interest in tactical knives is a direct outgrowth of his study of the martial arts. A long-time practitioner of the Filipino arts, he trained for a number of years in a system that combined elements of Inosanto Kali and Pekiti Tirsia. Later, he chose to focus on pure Pekiti Tirsia and has been training di-

rectly under that system's most iconic figure, Grand Tuhon Leo Gaje, Jr., for the past four years.

Pekiti Tirsia is a system of Filipino kali with a highly evolved edged-weapon curriculum. Literally meaning "Close-Thirds," Pekiti Tirsia's most descriptive translation, in the words of Grand Master Gaje, is "to cut up small, in close." It therefore makes sense that experienced Pekiti practitioners know how to handle a knife exceptionally well. They also know what separates flash from function when it comes to designing a blade for personal defense.

Combative Edge Birth

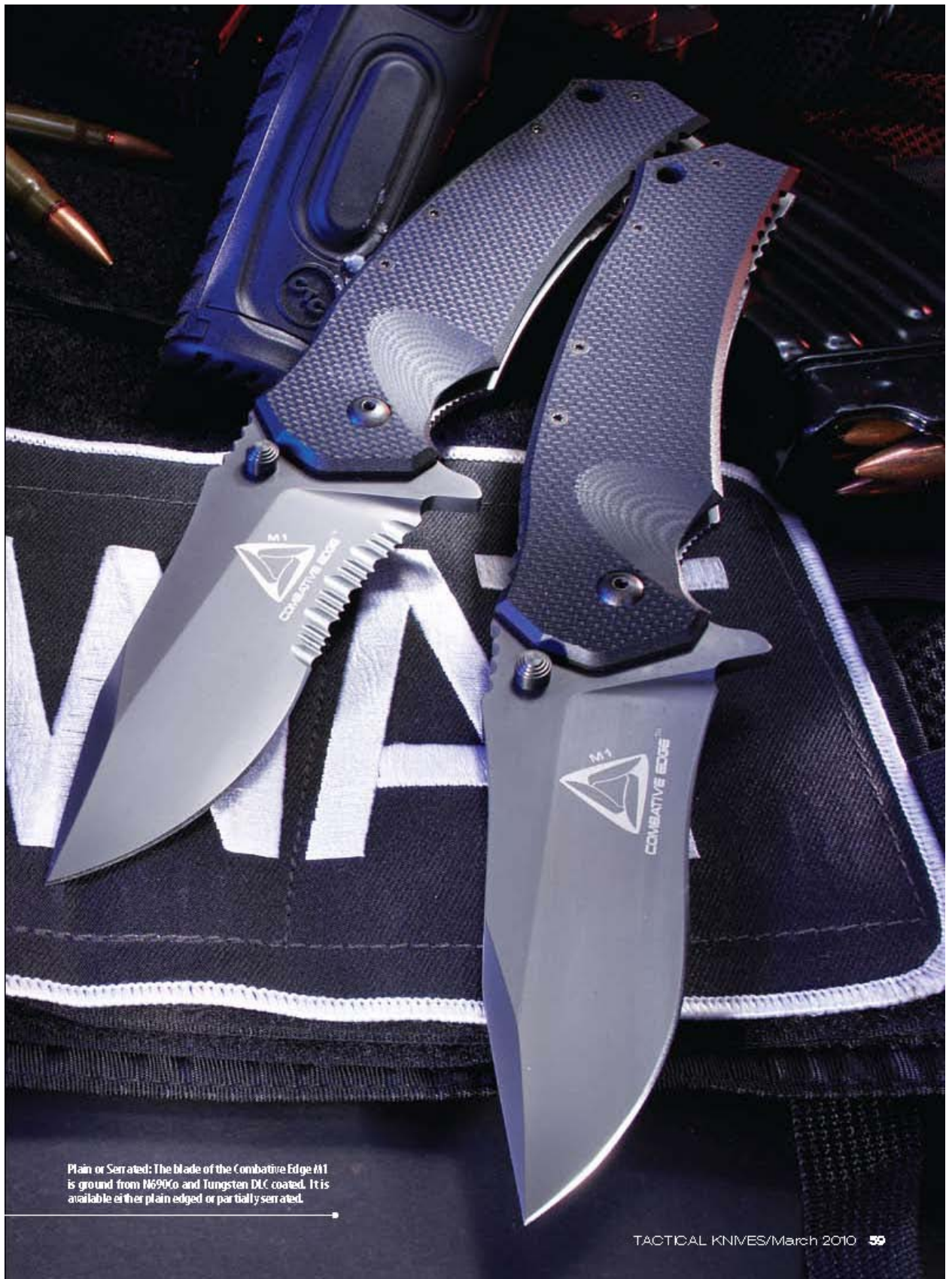
Walker founded Combative Edge in 2006. Unemployed and uncertain what to do with his life, he decided to focus on the two things he enjoyed most: knives and the martial arts. His concept was to manufacture high-quality knives and teach people how to use them for personal defense through training programs and seminars.

Walker was confident that he was prepared to tackle the training aspect of his business model; however, knife manufacturing was a different story. Although he knew the knife industry and its major players from a consumer's perspective, he had no idea what it took to start a knife business. To remedy that, he attended the 2006 SHOT Show to meet

and hopefully learn from the best minds in the business. There he had the good fortune of meeting Spyderco's Sal Glesser, who gave



The M1's clip is reversible for right-side tip-up or tip-down carry. It also includes an overtravel stop attached to the other end of the handle.



Plain or Serrated: The blade of the Combat Edge M1 is ground from M690Co and Tungsten DLC coated. It is available either plain edged or partially serrated.



Thumb opening of the M1 requires gripping the handle with the fingertips on the clip. Gripping too tightly on the lock bar can apply pressure to the detent and bind the blade.



The integral flipper on the M1's blade is perfectly sized and contoured. It opens the knife reliably and offers a substantial guard without being cumbersome.

Rob a crash course in the basics of the tactical knife industry and how to get started. Walker still considers that conversation a landmark event in his career planning and the history of Combative Edge.

M1 Tactical Folder

The first knife to be offered by Combative Edge is the M1 tactical folder, which he developed with the prototyping support of custom knifemaker and *TK* photographer, Steve Woods. Walker wanted his first knife to be something simple, reasonably big,

and comfortable in any grip. The M1 is all that and a whole lot more.

Manufactured by Fox in Italy, the M1 is built around a stout frame-lock mechanism. The lock side of the M1's handle is precision machined from 6AL/4V titanium and bead blasted to a matte gray finish.

The other side of the handle is machined from coarse-textured G-10. Since the titanium side of the handle provides the majority of the handle's structural strength, no liner is necessary on the G-10 side. A full-length spacer and plenty of assem-

bly screws further enhance the handle's structure.

The M1's 4-inch blade is a wide, clip-point design with a straight, unsharpened swedge. It is flat ground from Bohler N690Co steel and has a clean, high grind. The edge profile features a generous belly near the point and a hint of a recurve near the heel. The blade is Tungsten DLC coated for a durable black finish and features both an ambidextrous thumb stud and an integral guard/flipper.

Carry of the M1 is supported via a "foldover-style" pocket clip that does double duty as an overtravel stop for the frame lock. As it comes out of the box, it is set up for right-side tip-down carry; however, the clip can be easily switched for tip-up carry if preferred. To support this option, the knife comes with an overtravel stop attached to the butt end of the handle. When you switch the dip, this stop should be installed on the pivot-pin end of the handle. It prevents you from pushing the frame lock too far when releasing the lock, weakening its spring tension and affecting the integrity of the lock-up.

Both the pocket clip and the overtravel stop are attached via four stout Torx-head screws—a nice touch that keeps the clip very secure.

Initial Impressions

The first thing I did with the M1 was evaluate the engagement of the lock mechanism after different types of openings. Locks will typically seat well when a knife is opened briskly, but to me, the true test is lock engagement after a slow opening. When opened slowly, there is no extra blade inertia to help the lock “seat.” It either works or it doesn’t.

The M1’s lock clicked into place with a nice deep engagement despite a dead-slow opening. A few moderate spine whacks confirmed that it was determined to stay there, just like it should. High-speed openings with the thumb studs, flipper, and good old inertia all produced solid lock-ups with no excessive galling or binding.

The handle profile of the M1 is nicely tapered to fit the natural shape of the hand. Its generous length provides plenty to hang onto—even with large hands—and offers a substantial punyo (butt) for impact strikes. Although the balance point of the knife is centered along its overall length, the lightweight handle construction and beefy blade thickness give it a slightly blade-heavy feel.

The only challenge I faced in handling the M1 came while practicing high-speed draws and thumb openings. Like all frame locks, the fact that the lock bar is not covered by a handle slab makes it possible to squeeze it with your fingertips while attempting a thumb opening. This pressure forces the detent ball into the blade and holds it closed, stalling the opening. With very little practice, I was able to adjust my grip to avoid binding the lock while still maintaining solid control over the knife during the opening. To be fair, I have experienced this issue with other frame-lock knives in the past. Again, a little bit of tuning of my grip solved the problem.

If you are a “flipper” fan you’ll find that the M1’s well-designed flipper and significant blade mass combine to yield a very positive opening option. The flipper also serves as a very functional guard and is devoid of any sharp edges or unnecessary texturing.

Releasing the lock on the M1 was easily accomplished, but—like any good defensive knife—not too easily accomplished. On my samples, the contours of the lock release and the adjacent G-10 scales are nearly flush. According to Walker, this has

already been corrected to make them completely flush. This often overlooked detail confirms Walker’s commitment to producing a true combat-worthy knife. Many liner locks and frame locks have generous cutouts on the handle slab opposite the lock. In a fight, the index finger bears against the lock when the knife is gripped tightly and can possibly release the lock unintentionally. That won’t happen with the M1.

Cutting and Puncturing

Clearly, the overall design and ergonomics of the M1 are sound, but the true measure of any tactical knife is its actual cutting (and puncturing) performance. I’ll save you the suspense; the M1 performs just as it should.

Thanks to its excellent edge geometry, the M1 cuts extremely well. Against foam test targets covered with denim, the M1 produced deep cuts—exactly the kind that would have telling effect in a defensive situation. It also performed very well in thrusting tests on a foam mannequin torso, penetrating deeply and allowing excellent control of impact shock.

The handle ergonomics of the M1 also shined during my tests. Its flat profile allowed easy edge orientation and I found no “hot spots” during hard-contact cuts and thrusts. Since Pekiti practitioners are also known to be fond of reverse-edge tactics (gripping the knife with the cutting edge facing toward the user), I also gave those a try with the M1. Once again, the results were excellent.

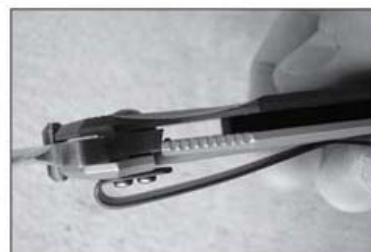
I also tested the M1 through a variety of more “mundane” cutting chores, including repeated cuts on rope, cardboard, and carpeting. According to my research, Bohler’s ordinary N690 steel is basically the equivalent of 440C. The M1’s N690Co steel, which is made in Bohler’s Austrian facility, adds cobalt to the alloy mix, which generally increases the steel’s hardness and strength and allows higher quenching temperatures. It also acts as a catalyst to enhance the benefits of other alloys in the steel. Although I am not a “steel geek,” I found the M1’s performance noticeably better than the 440C blades I’ve used. Once I managed to get it dull, it was no problem bringing the edge back to life with a few minutes of effort on a Spyderco Sharpmaker. The slight recurve in the edge profile of the M1 pretty much requires a rod-style sharpener, but I don’t consider that an issue at all.



This close-up shows how the overtravel tab of the dip acts as a stop for the frame lock.



The M1 performed very well on utility chores, including extensive cutting on abrasive carpeting.



The substantial construction of the M1’s frame lock and solid backstrap is clearly evident here.

Combative Edge is off to an excellent start with the M1. It is a substantial, well-executed folding knife with excellent potential as both a tool and a defensive weapon. With a target suggested retail price of \$170, it represents an excellent value as well. For the record, Walker plans to offer a matching training knife for it and all future Combative Edge designs. Serious tools and a serious commitment to training; sounds like a recipe for success to me. TK