



# HUNTING KNIVES:

THEY SHOULDN'T BE AN AFTER THOUGHT!

BY MICHAEL WARE

**WHO DOESN'T** carry a pocketknife? That's what I want to know. I know tons of people who carry guns, but use them rarely all the while training and practicing. I know ten times as many people who carry knives, use them daily, and never have taken a lick of training for their use or potential. Think about it. Whether you're dicing tomatoes, spreading butter, hacking down horseweed with a corn knife, dressing a deer, or using a weapon for self-defense, we manage to utilize these tools routinely.

We have a ton of people coming out of the woodwork buying self-defense knives and signing up for our edged weapons courses. I'm glad to see it and I encourage it, but I sometimes wonder if we've put the cart ahead of the horse. We've all been to the local gun shop and marveled at all the weapons there are to choose from. Have you ever taken a long look at the knife section of a store catalog? There are so many edged weapons it is truly staggering. Where do you start? How do we choose the right knife? You've read my stance on this a dozen times by now. Ask yourself what purpose this tool represents 90% of the time, don't skimp on the quality, and you'll have the hard work out of the way.

Deer season is on top of us, and you'll be utilizing a knife for field dressing. There are tons of edged tools for daily use, but let's concentrate on the hunting knife choices

**CONVEX EDGES  
AREN'T AS COMMON  
OUT THERE, BUT FOR  
SUPERIOR SHARPNESS  
AND STRENGTH, THEY  
ARE TOUGH TO BEAT**

The quillion, sometimes

referred to as the 'guard, is the hunk of metal that sticks up between the handle and blade. When using a tool elbow deep in a deer I prefer not to slip and cut myself. I've watched a lot of friends cut themselves, and to be honest, I do not want to share fluids with an animal. A thumb grip or knurled area along the blade spine is fine, but if your hands are cold and you're wearing gloves your sense of feel and dexterity degrade. You can easily find these attributes in a folding knife as well. I simply prefer a solid one-piece knife in this application for ease of cleaning. I prefer non-

aggressive rubbery or solid grips on my hunting knives. I'm able to run hot or boiling water over them and the tallow and debris rinses off clean leaving nothing behind to mess with. Folders manage to get packed with all sorts of nastiness, and while they too can be cleaned, I'm not working with a space constraint or method-of-carry issue, so a longer overall package works fine for me.

Knife serrations essentially provide more cutting surface. We simply manage to pack more sharp edge into a shorter blade. There is no magic involved. For the purposes of field dressing I used to employ them often. I no longer cut through the sternum area of

a deer very far at all, so serrations are no longer a deal breaker for me. Just the same if you are doing this you'll probably want to avoid a blade that's 9" long. Utilizing a serrated blade will help give you more cutting edge in a shorter blade and this allows you to cut through those areas without a lot of metal protruding into vitals or worse. Serrations tend to be kind of tough to sharpen without the correct equipment, so keep that in mind.

Gut hooks? Also known as 'zip blades,' they are a great, but specialized tool. I have used them a lot. When sharp and properly employed, they can make quick work of the chore. I also like the fact they have a low tendency to cut something you don't want cut. I don't have to put into words what we're all thinking, so let's agree nobody wants to cut into the innards. Much like serrations, they are a bit tough to sharpen depending on your

sharpening method, but I'll gladly accept that trade off when the design works well.

The blade length, size, width and other features are completely up to you and are very personal choices. When I would harvest game as a pup, I leaned towards a larger knife. After doing the happy dance over my big buck, or too often in my case the doe that I settled for instead, I would start by getting out my 12" Bowie and going to work. With a long narrow blade I got a lot of work done in a short time, but I struggled through the fine work and using a tool too large was awkward for me. I'm using knives now that are typically 6 1/2" to 8" overall in length. I prefer a thick wide blade. My brother uses a much smaller knife. His favorite is about 5" long overall and extremely thin. We both manage to do quick work and do it well even though our tastes are very far apart. One thing we do agree on is that a really large knife simply works poorly on game this size.

The shape of our blades can vary greatly. Most folks don't pay much attention to the knife point, but there are tons of different styles available. We see a lot of drop point and clip point blades in hunting knives and as far as the actual location of the tip they are very similar. These swept and curved blades have been around for years and have served the hunting community well for generations.

We're also seeing a surge of the Tanto Point blades. The Tanto employs straight lines rather than a curved edge. We see a ton of folding hunting knives now in Tanto configuration. I'm not convinced they work any better or worse than the others available, but I can't deny the sales volumes associated with them happen to be staggering compared to just five years ago.

I really believe the handle choice is very similar to the blade configuration. There are so many really great choices that there are few that are what I would label inherently poor. I admit I like something synthetic or man-made over more traditional handle materials. There's nothing wrong at all with a wood handle, the antler or bone handles, or even rock handles. They work well and look great. I've never really had a knife handle

that failed me that was of quality component and build. Whatever trips your trigger will probably work just fine for you. The area I pay attention to here is the exterior surface. The more ornate, checkered, or textured it is, the more hassle there is during clean up. However I do appreciate the sense of feel I get with a textured surface and there are many who think similarly.

Blade material and the metallurgy alone would require several pages for me to really cover thoroughly. There is a short answer to this though. Any quality knife of decent material will do the job nicely. Why? The

quality knives are made of good material. If you clean it thoroughly and tend to it like any other tool, it'll serve you well for many years. Don't get in a twist about stainless, carbon steel, tool steel, or alloys at the moment. At the point you turn into a true 'blade aficionado' you'll delve into that deeply and become opinionated in a hurry. For now concentrate on quality, shop by features, and buy local every chance you can. Besides, doesn't the adage, "there's more than one way to skin a cat" fit nicely into this discussion?

Sharpening is a chore, so get over it. If you want your truck to run, you put gas in it.



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## Hunting Knives

If you want your knife to work, you'll have to sharpen it. Whether you buy a machine, use stones, or a fixture and jigs to accomplish a great edge, do a little research first. My first lesson with this came as a child. My Granddaddy came into Dad's shop one day to sharpen the blades on his lawn mower. One half hour later and lots of flying sparks he had a set of blades that would rival an Exacto knife. Unfortunately they didn't cut that well. My Dad explained to me that the angle was incorrect and while sharp they didn't 'lift' and that's why his lawn always looked a mess. It didn't make sense then, but it does now. Blade angle matters depending on the task you seek to accomplish. The same angle we'd apply to our filet knives is certainly not what we'd utilize on our hunting blade. The primary edge of the knife is the vast majority of the blade, with the secondary being the last little 1/8" or so that you sharpen. Whether you choose flat, taper, hollow, or a convex grind, you'll need a consistent way to lay down that angle on your secondary edge. After all, that's where the work is being done.

I've seen guys use stones and sticks and in minutes they've transformed a knife into new. I can't do it. I need training wheels, so I use angled sticks, or a fixture especially on flat and saber grinds. I really appreciate the convex (rounded) grinds, but they generally require an actual razor strop. In case you didn't know, the strop can actually be used for things other than punishment. This was a new concept for me, as I was a 'challenging' child to my folks. Don't worry; I had it coming and then some... When I finally did learn to use the strop, at the urging of one of our weapons trainers, I was tickled at the results and how easy it was to achieve the perfect edge. Convex edges aren't as common out there, but for superior sharpness and strength, they are tough to beat. The flat grinds and hollow grinds are still the most available no matter where you shop, so keep that in mind.

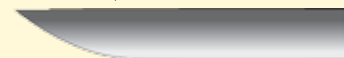
If you have a folding knife you can use a sheath, but few do. If you've got a pocket, you've got a sheath is my motto. However, putting that folder back in your pocket after using it when field dressing isn't my first choice. Those handy little nylon or leather sheaths that come with many knives are super items; so don't throw them away like some hunters. I've used plastic, leather, nylon weave, and Kydex sheaths of all configurations. I prefer the smaller units with a tension system or a simple button clasp. I attach the sheath as often to the strap on my bibs as I do a belt. It really doesn't matter to me much where I fasten it as long as I can get to it easily and quickly. There are times it is necessary to clean or care for your sheath a little, but most are pretty straightforward. Don't put away a dirty messy knife and you'll

have a lot less work do to on your sheath.

There are no shortages of knife configurations, styles, and materials. Size, length, blade, handle, and an easy method for cleanup and care are paramount for me. Put some thought into this and you'll pick up a great knife that fits the needs you've identified as important to you. You've got no excuse now, so go handle several knives on your next trip to the store. I wish you all the best on a great hunt this fall! 🐾

### HUNTING KNIVES:

✓ STRAIGHT BACK POINT



✓ TRAILING POINT



✓ DROP POINT



✓ CLIP POINT



✓ SHEEPSFOOT POINT



✓ WHARNCLIFFE POINT



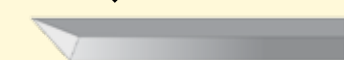
✓ SPEY POINT



✓ SPEAR POINT



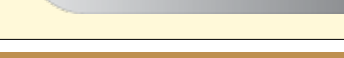
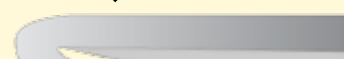
✓ TANTO POINT



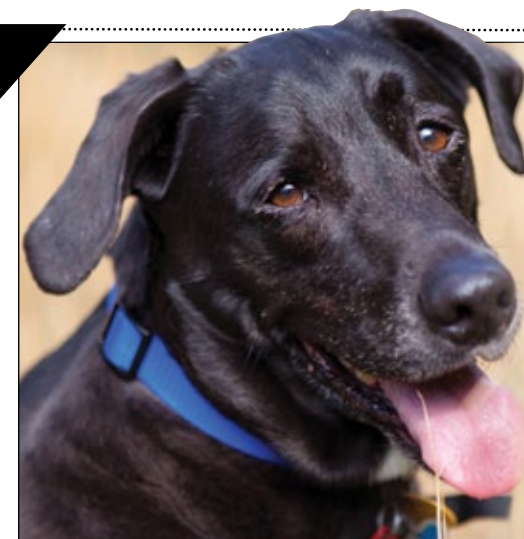
✓ HAWKBILL POINT



✓ GUT HOOK



## CANINE CORNER



# PREP FOR! THIS SEASON: FIRST AID OVERVIEW FOR SPORTING DOGS

■ By Ryan Eder, Upland Gundog Association President

**As I sit** down to collect my notes for this article, I must reflect and share with you my experience this past week on a hunt I went on. It is nuisance goose season, an early time period prior to waterfowl season where hunters can legally hunt local geese at a five bird per hunter limit. Just this morning we shot over a dozen geese, but it wasn't the same without my dog in the layout blind with me. Colt, a three-year-old black lab male is my right hand man in the field. He has earned his UGA Advanced Flusher title, and is only a couple of passes away from his AKC Master Hunter title. Needless to say, he is a talented dog that was sidelined from his favorite game this week due to injury. We are at that time of year when we begin to shift activity with our dogs from the training field, hunt tests or field trials to full blown hunting. I felt it very important, especially considering my personal experiences as of late to provide an overview of important first aid materials to have with you in the field (at least in the truck) at all times when competing in field trials, running hunt tests, hunting or training with your dog.

Bear in mind, the type of hunting you do, your dog's unique tendencies and even geographic location can influence how we "build" a first aid kit for our sporting dogs, but I do feel there are common injuries and factors to consider for all of us that can occur regardless of what or where you hunt. It is also important that I tell you that this article is more of an overview with a few "quick considerations and recommendations", but there is a significant amount of fantastic information out there (books, videos, articles) regarding first aid care of sporting dogs. Today, there is no excuse for any of us as sporting dog owners to not be aware of how to prepare for and treat several possible injuries that occur in hunting situations for our dogs.

Prior to any hunt (or training session, exercise session, hunt test, or field trial) it is always a good idea to inspect your dog head to tail. Look for any cuts, soreness or other obvious injuries before you work them. Do not forget to look in the ears, and definitely check their paws (pads, between the toes, make sure nails are trimmed and maintained). This is a great way to notice injury or issues before working the dog so that further injury or complications do not occur. Often times, injuries are worsened during a hunt and do not originate there.

It only takes a few minutes to stay in tune with the condition of your dog.

A few basic essentials for first aid in the field are bandages, tape, vet wrap, tweezers and/or forceps (pulling out thorns or quills for example). With these items, you can at least cover a wound safely and effectively, as well as remove anything that can cut or pierce your dog's skin. Saline solution is also very important in order to clean a wound and flush it prior to bandaging it. Hydrogen peroxide is also an option, as it cleans and disinfects. The only downside is the burn of alcohol and discomfort it may cause. Cuts and gashes to the paws, legs and chest are very common injuries in both upland and waterfowl hunting scenarios. Our dogs are running on various terrain with constant threat of something cutting their paws or legs, and occasionally can run through thick enough cover or objects that can cut their chest or other areas of the body. The ability to clean a wound and bandage it properly is crucial.

Other items such as scissors will prove useful to cut tape or bandages to size. Styptic pencils are also something we should all carry in our kits, as they can stop bleeding on smaller, minor cuts on the ears or even torn-off toenails, both of which are common occurrences in the field.

These basic items prepare you to handle

### BASIC SPORTING DOG FIRST AID ITEMS:

- Bandages
- Tape
- Vet wrap
- Tweezers
- Forceps
- Saline solution
- Hydrogen Peroxide
- Scissors
- Styptic pencil

almost any common injury to a sporting dog in the field. This is not to replace veterinary care, rather, to at least begin proper treatment to prevent worsening of an injury. We invest significantly into our hunting dogs, not only in terms of money and time, but the emotional attachment and bond that we have with them. With just a few basic items we can help take better care of our hunting partners and help reduce risk in the field. 🐾

### ABOUT UGA

The Upland Gundog Association (UGA) offers upland hunt tests for pointing and flushing breeds in three divisions; Gundog Level, Advanced Level and a Youth/Beginning Handler Division. In addition, the UGA offers the Open Gundog Challenge, a timed event where 1 man / 1 dog teams compete to hunt and harvest 3 birds in the fastest time. The UGA is also the only venue that offers a Shed Dog hunt test as well. Visit [www.uplandgundog.com](http://www.uplandgundog.com) for more information \*\*