

# FIELD TRIAL

## Fällkniven Modern Bowie

by M. Willson Offutt

The Fällkniven Modern Bowie (MB) pays homage to its historical namesake, but the interpretation is starkly contemporary in styling and materials – even its packaging. This bowie is the unabridged version, large in all dimensions, though not heavy in hand. It is a nimble powerhouse capable of inflicting and enduring forces unthinkable for lesser knives. A knife, and especially a large knife, should be sized to fit the user – same as a shotgun. I found the Modern Bowie a surprisingly good match for my physique. I'm 5'-9" and fit from farm work. I am able to swing the big knife accurately with the motion of a tennis serve, and forehand but not backhand, at good speed without muscle strain or premature fatigue. The MB would be a perfect match for a fit person who is slightly taller.

### VISUAL

The Modern Bowie is long and broad, with what seems like an acre of brushed stainless blade, a robust guard, and an exposed tang protruding through the butt. The blade spine is extra thick, tapering to a much thinner edge. It's finished off with an ample checkered black synthetic handle and black leather belt sheath just smaller than a canoe paddle. It is among the largest knives I have tested, (roughly) two sizes larger than a Ka-Bar, and two sizes smaller than a gladius. It arrived packed tight in a black plastic case resembling the Pelican brand, filled with dense black open cell foam, cut to the exact dimensions of the knife. It provides a hard shell, with padding plus stability. Just like the larger versions I have seen fitted to expensive shotguns. Pelican used to advertise its guarantee covers anything but shark bite, bear attack, and children under five. You get the gist.

### VENUE

The MB was shipped to my office where it is too large to be useful, likely to damage the furnishings and frighten the staff. At my farm, it is a completely different story. We have a line of trees along my half-mile western boundary, wrapped in mature vines – mostly wild grape and Virginia creeper. So they don't kill the trees, I set in to removing the vines ranging in diameter from my index finger to my forearm. I was astonished that a ten-foot segment of wild grape vine cut with the Bowie weighs forty pounds. The vine clearing process closely approximates the moves of the BladeSport

competition, cutting free-hanging rope. Where vines hang conveniently close to a tree, the trunk becomes a chopping block, which is a productive cutting technique that requires less accuracy and less blade speed. The knife efficiently lops off protruding tree limb growth, some exceeding two-inches in diameter.

### CUTS

The blade is remarkable on several counts. The steel is laminated. San Mai is the Japanese term dating to 13<sup>th</sup> century swords. It is comprised of an extra hard steel core, which tends to be brittle, sandwiched between layers of softer supporting steel. The concept makes theoretical sense. It gives the marketing people a differentiating feature to promote. It has been working in practice for eight hundred years. The rub is the added steps to produce it, and this increases the cost. Several times I have owned or used laminated steel blades and never have I encountered an issue with durability or delamination. The ABS Masters tout differential hardness where the edge is harder than the spine. Lamination is another method to achieve a similar performance outcome. The edge geometry is slightly convex, which is used by many knifemakers but often associated with Bill Moran who was a visible and vocal proponent. Left in a damp sink overnight, I found zero rust, from which I conclude the core, laminations, and fittings are "stainless," containing enough chromium to be highly resistant to corrosion. This is confirmed by review of the Fällkniven literature, which describes the core steel as CoS and the flanking steel laminations as 420J2, though my Swedish is a bit rusty. To sharpen the long edge takes time. The process would be faster and better with shop equipment and a slack belt sander.

### APPLICATION

The Modern Bowie is not my first choice to carve a ham. It is a "whacker" not a "slicer," borrowing the words of ABS Master Smith Rob Hudson. This is the knife you want in hand to fend off feral dogs and chop down dogwood trees. Though the cutting edge is longer, the MB will chop much like a cleaver or hatchet, and better than a machete. It will perform tasks you would otherwise assign to a machete, axe, or saw. By its nature, the MB is more portable to carry distances on foot than larger or heavier

heavier tools, and more silent (compared to a chainsaw) when stealth matters. Walking the boundaries of my farm at sunset, to check for open pasture gates and fence damage, I am armed with the big Bowie to defend myself from indigenous predators. It imparts a feeling of utter invincibility. And when I find a fallen limb blocking an aisle or path used by tractors and horses, I have the means to cut it. The Modern Bowie in its sheath is long, wide, and heavy to hang on a belt. I prefer to carry it in hand, or attach to a pack or ATV using zip-ties, as I would do with a machete.

### WEAK LINK

The synthetic handle material has the appearance of checkered black rubber but it is hard, without the gummy traction I hoped for. In heavy use, the handle checkering actually abraded the skin of my bare palm, exactly like the first time I fired a .44 magnum with checkered walnut grips. After losing the first layer of skin, you need no further reminder to wear a glove, which perfectly solves the problem.

### CONCLUSION

I give the Fällkniven Modern Bowie high grades for design, construction, performance and good looks – and the ample sheath does its job. If not quite epic, it is close to it. My farming operation provides an optimal venue where the knife is gainfully employed and appreciated, and not limited to vine removal or predator protection. My only unresolved reservations relate to size and weight if you hike Appalachian Trail terrain and distances, and to expense if you are at all price sensitive (though I see it advertised for 20% less than its suggested retail price). □

### DATA SIDEBAR

Maker	Fällkniven AB
	<a href="http://www.fallkniven.com/en/home/">www.fallkniven.com/en/home/</a>
Model	MB (Modern Bowie)
Blade Steel (core)	CoS
(laminations)	420J2
Handle Length	5.25"
Hardness Rc	Core 60 (per maker)
Blade Length	10"
Length Overall	15.25"
Blade Thickness	0.29"
Weight (knife)	20 oz.
Weight (sheath)	9.5 oz.
Made in	Sweden
Retail	\$872.50