

# MSK1 Elite Warrior



# 2021 KNIFE OF THE YEAR

It's been long awaited and long anticipated, but as you will read and see here it has been worth the wait. After all the great knives we looked at and used during 2021, we have the 2021 Knife Of The Year. After coming in at the top 5 knives since 2018, Ultimate Survival Tips came out on top with their newest version of their famous MSK1 series. The MSK1 Elite Warrior is simply one heck of a blade...plain and simple.

I first met owner David P. back in 2017 when we hooked up on the phone to discuss the possibility of getting them in the line-up for the 2018 Gear Review Expeditions. The original MSK1, made from 1/4" D2 steel, was creating a lot of buzz amongst our readers at the time, with many asking to see the knife in the GRE line-up. I found David to be very enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and open about everything I asked. The only surprise I encountered was learning that he and his family were running the business, one knife at a time, out of their basement. That didn't phase me, because if there is one thing I've learned in running this magazine, it's the fact that there are numerous genius level inventors and builders who are working out of their basement or garage. In the end, we decided to send him an invitation, and a few weeks later we were staring down the spine of a very impressive MSK1. That year the MSK1 missed being named the KOTY by only a few 10th's of a point. David decided to go back to the drawing board and set about making improvements that led to the birth of 3 new versions of the MSK1.



The first of the new line-up was conceived out of concerns that many people had raised about the price. The original MSK1 came in right at \$400, a little much for some folks. Instead of reinventing the whole MSK1 wheel, David examined those elements of the knife that drove the price which could be changed without taking away from the integrity and purpose of the original design.

The first thing he did was to find an off-shore foundry who could forge the knife for a price point that would accommodate his budget minded customers. He inked a deal with IMACASA, who has a history of fine German quality that dates back to 1787. Today that foundry is pumping out some great budget friendly knives for CONDOR, one of our favorite production knife companies. The second thing David did was to convert the bones of the original MSK1 from D2 to 1075 HCS, which is very similar to 1095 HCS. No, it's not a premium steel, but it is a very capable steel. And, it dropped the price considerably for the end consumer. The third thing he did

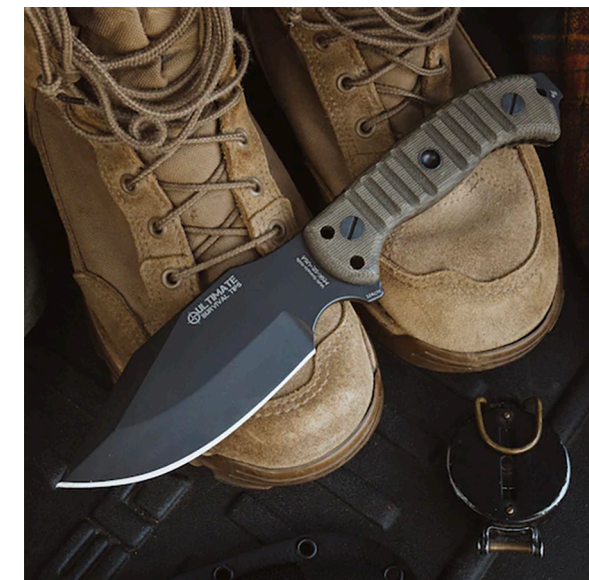
was to change the scales from micarta to a hardwood. And last, he placed the Primitive into a budget friendly leather sheath that is not only functional, but also very attractive. The Primitive comes in right around \$150!

The one thing that I want to be sure to mention here is that aside from the materials I mentioned above, all the new versions of the MSK1, including the Primitive, come with the same features as the original that you see in the diagram. David wanted to make sure the integrity of the original design stayed intact as each version evolved. That also includes the in-handle mini-survival kit. Which, by the way, has been improved over the original. All the other features that made the original MSK1 so popular are found in all 3 of the newest versions. Take a good look at the diagram on the next page.

When I got my hands on the original MSK1 there were a few things that jumped out at me. The first was the meaty feel of the knife when in the hand, which is attributed to the 1/4 slab of D2 steel that it was made from. It's designed and built for a lifetime of hard work. A few rotations in my hand and I realized that the MSK1 was chock full of features that were well thought out in the design phase, and well executed in the fabrication phase. Take a close look and you will see what I'm talking about. They're all simple features, but they all have a practical purpose that is not overstated, nor a waste of precious real estate on the blade.



Our collective opinion here at BWB Magazine is that this is one of the reasons that many people were negative about the price of the original. They simply didn't understand, or they did not take into consideration, the cost of manufacturing a knife here in the USA. Each time a feature is added means that the knife is moved along to another station where more labor costs are incurred. Count them...there's 24 features on the MSK1 in the photo above. David and I have never breached the subject, but I've often wondered if there was ever a time where he thought about reducing the number of features. Knowing him like I do, and the passion that he wears on his sleeve about his creation, I would say not. All these features are a part of the legacy of the MSK1. That's why we applauded him for keeping all those features intact when he set about building a budget friendly version of the original. Remember, price was one of the negative things that were said about the original. David inked a deal with an off-shore foundry that was highly capable of producing the budget friendly version, while keeping every single feature that the original had. From a marketing stand-point it was very smart. From the position of growing his customer base, it was genius! Many of those that once complained that the price was too high are now proud owners of the MSK1 Primitive. And rightly so! The Primitive is no different than any other high-carbon steel knife that is out there. It needs to be cared for properly to avoid rust. That leads us to the next version in the MSK1 line-up.



One of the other complaints that we heard about the original, and this came mostly from front-line guys whose lives might have to depend on their blade/s, our own US military personnel. We have subscribers in every branch, those who are independent contractors, and many more who are retired military. There was one common theme that came from this group...the D2 used in the original was too susceptible to rust, especially so in brackish or salt water conditions. We agreed with that observation, as we had to remove rust from the blade on more than one occasion. It wasn't because the steel is inferior, it was because we were in too big of a hurry to maintain it correctly. For us, when we are in the field testing gear, it is a non-stop affair where everything is scheduled down to the minute. I can also tell you from experience that when you're in a hot AO where your entire world is measured by seconds under stressful conditions, maintaining a blade is not at the top of the list. We heard that very same thing from others as well. There's no time to worry about a blade rusting while in combat, especially not in this day and age where rust-resistant steel can be found in a variety of configurations and flavors.

According to David, he heard some of the same from others as well. That put him on another path that led to the next evolution of the MSK1... the ELITE. With the Primitive set in place, David set about designing a new version of the MSK1 that would address 2 different issues. The first was finding a manufacturer here in the USA, and the second was to find a rust-re-





sistant steel that would check all the boxes that he required. The first was accomplished when he met with reps from TOPS Knives, owned by Mike Fuller and located in Idaho. That addressed one hurdle in quick fashion. The other issue was addressed when the brain trusts decided to use 154CM Stainless, one of the most popular amongst tactical professionals today. 154CM is a type of stainless steel developed and manufactured in the United States by Crucible Materials Corporation (now - Crucible Industries). Crucible 154CM is a modification of martensitic stainless steel type 440C to which molybdenum has been added. It was originally developed for tough industrial applications and combines three principal elements: carbon, chromium, and molybdenum. It is tough, easy to maintain, easy to sharpen in the field, and it is highly capable of resisting rust! According to David, the sheath is a Tactical Black Kydex, ACS™ Compatible, and Multi-Carry / Multi Setup.

For us, this new version of the MSK1 was a true game changer. It answered a lot of the questions, and checked off all of the boxes. We have not received one negative email about the Elite since the day we started our reviews. It is a rock solid knife that will last a lifetime if used with respect and the knowledge that it will require a little maintenance every now and then. From our perspective, the Elite was a solid performer in the field, fully capable of performing every task that is on our list. It was a solid performer when bush-crafting different tools and projects, building shelters, processing game, and making trap triggers. The chopping capabilities of the Elite with its forward energy delivery is outstanding. It's not an axe, nor was it ever intended to. But for this knife to perform as well as it does when chopping is impressive. Maintaining the knife was a breeze in the field as well. It sharpens easily, and requires little to no oil to coat the blade. Out of habit I rubbed some Bush Butter on the blade, but I'm convinced it wasn't need. If there is a short-fall on this knife, it's the same that we found with the original... you need the MSK1 Mini to perform those intricate tasks that require a little more control. All in all, the Elite is a great blade that would fit well in any tactical scenario, or in any wilderness application as well. In case you're wondering, it made it to #3 on our list of potential candidates for 2021 KOTY! Price on this beauty is currently on sale at \$329 on their website.

I was sitting at my desk when the first email came through from one of my main contacts out in Twenty-Nine Palms with the MGAGCC. He had heard that there was a new MSK1 designed specifically for tactical use. I reached out to David, who confirmed the release of the MSK1 Elite Warrior. A few days later I was holding one of the most impressive blades I had seen all year. Side by side, there are only a few more features that differentiates the Elite from the Elite Warrior... but they are game changers.

First of all, let me start this section off by sharing with you the difference between these 2 models. Everything you find in the Elite model can be said for the Elite warrior (EW going forward). It is made by TOPS, made from the same 154CM, and boasts the same 24 features outlined in the diagram on page 45. However, that's where the comparison ends.

Here's a quick overview of those differences. 1] Secondary cutting edge from the point to mid-spine. 2] Serrated cutting edge from mid-spine to ramped jimping. 3] Black CERAKOTE non-glare finish on the blade. 4] SERE Elite™ Combat, Dual Layer / OD Green + Desert Tan Kydex, capable of Multi-Carry / Multi Setup. That may not seem like enough to raise eyebrows, but you can rest assured that is exactly what happened when we started passing this around the room during a morning round-table discussion. I put the knife in the middle of the table and asked everyone to write down their thoughts without saying anything. All 3 said basically the same thing as me.. "Game Changer". We were looking down the spine of what we



all believe will have a considerable impact on the tactical knife industry. Let me share my thoughts on the 4 new features on the EW.

First off, I need to address the fat elephant in the room... the serrated edge. For years I have griped about the wasted edge that is sacrificed for serrations. About 95% of the serrated edges I have seen are useless because they simply do not cut "adequately". By adequate I mean getting the job done cleanly and efficiently. Very few knives I have seen with this feature actually fits that bill. The EW does that and more. The serrations on this guy are serious to say the least. It will not only go through wood, but I cut through dense bone while processing game with it as well. Sharpening the serrations is easily accomplished with the appropriate ceramic. The secondary edge is often neglected by designers who have no tactical experience. This edge is not for trimming fingernails... it is designed for opening massive holes in the body cavity, and for opening the throat of the enemy with a rear address. Obviously we didn't have the opportunity to test it in a real life situation, but I can tell you that simulating those actions on a deer carcass was an eye opener. The CERAKOTE finish on the blade is a new feature that will be appreciated by those who are trying to stay concealed while using the knife. Other than the edges, this knife does not reflect any amount of light. And then there is the new sheath. Not only is it sexy looking, but it is designed



to perform, which it does without disappointment. One of my gripes about kydex is that it can be noisy. Imagine being in a sniper-lay and the need arises for you to skin your knife. A loud kydex sheath draws about as much attention as a club banging on a garbage can lid. Not this sheath! It is both quiet and easy to deploy. As you can see off to the left, we added the MSK1 Mini and Ferro Rod to our system here. For what it's worth, it just makes sense to all of us here to fork out the extra cash. Together they form a "system" that can handle any task you throw at them. Being transparent here, I also wear a mini around my neck. I know it's overkill, but I chalk it up to a memory when I was separated from my pack where my main knife system was attached to the left shoulder strap. Price for the ELITE WARRIOR is currently on sale for \$359.



Before closing I wanted to be sure to mention the new and improved 24 piece in-handle Micro Survival Kit. The first version of this kit was "ok", but had room for improvement. David did just that by adding some new items and upgrading others. When you look at the photo to the right {and you should do this anytime you're looking at anything "micro survival"}, the fishing kit he has designed will actually catch fish. The fire starters will catch a spark from the included ferro rod, and the Ranger Bands help to extend that fire when needed. The water bags are actually sturdy enough to boil water, a skill that takes training and practice. The needle is a multi-purpose addition. Sew clothing, remove splinters, and to fashion a make-shift working compass. The water purification tablets are also a great add. I might mention here that David has also developed another survival kit that actually covers more bases, but it will not fit in the handle of the MSK1. For us, the kit you see here is one of the most impressive that we have seen that actually nestles into the skeletal cavity of this knife.



After all the tally's and discussions, the MSK1 Elite Warrior came out on top with an overall score of 98.3 out of 100. The closest competitor was 95.7, which was the ANZA Kudo. It is a great knife, but just not in the same league. Whether for pure tactical, general outdoors use, or for wilderness survival, the MSK1 Elite Warrior fills the bill. Highly recommended to those who in the military, for first responders, and for those venturing out into the woods to enjoy nature at every level. Congratulations to David and the entire crew at Ultimate Survival Tips on successfully kicking the new MSK1 up to another level. The **MSK1 Elite Warrior** has earned the title, **2021 Knife Of The Year**. I encourage those readers who are interested in obtaining one of these, or any other model, to contact them quickly. You can find them at [www.ultimatesurvivaltips.com](http://www.ultimatesurvivaltips.com).