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Laminated steel mora knives

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Fixed blades -



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Description :

Testing laminated steel mora knives.

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I've been a long time getting hold of some laminated steel Mora knives. This is surprising since I have a drawer full of the regular carbon steel variety and the laminated variety are available at a reasonable price from Lee Valley. So I decided to get one of each of the four varieties of laminated steel available - basically the same stuff in four blade lengths. Since the knives are still on their way it's a good time to go over the considerations..

I'm a great fan of Moras of the regular carbon steel variety, and that's probably why I haven't been in a hurry. These are supposed to be of slightly softer steel at the edge - 59RC as opposed to 62RC - but certainly hard and tough enough. The edges have held so well that I haven't had an overwhelming desire to get something better. The steel holds an edge through most of the rough wood whittling I do, and are quickly brought back to a razor edge at the end of the day by a little stropping. While lots of people tout the easy sharpening of the laminated Moras because of their soft steel cladding, I'm quite happy to put an initial edge on a knife with an hour's work with a diamond stone or a few minutes on a belt grinder. Then I strop on the razor edge and from then on I rarely ever touch the knife to a stone - I just strop for a few minutes after a day's use. Sometimes I polished up the bevel a bit with a fine diamond stone if it had gotten some rust spots from my careless use, but that was just to get it clean for stropping. Just a few minutes on a stone was all that was required - and then only because I left the knife in the truck after use when the wax from the honing compound had been worn off the blade. So all in all, the ease of sharpening has never been a consideration. Now that I've got a leather belt loaded with buffing compound for the grinder I find it a pity that Moras are so easy to sharpen. So all in all, I don't expect to be blown away by ease of sharpening.

The laminated blades are supposed to be more tolerant of flexing, at the expense of having a hard enough back to strike flint. I did have some wonderful ideas of differentially tempering the blades of regular carbon steel Moras. This is a simple process with a pencil torch, but I never got around to it because I didn't get any knives breaking or such. After a while I did think that I'd prefer the back at full hardness for striking flint, and because I use a baton so much. I'm not so sure that the flint idea is so great, a piece of broken file being better. Now you can get a spark from a regular steel Mora - but without some char cloth or steel wool you're not likely to get a fire started when stuck with only your trusty Mora. If I needed a hard edge to scrape a ferrocerium rod and didn't have a piece of hacksaw blade, then I'd do what I do now and scrape with a sharp rock. Like most people I get all of these wonderful armchair ideas for improving stuff which upon reflection just aren't worth the trouble. So- - - I'm not expecting that the softer steel side laminates will give any special advantage or even give any problems. I am interested to see if baton use will cause problems, but that's about it.

I guess what I should really be anticipating is the superior edge holding of the blades. The fact is though, that having some M2 blades I doubt that I'm going to be blown away. The regular Mora carbon blades hold a sufficient edge between stoppings for me anyway. Chipping might well be an issue as when these knives are used in the bush you can't avoid coming across some tougher stuff than might be found in regular carving. I'm thinking of bone here, but there are many other abuses.

I am sure though that the knives will have some advantage. These are mass production knives that have remained the same for many years, and every one has some good reason for its long term existence. That's part of the fun of knives for me, even though I'm limited to cheap ones: finding the special advantage. It'll probably be something as simple as having full size handles on small bladed wood carving knives...

The Knives Arrive!

I was certainly impressed with the knives on first inspection. The handles were plain birch, but at least they weren't painted! The blades were decently polished and coated in a very thin layer of varnish. I looked them over and could

find none of the polished over grind marks common to regular Moras. My first thought was that I'd been pretty dumb to encourage people to get regular Moras when these are available for just a few dollars extra.

That didn't last too long! A few minutes rubbing the bevels on carborundum paper soon showed that the bevels weren't flat and that there still was a secondary bevel that had to be ground away. The smallest knife took over an hour with a diamond hone. I could have used the belt grinder but I wanted to see how long it would take. The other knives went far faster as the bevels weren't so bad - say 30 minutes per knife using 600 grit carborundum paper on a flat surface. As always it's a strange feeling to be scratching some polished blades, seeing flakes of metal come off the high spots as the edge gets straightened. Gradually though, everything looks better through the 16X lens and feels better and it's time for stropping. The scary edge comes up fast and pulling the edge through paper gradually shows few and fewer dull spots. I guess that the bottom line is that original grinding of the bevels varies and that a person is in for between 30 and 60 minutes to get a good durable edge. As good as the plain birch handles feel, I'll probably burn and sand anyway before treating with tung oil so nothing is saved there in terms of preparation time.

My one big complaint with the knives would be with the sheaths. The 2" has the same sheath as the 4": I'd have thought that Frost would have at least have had a run of sheaths of various sizes - they must sell enough knives to make this worthwhile. The 2 3/4" also has what appears to be a new variety of sheath - same plastic just a grey color and with what appears to be a weaker integral belt loop. Anyway, it doesn't hold very firmly, and even appears as if it isn't the correct sheath for the knife. A little burning and scraping of the handle should at least make the fit in the sheath safer.

So..

You buy a set of cheap knives, spend a bunch of time sharpening them and end up with some decent woodworking tools. The knives are comfortable to use and take a very good edge with enough work. As is I can sure slice a pile of paper before re-stropping on a piece of cardboard with a little green honing compound - and it takes about one minute to bring back the edge. All the knives feel good to carve wood with, especially the slim bladed models with the oversized handles. I like them a lot and am going to order a bunch of the 3 1/8" as Lee Valley will no longer be carrying them. It's take a few months of whittling on wood to really test the steel - this involves a lot of hard prying which is more stressful to edges than just slicing paper. I expect good results since people have been using these on wood for a long time. So far things have worked out well. A big help to avoiding chipping might well be the polishing of the bevels.

One of my friends was over and looked at the knives. He just recognized them as sloyd knives - and that says it all. Sloyd or slojd is just a method of working wood with simple hand tools - which was developed in Scandinavian countries. Stuff like using a hatchet to rough shape, draw and regular knives to shape what you want instead of using chisels and stuff. That pretty well says it all - shaping wood is a pretty important ability in the outdoors, and one might as well go with a proven method and tools. Not very glamorous and certainly not the stuff of dreams of fighting off big critters with huge knives. The knives themselves are best seen as tools and one shouldn't need any "out of box experience" when getting them. If a lot of work is needed to fix them up, then this is a vital skill to have, and gives one knowledge of knives and edges.

A Couple of Months Later:

I bought a couple of no-name Mora knives from Lee Valley to test against the laminated Frost versions. These must be collectors items with no maker's logo - and only \$8.95 CAN! Anyway they have narrow blades and are advertised

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as being carbon steel at RC57. Like the laminated types they've proven to be very useful, and if they're softer steel than normal, I'm not seeing any real difference in practical use. They came with better sheath fit than the laminated versions, and actually a better bevel on the blade. My bet is that a lot of knife users would use them right away or with just a touch up sharpening and find that they held an edge longer than the laminated knives. With proper sharpening of both versions, though they won't. Lots of the cheaper Scandinavian knives used for carving such as the Lauri are only hardened to 57 with the philosophy that the ease of sharpening and increased toughness of the edge pays off. Other people don't want to stop even for a minute in the middle of carving to sharpen - and prefer a harder blade. For whittling in the bush where most of the woods are softer, I don't think that people will notice a lot of difference. I have tried the laminated blades with a baton on dry wood and haven't noticed any chipping of the edge yet. That might change with extensive trials.

It's sure going to be a while until I've got around to doing all the nasty things I do with knives to check out the laminated blades. For the present time, the point to consider is the initial price of the knives, and the great designs. The slim bladed knives are perfect for the bush allowing heavy duty use with their larger handles - despite the slim blade profiles. The short wider blade is very useful, having a more substantial handle than the tiny red handled version. The 3 3/4" is of course a good regular belt or neck knife. I believe that the main point is that you sure can't argue with the price and weight. Just get one or more and test them for your purposes. These appear so far to me to be fine knives - but they are most certainly not the pinnacle of the Scandinavian knifemaking art. If you want something better than that something is readily available at Brisa, and Dennis Holmbacka is a great guy to advise you. These Moras will just be the starting point for some. For others like me then they may be the main knife for many years to come as I'm satisfied.

For now I'll finish up with my favourite knife hype from the movie "Exposure" starring Peter Coyote. As the knife dealer says, "This is a....., treacherous, fierce steel. Honed on natural stones by hand, by masters." If you dispense with the fierceness and the treachery, become a master sharpener by practise, and use some cheap sharpening tools, you can have a super knife with a Mora. I really don't believe that's hype. Whether or not you find the laminated blades to be superior is going to depend a lot on how you use them, but I do believe that if you give the slim blade profiles a chance you might find them to be just what you need.

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).