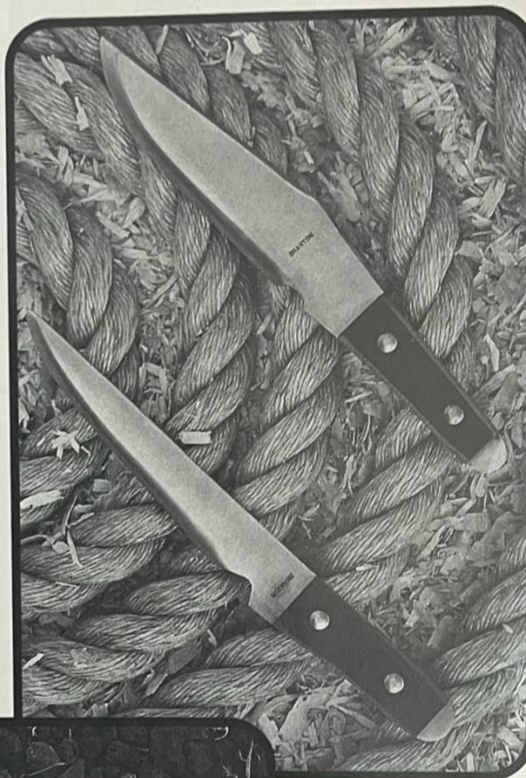


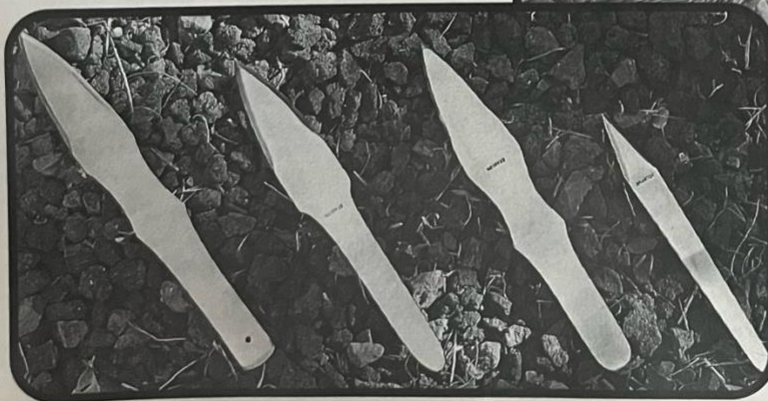
On-Target THROWING KNIVES

Bobby Branton
carries on
the traditions
of the late
master of the
spinning blade,
Harry McEvoy!

BY MATTHEW RAPAPORT



Both these Pro Flyte models are designed to serve as both utility and throwing knives. Naturally, a utility thrower is best balanced for handle throwing.



Pro Flyte's all-steel target throwing knives. The longest is 13 1/2 inches and weighs 15 ounces. The smallest is the popular 9 1/2-inch "Pro Flyte Sticker."

"KNIVES DESIGNED BY

professional knife throwers for the knife throwing enthusiast." That's the motto of Robert (Bobby) Branton for his Pro Flyte throwing knives.

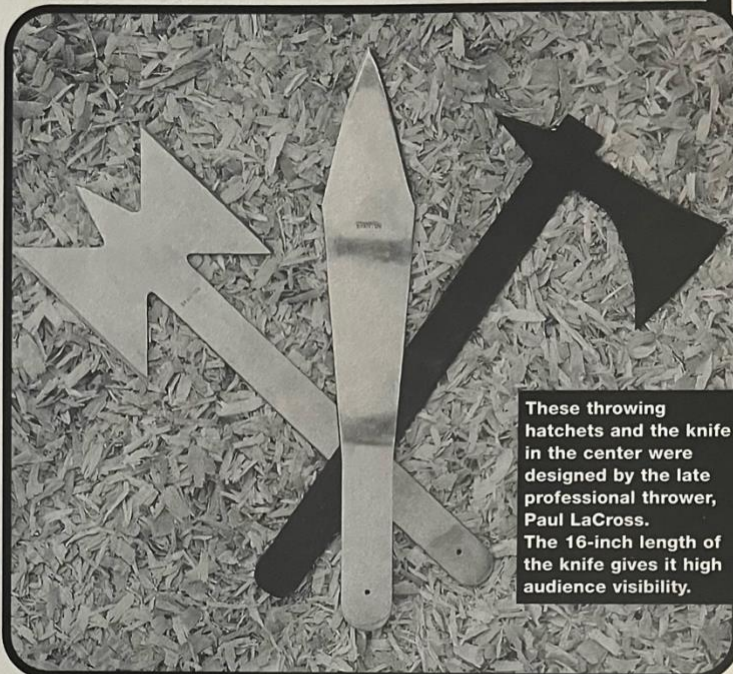
Bobby Branton has worked with his hands all his life. While knives have always fascinated him, custom knife collecting brought him a new appreciation for blade craftsmanship. Like many before him, this in turn inspired him to try his hand at forging steel. He began offering his own custom knives in 1985 as Branton Hand-crafted Knives. Branton became an American Bladesmith Society journeyman in 1992, and a probationary member of the Knife Makers Guild in 1995.

The knife making and knife throwing came together at The Blade Supershow in 1987 when Bobby met the legendary thrower Harry McEvoy. Harry, in turn, taught Branton what he knew about both throwing and designing throwing knives. From this sprang "Low-country Throwing Knives," with the first four models designed by Harry McEvoy himself. After purchasing Tru-Balance South Throwing Knives Co., Bobby changed the company name to Pro Flyte.

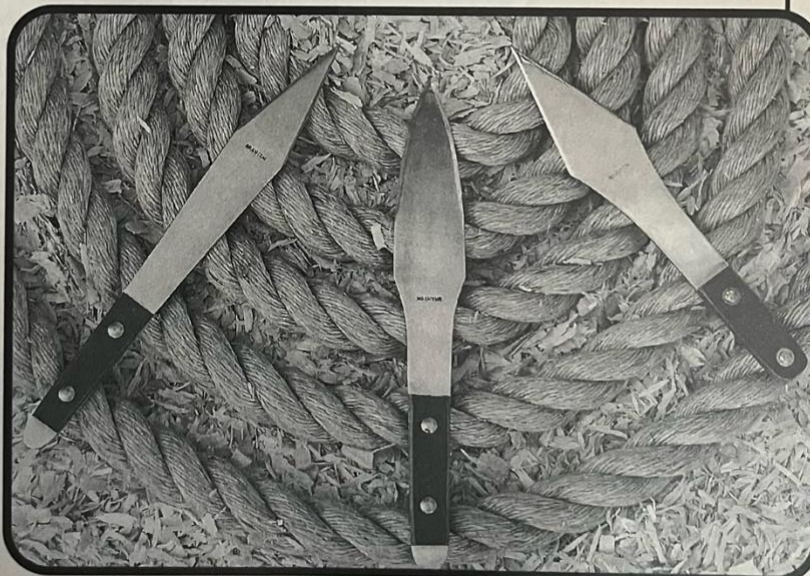
There aren't a lot of custom knife makers who make throwing knives. Perhaps one must first have been bitten by the knife-throwing bug. Branton is one of the few who truly brings this dual level of skill to his line of throwing blades.

Anatomy of a Throwing Knife

Basic carbon steels make the best throwing knives. Many of the high-alloy stainless steels are unsuitable for throwing knives because they are too brittle when hardened to stand up to heavy impacts. Even when not fully hardened, they still may not withstand the abuse of being repeatedly thrown. You wouldn't take a hunting knife, drive it a half inch and more into a piece of wood and then slap it side



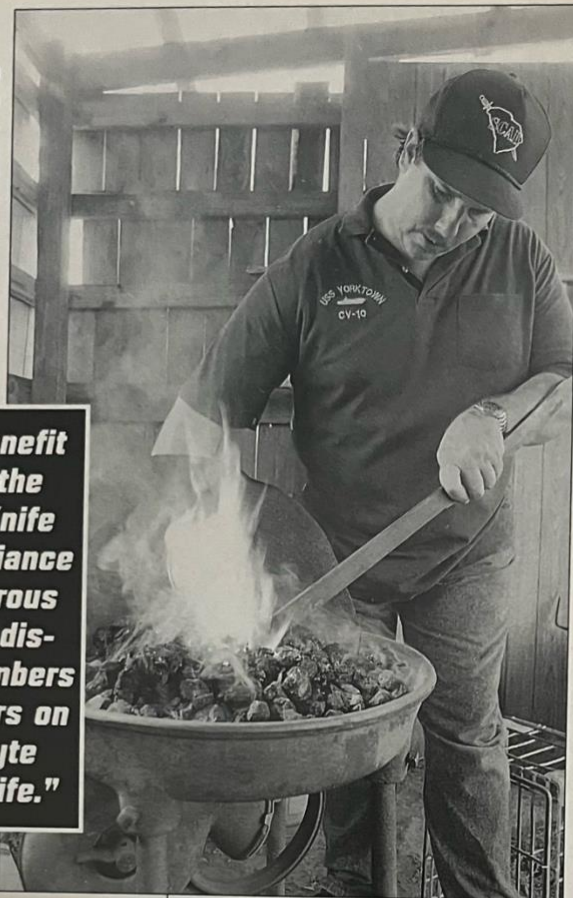
These throwing hatchets and the knife in the center were designed by the late professional thrower, Paul LaCross. The 16-inch length of the knife gives it high audience visibility.



Three handled target throwing knives from Pro Flyte. The knife on the left proved to be an outstanding 1 1/2-turn thrower. The handles on all these throwers are non-slip rubber attached with heavy rivets. Several hours of throwing failed to loosen any grip in the group.

Bobby Branton hard at work forging a blade in his shop. The maker has been a member of the American Blade Smith Association since 1992.

"Another benefit of joining the American Knife Throwers Alliance is the generous 20-percent discount to members Branton offers on any Pro Flyte throwing knife."



ways. Yet throwing knives are subject to this abuse all the time.

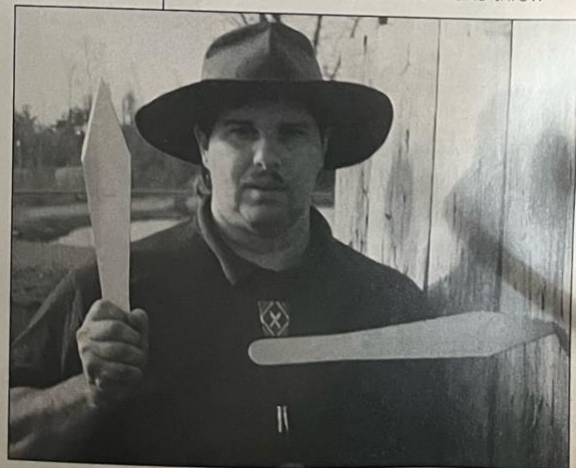
Then there are the objects knives may strike if they miss their target. Even if your practice range is covered with nice soft grass, the knife can hit rocks and many other hard objects when used in the field. Spring steels of low (.50) carbon content, with a medium hard Rockwell of 44-46, make the best and most durable throwing knives.

As mentioned earlier, designing the knives for throwing takes throwing experience. Balance is the first problem. Most knives will throw when held by their blade or handle, but not both. It takes experimentation to get the center of gravity close to the center of the knife so it throws well either way. Length is a second facet. A professional throwing knife is typically 11 to 15 inches long. The longer the knife, the slower it will rotate in flight. The slower the rotation, the more depth of field it has. That is, it will stick in the target over a wider distance for any given throw and number of turns. Weight is a third factor. Throwing knives must be heavy, as weight gives the knife penetration power.

Weight also gives control. A slow-turning knife that is too light begins to float, drift and wobble after 1 1/2 to two turns. Harry McEvoy believed that a good throwing knife should weigh at least 1 ounce for every inch of length. The proper weight-to-length ratio is achieved by adjusting blade width and stock thickness. In this way, throwers can be tuned to specific purposes or individual taste.

A throwing knife designer also must consider alternative purposes. A thrower designed for pure target work is usually symmetrical with dulled double edges. This permits the user to hold the knife by the blade with the same grip used to throw from the handle. Throwing knives

Bobby Branton displaying two of his own handmade throwing blades.



also can serve as general purpose camp knives and even hunting weapons in very skilled hands. These require a real edge which makes a handle throw balance desirable.

Pro Flyte Throwing Knife Line

On the Pro Flyte line, three are primarily target throwers. One is something of a thrower/butcher combination, while the throwing Bowie can serve as a general purpose chopping and all-around camp knife. Looking at this last model I can picture the camp cook (usually myself) spotting a nearby squirrel while working on dinner and adding a bit of fresh meat to the stew with a quick throw. Taste and specialization also may play a role. Bobby's biggest seller is his little 9 3/4-inch, 8 1/2-ounce "Lowcountry Sticker." It is his lowest priced knife but its size makes it suitable for indoor or outdoor practice, a convenient and excellent introductory thrower.

To help keep prices reasonable and allow Branton to better duplicate his patterns when making sets, the maker uses the stock removal method of knife fabrication rather than hand forging for his throwers. Bobby makes his throwing knives with function and performance uppermost in his mind. For him, aesthetic considerations are secondary to function, but aesthetics often follow good functional design.

Variety in what one throws is one of the elements of challenge in the sport. You experiment with different designs and develop experience with throwing different shapes and styles because it makes the hobby that much more interesting. That interest is what creates the variety in Pro Flyte thrower designs, as it does for most of those who make throw-

ing knives. Pro Flyte can also custom fabricate throwing knives designed by individual customers.

The Knife Throwers Alliance

Bobby Branton loves the sport of knife throwing. He has put much of his enjoyment into his knives and supports the hobby in other ways. When Harry McEvoy was alive, he was the driving force behind a 1,200-plus member club, the American Knife Throwers Alliance. Bobby has picked up the banner of the AKTA and wants to build the club into the primary resource for the sport/hobby of knife throwing. He has collected many of the books written on the subject (there aren't a lot), and maintains copies for sale at cost to club members.

In the combined AKTA membership, there is a lot of experience. For example, new target ideas are particularly valued in this hobby where target material is rapidly consumed by the impact of eight to 15-ounce pieces of steel. He also cites a call from Hollywood looking for a professional thrower. Bobby handed the studio over to Larry Cisewski, in Southern California, who then trained Robert DeNiro to throw axes and knives for a recent movie. Bobby made the custom ax to be used in the film. In these ways and others, he hopes the AKTA can help to expand the sport. Another benefit of joining the AKTA is the generous 10-percent discount to members Branton offers on any Pro Flyte knife. He publishes a small newsletter four times a year and has produced an artful AKTA patch from Harry McEvoy's original design (membership \$25 the first year, \$20 thereafter).

Beyond this, Branton travels the Southeastern U.S. giving demonstrations and educational tours. He recently organized the First Annual Knife Throwing Contest held on April 20, 1996 in Charleston, South Carolina. The 2nd Annual Knife Throwing Contest will be held on March 29, 1997 in Mt. Pleasant, SC. Bobby would like to see regional gatherings of throwers, more demonstrations and teachers and a growing awareness of the professional levels of the sport. He'd be happy to see more competition in throwing knife design from other knife makers. Pro Flyte and the AKTA will be there supporting all of it for the sake of keeping interest in the hobby growing. **TK**

For More Information

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