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## ESEE Knives Junglas Machete Review

Written by Garrett Lucas  
Saturday, 08 May 2010 14:54


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There are a few things in this world that just trip my switch...gadgets, guns, Scarlett Johansson, and big knives. So, you can imagine the lust that stirred within me when I saw the new [Junglas Machete](#) from ESEE Knives at the SHOT Show this past January. It was a long wait with many nights of cold sweats, but the Junglas finally arrived and it just goes to show that love at first sight sometimes actually works out in the end.



I saw a few guys on the forums that were complaining about how agitated they were to have to wait for their Junglas to arrive at their front door. I know the feeling. Even worse, I couldn't use the Junglas for a few days after I got it because I had to get a few shots of it before I got it dirtied up outside. Micarta is nice and pretty when it's brand new, but it doesn't take very much use for the oil and dirt from your hands to soak into it and sully that "out of the package" appeal. So you can imagine my torment as I passed by the Junglas Machete resting on the shelf each day until I finally could get some beauty shots before the I put it to work.

I'd have to say the the most appealing feature of the Junglas when I picked it up the first time was the handle profile. I don't know about everyone else out there, but it fits me like a glove and is very, very comfortable. I had one of ESEE's earlier big chopper from a few years back, but quite honestly, the handle to me was like gripping a two by four. Not this one! I think the folks at ESEE nailed the handle design this time around. As you can see in the pictures, it appears that about


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1/3 of the steel in the tang was sculpted away to provide the user with a much more comfortable purchase on the grip. During the chopping exercises, I had no problem hanging onto the Junglas even when I was getting into some harder wood. I did find that even with the long blade I still got better results by backing up to the end of the handle, but had no concerns with it slipping out of my hand because of the relief for the bottom of the hand. This design works nicely and it's hard for me to say enough good things about it.

Speaking of the blade, we're talking about 10.5 inches of 1095 goodness with a thickness of 3/16th of an inch. It sports a powder coat, textured finish with an overall length of 16.5 inches with almost 6 inches being dedicated to the handle. The thickness of the Junglas blade is a bit of a departure from big choppers I've used in the past. Most that I've played with or acquired start at a quarter of an inch. Additionally, rather than a convex edge, the Junglas has a high saber grind instead. For background for the review, I contacted Jeff Randall about these two specs and inquired as to what niche he saw the Junglas filling here stateside. Rather than being billed as a knife, ESEE Knives labels the Junglas as a machete. This is an interesting twist, but the folks at ESEE Knives designed the Junglas primarily for work in tropical environments. Because of that, they decided to go with a thinner blade. To quote Jeff Randall, he said the Junglas was, "Never really intended to be a heavy-duty chopper, so the 3/16ths gives it a little more cutting efficiency and lightens up the weight a bit." I can attest to this fact having used the Junglas quite a bit, and it's probably the reason why I needed to back up on the handle quite a bit to get good strikes. Lacking the momentum extra mass would provide in the swing, you need to improve your technique a bit--especially when working with harder wood. As far as the grind is concerned, Jeff Randall said it was to help strengthen the blade and it was also a result of tooling considerations. I do have to say that using the saber grind was probably a good idea given they were going with thinner steel for a chopping blade.



As I was perusing the various posts and gaining people's perspectives about the Junglas, I did notice a couple of people who said it was overpriced. Huh? I've surfed the net and found several places where you can get a Junglas Machete for under \$130.00. That's not out of line at all. In fact, I think it's very reasonable for a knife of this type. I think where some people got a bit confused is they were probably looking at the price of the Junglas with the Kydex sheath which will run your about \$50 more. Now, yes, most knives come with a sheath from the factory, but most factory sheaths are lackluster at best. The Kydex sheath that you can get with the Junglas is a top-drawer representation of form and function and is (to date) the best factory sheath I've seen with a production knife. Full end stop. Now, you might think that I'm pandering a bit with my opinion of the sheath. No, I'm not. While working on and writing all of the reviews that I do for Woods Monkey, I really try hard to avoid "absolutes" when it comes to quality or performance. I do that because it's usually relative to a person's experience and quite honestly, it tends to make other makers/manufacturers upset when they see such declarations. So, I typically just comment on the individual performance of the products I review and leave all the rest out. However, the Kydex sheath that mates with the Junglas is such a strong product, I decided to break with tradition and lay it out on the table. Part of the reason is to give a tip of the hat to the designers, and it's also to get the attention of other manufacturers to let them know what else is on the market and how it's appreciated by the end user.



The sheath is an ambidextrous design which allows the user to switch the Cordura top from one side to the other to accommodate either hand for the user. Switching the top from one side to the other is very easy. You simply undo the 4 screws attaching the Cordura top and the sheath and place it on the opposite side of the sheath. That's it. I wanted to go for left-hand carry since I carry my firearm on the right hand side, and after I broke in the



Junglas, it took me about five minutes to make the switch. The Cordura top also has MOLLE compatible strapping, a belt loop, a 2 inch extender ring, and an adjustable handle retention strap. I took the previous sentence from ESEE's forum just to make sure I didn't forget anything while I was writing this. But, to sum it up, the entire sheath system is very comprehensive and versatile. It's able to be tweaked and modified for each individual user and for various activities. I am very impressed at the thought that went into the design of this sheath especially since they were willing to pull good ideas from various places and put them all together in one product to give the user a lot of options to configure their sheath how they like.



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One such good idea is the adjustable tension screw that's built into the side of the sheath near the handle. I bought a knife a couple of years ago with this feature built into the sheath and it's a fantastic feature. The basic premise is that you can slide the screw up and down to meet the level of resistance you want to make sure your knife resides securely in place. If you're like me, you've probably



worked with Kydex sheaths that you've gotten with knives. I've had a couple that have been a bit loose, and I just drilled out an extra hole and put an additional screw in place to tighten it up. But, I stopped there. Why didn't I think of this innovation? When you look at it, it seems like an obvious thing to do, but the Junglas Machete is only the second knife I've seen that has this design incorporated into the sheath. The only downside to this feature (if you want to call it a downside) is that you have to use a screwdriver/bit to make the adjustment. What I would like to see is some type of screw that incorporated wings or something (like a wingnut) so the adjustment could be made by hand for those times you're doing some strenuous activity or you just simply want to make sure the knife doesn't pop out. I've seen GPS devices and other electronics that have a screw that you need to use to secure the battery cover into position. They typically have a metal tab or strong wire frame that flips up and you screw/unscrew the piece by using the piece that flips up. Almost like using a nickel to turn a screw. Once you're done, you simply flip that piece over and back down into its position flush with the rest of the body. If something like that could be done with the tension adjustment feature, that would be an even better proposition for the user. I'm no engineer, but I'll bet it could be done!

But, now that we've let the Junglas prance around on the runway, it's time to get it outside and get some work done. The true beauty is in how it performs, right? Well, the first thing I did with it was chop. I wanted to start beating the crap out of something and since I had to stare at it on the shelf so long, I had a lot of pent up energy waiting to come out. So, I just started chopping. The first thing I wanted to gauge was how it handled while chopping into wood and see how deeply it would bite. It took a little getting used to the Junglas. As I mentioned, the lighter weight didn't give it as much momentum as some of my heavier blades, so I had to back up on the grip a bit to give it a bit more umph. That was



no problem since the grip was comfortable even with my hand back up as far as it could go. This was one definite advantage over the handle on the Lite Machete. Even so, the addition of a lanyard is certainly a prudent thing to do just to make sure it stays in your hand while you really go to town with the blade. I started chopping into the same tree that I used for the Lite Machete review and found that my first few whacks were glancing off the wood a bit, though it was getting a decent bite. I was chopping too close to the end of the blade. The length of the blade was a little deceiving, so I had to focus and make sure I was getting hits with the center portion of the edge. Once I found the right spot, I had no problems making good cuts into the wood. I just hacked away for a couple minutes so the Junglas and I could get used to each other.

After our introductory session, I decided to time myself and see how much I could get done in a minute and a half of chopping. After setting the stopwatch, I got busy again. And, as I did this chopping test and others during the afternoon, I really came to appreciate the handle design of the Junglas. The knife (machete) rolled naturally during swing and I never felt like I was going to lose my grip on it even when I was putting everything I had into the chops. I will say that the Junglas didn't bite as deeply as my own personal chopper that I've used the past several years, but it wasn't too much of a difference. Also, the Junglas has the Micarta handle where my chopper has Kraton for the handle material. After a while, the Kraton start doing a bit of a number on your fingers and it's easy for me to find hot spots on my hand/fingers after using a Kraton handle for a while. So, it's a bit of a wash between the two in my opinion. After a minute and a half, I had completed the cut on the right in the picture. The left cut was from the first couple of minutes chopping with the Junglas. This wasn't too bad for performance, but I didn't feel like I was getting everything I could out of the Junglas, so I decided to try again.



This time, I went the opposite direction with timing myself. I just set the watch, threw it on the ground and went at the chopping in full-tilt-boogie mode. I just wanted to chop until the tree was in two pieces and then I would check my time. By this point, I think I'd

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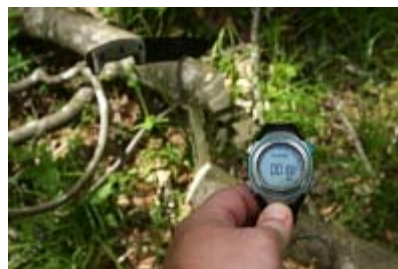
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gotten used to the Junglas enough to improve my technique a bit and judge how it would react during the exercise, so I was able to squeeze out even more performance this way. Just to show that I didn't cheat, you can see in the left picture the right the three places I did the chopping tests with the Junglas. The last one where I chopped all the way through is toward the back left of the left picture. The picture on the right shows the severed pieces close up and personal. Even though I was already a bit used up from the first chopping tests, I was able to get completely through the tree much quicker than I would have thought. Granted, I was working a bit higher on the tree, and it was a shade thinner there, but I was still impressed by how quickly the work went when it was all said and done.



The amount of time it took me to cut all the way through and grab the watch to stop the time was right at a minute and eight seconds. Not too bad! While I went full bore for this exercise and had to recover a bit over the next few minutes, keep in mind that you won't have to push yourself or the knife to this extreme in most circumstances. You can take your time and work through a tree like this over a five, or even ten minute period if you like. The important thing is that if the Junglas has to be pressed into hard and fast service in an emergency situation, it's up to the job. But I'll be honest and admit that there will be few times where any of us are going to need to chop through trees of this size. More often than not, we'll be working with material that's much thinner and more appropriate to the design for which the Junglas was intended. But, I like doing these kinds of tests just to get a feel for the "outer limits" of what can be expected with regard to performance in a blade like this.



While the thinner blade design is a bit unusual for most of us stateside when it comes to our choppers, it's a definite plus when it comes to batoning wood. Yes, batoning. Go ahead and admit it. You've done it. We've all done it even though all the "experts" tell us we shouldn't. Yes, axes are ideal for splitting wood, but most of us just don't carry axes out in the woods. So, when we need to split woods to make a fire, we've got to improvise a bit and work with what we've got. The Junglas Machete stepped up in fine fashion for my batoning exercise. As mentioned, the thinner blade was easier to get set into the wood and did seem to cut through the wood rather than being "pushed" through as I've experienced with my thicker large knives.



For this test, I started out with a medium sized log since that's probably the largest most of us would work with out on the trail if for no other reason than we probably wouldn't/couldn't cut logs much bigger. I say this because I carry a pocket chainsaw with me as well. It's got nylon webbing straps and it's very comfortable and easy to use--provided I don't get too ambitious with what I want to cut. I felt like this size log would be representative of the size that I would work with most commonly. But, before I got started I used the Junglas to cut down a decent baton to use for the test and had it ready to go in just about one minute. Oh, wouldn't our ancestors be jealous if they could see the tools we work with now!

As I expected, the Junglas devoured the wood and let me fly through the batoning exercise with little to no exertion for the most part. I didn't use the stopwatch during this part of the review, but I'd estimate that I split it all up into a nice bundle in under 7 or 8 minutes total. The only time I had to step up the power of the baton strikes was when I got to a good sized knot at the bottom of one piece of wood. When I first got to it, the blade just sat there as if to say, "Uh, no, I'm not going any further." But, I drew back and put everything I had into the swings and got it through that section of the log after five really solid strikes. I will admit to being a little





nervous at this point, however. It's one thing to tap a blade like this through a log to get a little firewood. But, when you really start pounding on the end of the blade around the point, images start flashing in your head of the blade breaking and so forth. That wasn't the case here, just a bit of the jitters on my part. I will point out that, for some reason, the blade felt like it was turning a bit while I was batoning it through the log. I'm not sure if my grip wasn't strong enough or it was just how the handle felt to me while I was working, but it wasn't any kind of issue in getting the job done--just something I noticed and it could have well been my technique.

So far, I'd been pretty impressed by how the Junglas Machete was working out. It's kind of funny that when I spoke to Jeff Randall about it, he said that he actually preferred a thin machete for his survival tool. He even went so far as to say he wasn't sure who would actually buy the Junglas since it was really designed as a tool for tropical climates. Well, you can count me in the crowd of who would

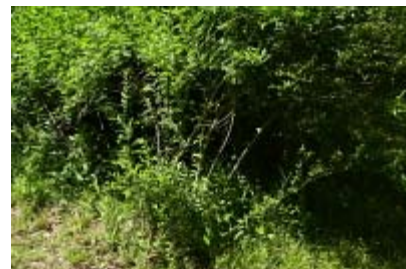


pick up a tool like this. No matter what the design intentions were, the Junglas was turning about to be every bit the tool that I thought it would be when I first eyeballed it back in January. The folks over at ESEE also have another fan in my dog Jethro. For some reason, he has a thing for fresh-cut wood. And, as soon as I had batoned the first piece that was the right size for him, he took off with it so he could have something to do as I went on with the rest of the test. It's hard to get a better endorsement than that!

After doing the heavy lifting exercises with the Junglas, I decided to try it out making some tinder for a fire. I know everyone out there like to make fuzz sticks for just such an occasion, so it's tough for me to not do the same. We'll just go on record here to say this isn't the strongest point for the Junglas, and it probably shouldn't be either. The blade edge doesn't have the sharpness that we've come to enjoy from those top tier bushcrafting knives. If it did, it probably wouldn't hold up long to all the chopping chores. So, I wasn't able to get nice "feathers" working with the wood I was using at the time. At least I wasn't able to get any that were picture-worthy. Even so, I was still able to scrape off plenty of shavings from the wood that would be more than adequate to get a nice fire going. While not as "pretty" as a fuzz stick, they'll get the job done and that's what matters most. Naturally, working with the Junglas for this kind of fine work isn't as easy as a smaller fixed blade or an appropriate folder, but if the Junglas was all that you had on you, it'll more than meet your needs.



With that in mind, it should be noted that the edge on the Junglas is rather nice out of the box. For this kind of grind and for the kinds of things I'd be using the Junglas for most of the time, I think it's about as good as it gets. Your mileage may vary, however, depending on what you want to use it for when you pick up your very own. For example, there was a dense bush along the creek on our land that I decided to take out using the Junglas Machete. While I was able to complete the task with some effort, this is where the Lite Machete would be the more appropriate tool because of its longer reach and thinner blade. I don't know what type of applications the Junglas would be used for in the tropics, but for



clean, swift strokes that clear this kind of viny material with one whack, the Junglas needs to have a much keener edge. The freestanding limbs are too flexible to get taken out with one swing most of the time with the factory edge. Again, if the Junglas was all you had, you could get the job done. But there are better tools for the job, or at the very least, you need to have the edge touched up a bit more.

Speaking of the edge, after all of the various tests were done that afternoon, I checked out the edge of the Junglas to see how it held up with the various tasks. There were no dents or dings and I didn't see any rolled edges along the entire length, so I'd say it held up just fine. Even pounding it through the knot in the log and then later chopping off that same knot,



the edge still felt just like it did when it came out of the box. Certainly over time it will need to be brought back after it's lost its bite, but that's the nature of this kind of steel and these kinds of blades. But, I was very pleased by how well the Junglas performed in spite of the caveats provided by Jeff Randall when we discussed its design. This was also a great experience for me just to have the opportunity to try out the Junglas at various jobs to build that confidence that's extremely important when you decide to depend on a blade like this--especially during those times which your life might depend on it.

The final test for the Junglas was to see how well it would fit into the home I had waiting for it back at the house. For the past several years, I've used a Mercworx Sniper Pack as my ultimate "do everything" outdoors pack. I like this pack because it has exterior side pockets which sport a pass-through area behind them where you can carry items like machetes, knives, or even a rifle if you so desire. This is the spot where I've carried my personal big chopper for quite a while now. After pulling it out and replacing it with the Junglas, I was glad to see that it fit there like it was made for the Sniper Pack. I can use the extender ring on the Cordura Top to secure it to a strap and prevent it from sliding down out of reach. But don't worry, if you don't have such a pack, the sheath wears extremely well in its native configuration. And, you've got plenty of grommet holes along the edge of the sheath to lash it to just about any piece of gear so you can carry it any way that you like. This just happens to be the way that I like to carry my larger blades when I'm wearing a pack.



If you haven't figured it out by now, I think this is a pretty great system to have with you when you are in the woods--especially if you're partial to big knives. The thinner steel helps with lightening up the load a bit and making a more effective batoning knife, but the saber grind does help bolster the strength so you're not losing all the advantages of thicker steel. The ergonomics of the handle are excellent and I felt like I could work all day with the Junglas Machete with my hands being no worse for the wear. But, I will point out that I believe this all works best as a complete system. Yes, you can purchase the knife separately without the sheath, but I've got to ask why. You're going to need a sheath anyway, so why not get the sheath designed by the makers for this knife especially since they did such an incredible job with all the design points of the sheath. This is one of those times when you really do get what you pay for, and probably even a bit more than that.



The ESEE Knives Junglas Machete checks all the boxes for fit, form, and function. The quality of both the knife and sheath are superb for this price range and the quality is easily observed as soon as you pull it out of the box. It's an attractive tool with clean lines and nothing to quibble about when it comes how it was engineered or manufactured. Throw in their [no questions asked warranty](#) and you've got a tremendous value in this package that's hard to beat. Even if you don't live in the tropics, I think you'll be just as impressed as I am by how versatile a tool it can be--even if we are north of the equator!

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