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ESEE Knives Lite Machete Review

Written by Garrett Lucas
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Reviews - Knives

The most read article on Woods Monkey is our review on the [ESEE Knives](#) (formerly RAT Cutlery) RC-5 knife. But, the guys have been hard at work the past year and they're releasing some brand new models that look to be very promising. Only time will tell if the new models will generate the same interest as our RC-5 review, but our findings on the new [Lite Machete](#) sure makes it seem like an easy bet.

Chopping included below as well!



First off, we've commented in the past about our admiration for the folks over at ESEE Knives. I know I've stayed current with their adventures and business ventures for well over ten years. I mention the adventures part because that's how they pretty much got their start. Jeff Randall and Mike Perrin began taking groups of avid outdoors folks down to the Jungles of Peru to learn real-life survival skills in some pretty harsh terrain. So, these guys know what it takes for a tool to perform in less than ideal conditions. One of our writers, Joe Flowers, has gone on one of these trips and he's had nothing but positive things to say about the experience. In fact, I've noticed that Joe's developed a deeper appreciation for the machete as a vital part of his outdoors kit. After having a chance to use the new Lite Machete, I think I can understand why. First off, I'll admit that I'm still getting used to the new name for the company. I'm not sure how to pronounce "ESEE" other than E-S-E-E. It just doesn't roll off the tongue as naturally as the old name, but I hope I'll be forgiven any mistakes I make in this article or in the video for slip-ups with how I refer to the company. No matter how I say the name, I'm as impressed as I ever have been by what they offer for us rabid consumers to use.



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The Lite Machete is the first new product for 2010 that we've had a chance to use and review, and we got it just in time to take down to our annual outing in North Carolina where we had the chance to put it through its paces. The Lite Machete has a unique appeal to it because of something I've not seen with another machete of this type. It has Natural Micarta for the handle which immediately ups the ante for styling. The handles are actually affixed to the blades once they arrive in the United States. The makers of the blades, Imacasa are located in El Salvador and have a long history in manufacturing machetes that are used in some of the toughest terrains around the world. But, once everything is pieced together, you've got a fairly attractive tool for something as basic as a machete. But, looks aren't everything. What matters is how it performs and how it feels in the hand.

From the use standpoint, the Lite Machete is what most would consider a standard length for a machete. The handle is about 6 inches long and the 1075 steel blade is just under 18 inches. This is a common compromise length to handle a wide variety of tasks. The thickness of the blade is right at .065" of an inch and the entire package weighs in at 17 ounces. It also sports a convex edge which many proponents out there will tell you is the best edge for chopping. I'd probably have to count myself in that group. But, I'll have to admit to having a knowledge deficit when it comes to extensive use of machetes. My experience has been limited to a couple of military issue machetes that I picked up along the way. I haven't had a lot of need for a machete, myself, since I haven't lived or played in areas where it was an every day necessity. The times that I've used a machete have typically been for work around the house or on our land, and even then I wouldn't claim to have very deep knowledge--at least not like those folks that recreate in the Jungles of Peru!

With those disclaimers out of the way, I'll just say right up front that I liked the feel and the heft of the Lite Machete. The Micarta handle provides a very nice gripping surface that feels more "organic" than plastic ones I've used in the past. Also, the micarta helped with keeping a sure grip on the machete while I was doing the chopping tests in the video. It had been raining/misting all day and it didn't take long for the machete to get wet, but it turned out to not be an issue. After spending some time with it that day, I became very confident in the purchase on the handle that the Micarta provided for me. One feature of the handle is the bird's beak at the end which helps keep your hand from slipping off during your chopping tasks. Even with the Micarta material, my hand did slide a bit. As I pointed out in the video, when I hit the center portion of the sharp edge, there was no issue. But, when I got closer to the end where there's a bit more belly and what some would call the "sweet spot", the hand would slide a bit lower on the handle until the little finger was being pressed into that bird's beak area. This, naturally, is because of the momentum generated by the blade and the longer arc of the swing when trying to strike with the more forward end of the blade. You've got more roll and force working and that's gonna make it a little tougher to keep in the hand. While the bird's beak did its job in retaining my purchase on the handle, it gets a little uncomfortable in that position after a few chops. Even so, it wasn't too much of an issue and it took just a slight readjustment of my grip to get back on track. Also, I'll point out that when I really noticed this, I was chopping stuff that a machete really wasn't designed to chop. So, that was more me than the machete. More on that later...



While we were at the Practice What You Preach gathering, Tim Stetzer wanted to cut some pine boughs to make some bedding for himself later that night. So, we figured that would be a perfect time to try out the Lite Machete and a couple of others as well. Tim, like everyone else that's picked up the Lite Machete, gave a little smile and a couple of nods of the head when he picked it up the first time. That seems to be the reaction of just about everyone I've been around that's picked it up or tried it. It just feels really comfortable in the hand, and it seemed like it got Tim more motivated to get to chopping as well. After posing for a few shots and wiping the drool of his chin, he finally set to limbing some pine trees to build his mattress for the night. While we were out in the chopping fields, we also took along a couple of other machetes to do a bit of side by side comparisons as well.



It didn't take us long to see that the Lite Machete was taking big bites into the woods we were chopping. Granted, it was soft wood, but out of the few machetes we took with us to try out, the Lite Machete was making the deepest cuts. I'll point out that the Lite Machete was the longest one we had, so I'm sure the increased momentum we picked up



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because of the extra length had a good part in extra cutting power. However, just from eyeballing the different blades on hand, I felt like the Lite Machete had the best edge on it as well. It didn't take long for Tim to zip through his limbing process. When we was done, he hadn't even broken a sweat but had a pile of material that would take him a couple of trips to transport back to his camp. We didn't try chopping any hardwood or thicker trees that evening, but that's not what a machete is for anyway. Of course, I couldn't resist the temptation to do some heavier chopping. That's just my way. I just like to see how certain tools will perform when pushed outside of their "safe zone" just a bit. My chopping experiment is in the video below.

Yes, I know that machetes weren't designed for the chopping stuff I was doing in the video above. I can just hear the machete geeks out there cursing me from behind their computers. But part of our mindset is to understand how far tools can be pushed because there might be times when that's all you have on hand to get the job done. This is especially important when that job might require shelter building or other tasks that could prevent dire consequences when in an emergency situation in the outdoors. I've already had a couple of people comment to me about the amount of flex in the blade when I was pulling it out of the tree that I was chopping. That's actually what you want in a machete.

Machetes are thin by design because they are typically used to shear through vegetation like vines, saplings, and so forth so you need that thin cutting edge. That flexibility in the blade also prevents the blade from shattering in case you strike something hard like a rock or other material while you're doing your work. Even with all of that, I was still impressed by how the Lite Machete did in chopping through that thicker tree. It just proves the point that machetes are indeed versatile tools that can be used in a variety of circumstances.



The only plain Jane aspect of the Lite Machete is the sheath, and it's kind of hard to complain about that point. It's an ambidextrous design fashioned out of Cordura, and while I'd like to have something a bit more substantial, I'm a realist and understand that could drive up the costs quite substantially. However, I would personally prefer a drop loop on the sheath as the current loop's position makes the sheath ride a bit higher making it awkward (for me at least) to easily extract the machete. A lot of people will be perfectly happy with the supplied sheath and not feel compelled to accessorize or dress up the package like I am often prone to do. That said, the sheath seems to be pretty well made considering the material. But, as I pointed out earlier, too many design touches or different materials would probably drive up the price too much for the package. Truth be told, the Lite Machete doesn't need dressing up at all. The



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sex appeal comes from how well it performs and from the fact that its design makes it feel like a natural extension of your hand. Besides the stuff at PWYP and the chopping test in the video, I've used the Lite Machete several other times for various things here on our land.

I have to keep my young dog Jethro on a long leash when I let him out to play in the yard. I don't have a fence and he has a tendency to run off and go exploring. But, he's constantly getting his leash wound around a few bushes in the yard so I decided to take them out. Fortunately enough, I had the Lite Machete on hand so I put it right to work. No problem. In about ten minutes, I took out several bushes with little effort. I know a lot of folks out there



like shorter machetes, but the extra length this one provided was a welcome feature. It let me get in close without having to deal too much with branches and leaves in my face. I also used the machete to clear a couple of corridors on our land. Our family has a nice spread, but it was allowed to grow over in the decades before it came into our family. This makes getting to some scenic spots a little troublesome because of the vines and nettles in the way. About a week ago, I spent part of an afternoon clearing through some of that nuisance and I think that's when I really developed an appreciation for the utility of machetes in certain tasks. Just like previous instances, the Lite Machete did a great job letting even a machete newb like myself open up several areas for travel on our land. I'm sure when the vegetation starts growing even thicker later in the year, I'll be pulling out the Lite Machete again.

I'm not a globetrotter, nor am I an adventurer that spends a lot of time in the jungle. But, even here in the hills of West Virginia there are plenty of uses for machetes once you get used them and understand their strong points and limitations. The ESEE Knives Light Machete is certainly a step up from any machete I've previously owned or even handled. That's mainly because of the great Micarta handles and the convexed edge that really did a nice job with the various cutting and chopping jobs I undertook. Performance lived up to what I've come to expect from ESEE products and that's a pretty high watermark. If you're in the market for something in the machete range and are willing to pony up a little extra coin over a cheaper model, I think you'll be very pleased with the Lite Machete. I know I am!!

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