

survivin' in style  
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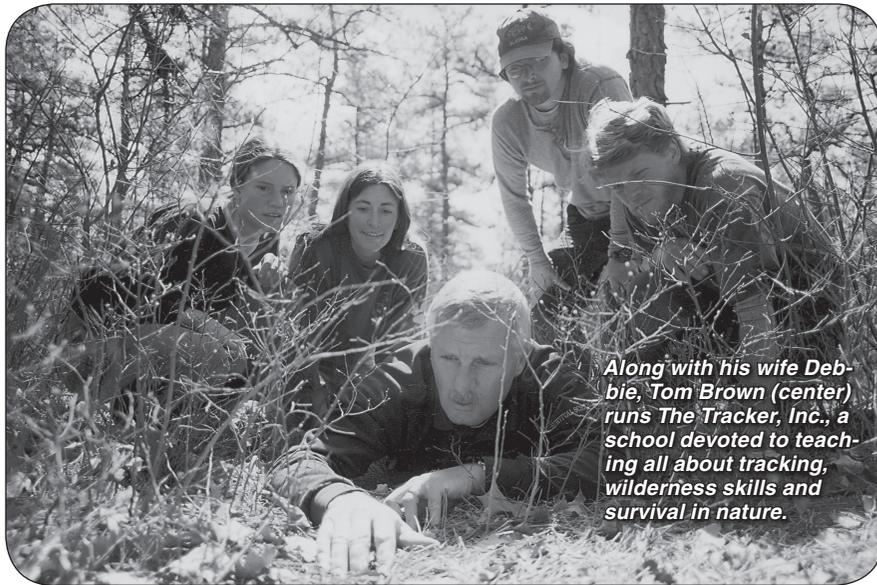
# Quest for The Perfect Folder

By Dexter Ewing  
BLADE® field editor



Survivalist Tom Brown and William Henry Knives—a classic case of opposites that attract

*The William Henry Knives/Tom Brown Quest is available in ZDP-189 stainless steel (\$375 MSRP), a powdered metal with 3 percent carbon and 20 percent chromium. According to WHK's Rick Thronburg, it Rockwells as high as an amazing 65-67 Rc without being brittle.*



*Along with his wife Debbie, Tom Brown (center) runs The Tracker, Inc., a school devoted to teaching all about tracking, wilderness skills and survival in nature.*

There are things in life that, on paper, don't seem to match. However, in practice, the same things seem to fall into place and, in the final analysis, all works out beautifully. Such is the case with the pairing of renowned tracker, environmentalist, author and teacher, Tom Brown, Jr., and William Henry Knives.

Brown has earned his reputation as a tracker by locating missing people, children and fugitives from the law. Having spent a considerable amount of time outdoors since his youth, Brown knows the value of good tools—especially a good knife. That knowledge is exemplified in The Tracker knife that he designed for the movie, *The Hunted*, starring Tommy Lee Jones and Benicio Del Toro. (For more on The Tracker knife, which is reproduced by TOPS Knives, see the April 2003 *BLADE*®.)

Along with his wife, Debbie, Brown runs The Tracker, Inc., a school that teaches tracking, wilderness skills and survival in nature. William Henry Knives (WHK) is a small knife-manufacturing studio situated in its new home of McMinnville, Oregon, that is dedicated to creating masterpieces with an edge and the best gentleman's knives in the world of production knives.

It does seem a little odd that a person of Brown's background would select a William Henry knife, since, after all, he definitely is *not* a member of the suit-and-tie crowd. So what gives?

#### **Eye On The Icon**

A few years ago, Brown visited a retail cutlery store in California where a certain knife caught his eye. It was a WHK Icon, a large titanium interframe folder that is now out of production. Immediately, Brown was taken by how well the knife was made and how comfortable it felt in his hand.

"[The Icons] were put together very well," Brown says of his first exposure to WHK's knives. "I bought six of them and gave them to my instructors." The instructors took the knives into the bush and tested them. As Brown recalled, "They beat the hell out of them!"

He and his staff were impressed at how well the knives held up under extreme conditions, how comfortable they were to use over long periods of time, and how aesthetically pleasing they were. It is basically the whole package

that drew Brown to WHK knives, much in the way that people who appreciate a well-made folder gravitate toward WHK's exquisite offerings.

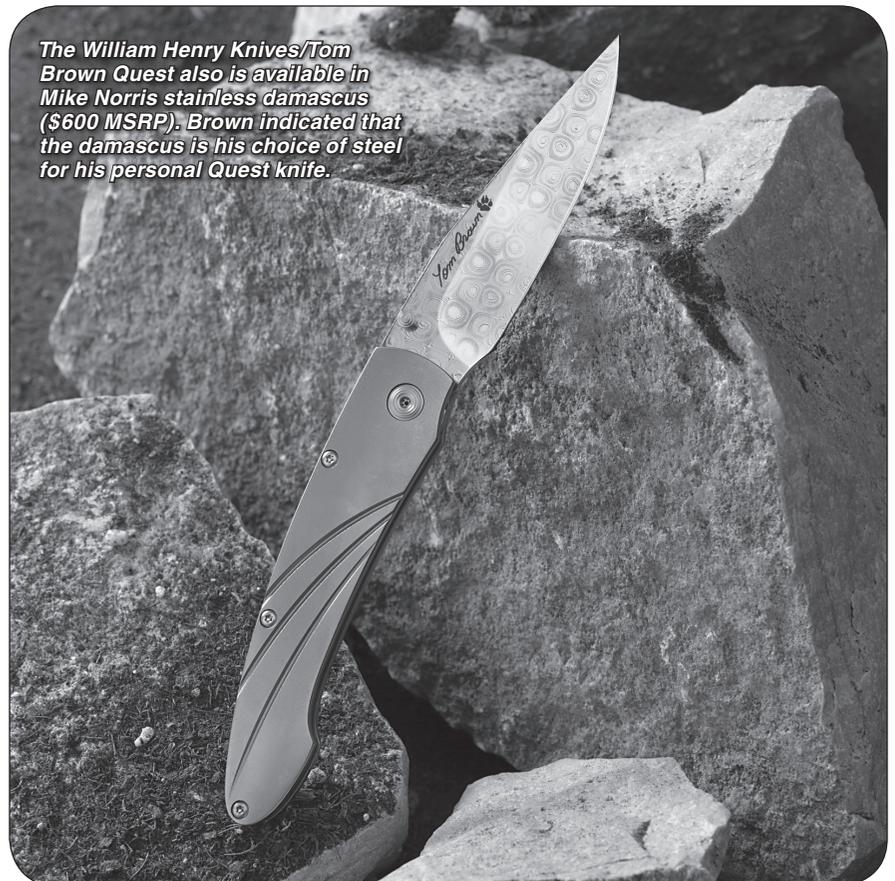
It wasn't long before Brown met Matt Conable, president and co-founder of WHK. Almost immediately, the two started to discuss a special knife for Brown. The result of the collaborative efforts is the WHK/Tom Brown Quest.

Don't let the Quest's looks fool you. On the outside, it is a lot like WHK's other knives—sleek lines and a slender profile, with an heir of refined elegance sprinkled in the mix. However, the Quest was designed and made for prolonged use over extended periods of time, and to hold up well in the elements. But why a folding knife?

When in the bush, a big fixed blade is an ideal survival tool, but when one returns to an urban setting, Brown explains, carrying a big fixed blade is not feasible. As a result, he wanted a folding knife to meet his standards.

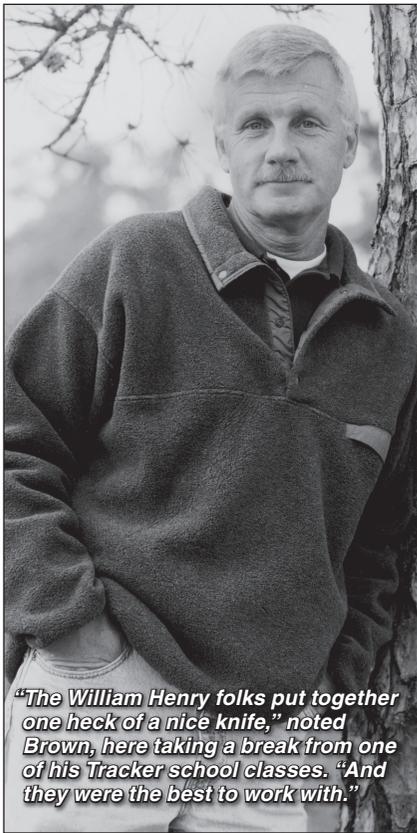
"We talked about things that he liked and what we were doing at William Henry Knives," says Rick Thronburg, WHK's sales manager. "With Tom and his instructors, it's all about performance."

The 3-inch-long, clip-point blade of the Quest has a tip precise enough for fine work, and the blade's slight belly is suited for making bow drills, traps and fish spears, and for intricate carving, skinning, gutting and other cutting chores that may arise. "I



*The William Henry Knives/Tom Brown Quest also is available in Mike Norris stainless damascus (\$600 MSRP). Brown indicated that the damascus is his choice of steel for his personal Quest knife.*

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*"The William Henry folks put together one heck of a nice knife," noted Brown, here taking a break from one of his Tracker school classes. "And they were the best to work with."*

wanted the knife to do everything," Brown remarks. In the bush, he says that he and his instructors have a knife in their hand, literally, for six to seven hours at a stretch performing all sorts of cutting tasks.

Handle comfort is definitely a high priority and Brown has a strong disdain for pocket clips. He said that for as long as he and his team use a knife, a pocket clip gets in the way and makes the handle feel uncomfortable. Consequently, instead of a clip, the Quest comes with WHK's Clip Case, a sewn-leather slip sheath with a steel pocket clip on. In other words, you get a clip-carry knife without a pocket clip! Brown is quick to add that the titanium handle feels very comfortable. "It's so lightweight," he observes.

The base model Quest sports ZDP-189 san-mai blade steel, and also is available in Mike Norris stainless damascus. In the former, a core of ZDP-189 is sandwiched by two outer layers of 420 stainless steel. ZDP-189 is a powdered metal with 3 percent carbon and 20 percent chromium and, according to Thronburg, Rockwells as high as an amazing 65-67 Rc without being brittle. He adds that it is very wear resistant yet easy to sharpen.

"ZDP-189 has four times the cutting performance of D-2, based on inde-

pendent cutting tests and metallurgical analysis," he points out. Why ZDP-189 for the Quest? "We wanted to be able to offer something to outperform all the other cutlery steels," Thronburg asserts. (There will be more on ZDP in the February *BLADE*.)

Running counter to the popular wisdom that all damascus is for collector knives and showpieces, Brown indicates that the Mike Norris stainless damascus is his choice of steel for his personal Quest knife, which sees a lot of use. "Once you sharpen [the Norris stainless damascus], it holds an edge well," he says.

The handle shape of the Quest is similar to WHK's B7 Westcliff model—the *Blade Magazine* 2003 Overall Knife Of The Year®—though a more muscular variation that enhances grip and control. The knife's button-lock mechanism is easy to operate and provides super-tight lock-up.

## Quest Test

How does the Quest hold up to real-world use as dispensed by Brown and his instructors? "In six to eight months, my instructors and I will destroy any lockblade knife," he guarantees. Given the amount and nature of how they use their knives, it is quite easy to see why. They are in the elements all the time, getting soaked with water and caked with debris. Meanwhile, Brown says that his instructors have had the Icon interframes he bought for them from the California retailer for four years now and the knives are still holding up well!

How does the Quest withstand heavy and constant use? "Excellent," Brown says. "It's a well-manufactured knife. The William Henry folks put together one heck of a nice knife." Brown is quick to point out that Conable and crew were very receptive to his feedback, and no matter what he suggested, they were always ready and willing to try it, accommodating him at every turn.

"I wanted to create something where if your life is on the line, the knife will hold up. We submerged [the Quest] in water and muck, did extensive carving and all types of cutting chores. If I had to bring a folder with me into the bush," he concludes, "this would be the one."

*The Quest is available from any WHK dealer or directly from The Tracker, Inc., attn: T. Brown, Dept. BL1, 92 Valley Station, Asbury, NJ 08802 908.479.4681 and 908.479.6867 fax [www.trackerschool.com](http://www.trackerschool.com). The site has more information on the school and Brown. For information on the WHK dealer in your area, contact WHK, attn: R. Thronburg, Dept. BL1, 3200 NE Rivergate, McMinnville, OR 97128 888.563.4500 or 503.434.9700.*

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