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THE MANTIS STRIKES!

YOUNG BLOOD IN THE KNIFE BIZ

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PHOTOS: CHUCK PITTMAN, INC.

Sometimes the road isn't just about how you get there, but what you do when you get there. Such is the story of Mantis Knives and company founder Jared West's unusual but highly effective way of building a knife company. Mantis Knives is a scant two years old, Jared West is just 27 years old, but the budding company has come out of nowhere to be one of the hottest cutlery names on the market. To reach that status, West took a different course than most start-up businesses in the knife industry and his gamble has paid off.

Most cutlery companies are either handed down from generations or created by seasoned industry insiders, such as management employees, or experienced artisans like custom knifemakers. Nobody told Jared West he had to be



either, he just saw a unfilled niche in the tactical end of the cutlery market and went after filling it hammer and tong. In fact, Jared West's bio reads more like a college kid knocking around in the wilderness trying to find

his purpose in life.

"I've done a few different things in my life," states West. "I worked at a veterinary hospital as a Vet Technician. I sold sporting goods at a retail store, I traded foreign currencies in Los Angeles, and I was in television production for a bit. I'm not really sure how these careers have influenced my work, but one theme runs true throughout my life — get noticed. I've always wanted to stand out in a crowd, and I certainly want my products to do the same."

All the while Jared always had an interest in knives, dating back to his childhood days when his grandfather gave him his very first pocket knife, a Swiss Army multi-blade, at the age of ten. Later West would feed his interest with building knife kits and making semi-custom knives, but things wouldn't heat up until he purchased the now defunct California knife company that was GT Knives. At the time he

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THE MANTIS

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worked at the company as an employee, and when the company owner decided to close its doors, West made an offer and the rest is, as they say, history.

In the short term he focused his attention on filling orders on current models to keep the company afloat, but a burning desire to be different, to cut through the clutter, to push the envelope of design to parts unknown gnawed at his gut. This was where the road had taken him. Mantis Knives was born.

The Youth Factor

Jared West is a product of a generation most knife companies traditionally have not gone after. Call it by that ubiquitous term "Generation Y" if you will, but the category is mainly made up of young adults in their late teens and early twenties. Sure, there've been many innovations and wild designs offered by manufacturers over the last decade since the rise of the tactical folder, but these have been mainly produced to help sell the more traditional models in their line. Jared's concept of Mantis Knives was to sell nothing but edgy designs people his age would find exciting and appreciate.

The younger consumer wants something different than what the older guys are using.

According to Jared, "We wanted to appeal to the younger generation, not only with the aesthetics of our knives, but also with the price point. Our knives are definitely not your grandfather's knife. What we saw in the market were knives that were very unique in the materials being used, but not necessarily their look. It seemed like there was a gaping hole in the industry and somebody needed to fill it. That's where we came in.

"The average age of the Mantis knife buyer is in his twenties and he's a knife enthusiast or a user, like a military guy. I think with Mantis what you're achieving is a really unique look and great utility — at the same time. The younger consumer wants something different than what the older guys are using," explained Jared.

Mantis' first designs not only rivaled some of the wildest manufacturers' fare, they were distinctively different. One might be robotic looking while another resembled a sleek racecar. Black coatings were accented with bright red anodized machined components like rings dispersed along the knife to enhance the grip — checkered

handles be damned. It takes a lot to rattle us seasoned writer types, but I recall seeing Mantis' first ads and carefully placing my eyeballs back into their sockets to see if what I was seeing was real. Exaggeration of course, but West's designs caused me to take note, exactly as he had planned.

A New Envelope

West and Mantis have not just pushed the envelope, they've redesigned a new one. If there is one model exemplifying this it's the MTF-4ti Chaos folder. And while the Chaos folder may look unorthodox, everything about it is pure business. "Our most popular model is the MTF-4ti," says West. "This knife has it all. The blade is constructed of S30V with a black-oxide coat. The handle is comprised of individually placed blocks of G-10 onto a 440 frame with Titanium liners." The machine-like, robotic looks of the Chaos are a prime example of the youth appeal in the Mantis line. There are two Chaos folders in the Mantis line-up and fixed-blade fans will be pleased to know they're covered with two straight models. The MF-4cm Chaos II fixed-blade is pictured herein alongside its folding brother, the MTF-4ti. The Chaos folder rolls out to a beefy 9.25" in length while the fixed-blade checks in at 8.25" overall.



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has a relatively tame re-curved drop point blade that will serve a hunter well. And if you're into four-wheel-drive check out the handle scales with a mud grip tire pattern that just so happens to enhance the grip of the knife and, yes, it is made of real ZR rated tire rubber to boot! At 7.80" (3" in the blade) the Seymore is just the right size for lightweight carry (in its Kydex sheath) yet large enough for many field chores and a little combat should the occasion arise.

Newer additions to the Mantis line are a group of tactical pocket folders ranging from basic to upscale. Top of the line is the MT-2Ti Classiest Act, a sleek all-black folder with an all-black oxide finish topped with highly polished carbon fiber scales. The 3" clip point blade has a clam-shaped opening hole and features top shelf S30V stainless steel. A liner-lock mechanism holds the blade firmly when engaged; a pocket clip keeps it nestled for easy reach when it's not.

A Sharp Future

West stays on top of his customers wants and needs through a program called the Mantis Militia. Members not only get to give Jared direct feedback on current and future knives, but also get advanced notice on all new products and receive special promotional offers. According to Jared, "The Mantis Militia is vital to the longevity of our brand. With the these loyal supporters I am able to converse directly with the customer during research and design of each knife, this allows us to get a very firm grip on exactly what it is our customer is craving."

Mantis' knives are surprisingly affordable. Most of the knives, folder and fixed-blade alike, are priced in the \$30-50 range. This includes some very slick knives like the TA-2 Seymore and MK-3 CinQ III Karambit. At the upper end you'll find the MT-2Ti Classiest Act priced at \$144.00 and the flagship MTF-4ti Chaos folder at \$260.00, not bad for two folding knives featuring the best materials on the market.

You won't want for selection either as Mantis is growing their line at a rapid pace. "We have knives that are small and concealable, and we also have knives enormous by anyone's standards. There are currently 31 knives in the lineup, and we add new models into the mix twice a year. During 2008, a total of seven new knives were created, and in 2009 we expect to introduce as many as 11 more," says West. Stay tuned,  as they say.

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