



BROADSWORDS

The fine details, you will understand, are lost in an alcoholic haze, but the bare fact is that the academic ambition that sent me to university scarcely survived my first week there. "Cherchez la femme," you say, in an approximation of Law French. Indeed, but my immediate downfall was otherwise, for I had no sooner arrived than by chance I fell in with a coterie of rust-stained derelicts who spent their time laying at one another with broadswords, battle axes, maces and the like. Then they would retire to an inn, discuss the finer points of swordplay, and continue the battle with beer drinking contests.

Now this was more like it, and I soon found myself inextricably hooked on what is known in polite society as Medieval battle re-enactment. And given the velocity of the university cycle, it was only a year later that I found myself in charge of this rag-tag Round Table of latter-day Crusades dodgers. Our days were filled with individual combats and *mêlées* that would likely have proceeded to beheadings and disembowelments were it not for a happy convention that called for the early application of medicinal quantities of Ward's best bitter.

Medieval re-enactment, of course, is an equipment sport—in spades. Without

equipment, you cannot take part. And without a lot of equipment, you would risk severe injury if you were allowed to go ahead. My first concern, therefore, was to get access to enough equipment to get started which, at the outset, meant using someone else's broken sword, with half the blade missing, to practice the strokes. Impecuniousness and a degree of handiness led me to become my own armourer and, before long, to take orders from others. The highest profile order, no doubt, was when I made the publicity swords for the heavy metal rock band, Iron Maiden. As for fighting equipment, I have made perhaps a dozen swords,

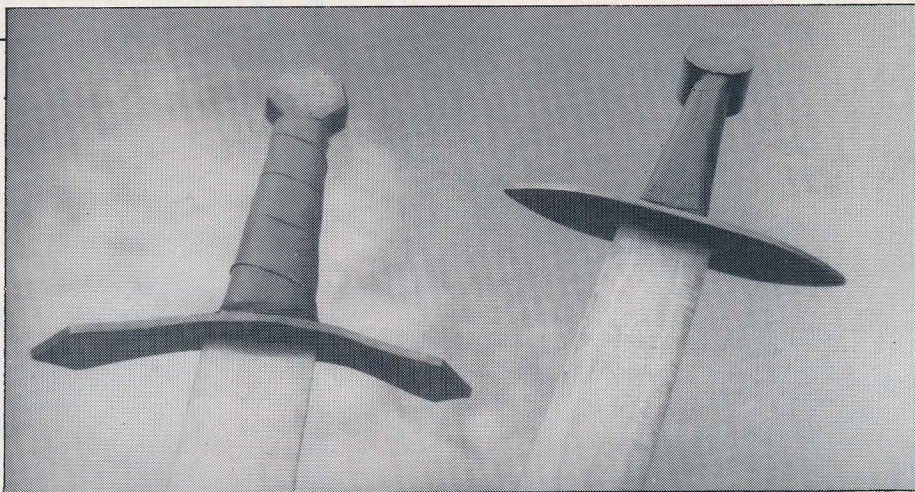
two suits of plate armour, a suit of chain mail, with gauntlets and shields as required—the odd dagger or *main gauche* as well. I was, as you might imagine, delighted when the opportunity came to review a sword from another shop.

The sword under review is from the Eastbourne company Battle Orders, and is three-foot, single-handed example from their medieval collection. It is of a style prevalent in Europe between 1350 and 1450 and tends toward the continental pattern of a narrow, tapering blade, as opposed to the contemporary English fashion for the slightly shorter, broader, though no less tapering, blade. The blade, of hardened and tempered EN45 steel, is 29½ inches from point to quillons, and penetrates the hilt as a tang a further 4 inches. It is of 3/16 stock, bevelled to ⅛ inch at the edges giving a pleasing “finished” appearance. It is shouldered at the quillons, diminishing from a width of 1⅝ inches to 1¼ inches at the head of the hilt. This yields a hilt just a bit too narrow for my liking, though for those with smaller hands it should provide a grip of sufficient stability. The hilt length of 4½ inches is similarly too small for me, and even those of smaller stature may find the length insufficient for two-handed combat if plate gauntlets are used.

The hilt terminates in a 1-inch section of inch and a half bar. The quillons are a simple cross-bar of 3/16" mild steel, one inch wide, six inches across and ground to an ellipsoidal section. A nice detail on these is the slot cut for the blade. As the blade width diminishes to the hilt, so the slot tapers with it through the thickness of the quillons. This gives a good finish on the backside of the quillon bar where the fingers bear against it. It reduces wear on the gloves and prevents gouged fingers in the case of blade slippage.

My only major criticism of the sword form is the point: a more or less direct copy of a period point, which is good for authenticity but runs the possibility of serious accidental injury a little too high for my taste. The Federation of Medieval Societies, of which both Knights in Battle and Outremer (my old local societies) are members, asks that all points be reduced to no less than the radius of a pound coin for inter-society battles. This is a sensible precaution and leads to deep bruising rather than potentially fatal penetration. The extra ounce or two of resistance also greatly increases in the ease with which thrusts may effectively be pulled if contact occurs.

The hilt is of classical construction with the tang sandwiched between two side plates which are welded at either end to the quillons and pommel. Two rivets driven through the layers hold the affair together. Wooden panels glued to either side and shaped give the grip form, the whole being covered in leather. On many swords I have seen, not only in this country but in the States

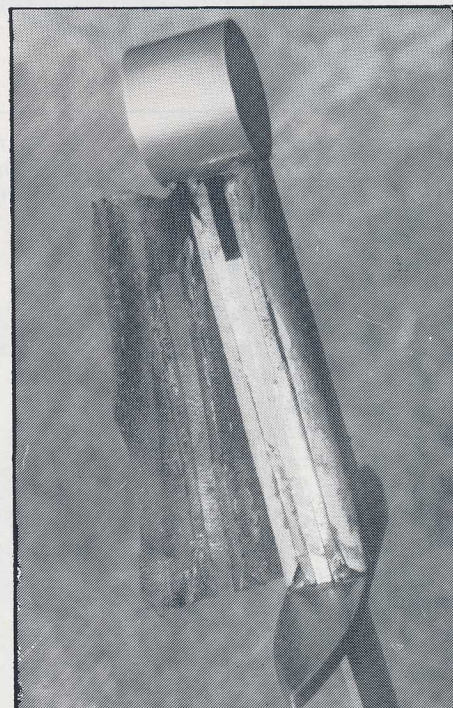


Battle Orders broadsword (rt.) is 100% fighting kit of c. 1400 continental pattern. The 29½" blade tapers from a 1⅝" hilt width and is ground from 3/16" stock, bevelled to ⅛" at the edge. Hart's tournament sword at left has a strip-wound handle with twisted wire in the gutter for a classier finish.

as well, the leather grip covering is applied with little care, degrading what sometimes are magnificent blades. A piece of the material the length of the hilt and as wide as its circumference is wrapped around and glued, leaving an ugly, and often shredded, edge down one face. My own swords are always wrapped with a strip of leather, as one would bind an arm with a bandage. Neatly glued, and with a twisted wire fillet following the groove, a much more presentable hilt is formed for a minimal increase in either time or effort. I understand, however, that since the time of writing the hilt construction has been modified to improve the overall standard, and thus recent examples may achieve a higher level of appearance and serviceability.

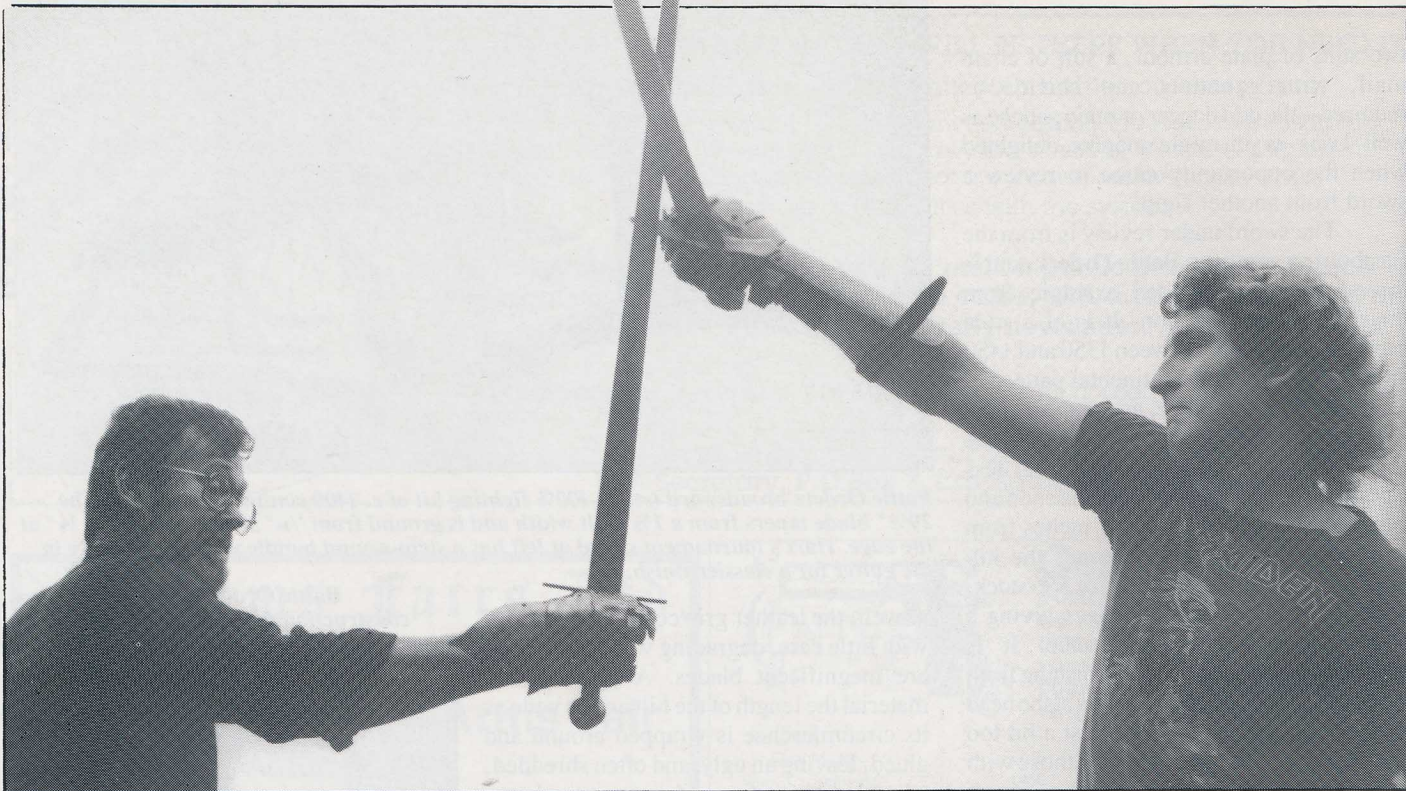
However, enough on the sword as an object; how does it fight? Well, the combat test was undertaken between myself and the editor, with my normal combat sword completing the pair. The Battle Orders weapon weighs 3lbs ½oz, while mine is somewhat heavier at 3lbs 13oz. Mine has a blade an inch and a half shorter, and a hilt 2¼ inches longer. It balances 1¼ inches

Battle Orders hilt is of standard construction with the tang sandwiched between mild steel plates welded fore and aft, with leather-wrapped wooden scales



The blurred image indicates speed of movement as the author (rt.) blocks an incoming roundhouse attack to his left. Carry-through of the Battle Orders blade (left) is such that a blow like this, once launched, is very difficult to pull or stop short.





Author (rt.) takes care to block an over-the-top attack near the hilt of his own sword, for such is the inertia of the Battle Orders blade that a parry further out would risk being smashed through. In point of fact, Hart's blade later broke under the pounding. This was a full-speed attack, frozen by blade contact and a high shutter speed. Lines of attack, however, were clearly telegraphed, else helmets and armour would have had to be worn.

from the quillons, compared to the test sword's balance point 5½ inches down the blade.

In the defence, this blade heaviness is partially advantageous since the centre of mass is closer to the point of impact. However, it considerably slows down the blade in transition from parry to parry or from parry to attack.

When struck, the blade emits a healthy ring, indicative of a solid and well made hilt, yet on occasion this can lead to unpleasant vibration, and a slightly larger pommel would help alleviate this. As I indicated before, the narrow grip left me wishing for a more positive feel, and anyone contemplating the purchase of the sword must check out what is good for him and alter accordingly. I found the blade rotating in my hand, especially on the transitions between lateral and lower leg parries. Yet the parries themselves were all solid and reassuring, with the likelihood of penetration minimal compared to lighter swords, which present a less solid barrier to the attack.

In attack, I found the delay in movement caused by the balance point annoying, but I personally like a balance point on or near the quillon block. I know, however, that this taste is not universal, and other people may well get on with this delayed action. Yet for me, the inability to get smooth transitions in such combat manouvres as feints and parry-riposts meant that I would not wish to be caught with this sword in serious individual conflict. It is simply too slow. Yet in straight, no nonsense

Saladin's despair: the broadsword was Europe's weapon of choice for half a millennium. A power tool, it required strength and technique and long application to master, an exhilarating accomplishment in the end. As a fighting discipline, it is first class.



combat, it is an excellent deliverer of effective blows, and penetration against even a 12-gauge shield was impressive. I would advocate, however, that in training with this sword, great care be taken to ensure personal safety with regard to the pulling of blows. Due to its massive carry-through it could, in the hands of a student, become an uncontrolled weapon, and hence very dangerous. Therefore I would suggest that the swordmaster in charge of training should be experienced, and the novice not a complete beginner before this sword is used. Better the parries and attacks be taught with a lighter sword and their implementation assured before using this sword as a "beefing up" instrument.

In slightly more advanced training, however, a further bonus is that, due to its centre of mass being in the blade, parry-smashes, delivered from either the blade or the quillons, are extremely effective; the devastating effect on the opponent's weapon allows for useful counter attack. I would suggest that a pommel-strike is the most useful such counter attack, as generally the sword does not have to be rotated to become effective, and thus the strike is significantly quicker. This is its big advantage over a more pommel-heavy sword. A further bonus is that its penetration is achieved at a relatively low weight, so carrying the weapon on cross-country marches will not result in a complaining hip.

The sword comes with a leather combat scabbard 5¾ inches long, fitted with two strap and buckle affairs on the rear for belt attachment. It is a simple open ended sheath, of 4mm leather secured with five rivets along each edge. A slight shame is that these are modern, hollow rivets punched over from the rear. Again, the extra effort in using solid rivets, of an authentic style, would be small and would allow for increased pride. The surface is tooled neatly rendered, and the simple decoration is becoming to the sword as a whole. These sheaths do wear out, with the constant tearing by the burrs of the edge, and I assume that replacement sheaths are available.

In combat, the scabbard I tried was sufficiently broken in to allow the sword to leave it rapidly enough for effective engagement. However, the strap and buckle arrangement on the inner face hangs the sword vertically from the belt, and on a quick draw I frequently found myself cracking my wrist against the pommel. Again, a matter of personal taste, but an angle of 10 to 15 degrees off the vertical would save me from mutilation by my own sword or death from my opponent's.

In conclusion, I think that, bar a few shortcomings, this is an excellent piece of workmanship. The finish is of an acceptable standard and, with care in use, this sword could be an asset to anyone's equipment. It



Editor (rt.) moves to parry an over-the-top attack. Hart's extended handle moves the balance point down near the hilt, giving him a fast, agile blade. The Battle Orders sword, defending, would be slow on a blade riposte, but fast on a smash counterattack with pommel or quillons.



Get tough or die. Author Hart sets up Judith White's defending stance. The broadsword requires strength and skill in equal measure. Joan of Arc was lean meat.

is suited to the beginner's market in that the blade will force rapid muscle development and give good results in basic attack and defence. I would emphasise, though, that with the balance point well down the blade, the quick and easy pulling of blows is not one of its characteristics; during training due care must be taken to provide effective personal protection. Its price of £69.95 is within the range of most people, and compares favourably with other swords of its class currently available. It has a big brother, in

the form of a double hander with a blade of 36 inches, an overall length of 45" and a weight of 4½ lbs. It retails at £89.95, but at present I have no further information. A three-footer is a good sword to keep by you with increased practice, allowing "revision" of good technique and keeping the sword arm in trim. After all, the medievalists who knew about these things, such as the 16th century Italian Cappel Ferro, recommended practice swords "with the weight of a spear and the balance of a mace."