

SOG Spec ARC Knife

Reviewed by
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TEST FIRE



Among other stuff, the NZ Ammunition Company is the distributor for SOG knives. Their company is well known in NZ, given they seem to be the distributor for a lot of trusted high-end hunting brands. Indeed, this was reflected in a recent chat I had with their managing director. He's also a keen hunter and lobbyist for our firearms industry. When asked about his business philosophy at a private dinner with the then Prime Minister John Key, he proudly exclaimed, "there's enough crap in the world without my business adding to it". It's that cultural pillar which his business is based upon.

The SOG brand is another top-end product. We tested their SOG LED illuminated fixed blade unit called "Bladelight" in our previous issue, as we felt readers should see what we thought of the SOG brand and its innovative introduction of LED lamps that were embedded into the knife handle. Overall, the knife performed well and the nerdy light system proved to be quite helpful in the field.

We've now received the higher level SOG Spec ARC model, which this review puts under the hammer for you.

The basic specifications

Length: 4.0"
Overall Length: 8.8"
Closed Length: 4.8"
Blade thickness 0.14"
Weight: 4.4 oz
Blade Material: VG-10
Blade hardness RC60
Handle Material: GRN
Locking Mechanism: Arc Lock
Deployment Mechanism: Thumb Stud
Country of Origin: Japan
Price Range: Around \$225

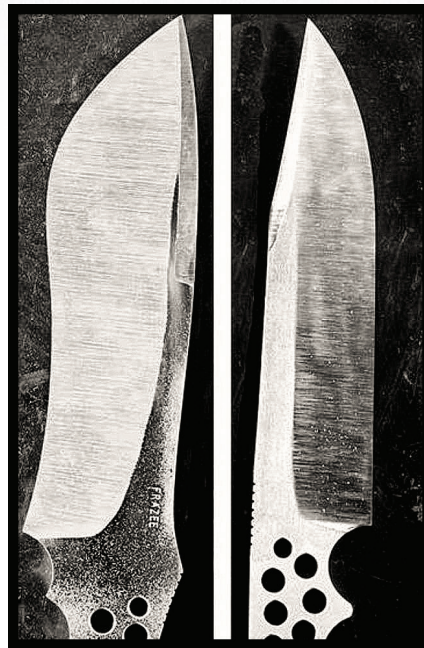
Like most things, first impressions count and I used the SOG Spec ARC exclusively on a spring tahr bow hunting adventure where it admirably carved up three of those rugged alpine beasts.

First up, this knife feels the business.

It's well weighted, and the blade is quite long for a folder. It's also sharp out of the box, very sharp, and it stayed that way after a lot of butchering abuse.

As weird as this sounds, the thing that struck me almost immediately in the field was the blade profile. The knife specifications say it's a 'drop point' design, however I reckon its more of a moderate "clip point" variety, and it caught me by surprise. Thing is, I realised I'd been using classic "drop point" styled blades most of my hunting life and found this clip point blade somewhat tricky to use.

Upon slicing off the first tahr back steak, I inadvertently pierced its thorax cavity between the ribs with the blade tip - an unpleasant surprise. Peeling off said back steak was also a tad harder to do given the lack of blade curve and depth just under the tip, I got better with it over time.



Drop Point Clip Point

Generally, clip point blade designs promote a quicker, and thus deeper, puncture upon insertion. Whereas drop point designs are slightly slower to insert due to its thicker spine near the tip. The clip point also tends to have a quicker "stabbing" advantage with less drag during insertion and faster withdrawal. However, this is traded off with its narrower and comparatively weaker tip.

I'm a self-confessed meat-axe when it comes to butchering animals. With over 30 years of hunting, I've perfected my own rapid (yes rough) method to extricate key meat from an animal, given I'm often doing the business in remote, steep, awkward places and need to move on with haste to get out of danger and either get back into action, or zap back to base before dark.

The SOG Spec ARC blade

In our previous review of the SOG Bladelight, we went to some detail on the metallurgy behind its 8CR13MoV stainless steel blade makeup. The SOG Spec ARC is made from an even higher end stainless called VG-10. I'm a fan of stainless blades simply because they require less maintenance. I'm lazy so that suits me.

My choice of blade steel over the years has defaulted to 154CM stainless, which I've found to be a good hunting balance between Hardness (Rockwell standard), Toughness (resistance to cracking), Edge retention and Wear resistance. The VG-10 steel used for the SOG demonstrated equivalent, if not better, capability to 154CM so it gets a big 'thumbs up' from me.

I butchered three tahr (heavy skins) and three deer (two stags and a hind) without any need to tickle up the blade - it's still sharp and ready to go in my hunting bag - impressive metal.

The blade locks into place via a small pivoting cylinder that is pushed via an internal spring, in an arc fashion (hence the name) into a slot on the blade tang. I've seen a similar locking design made by Bench made knives, it's a strong system which I'd argue is the best for folding knives.

To release the locked blade, you simply pull back on the external ends of the spring loaded locking cylinder and then simply fold the blade back into its handle.

Other features of the SOG Spec ARC

The handle is made of Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRN) - if you want to know, it's a chemical formulation of thermoplastic polyamide, essentially plastic with some fiberglass stuffed in it.

Like plastics used in quality rifle stocks, it offers a stable handle that is strong and won't swell with moisture or distort under heat. The handle has the SOG logo deeply molded into it which looks cool and helps with grip. The handle also incorporates a poorly designed belt clip which would quickly flip off anything – fortunately you can easily remove and biff it away.

SOG Spec ARC – the Good, Bad & Ugly

PRO

Useful, long blade for a folding hunting knife

Excellent VG-10 steel that withstood some hard yards in the field

Well balanced

Simple but easy to hold handle

A proven, strong blade locking mechanism

CON

Teflon rather than bronze bushing on the blade pivot – subject to early wear in our conditions

Pathetic belt clip

High end RRP for a folding knife at around \$225

Subjective Clip point blade design which took time to get used to

Black handle – prefer it also offered in Orange to aid finding when placed down in the field while butchering

Conclusion:

I prefer folding knives over fixed blade versions for most game hunting, simply because they are light and safely pack away in your pack (or pocket) without the need for a bulky sheath. They are generically weaker than most fixed blade knives, but I've never needed that additional strength butchering game – if you're sticking pigs, that's another story altogether.

This folding knife from SOG is a class unit. However, like most things we test there is always room for improvement as shown above. The most interesting thing about this test was how I discovered / confirmed my preference for Drop point blade configurations over their Clip point brothers.

I got used to the SOG Spec ARC blade design but feel it could be modified a little more towards the Drop point end of the scale.

The VG-10 steel was an awesome find, it easily matched (arguably exceeded) 154CM steel which I feel is a specification suited to our tough, wet NZ conditions.

Overall – a very good hunting knife; expensive yes, but you get what you pay for and that VG-10 steel is certainly worth every penny.

The SOG Spec ARC was used on this mature red hind, a great BBQ animal.



How should I care for my SOG folding blade knife?

Keeping your knife clean, dry, oiled and sharp are the primary defenses against corrosion, wear, and potential injury. And practicing proper care for your knife will extend the life of your SOG as well as increase its durability and reliability.

Keep your knife clean. Be sure to clean the blade and handle set after each use. A mild solution of soap and water should remove any dirt and debris that may have accumulated during use (avoid harsh detergents such as laundry or dish soap, and chlorine products). It is best not to immerse your folding knife in water. To remove any debris from inside the handle you can use a toothpick for any visible lint or dirt, or a Q-Tip for smaller amounts of dirt and debris. Also, a can of compressed air is useful for completely clearing out any embedded dirt or lint. (Ensure that you follow any cautionary guidelines that the product recommends, because some compressed air canisters use an accelerant which might damage your knife's finish.)

Keep your knife dry. After cleaning or after exposure to moisture be sure to completely dry your knife blade and handle, using a Q-tip to dry areas that are not easily accessible. Use a soft cotton cloth or chamois and a small amount of moisture-displacing oil (such as WD-40 or 3-in-1), on the blade only, to prevent water spots and oxidation from forming.

Keep your knife oiled. Fingerprints and weather are the primary causes of rusting or corrosion on a knife blade. To keep your knife looking its best we recommend that you give your blade a light coat of oil after each cleaning, and prior to long term storage (you may need to re-apply oil more frequently if you live in humid or marine environments).

Keep your knife sharp. A sharp knife is safer and easier to use than a dull one. If you are new to sharpening blades we recommend that you invest in a fixed-angle sharpening kit, so that you ensure a consistent grind from tip to base - we also recommend that you practice your sharpening skills on your kitchen cutlery first, before working on your SOG knife.

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