

Practical hints and guidance for sword owners

Cardboard tubes as an alternative target

So a little while back now, whilst out and about, I spotted some cardboard tubes that were going to be thrown out. This opportunity to acquire and give them a test run was too good to pass up and so, politely asking if they were going to be thrown out and whether or not I could maybe take them, I walked away with as many tubes as I could carry.

I've heard people say that they work quite well but have been unable to find any video or conversation that actually details their use at all. This left a void in my overly inquisitive mind and therefore being the sort of person that I am, I decided that I would take the plunge, for the good of all cutters out there and give them a try.

The tubes that I managed to get hold of are probably just over an inch and three quarters in diameter and the walls are about half a centimetre to two thirds of a centimetre thick. When they're dry, these things are solid as a rock and by that I mean you could beat someone senseless with them. Forget the sort of kitchen roll or wrapping paper insert thickness, these are meaty and I wasn't entirely sure how I was going to manage to cut them.

They are also made of cardboard of course and if paper is notorious for ruining the edge on knives, imagine how this could be on the edge of a sword. On the plus side, this made it particularly easy to decide on a sword to use. Anything I didn't want damaged, I thought would bend or was unwieldy I put to one side. This would be a test that I felt comfortable with, with a blade I wasn't scared I'd break.

To allay the problem of potential edge damage, I decided these tubes needed a little wetting in order to get them to the point where I was comfortable cutting them without worrying. I would advise, if you were to try the same thing, to do this. I cut a few without wetting them and although they cut, and the resulting 'thunk' noise was quite satisfying, you could feel the edge on the blade deteriorating and so I stopped. Weird how something as innocuous as cardboard can do this isn't it?

Soaking the tubes took me about 5 minutes because the cardboard is relatively thick and afterwards, its best to stand them up and let them drain off for about the same time. This gives you a fantastic amalgamated cardboard target that has been softened up enough for your sword to forgive you but still sturdy enough to make sure you pay attention to hasuji.

(Please forgive the quality in the talking parts of this video but hopefully it will show you first hand how these targets stand up to being cut.)

In conclusion

These cardboard tubes feel awesome to cut and the fact that you can get multiple cuts on a target is very nice indeed. They're slower than bottles if you'll forgive that expression and by that I mean that you have plenty of time to decide where you're going to place your next cut. With bottles you have half a second before it drops. In retrospect, if I had thought about that extra time between cuts, before I actually started cutting, then I probably would have spent more time perfecting my cuts and watching my stopping distances. But to be fair to myself, this was

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something of an experiment to see *if* they could be used, rather than what they could be used *for* in a practice session.

The tubes make a satisfying noise when cut correctly and they cut clean. They make a mess if your cut is off. Looking at the target afterwards will immediately tell you if you're scooping your cuts or your edge alignment was off which is refreshingly useful. As for resistance, they do offer more resistance than bottles but at no point (past the initial first attempt) was I worried that I wouldn't be able to divide the target. If you want to compare these to the difficulty of cutting tatami or bamboo, although I wouldn't know as I haven't cut those targets yet, I feel I would be forgiven for suggesting that they are in no way comparable difficulty wise.

These tubes will wreck your blades if you don't soak them beforehand and there's no doubt in my mind about that. Even after soaking, they retain enough of their structural integrity to be able to scuff and scratch the blade and the extent to which they do this means that although the edge damage is negligible in the big scheme of things, it is still there and it is immediately noticeable by thumbing the edge.

Basically put, if you don't mind tidying up your blade afterwards, these things are a lot of fun. Don't use your finest most beautiful blade. Wet them before use and don't compare them to traditional targets because they are nothing alike.

Shad.

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