

Make Mine Automatic

By Tim Stetzer, Tactical Knives Magazine, January 2014

Blackie Collins Signature Series

Autos and Keychain blades that continue the legacy of a lost craftsman

Colonial Knife has a long history of producing both commercial and military knives. It has had great success with its M-724 autos, which are essentially updated MC-1 parachute knives that Colonial revamped with modern materials and construction techniques. As popular as the knives were with the military, Colonial's Steve Paolantonio knew there was more potential in the design for the commercial market. He just needed the touch of an expert designer to bring it the next level.

Fast-forward to 2011 and a fortuitous meeting with renowned knife-designer Walter "Blackie" Collins during a popular East Coast knife show. Steve and Blackie hit it off, and along with Blackie's wife Jane, they sat down and hashed out the details for Colonial/Collins collaboration. Blackie left the show with a number of the Colonial ribbed and keychain series autos. Within a couple weeks, Steve received a call that Blackie had come up with a set of new blades for the two styles of knives. Blackie had designed a sleek tanto design for the ribbed auto and a fully serrated blade for the keychain. The two hammered out a licensing agreement and some blade options. Prototyping of the blades began. Unfortunately, in July 2011 and within weeks of all this happening, Steve received a phone call informing him that Blackie had died in a motorcycle accident. Blackie's passing didn't stop his legacy from continuing on, and by working with Blackie's widow, Jane, the Blackie Collins Signature Series knives were born.

Beefed-Up M-724 Military

The Signature Series consist of both autos and Quick Flick knives, but it's the 100 series autos that we're going to focus on here. The 100 series knives use the beefed-up design of the M-724 military autos with a number of enhancements. First is the ribbed grip frame, which is made of a nearly indestructible polymer that's used in hard hats, snowboard and tool casings. Next are the Blackie Collins designed blades. The larger 105, 106, 107 and 108 models use a slick, modern tanto-style blade of ATS-34 stainless steel. The tantos come in both serrated and un-serrated versions. (Models 105 and 106), and with either a black handle and black, non-reflective, serrated blade (Model 107) or a desert tan handle with a black, non-reflective, serrated blade (Model 108). The blade length is 3 inches with a 4.25-inch-long handle. Weight is a comfortable 2.3 ounces. A sturdy pocket clip is affixed for tip-down carry.

The Models 210, 102 and 103 make up the Ameba keychain series. The keychain sized Ameba was originally designed by Adam Smith of the Rhode Island School of Design and the updated with the blades designed by Blackie Collins. They use an open framed design of the same rugged polymer and carry a stubby, 1 ¼ inch, drop-point ATS-34 blade mounted to a 3.25 inch-long handle. The 210 uses a satin-finished plain edge blade, and the 102 and 103 use a fully serrated blade. The 101 and 103 have black

handles, while the 102 uses a bright easy-to-find, safety/hunter orange handle. A short pocket clip and a ball keychain are provided with a Ameba knives.

Firing Mechanism

All of the Signature Series autos use the same style of firing mechanism. This consists of a push-button firing button located on the left side of the knife. Opening is fast and positive without a kickback that is found on some automatic knives. A large, sliding safety button is mounted just below the firing button. The safety protrudes further than the firing button so that there is no confusion between the two. The big button also makes the safety easy to operate, even with gloves on. Push p for safe, and pull down for firing. When I first got the autos, I noticed that the clip was very tight and very secure. You certainly weren't going to lose the knife once it was clipped to your gear or pocket, but it was sometimes tough to clip on and rough on clothing when you went draw the knife. Thanks to a tip from Steve Paolantonio, I discovered that you can adjust the tension on the clip to the level that suits you and your clothing best. For my purposes, I loosened up the tension slightly and got a good mix of security and ease of draw that didn't tear up my clothes.

ALL of the Blackie Collins signature series autos are made in Warwick, Rhode Island, and come with a lifetime warranty. They sell for an extremely reasonable suggested retail of \$69.99, which offers the user a heck of a value for a design that employs quality American manufacturing, top-grade materials and the talents of a famed knife maker.