

# THE TIRE STAND

## Get More Mileage Out of Your Sword Training

by Daniel M. Furuya

When entering a traditional aikido dojo, you might not see the usual martial arts equipment found in other types of schools. There's no punching bags, weights, *makiwara* (punching board) or cache of exotic weapons. However, you might see an unusual item—an old automobile tire mounted on a sturdy wooden frame. This odd bit of equipment is essential for aikido sword training. Aikidists use the tire as a striking target to develop strength, penetrating sword power and stamina for sword techniques.

The Japanese sword is sometimes taught to stop short or out of range of the target. In general, the sword techniques have no strength or power—just speed and flash. This may lead to a misunderstanding of the techniques of the sword, and greatly inhibit progress in the practitioner's training. In aikido, the sword must reach and penetrate through the target. Therefore, the deflection or evasive movement within the technique must be precise and effective. If the techniques are understood and skillfully practiced, an opponent will not be able to touch the aikidoist.

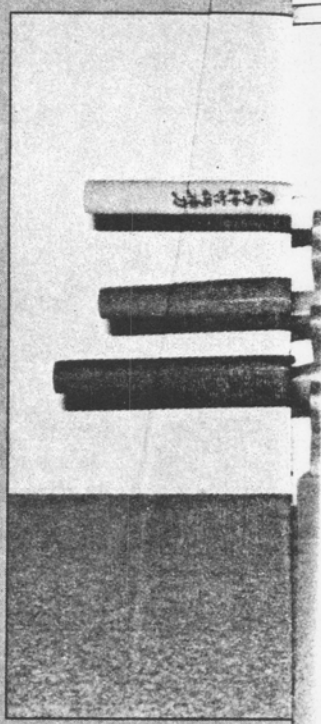
◀Some Japanese arts teach the practitioner to stop just short of his target. Not aikido. Here the student uses the sword to reach and penetrate the target (1-3).

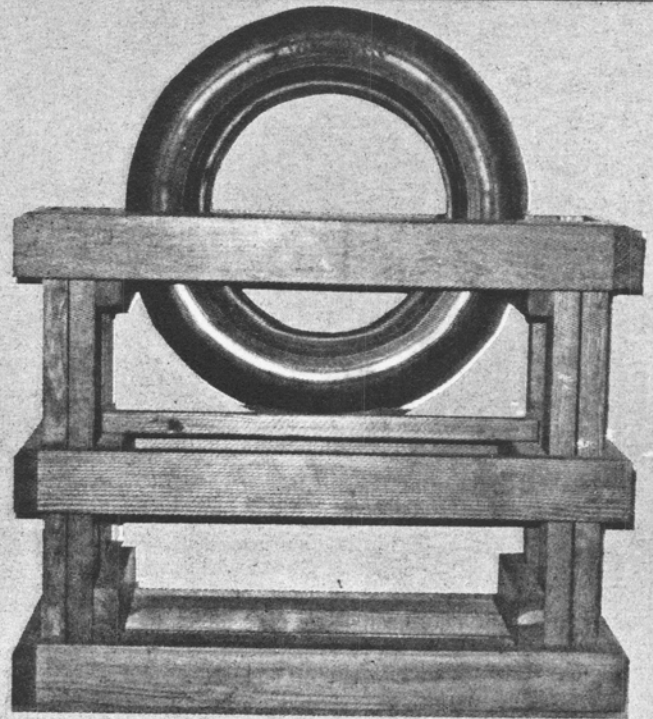
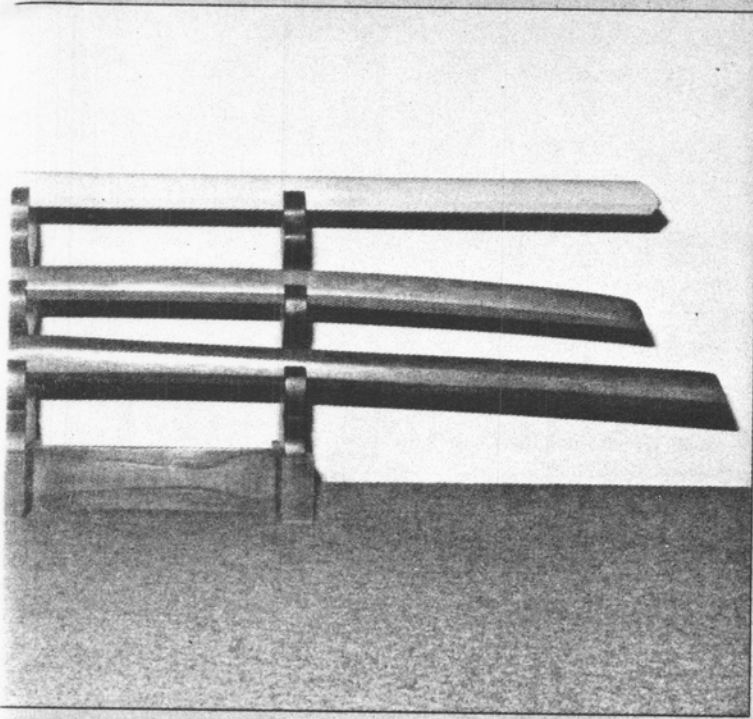
It is in this type of training situation that the aikidoist learns to move effectively against the sword and develop skill and strength. Thus, in learning sword techniques, it is essential for the aikidoist to develop a solid, strong and accurate cut to execute effective attacks and defensive techniques and adequate stamina and endurance to perform the techniques countless times. To this end, countless striking the tire is an important aspect of aikido sword training.

Tire training enhances the three general fields of sword training. The first is *suburi*, solo exercise consisting of overhead cuts to the head and thrusts to the throat in combination with footwork. The second is *kumitachi* which is sword-against-sword or sword-against-long-staff training. It is in this training that the practitioner learns the essence of sword work and the aikido principles of *awase* (blending). The third is *bokken-tori* or defense against the sword utilizing unarmed body techniques. In ancient times, this was referred to as *shiraha-tori* (bare-blade techniques), and were secret techniques of the *yagyu shinkage* school.

### The Bokken

It is important to select a good, sturdy wooden sword. In normal training, a medio-





When training, it is very important for the student to select a good, sturdy *bokken* (wooden sword) like the ones pictured here. Once the sword is chosen, a tire stand is a perfect instrument to strike while training.

cre wooden sword will only last a couple of months at best. The best wooden swords are made of Japanese white oak. They are strong and densely grained but pliant. Wooden swords made from the loquat tree are considered the best, but they are rather light and very expensive—too expensive for normal training. In this country, wooden swords made of red oak seem to be the most available. Experience has shown they split very easily along the grain or break in half on strong impact. These are not ideal for training. When you select a wooden sword, examine the butt end of the handle. The grain should run vertically. If it runs horizontally, the sword will split easily on impact. *Bokken* made of ebony or iron wood are very hard but break easily because they are not pliant.

The *bokken* should have good balance and feel a little heavy at first. When you first pick up a wooden sword, it should feel very solid and good in the hands. When you assume your stance, the weight of the *bokken* should feel evenly distributed through the entire length of the sword. If it feels too heavy or clumsy in the grip or toward the tip, it is not a good wooden sword and it will disturb your training.

- **Grip**—Gripping the *bokken* is important. It controls the strength and accuracy of the cut. Grip from your small fingers with 70 percent of the power in the left hand and 30 percent in the right. The power comes from the left hand and the right hand. Gripping relatively lightly guides the sword to the target. The wrists of both hands should be positioned above the handle to put the weight of the body and hips behind each cut. This is a very important point. During the movement, it is common to relax the grip and the wrists usually move to the sides. This greatly reduces the power behind each cut and, if the opponent strikes down hard on your sword, it will go flying out of your hands.

- **Cutting stroke**—The basic cutting stroke is the direct overhead cut. The sword is brought directly overhead and brought straight down. It is important not to relax or change the grip during the cut. It is a common bad habit to loosen the left hand (strength hand) as the sword is raised overhead.

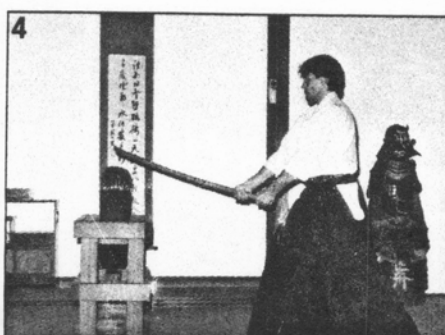
The power must be concentrated in the cutting portion of the blade which is approximately the first one-third of the blade from the tip. As the cut is executed, it is important not to hyperextend the elbows or put too

much strength in the shoulders. The power of the cutting comes from the hips and the body weight behind the sword.

When practicing on the tire, position yourself at a comfortable distance from it. In cutting with the wooden sword, enough power should be released to cause the tire to bend in half. It is important in training to control the grip so the sword doesn't bounce back up, but remains immobile. If the sword bounces after the cut, it indicates that the grip is wrong or the power does not come from the hips, but from the shoulders. You should space out the cuts at first and gradually shorten the time between each one until you can make numerous cuts in rapid succession. You must concentrate your mental energy to make each cut strongly and accurately. This type of training is best done under the careful supervision of a qualified instructor. It is very possible to sustain an elbow injury if the cuts are not properly executed. In addition, it is important not to create bad habits. Finally, in

Continued on page 78

The basic aikido cutting stroke is the direct overhead cut. The sword is brought up to an overhead position (1). Once there (2), it comes straight down (3-5) until it hits the target. ▼





# THE TIRE STAND

Continued  
from page 47

conjunction with this type of wooden sword training, very precise and proper instruction on sword techniques is essential.

- **Footwork**—In the most basic position, place the feet rather far apart with the heels in a straight line. As you cut, train to drop your hips using the weight of your hips as the source of power. As you drop your hips, the knees bend outward. It is important to keep the back straight and the shoulder reasonably relaxed. Also, do not crane your neck or head forward. This seems to be a common bad habit.

In the next basic method, stand in *kamae* (proper sword stance) with the cutting portion of the sword over the tire. Draw the lead foot back and then forward as you cut. In this exercise, you learn to push your hips forward into the cut. Other types of exercises involve the same footwork as in suburi training.

## Tire Stand

In the old days, tires were tied to trees. Nowadays, it is practical to make a solid tire stand which can be moved around inside or outside the dojo. It is important to make the stand very solid and heavy. If the stand is too weak or too light, it will break very quickly or move around too much while you're training. The position of the tire should be at waist level. Remember, you are practicing to cut through, not cut to, the target.

Any kind of intensive training of this type should always be done under keen supervision of a qualified instructor. If the training is not properly learned, injury, not progress, is the only result. ★

---