

Introduction to features for the Mount & Blade Intensity/polearm mod.

Increasing damage has much more complex effects on gameplay dynamics than one would think. When combined with the careful rebalancing, the effects become even more diverse:

1. Weapon length is now more useful as it allows one to gain the first strike (which is often the last strike due to the increased damage). However, weapon speed is still very useful and a shield can allow one to get to close range where the agility of a lighter weapon usually carries the day. One could even say that both one-handed and two-handed weapons are now more useful than they were before.
2. Horsemen are terrifying to fight as an infantrymen - but they also must gauge the range of infantry weapons as one or two strikes can now dehorse them. It is possible for horsemen who are touching flanks (running parallel) to take each other down more easily. A very well timed strike with a spear can kill an opponent or their horse.
3. Most weapons can now be effective (even the weakest ones), although the best weapons give increased reliability at achieving results and will allow one to survive longer on average. In addition to this increased flexibility, more 'optimal' combinations of equipment now exist: it is useful to carry two shields into combat, or to carry a polearm along with a sidearm as an infantrymen or to carry a thrown weapon.
4. Combat is more unpredictable. It doesn't settle into extended block/slash cycles (although a realistic two-three cycles often take place when fighting in single combat). Timing and situational awareness are both important now. It is possible to run through a formation and take down five opponents in a few seconds - but if one isn't aware of the position of all enemies an unexpected strike can make even the best warrior fall.
6. Group combat is more dependent on the exact layout of troops and chance events - leading to somewhat more dramatic and unpredictable gameplay. It is also now important to work in groups during mêlée - to not charge ahead of allies, but rather to try and defend them as much as possible.

To avoid unbalancing the gameplay numerous additional changes have been made:

These include careful reworking of both thrusting and swung polearms, as well as the division of thrusting polearms into three different categories. They also include numerous adjustments to bow and arrow damage values and more subtle details like slightly increasing rate of fire for longbows/warbows, which are now limited to infantry use. Charge values and hitpoints for horses have been carefully adjusted, along with increased shield speeds and decreased shield durability. Throwing weapons have been rebuilt and numerous other changes have taken place.

Notes on tactics organised by player / AI classes:

Charging Cavalry will find the length of lances/spears increasingly important, as a single contact with an enemy polearm can be decisive. Swords are still very effective and shields are important. The increased vulnerability of horses means that it behooves (sic) a player to think twice before charging and to carefully pick out which infantrymen are most vulnerable. Enemy cavalry are a bit easier to take down, but managing distance and turn speeds is important.

Horse skirmishers (ie. thrown weapons) are effective at quickly taking down a few infantry, but more limited ammunition means that they have to switch to other weapons earlier in the battle.

Catephract Archers (ie. heavily armoured horse) are somewhat improved due to the decreased reliance on shields against arrows (ie. since archers have less penetration against the best armours, it is possible to remain within archer range for moderate periods of time).

Infantry carrying polearms are now very effective (instead of totally ineffective as was the case in the original). Timing and accurate aim are key to effective employment of polearms. However, it is still important to carry a swung sidearm (often combined with a shield).

Infantry sword & shield combinations are very effective in close combat and use of an expensive reinforced shield is advisable. Alternatively, it is useful to carry two weaker shields into combat.

Infantry with two-handed swung weapons combine some of the reach of polearms but remain effective at closer ranges. However, they have the disadvantage of a long swing time and having no shield. They are most effective against armoured opponents and nerve wracking to fight.

Skirmisher infantry can take down a couple of opponents with thrown weapons before engaging. However, they will eventually end up in close combat. It is sometimes useful to have a thrown weapon in order to quickly disable one or two opponents or an enemy who is otherwise out of reach. But such weapons are far from necessary.

Archers have useful roles. As a skilled player it is possible to take down three to five enemies during an encounter. However, heavily armoured opponents will be relatively impervious and can survive contact for a prolonged period of time. While having one or two archers can still be useful in extending the reach of weapons and countering enemy archers, the game tends to favour larger formation of archers to overwhelm enemies.

Crossbowmen, unlike archers, remain somewhat effective against heavy infantry and armoured cavalry - but in a duel between archers and crossbowmen the greater fire saturation caused by the higher rate of fire achieved by bowmen carries the day. Infantry can easily overrun a force of archers of either type (although light infantry will take heavy casualties).

Notes on tactics organised by weapon type:

Horses: Hitpoints are reduced by approximately 20%. When this is combined with the increased damage weapons now deal, the effective reduction is much greater. Horse combat generally feels more natural and dynamic as a result. It is now possible to stop a horse using the most powerful infantry weapons - assuming perfect timing and good nerves. It is also quite possible for unarmoured horses to be taken down by concentrated archer fire. If cavalry is stopped by an infantry formation it is quickly dispatched. However, the "charge" setting has been increased for horses which increases the range at which "trampling" begins - this makes it very frightening to attempt to hold the line against a charge and it is usual to see a horseman knock over (or force to dodge) four or five infantry. This means that Cavalry have a very positive kill ratio against infantry forces which are equal or smaller in size but can be annihilated if they charge an infantry force which significantly outnumbered them.

Bows: Penetration is reduced. It takes an average of three shots to take down an armoured opponent. A single head shot can still kill most enemies. It is possible for a single foot archer to take down three-to-four Sea Raiders. Unarmoured horses which have already received damage can be easily taken down by arrows. After prolonged fire some of the weakest shields can receive sufficient damage so as to be "discarded" by their owner. At maximum range, arrows have almost no effect against armour, becoming much more effective near point blank range. Some damage has been transferred to the arrow itself to allow firing against lightly armoured opponents at maximum range. Bodkin arrows yield a slight improvement in penetration damage (theoretically).

Crossbows: Compared to bows, damage is further increased. Penetration is also much better than bows. The low rate of fire (unmodified) means that crossbows are at a slight disadvantage against enemy archers - although they are close to being balanced. At maximum range bolts have reduced effectiveness (although some damage has also been transferred to the bolts to allow firing at range).

Thrown weapons: Thrown knives should be able to bring down an opponent with as few as 1-3 hits. Thrown axes can destroy some shields with a single impact. Thrown javelins/jarids can kill many opponents with a single hit (from horseback), although 2-3 hits is more likely in some situations (on foot, against a shielded opponent). Quantities are more limited for these weapons, but they still have a role in quickly reducing opponents to manageable numbers or extending the reach of weapons for a player without other ranged weapons on hand. In general, they are now more useful than in the original game.

Armour: Armours haven't been edited, but all other changed weapon values have effects on armour use. It should now be possible to ride on horseback near archers without carrying a shield (assuming you have the best armour) for 15 to 30 seconds. Armour will give you some protection against archers at long range, but receiving shots at the player's head or fired from closer ranges still represent extremely uncomfortable situations. Good armour will give the player an ability to withstand three or more strikes from light single-handed weapons, but some two-handed weapons will disable a player with a single swing.

Shields: Shields now move twice as fast as they used to and can be used to quickly block a strike some time after it has begun (or to quickly reconsider after starting your own strike). Most shields can be destroyed by a single impact from a horseman's lance or a footsoldier's two-handed weapon. Against one handed weapons most shields can withstand two or three strikes. The best shields do considerably better (check hitpoints value found as numbers in the brackets under the shield's names as well as the "resistance" value before buying a shield). If one can't afford a good shield it is now often useful to have two weaker shields in the inventory.

One handed swung weapons: It is important to carry a shield to block an opponent. Timing attacks and staying defensive until the right moment is now critical. Against a two-handed opponent wait until they swing prematurely or block their first swing with your shield - then move in and use your faster weapon to finish them off with a couple of quick strikes at point blank range. It is important to realise that you will likely lose your shield in this process.

Two handed swung weapons: In infantry use most of these weapons can take down a heavily armoured opponent with one or at most two strikes. With careful timing they can even be used against charging cavalry. It is important to have a good feel for the swing time and optimal distance for these weapons - it matters that the first strike succeed (and this isn't quite as easy as it once seemed). However, this apparent disadvantage is made up for by the longer reach that these weapons now have. If the opponent manages to block with a shield you may have to retreat, switch to a close range weapon and/or strike a second time. Some weapons can only attack opponents on one side when used while mounted.

Polearms: Swung polearms (eg. Scythes/Poleaxes) are similar to two-handed weapons but with even longer reach and more difficult timing required. Spears, Lances and Pikes have been rebalanced and are now useful for infantry. The lower speed of lances makes them best suited for cavalry, while pikes are effective against infantry and spears are well balanced - although slightly less effective at penetrating armour, spears can also be swung and are slightly faster than other polearms. Pitchforks are much faster but tend to do less damage. Polearms are very effective - but if the first and second strikes fail to fell an opponent, it is important to also carry an agile swung weapon for point-blank combat.