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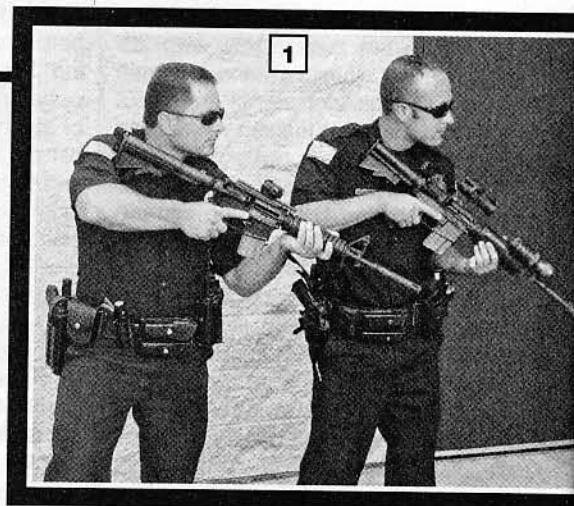
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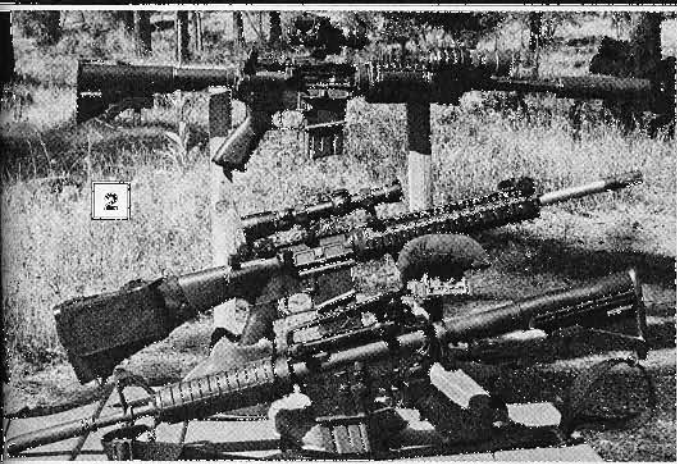
GUN TEST

A FEW FAVORITE .223 AR5



*Quest for the perfect
black rifle and
the gear to
go with it!*

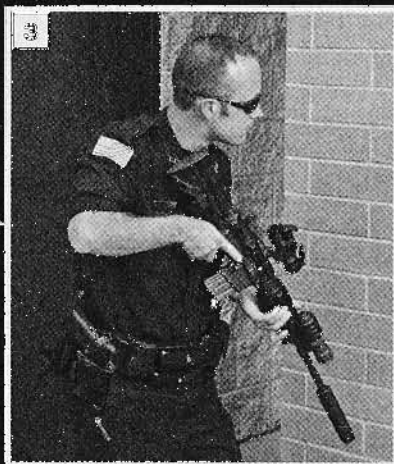
By Jeff Hall



(1) Action shooter training with the M4 and Commando.

(2) Test guns, top to bottom: Colt M4, Adams Arms, and DoubleStar Commando.

(3) This officer enters a school with the "do-it-all" AR with the SureFire Millennium light, Aimpoint Micro T-1 optic, and an Advanced Armament M4 3000 silencer.



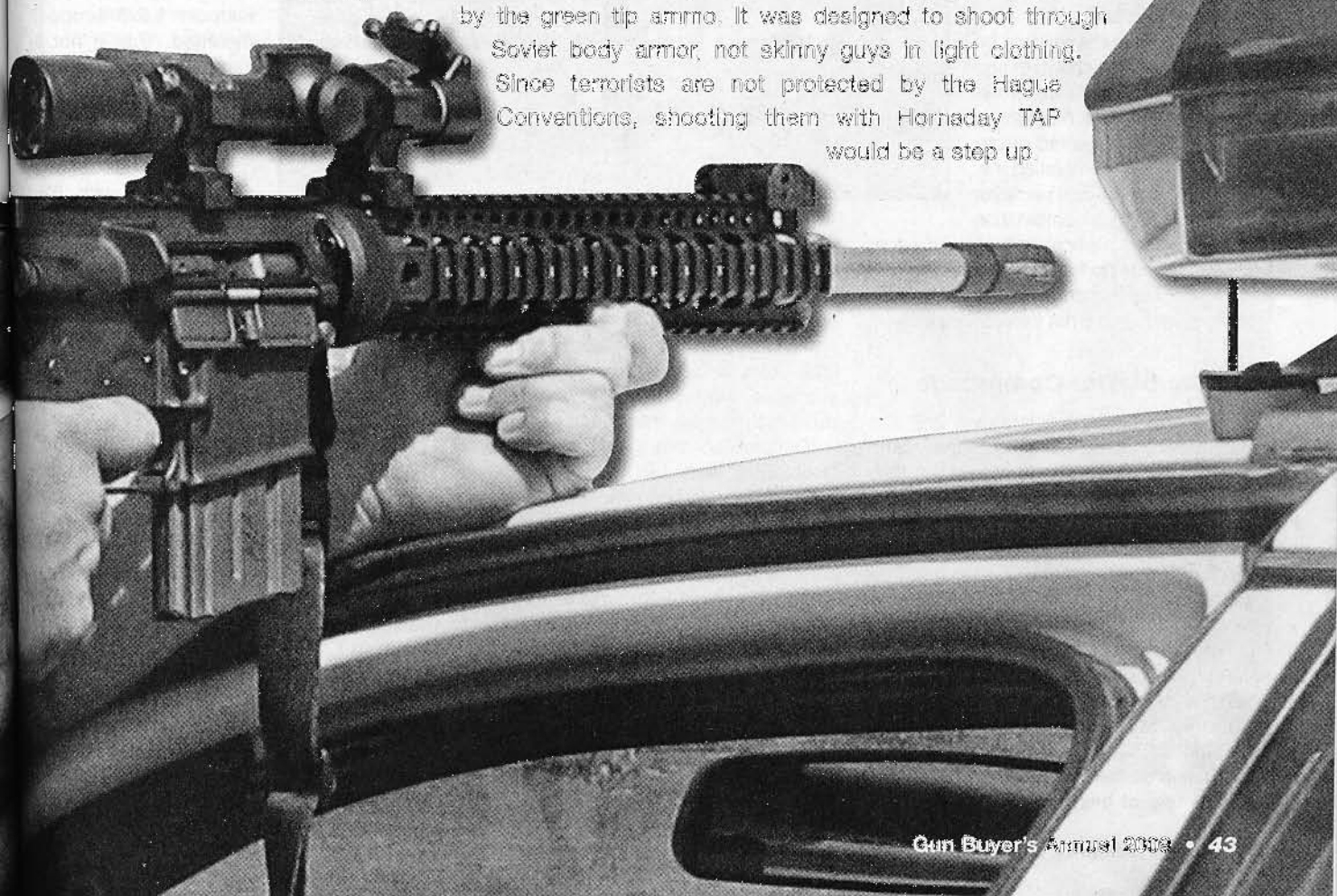
The M16/AR15 family of rifles has been with us for nearly 50 years. The M16 was first deployed in Vietnam in the early 1960s, where the gun got off to a rocky start. The early failures of the system in combat were due to the powder, not the design. Once this was ironed out, the gun became a reliable fighting system.

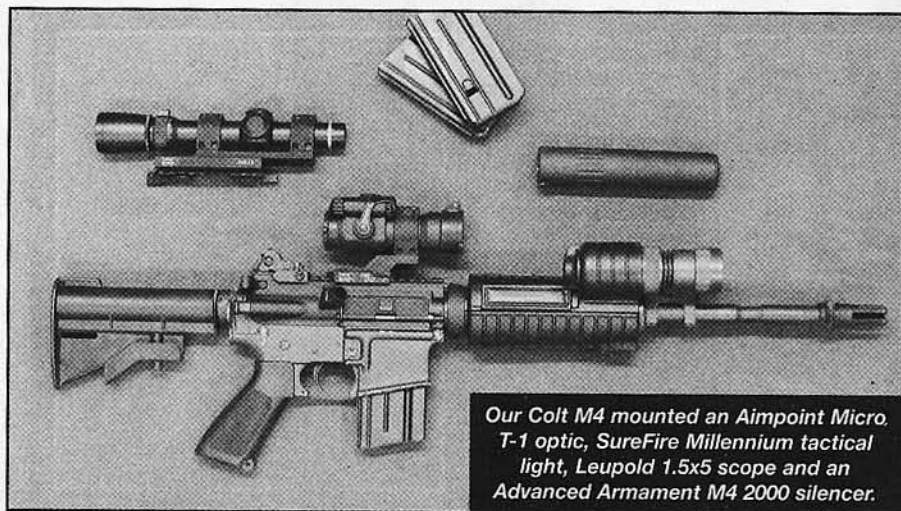
Like all firearms, the M16 has evolved. The A1 became the XM177E2, featuring an 11.5-inch barrel with a 6-inch flash hider. The A2 and A3 variants were changes that mostly addressed the sighting system. Colt experimented with the AR concept, with a shorter barrel that gave good terminal performance with pistol-caliber recoil. The current issue M4 is a flat-top, 14.5-inch barreled (16 inches for civilians), collapsible-stocked carbine that is seeing service all over the world.

The system has some difficulty in the talcum-powder sand of Iraq and needs a lot of maintenance. The stopping power failures seen in Somalia, Iraq, and elsewhere, are probably caused

by the green tip ammo. It was designed to shoot through Soviet body armor, not skinny guys in light clothing.

Since terrorists are not protected by the Hague Conventions, shooting them with Hornaday TAP would be a step up.

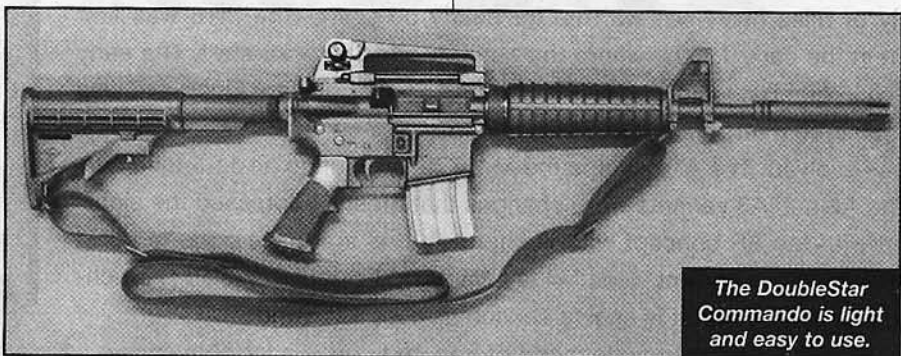




Our Colt M4 mounted an Aimpoint Micro T-1 optic, SureFire Millennium tactical light, Leupold 1.5x5 scope and an Advanced Armament M4 2000 silencer.

Picatinny rail mount. With a standard two-point sling and a 20-round magazine, the gun weighs less than 6.1 pounds. The gun is fast, easy to handle, very reliable (one stoppage in 580 rounds fired so far), and acceptably accurate. I get 1.5- to 2-inch groups with 55-grain ball at 100 yards. It's all you need in a defensive carbine, nothing extra, and easy to carry.

Accuracy fanatics will love The Tack-Driver. This is a LaRue Tactical upper receiver, mated to an SLR15 lower. The 16-inch stainless barrel has a 1-in-8-inch twist, metal handguards with mounting rails on all sides and LaRue's own flash hider. LaRue makes mounts for anything that needs to be on an AR, and all of them are bullet proof.



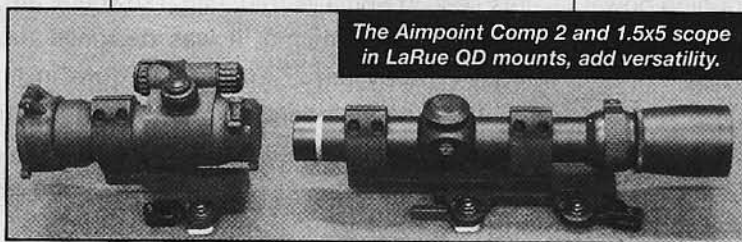
The DoubleStar Commando is light and easy to use.

Defensive Edge SLR15

Defensive Edge SLR15 makes their own very-high quality lowers (and complete guns), and put together a receiver with a standard Colt fixed stock and pistol grip with a match-quality trigger. "Sully" Sullivan, who owns SLR15, is a full-time police officer, SWAT dog, and gunsmith. Sully rejected about 85 percent of the components he was buying, so began building his own. The quality is outstanding.

The gun has LaRue's own back-up iron sights, but I used standard rings for the Leupold 1.5x5 scope I mounted. This is not a carry-all-day gun, but it really shoots. My first session at the bench resulted in half-minute groups will ball ammo. Later testing with 62-grain match ammo gave

I've been shooting one of the black rifles since 1970. I like it. I've used it in the military, on SWAT, for varmint shooting and for hunting. I've killed everything from mice to moose, including one ill-tempered grizzly bear, and it has never failed me. Like most gun guys, I've never found the perfect combination of size, weight, optics, and accuracy that will give me the performance I seek. I'm still searching, but this article is an examination of my search and what I discovered.



The Aimpoint Comp 2 and 1.5x5 scope in LaRue QD mounts, add versatility.

me groups of less than 0.50 of an inch at 100 yards. It's more accurate than I need, but I really enjoy shooting it. I keep it on the ranch for getting rid of coyotes, skunks and other targets of opportunity.

DoubleStar Commando

The first two considerations are size and weight. Let's face it, cops stand around holding guns way more than they shoot them. A typical call or training scenario will find the officer behind cover, watching and waiting with a 6-pound weight hanging around his neck. The more stuff you hang on the gun, the heavier and more cumbersome it gets.

The first gun is the ultra light. It's everything the average police officer or defense-minded civilian needs and nothing more. My favorite in this category is the DoubleStar Commando.

There are lots of manufacturers building ARs. A few of them are truly top quality,

while many of them are junk. In addition, this system is probably the most accessorized gun on the planet. A couple of add-ons are good, a few are nice to have, and lots of them are a waste of money. If I look hard enough, I can probably find someone who builds a solar-powered espresso machine that fits on the rails.

DoubleStar is a fairly new company. DoubleStar uses all US made parts and many are locally manufactured. The owners have over 30 years in the gun business. After many disappointments in quality of guns and parts, they decided to make quality ARs. DoubleStar makes every conceivable option in an AR, and can build to suit the individual or department's needs.

The Commando has an 11.5-inch thin barrel with a permanently attached 5.5-inch flash hider, like the XM177 of old. I opted for the flattop, so I could mount the outstanding Aimpoint Micro T-1 optic. The T-1 weighs only 4 ounces, including the

Colt M4

Number three is the "Do-it-All-Pretty-Well" gun. It's not as light and handy as number one, and not as accurate as number two. Like most things in life, it's a compromise.

This carbine is a standard civilian Colt M4. I added a Leupold 1.5x5 scope and an Aimpoint Comp ML2 red dot sight, both in LaRue Tactical quick-detachable mounts. I use LaRue because they actually do come back to zero when re-mounted on the gun. I zeroed the rifle, then fired, dismounted, re-mounted, and fired both optics 20 times. Each came back to zero for every shot. I like the

1.5x5 for mid-distance shooting, and the Aimpoint is the best red dot I've found. This is a serious compliment from a 'bat-teries die, iron sights don't' guy.

I also wanted illumination, so I mounted the SureFire Millennium fore-end light. It's a little bulkier than the Scout light, but I wanted lots of light for things that scream in the dark. There are good hand-held flashlight techniques that I like, but why fumble with a second piece of gear? For my applications, this is a great light.

While I was at it, I added the outstanding Advanced Armament M4 2000 silencer. I may want to be sneaky someday. Many writers prefer to call them suppressors, since they don't actually silence the shot completely. The patent says silencer, our friends at BATFE (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives) call them silencers, and so that's what they are.

The M4 2000 lessens sound by 36 decibels, adds only 4 inches in length and 16 ounces weight, and attaches with a ratchet fast-attach on the Blackout flash hider. If you talk to any combat veteran, he'll say "huh?" a lot. Saving your hearing is a good

SPECIFICATIONS COLT M4

Caliber: .223 • **Barrel:** 16.1 inches
OA Length: 35 inches • **Weight:** 7.3 pounds
Stocks: 6-position • **Sights:** Front post, adjustable rear • **Action:** Semi-auto gas operated
Finish: Matte black • **Capacity:** 30-shot mag
Price: \$1290-1470

SPECIFICATIONS DOUBLESTAR COMMANDO

Caliber: .223 • **Barrel:** 11.5 inches (16 inches with permanently attached flash hider)
OA Length: 34.75 inches • **Weight:** 6.1 pounds (empty) • **Stocks:** 6-position DS-4 (options available) • **Sights:** Front post
Action: Semi-auto gas operated
Finish: Parkerized (barrel and steel components) teflon-coated (upper/lower)
Capacity: 30-shot mag • **Price:** Starts at \$910

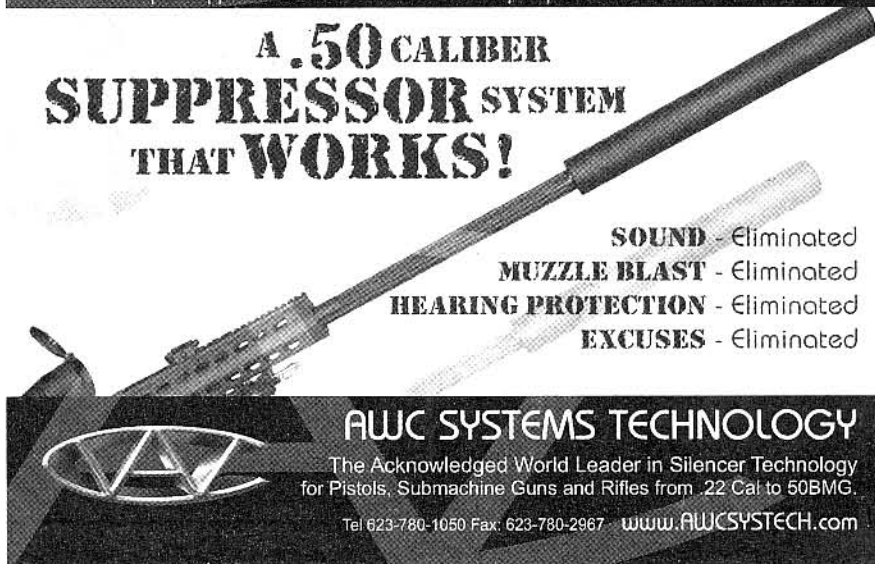
SPECIFICATIONS DEFENSIVE EDGE SLR15

Caliber: .223 • **Barrel:** 16 inches, 20 inches
OA Length: 35 inches, 39 inches
Weight: 6.5-7.25 pounds • **Stocks:** A2 fixed or 6-position, options available
Sights: Front post, options available
Action: Semi-auto gas operated
Finish: Parkerized, options available
Capacity: 30-shot mag • **Price:** Starts at \$785

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A FEW FAVORITE .223 ARs

thing. In a tactical application, cutting loose with an unsilenced .223 inside a room makes all voice commands irrelevant, no one can hear a thing except for the bells.

This is a good, all-purpose system. I'm still figuring out the ammunition/silencer combination, and plan to shoot it mostly with the can in place, since silencers can cause a change in point-of-impact. I've shot a variety of commercial ammunition and get good combat accuracy. I can put the scope on for distance shooting, or put the Aimpoint on if it becomes a house gun. It's not practical to think of changing optics during a fight, but they can be changed for a specific mission profile. With the light and the Aimpoint, I can shoot all kinds of pests at night with good results. All in all, it's good enough to do anything I need doing.

Adams Arms

The fourth system is the new kid on the block, a piston-driven upper. One weakness of the AR is the gas system—hot gas is blown through the gas tube into the bolt key to make the thing cycle. We all know that scraping that crusted carbon off the bolt is a pain in the ass. Guys back from Iraq tell me that the M4 really needs a lot of maintenance to keep it running. I've always found that the system needs a fair amount of oil, and oil is a dust magnet, so a solution needs to be found.

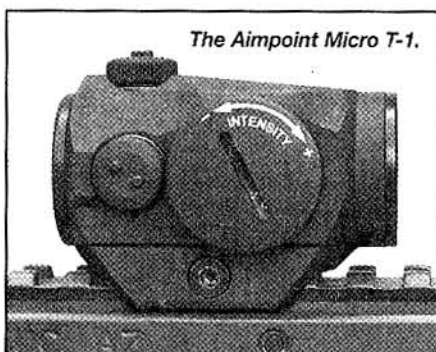
Adams Arms makes such a system. It replaces the gas tube and gas key on the bolt carrier and converts it to blow-back. One test gun currently has 12,000 rounds through it without cleaning and it's still running strong. It is designed so that the end user with basic tools can switch out the system in 10 minutes.

I loaned the piston upper to the local city's SWAT team for a week with instructions to use, abuse and wring it out. The SWAT troops fired 500 rounds through it and liked it. They noted that there is a mechanical "clunk" each time the gun cycles, but did not find it a distraction. (Manufacturer's Note: After consulting with Adams Arms, they noted that they never experienced the aforementioned sound.) Officer Rob Boothe mounted it to his full-auto lower, ran three 30-round magazines on full auto, and then field stripped the gun. He found the bolt carrier cool to the touch and no carbon on the bolt face. Since reliability is critical for SWAT teams, they are requesting an upper for further testing.

One issue we faced on SWAT in Alaska was the lubricant freezing solid at sub-zero temperatures. Our solution was to leave the gun dry. If this upper runs reliably with less lubrication, it may be an answer for all



The DoubleStar Commando with the Aimpoint Micro T-1 about to enter a school.



The Aimpoint Micro T-1.

of you in cold climates. I plan to do more research this winter, cold-soaking the gun at -50 degrees Fahrenheit to see if it works.

My time with the Adams Arms upper was limited, but the prospects are intriguing. There are lots of folks who treat guns like lawn mowers, servicing them once a year, needed or not. If this is you, a piston upper might be a good investment.

Final Notes

I'm still searching for the Holy Grail of black rifles. I have the luxury of being able to own several; however if you don't, look at the options I've outlined. Decide what exactly the rifle needs to do, your own interest and ability, your budget and make an informed decision. One rifle can do everything you need if you choose well and are realistic about what you will be doing.

The black rifle has been with us for 50 years and will be here into the foreseeable future. They are reliable, available, maintainable and durable. The caliber is adequate for any social situation, they can be configured to any need, and they are as accurate as you care to make them. Buy a top-quality gun, set it up for your specific needs and drive on.

For more information:

Adams Arms

255 Hedden Court, Dept. CH
Palm Harbor, FL 34683
727-853-0550
www.adamsarms.net

Colt

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