



The Basic Plus Rifle from ATAC Defense offers you everything you need in an AR and nothing you don't, plus a Cerakote finish. This rifle is in Burnt Bronze. ATAC Defense might be a new name to you, but they've been making OEM parts for other companies for years.



ATAC DEFENSE'S

By James Tarr

BASIC PLUS

More Than You Know

RIFLE

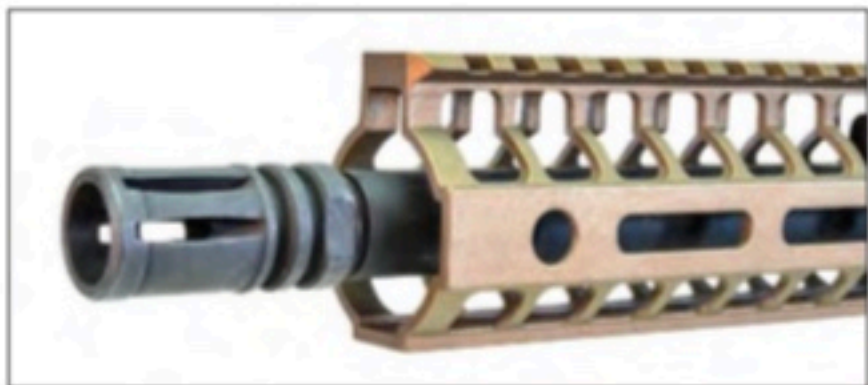
In 2021, the fact that there are many quality companies making AR-15s, companies many people might not have heard of, is a good thing — it means those smaller companies are not likely to be sold out of product due to the panic buying that's been going on for most of a year as I write this, and to which there is no end in sight.

One of those companies you probably haven't heard of is ATAC Defense. ATAC Defense has been in manufacturing for twenty years, and started out making automotive components. For the last seven years they've been making OEM firearm parts — more

than 300 — for various companies. In the past year they've decided to start making complete rifles and pistols under their own name.

ATAC makes rifles in 5.56 NATO and 300 Blackout, and pistols in 5.56 NATO and 9mm. ATAC Defense offers their rifles in various "trim packages," using an automotive term, and I asked them to send me one of their Basic Plus rifles to review. The Basic Plus seemed to be the best balance of price versus features.

While trends and what's "hot" in ARs tends to change almost on a yearly basis, the Basic Plus rifle follows the template of what is the most popular



The handguard is one of ATAC's own design, and features QD sling sockets at the muzzle end to either side. The barrel is tipped with a standard A2 flash hider.



The ambi charging handle is one of the two upgrades from the Basic Rifle, the other being a coated bolt carrier group.



Chances are if you own an AR, it has some parts in it made by ATAC Defense, even if you've never heard of them. They supply OEM components to many manufacturers, including some who have defense contracts.

AR-15 design on the market right now — a collapsible stock paired with a 16-inch barrel freefloating inside an aluminum handguard.

For those of you paying attention, you'll have noted that the rifle in the photos is not black. The listed price of the Basic Plus rifle includes a Cerakote color treatment of your choice on the receivers and handguard — black, Tungsten (silver), FDE, OD Green, or Burnt Bronze, like my sample. The Burnt Bronze has a bit of metallic glitter to it, but as you can see from the photos the glitter is very subtle, more "stylish" than "strip club."

Aluminum does not rust, so it doesn't really need a protective coating for that reason. And most of you aren't camo'd up and stalking through the Hindu Kush, looking for tangos to slot, so you don't need a colored rifle to help you blend into the background. What color finishes do for the average Joe (apart from looking cool, of course, which is always



ATAC Defense's Basic Plus Rifle adds a nickel-born bolt carrier group and oversize charging handle to their standard AR. It comes standard with a mid-length gas system and a 15-inch handguard.

very important) is keep your gun from turning into a branding iron when it is out in the sun. A black gun sitting in the sun, even in the mild Midwest, will soon get too hot to touch. Anything you can do to keep your gun cool, especially if you're doing a lot of shooting, is a good thing.

The sixteen-inch barrel is made of 4150 ChromeMoly Vanadium steel. It starts out as a barrel blank and ATAC turns it into a barrel in-house. The barrel is button rifled and given a 1:7 twist and a 5.56 NATO chamber. ATAC only recently started offering mid-length gas systems as seen on this rifle, and you should still be able to get one with a carbine-length gas system as well if you're more of a traditionalist.

Most people now believe a mid-length gas system to be the best for this length barrel. Compared to a carbine-length gas system, a mid-length gas system reduces operating pressures somewhat, which result in a slightly (we're talking fractions of a second)

slower bolt speed. This makes for less wear on the parts as well as slightly reduced recoil. While the US military as a whole hasn't caught on, the URG-I (Upper Receiver Group — Improved) now being fielded by U.S. Special Forces features a 14.5-inch M4 barrel with a mid-length gas system to improve barrel/bolt life.

The barrel is given an M4 profile, which means it is slender behind the gas block and .750" at the gas block and beyond. Interestingly, ATAC goes out of their way to state that their barrels start out as steel barrel blanks per Mil-B-1159SE. This is the military specification for barrels of small arms weapons, which I had to look up — it covers alloys, steel bars, and blanks under two inches in diameter.

1:7-inch twist, 5.56 NATO chamber, and the manufacturer known for their OEM work going out of their way to point out the barrel was made from Mil-Spec barrel blanks? I'm no Einstein Holmes, but being a



Offering everything that's currently popular in ARs — collapsible stock, mid-length gas system, long free-float handguard — ATAC Defense's Basic Plus rifle also comes standard with a Cerakote finish.



The nickel boron coating on the bolt/carrier keeps it slick, which helps to keep it running longer when it's dirty. It is far easier to clean than a standard bolt carrier.

"picatinny" rail runs atop the entire length of the handguard.

Longer handguards are in fashion, but they actually serve a purpose. Two purposes: first, they provide the maximum amount of area possible for mounting accessories — lights, lasers, vertical foregrips, angled front sight, angled foregrips, slings, bipod, hand stop, grilled cheese sandwich, whatever.

Secondly, the current accepted "tactical" technique for employment of an AR is to get your support hand off that darn magwell and move it as far

forward as possible. That way you are better able to manage recoil and drive the muzzle between targets faster.

Total unloaded weight of this rifle is six pounds five ounces, which is somewhat light for a rifle with such a long handguard. That reasonable weight is mostly due to the slender profile of the barrel, but the skel-eonized nature of the handguard helps. Unloaded the rifle balances over the barrel nut. Total length with the stock extended is 35.75-inches. Collapsing the stock fully brings the overall length down to 32.25-inches.

The upper and lower receiver are both 7075 T-6 aluminum forgings and machined in-house. ATAC states that they leave the upper receiver lugs slightly oversized, and they hand fit each upper and lower to reduce slack and/or rattle. While the fit between receivers on my sample wasn't as bank vault-tight as I've seen on some CNC/billet guns, it was even, with minimal gap and no rattle. There are pictogram markings on both sides of the lower receiver for the selector.

As for the lower receiver, ATAC broaches the magazine well in-house. The Basic and Basic Plus rifles offer a threaded bolt catch pin and a threaded (captured) rear detent pin. And while you might be suspicious about claim that the upper and lower receivers being hand-fit, check out the right side of the magazine well, below the ATAC logo. Instead of the standard generic caliber and model designations you see

trained detective (no, seriously, I spent most of 20 years as a private investigator before quitting to do this "job") it's easy to guess that means ATAC makes M4 barrels for a company which has a contract with the U.S. military to supply M4s. A gun company you probably thought made all their own barrels.

At the end of the barrel you'll see the standard A2 birdcage flash hider, and the barrel is given a standard phosphate coating. The gas block is a low profile model held in place by two set screws.

The 15-inch handguard is an ATAC design. It is constructed of 6061 aluminum and features M-LOK attachment slots at 3, 6, and 9 o'clock. There are QD sockets on either side of the handguard, front and rear, for mounting a sling. The MIL STD 1913



The basic G.I.-style pistol grip, stock, and trigger are the only parts of this rifle people might want to swap out. However, you can't get two people to agree on which are the best aftermarket replacements, so not paying the factory for a BCM pistol grip when you want a Magpul (or vice versa) ultimately saves you money.

with many manufacturers (half the AR receivers in my house read CALIBER: MULTI) you'll see that this lower receiver is etched with a model and caliber, indicating that didn't happen until it was already matched with a top end and they knew whether it was going to be a rifle or a pistol, and what caliber.

In fact, every part is inspected. After hand assembly, the complete rifle is inspected, test fired, then inspected again before being shipped out. Each rifle and pistol ships with a lockable hard case and one magazine, in my case a black Magpul Gen M3.

As for the bolt carrier group, ATAC is once again happy to point out that all of their parts meet or surpass Mil-Spec — and as anyone who has been in the military can tell you, there is a specification for EVERYTHING.

The bolt is machined from Carpenter 158 steel, which is both the Mil-Spec for AR bolts and the industry standard. If you're a gun geek and get off on specs, let me throw this info at you, straight from the ATAC website: "Carpenter No. 158[®] alloy is a

chrome-nickel alloy steel Fully treated, Carpenter No. 158 alloy attains a core strength of approximately 160 ksi (1103 MPa) tensile strength with a yield point of approximately 135 ksi (931 MPa). These high mechanical properties will be developed in sections up to 5" (127 mm) thick. In addition, case hardened articles possess a higher wear resistant case because of the special alloy content of the steel. Specifications: AMS 6265, ASTM A646, QQ-S-624C, SAE J1249"

Again, if you haven't caught on that ATAC likely does OEM work for companies which have military contracts, I advise you not to get into detective work. However, just to make sure my assumptions trained professional investigative deductions weren't all wrong I reached out to my contact at ATAC. He told me this:

"James, you are correct. JMS Manufacturing (ATAC Defense's) parent company has a Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code issued by the Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS) as a contractor identifier for companies bidding, or doing



Tarr doesn't care for the A2 pistol grip as the finger groove is in the exact wrong spot for his fingers, and he prefers more material under the web of his hand. But everyone has different tastes, and as pistol grips swap out in just a minute using just a screwdriver, so keeping the G.I. pistol grip is a smart move and keeps cost down.

business with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). We machine parts for over 300 companies in the firearms industry. Due to NDAs being in place, we can't go into detail about who or what we are manufacturing for these companies. The ATAC Defense line of firearms was released in February of 2020, and was spawned from a desire to provide a quality firearm at an affordable cost."

After machining, their bolts are HP/MPI (high-pressure, magnetic-particle inspection) tested. I can throw another couple of paragraphs of steel-tech

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The Burnt Bronze cerakote has a tiny bit of metallic glitter in it, but it is subdued — more stylish than strip club.



While Cerakoted rifles look cool, the main functional advantage to a non-black rifle is that they don't get too hot to touch in the sun.

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geek speak at you, but basically that means the bolts have undergone testing designed to reveal potential flaws ("surface and shallow subsurface discontinuities") in the steel.

The M16-profile carrier is constructed of AISI8620, which is a chromemoly nickel low alloy steel. The gas key is also made to spec, installed with the proper bolts which are then staked in place.

What's the difference between ATAC's Basic and this Basic Plus rifle, other than the \$80 extra for the latter? The Plus substitutes an oversize ambi charging handle for the standard GI piece, and gives you a bolt carrier group (BCG) with an NiB (nickel-boron) coating. Considering most ambi charging handles are \$80, they're basically throwing in the BCG coating for free.

The NiB carrier is deliciously smooth in the hand. If you've never run an NiB bolt carrier group, the coating means they are very lubricious (or slickery, if you prefer, which is an actual real word that I swear I didn't make up). Not only does that coating mean the gun runs smoother, it means the BCG is much easier to clean. Generally, when cleaning, you barely have to scrub an NiB BCG at all, just wipe it down with a rag and most of the gunk comes right off with almost no effort.

The bolt carrier is paired with a standard carbine buffer and the aforementioned ambidextrous (more properly described as bilateral) charging handle that is unmarked but is the spitting image of the well-regarded Radian Raptor.



Tarr finished his last case of Winchester 5.56 ammo testing this rifle, which made him both happy (because he was shooting) and sad (because ammo currently is worth its weight in gold).



The castle nut is properly staked. A small detail, but important.

In the lower receiver you'll get the standard GI-style controls, and that includes the trigger group. The trigger pull on my sample provided a gritty eight-pound trigger pull, which is a bit heavier than average for a GI-type trigger pull. It works fine for a "general use" AR, but which I'd swap out if I intended to use the rifle for any precision work.

ATAC's top-of-their-line ADER features their 3.5-pound tuned trigger, available in either single- or two-stage models, but I understand why they didn't upgrade the trigger in this rifle. First, it would cost more money, and a better trigger would be wasted on a lot of consumers. Secondly, you'd be hard-pressed to find two AR fans to agree on which type or improved pull-weight trigger (aftermarket or otherwise) should be put into the rifle. Everyone has their favorite "match" trigger, and none of them are cheap.

I would like to point out that ATAC's trigger group is not "Mil-Spec" for one very good reason — there is no Mil-Spec for a semi-auto trigger group whether made by ATAC or anyone else. The only trigger groups fielded in AR-pattern rifles by our military



The lines on both the upper and lower receiver were clean and perfect, and the rifle came from the factory nicely lubed.

(M16, M4, etc.) are select fire, either Safe/Semi/Full or Safe/Semi/3-Round-Burst.

At the back end of the rifle you'll see a polymer GI-style stock riding on a six-position buffer tube. The castle nut holding the tube to the receiver is properly staked. The pistol grip is a standard A2 style. If, at some point, you decide you want to change or upgrade your stock or pistol grip, that is easily done. Personally I always swap out the A2 pistol grip for two reasons. First, I want more material under the web of my hand, for a proper reach to the trigger. Secondly, I've got skinny fingers, and the finger groove on the A2 pistol grip is in exactly the wrong place for me. Your experience, as they say, may differ.

Their top of the line rifle is the ADER (ATAC Defense Enhanced Rifle), and sports upgraded furniture and fully bilateral controls. Ambi controls are what all the cool kids are getting on their rifles, but to be honest most people don't use them, and they cost money. I like the Basic Plus rifle because it gives you everything you need and nothing you don't, leaving you cash in your pocket to upgrade the pistol grip, stock, and/or trigger in the future.

Honestly, the basic G.I.-style pistol grip, stock, and trigger are the only parts of this rifle people might want to swap out. However, you can't get two people to agree on which are the best aftermarket replacements, so not paying the factory for a BCM pistol grip when you want a Magpul (or vice versa) ultimately saves you money. I also think every rifle which might possibly be used for defensive work should be equipped with iron sights, but I'm a bit old-school in that regard.

Personally, while I know the more vertical pistol grips like the BCM Gunfighter are more ergonomic, I prefer a more angled pistol grip. I also don't like rubberized grip textures, and want my pistol grip to have a compartment in which to store spare batteries for my optic. If you have any time behind the AR platform you'll soon develop your own preferences.

As this rifle is somewhat light I mounted a Trijicon 1-8X AccuPower for all of my testing, both close-up fun and accuracy work at distance. The scope was in a Midwest Industries QD mount. I really like the scope but I always end up shying away from permanently planting it on one of my personal rifles as it weighs two pounds two ounces with the mount. That's a lot of weight for a guy who likes to run either light rifles or short and light pistols.

With the scope and a loaded magazine in place this rifle weighs nearly nine and a half pounds. That means recoil was very soft even with just a standard flash hider, but no .223/5.56 AR is a bruiser. Honestly, unless you're running your AR in competition you don't want or need a muzzle brake as they're so abusively loud. If you think the AR has too much recoil, go spend a weekend shooting an M1 Garand.

When it came time to head to the range, my Texas friends were all in shock due to the snowfall in their state, but here in Michigan we were enjoying spring-like 40-degree days, which in January are about as common as a cat who obeys commands.

During accuracy testing, the Trijicon scope helped, and the eight-pound trigger hindered. Ultimately the Basic Plus Rifle demonstrated average accuracy for a modern commercial AR, which means most loads ran between 1-2 MOA. Which, honestly, is excellent. Most people struggle to shoot up to the accuracy potential of their rifles, and forty years ago finding a factory rifle (of any type) which could do close to one inch groups was rare. Now it's the rule, rather than the exception.

FYI: while there are amazing and awesome muzzle devices on the market, the basic standard G.I. A2 birdcage flash hider found on the end of this barrel works pretty darn well in killing flash. That's what is found on the muzzles of the rifles our troops use, after all, the guys most likely to be shot at by other people if they can see their muzzle flashes, so you'd hope A2 would be pretty efficient. It is.

When it comes to topping rifles like the Basic Plus with optics, if you intend the rifle to be used for defensive purposes, there are two schools of thought — the red dot school and the LPVO (low power variable optic) school. The red dot guys will argue that you don't need magnification — in the unlikely event you ever do need to address bad guys with your rifle,



Low power variable optics (LPVOs) have their advantages. Firing from the standing, supported position (left forearm pressed against a vertical post), with the Trijicon AccuPower 1-8X cranked all the way up, Tarr put an entire 30-round magazine into the head of an IDPA target at 75 yards.

ATAC DEFENSE BASIC PLUS RIFLE				
Load	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Velocity (fps)	SD	Avg Group (in.)
.223 REMINGTON				
Homady V-Max	55	2,940	35	2.26
Federal Fusion SP	62	2,801	24	1.66
Black Hills OTM	77	2,614	25	1.79
5.56 NATO				
Winchester FMJ	55	2,950	37	2.08
Black Hills TSX	62	2,893	28	1.22

Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 100 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocities are averages of ten shots measured with an Oehler Model 35P 12 feet from the muzzle.

they'll be close enough to be an immediate threat to you, which means inside fifty yards, and perhaps inside your house.

Proponents of LPVOs follow the "better to have it and not need it" school of thought on optics. A 1-4X, 1-6X, or 1-8X like the Trijicon AccuPower will have all the magnification you'll need to engage targets out to the limits of the gun, optic, and cartridge.

I've set guns up both ways, and you have to decide what's best for you and your situation. I live in the

suburbs, which means even if I climbed up onto my roof with my rifle (I don't generally recommend this, BTW, it tends to excite your neighbors and irritate local law enforcement) the longest shot I would have is under three hundred yards. At that distance you barely need to worry about drop with the 5.56, and I've made shots at that distance using just a red dot. However

Magnified optics do not, technically, help you shoot better. They help you see better, which in turn



Tarr worked the rifle off a barricade as well. With the scope at 1X the rifle worked very well at speed. The only hindrance was the heavy trigger pull.

usually helps you be more precise with your shots. In a hunting situation or at distance, they allow you to better identify your target. At 300 yards with a non-magnified red dot you're just aiming roughly at the center of the target and hoping for the best. With a scope, you can see the target, pick your aiming point, and sometimes even spot your hit.

For an example of this, check out the accompanying target photo. Firing from the standing, supported position (left forearm pressed against a vertical post), with the Trijicon cranked all the way up to 8X, I put an entire thirty round magazine into the head of an IDPA target at 75 yards.

At 8X I could see my hits, and the scope allowed me to aim at the precise center of the head. Considering I've got an astigmatism, and most red dot reticles aren't round to me but instead the uneven shape of squashed grapes, that's far better accuracy than I (or most people) could do running just a red dot. Especially when saddled with a gritty eight-pound trigger. And the beauty of LPVOs is that you can crank them back down to 1X and use them at close range, which is what I did later, running speed drills with the rifle, both offhand and using a barricade.

During that range trip I had the ATAC, a top-secret Springfield AR rifle soon to be reviewed in these pages (also with a mid-length gas system), and a Rise

Armament 11.5" AR pistol with a carbine-length gas system. Shooting them all together it was easy to see how much softer recoiling a mid-length gas system is, and you can even discern the slightly slower recoil speed of the bolt group.

These days nobody has the ammo for a full-on torture test using cases of ammo, but I can say that I didn't experience even a single hiccup in the testing I did of this rifle. I did finish my last case of Winchester 5.56 NATO FMJ in testing this rifle, which made me both happy (because I was at the range, shooting) and sad (because I finished the case, of course, try to keep up).

While you might not have previously heard of ATAC Defense, as far as I'm concerned that's a good thing. Because it means you get a quality MilSpec-or-better product for a price less than what you might pay from other, more well-known companies. Who probably most likely have ATAC parts in their guns. Just sayin

James Tarr is a longtime contributor to Firearms News and other firearms publications. He is also the author of several books, including CARNIVORE, which was featured on The O'Reilly Factor. Check out his latest novels at his website, OfficialJamesTarr.com **FN**

SPECIFICATIONS: ATAC DEFENSE BASIC PLUS RIFLE

Caliber:	5.56 NATO
Weight:	6 lbs., 5 oz
Overall Length:	32.25" (stock collapsed) 35.75" (stock extended)
Receiver:	Forged aluminum
Barrel:	16.0", CMV, mid-length gas system, 1/7" twist
Gas Block:	Compact
BCG:	Nickel-boron coating
Muzzle Device:	A2
Stock:	G.I. style, six-position adjustable
Pistol Grip:	A2
Handguard:	15" ATAC M-LOK compatible
Charging Handle:	Ambidextrous oversize
Trigger:	Single stage, 8 pounds (as tested)
Sights:	None
Accessories:	One 30-round magazine, lockable hard case
MSRP:	\$1,109
Manufacturer:	ATAC Defense AtacDefense.com

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SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S **2020 WAYPOINT** **6.5MM PRC RIFLE** DOUBLE FEATURE!

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ON AN ALASKAN
ADVENTURE!

DAVID FORTIER
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THE LEGS ON
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JAMES TARR
EVALUATES
ATAC DEFENSE'S
BASIC PLUS
AR-TYPE RIFLE

SMALL ARMS OF THE
RUSSO-FINNISH
WINTER WAR,
PART I BY PAUL SCARLATA

