



THE EVERYMAN RIFLE

ATAC DEFENSE isn't a company most riflemen know about, but they should. ATAC Defense makes the ubiquitous AR-15 rifle, but, unlike most of the smaller businesses based around this platform, ATAC Defense-made rifles include material improvements normally found only on the most expensive AR brands.

ATAC Defense has been in the manufacturing business since 1993 and started making parts for AR-15s in 2014. They've been turning AR-15 forgings into finished receivers for years, as well as making many of the small parts needed in the

rifle. What makes ATAC Defense different from everyone else is the level of materials research and development it has done on the AR-15, and how it incorporates those findings into the rifles now offered.

Chris Johnson is the owner of the company and told *Guns & Ammo*, "We will be here even after the market settles down and things normalize. We have no debt and we're passionate about firearms. We also have no interest in private equity companies." With those words, ATAC Defense has our attention.

ATAC DEFENSE ADER

TYPE	Direct impingement, gas operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	5.56 NATO (tested) or .300 BLK
CAPACITY	30 rds.
BARREL	16 in. , 1:7-in. twist, 4150 CrMoV
OVERALL LENGTH	33 in. (collapsed); 36 in. (extended)
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 8 oz.
STOCK	MFT Battlelink Minimalist Milspec
GRIPS	MFT Engage
LENGTH OF PULL	11 in. (collapsed), 14 in. (extended)
FINISH	Hardcoat anodized and Cerakote (aluminum); Burnt Bronze (tested)
TRIGGER	Two stage; 3 lbs., 8 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Two-position selector
MSRP	\$1,369
MANUFACTURER	ATAC Defense, 601-963-0300, atacdefense.com

ATAC Defense installs an ambidextrous magazine release on the ADER, as well as a unique, oversized bolt catch/release. These controls are easy to find.



The buffer tube assembly contains a 3-ounce weighted buffer and mil-spec spring for reliable cycling of the bolt carrier group. Worth noting, the castle nut was properly torqued and staked.



The MFT Minimalist stock is lightweight and adjustable for six positions. It works well for shooting offhand, but is difficult to support with a rear bag when shooting from the prone or on a bench.





The bolt carrier group features a 4340 heat-treated cam pin, and an 8640 heat-treated firing pin. The extractor is precision ground 4340 and the ejector is made of S7 tool steel; both are heat treated, also.



The ADER's mid-length gas system and barrel are shrouded by ATAC's proprietary handguard that features M-Lok slots to attach rail sections and accessories. The barrel is complete with a muzzlebrake.

The AR-15 is a rifle with few surprises. It has aluminum upper and lower receivers, and a direct-impingement (DI) gas system that cycles the bolt carrier group (BCG). ATAC Defense's line of rifles fit that description as well. The ATAC Defense Enhanced Rifle (ADER) model was sent to Guns & Ammo for review. They also offer a model known as the ATAC Defense Basic Rifle (ADBR) and the ATAC Defense Basic Plus Rifle wearing different Cerakote colors and chambered in either 5.56 NATO or .300 Blackout. G&A's test sample was delivered in 5.56 NATO.

The receivers are well-made and typical of those machined from 7075 aluminum. The ADER features a standard 7075 six-position lower receiver extension (i.e., "buffer tube") and some common but popular polymer pieces from Mission First Tactical (MFT, missionfirsttactical.com), namely the Battlelink adjustable stock and Engage grip.

Where this rifle deviates from other AR-15s is with the handguard, the barrel, BCG and the trigger.

The Sum of its Parts The ADER features ATAC Defense's own free-float handguard. It's machined in-house from 6061 aluminum, then tumbled and deburred. These rifles are only available with the M-Lok attachment system, which accepts direct-mount accessories and rail sections. The handguard's top rail integrates well with the upper receiver's optic rail for a full length of usable space. Here, you could add a night vision device, lights or an array of visible and IR laser devices.

The barrel is another special component of this rifle. ATAC Defense gets their barrels from a large defense contractor that otherwise only makes barrels for military contracts. Personal relationships that go back many years have allowed ATAC Defense to access the premium parts. Each barrel starts out as a mil-spec Mil-B-1159E bar of 4150 chrome-moly vanadium (CrMoV) steel that gets bored, button-rifled, and chambered by the contractor. The barrels have a 1:7-inch twist rate with a 5.56mm NATO chamber. The barrel is



The bolt catch/release lever may be oversized, but it work with a standard lower receiver. Behind it is ATAC's optional dual-stage trigger featuring a 1½-pound first stage and 2-pound second stage.

also coated and quenched, which gives it a lasting and durable matte finish. They'll shoot reliably even when conditions and ammunition aren't the best. The muzzle is threaded ½x28 and complete with a three-port muzzlebrake.

All barrels have the M4 contour and come with either a carbine-length or mid-length gas system. Where ATAC Defense deviates from military specifications on the barrel is the replacement of the chrome-lining process with nitride. Nitride is a better and more durable finish, especially for corrosion protection. The testing protocol for these barrels is way beyond anything used elsewhere in the commercial AR-15 community. Barrels are proofed with a 5.56mm cartridge loaded with pistol powder that generates twice the chamber pressure encountered by a SAAMI cartridge. They have to use pistol powder because it's not possible to put enough rifle powder in the case to double standard pressure.

The bolt in an AR-15 is the component most likely to fail under hard use. It's a small part that takes a beating every

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Each ADER sports MFT furniture including the Engage grip, Version 2. This grip features a 15-degree angle to improve comfort, and the texture offers positive control. Note the tab that covers the receiver gap that usually causes discomfort during prolonged usage.



ATAC Defense's oversized charging handle is ambidextrous and machined from 6061 T6 aluminum. This charging handle is easy to use, even with optics mounted above it.

time the rifle cycles. If it breaks, the rifle is immediately inoperable. Ways for a manufacturer to mitigate premature bolt failure include using heat-treated Carpenter 158 steel for the material, which ATAC Defense does. Unlike most AR-15 manufacturers, ATAC Defense sources bolts in the raw and then coordinates the heat treat and finishing. This allows them control not common in the AR industry.

Not content to just focus on the bolt, Monte Johnson, ATAC Defense's lead engineer and no relation to its owner, conducted a detailed analysis of each bolt component to ensure that it had the best material for the job. He ended up using 4340 steel for both the extractor and cam pin, too. "4340 can handle a lot of abuse and shows little wear for it" Johnson said. Most companies will use less expensive steel for the cam pin and the extractor, but ATAC Defense wanted maximum performance for a reasonable price, so 4340 was it.

A more exotic material, S7 tool steel, sees use as the bolt's ejector. Johnson said, "Once S7 has been shot-peened and stress relieved, it'll last almost forever in this application." ATAC Defense has a lifetime warranty on their rifles, so even if the guy who puts 30,000 rounds down the barrel and eventually wears the barrel out can rest assured that ATAC Defense will replace it. The same goes for worn extractors and worn ejectors. The warranty is one of the reasons they invested so much time into materials research and testing.

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PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVERAGE GROUP (IN.)
SIG Sauer Match 77-gr. OTM	2,496	34	12.1	.83	.97
Winchester Match 69-gr. BTHP	2,530	32	13.2	.89	1.04
Federal GMM 69-gr. BTHP	2,592	26	11.3	1.07	1.19

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured by Labradar placed adjacent to the muzzle.

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was within financial reach," Johnson said. "He knows it will work if he ever needs it to defend himself or his family."

Perhaps most surprising upgrade is the two-stage trigger that ATAC Defense installs for certain models. Each two-stage trigger is machined from billet tool steel, so the trigger pull it has when it comes out of the box will improve with use, but never worsen. Most triggers we find in AR-15s are made from metal-injection-molding (MIM) and, when done correctly, rarely pose an issue. However, MIM triggers will never offer the durability and service life of a quality billet trigger. MIM is an inexpensive way to make a good trigger quickly whereas tool steel is more expensive, but yields a product that endures.

At The Range Testing revealed accuracy slightly better than most AR-15s. Across three loads, the rifle averaged right around 1 MOA, which for anything with a 5.56 NATO chamber is excellent. Getting tighter groups out of any barrel would require the .223 Wylde chamber, which ATAC Defense can do on request.

The two-stage trigger was exceptional. Each stage was easily discernable and the trigger had crisp let-off. This trigger would require no replacement, even for snobs.

ATAC Defense offers a product that delivers far more than the price required to purchase it. After speaking with the company's owner and lead engineer, we have no doubts they make and sell exactly what they claim: A high-quality AR-15 for the average working American. 

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