You might not have heard of ATAC Defense, but they make more than 300 OEM gun parts for companies you likely have, and in 2020 they launched their own line of rifles. This, the ADER, is their top of the line piece.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

By James Tarr

THE ATAC DEFENSE ENHANCED RIFLE/ADER

ATAC Defense in Lucedale, Mississippi has been in manufacturing for twenty years, and started out making automotive components. For the last eight years they've been making OEM firearm parts—more than 300—for various companies. Last year they decided to start making complete rifles and pistols under their own name, and launched ATAC Defense in February 2020, a month before the country went nuts and gun sales went ballistic. Talk about timing.

ATAC makes rifles in 5.56 NATO and 300 Blackout, and pistols in 5.56 NATO and 9mm. They offer several different packages, with their Basic Rifle at the more affordable end of the spectrum, and the ATAC Defense Enhanced Rifle (ADER) as their top of the line model. I scored a sample of their ADER in 5.56 NATO for testing.

The listed price of all their rifles includes a Cerakote color treatment of your choice on the receivers and handguard—black, Tungsten (silver), FDE,

Slender and light, the ADER features a fifteen-inch handguard made by ATAC Defense, as are the receivers and barrel. The stock, pistol grip, and muzzle device are from Mission First Tactical.

Burnt Bronze, or OD Green like my sample. I've seen various versions of "OD Green" over the years, and they are not all the same. The OD Green on this rifle was more subdued, with a hint of gray, and I found I preferred it to the brighter greens I've seen.

A brief reminder about colored Cerakote on an AR—aluminum does not rust, so it doesn't really need a protective coating for that reason. What color finishes do (apart from looking cool, of course, helping you and your gun stick out from the crowd, which is always 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. Any color lighter than black significantly cuts the heat buildup from the sun. Anything you can do to keep your gun cool, especially if you're doing a lot of shooting, is a good thing. You don't want to contribute to global warming, do you?

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, giving it an M4 profile and a .750 of an inch diameter at the gas block. The gas block is a low profile model held in place by two set screws. The barrel is button rifled and given a 1:7 twist and a 5.56 NATO chamber.

ATAC's product pages are very detailed. They 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—it covers alloys, steel bars, and blanks under two inches in diameter. 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. In fact, it would be no guess:

My contact at ATAC told me, "*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 business with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).*" Those 300 OEM gun parts they make for various companies? A lot of them end up in weapons supplied to the military. Did you think those big-name companies with military contracts actually made all their own parts? I've got bad news for you. Also, this just in: the government is not your friend, water is wet, and most YouTube gun reviewers are paid by the manufacturer of the gun they're reviewing, so if you think they're unbiased…. Now back to our regularly scheduled programming:

The barrel is threaded ½"x28 and tipped with the EvolV combination muzzle brake and flash hider from Mission First Tactical (MFT). This two-port muzzle brake has a narrow .75 of an inch diameter and only adds a little bit of length when compared to a standard A2 flash hider. The MFT EvolV is tipped with a three-prong flash hider beyond the muzzle brake. It is constructed of 416 stainless steel and given a nitride finish.

The 15-inch handguard is an ATAC design—this is Version 2, with a little more angular styling and

The ATAC Defense Enhanced Rifle has more features than any other AR from them, including a bilateral modular selector, oversize magazine release, and drop-in match trigger group.

The bolt catch is a unique design that works either for releasing the bolt or helping to lock it back. Below it you can see the left-side magazine release.

Every rifle from ATAC Defense comes with a Cerakote finish, and the OD Green color of this ADER works well as camouflage, but colored finishes also help keep guns cool when in direct sunlight.

beefier QD sockets. 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, as well as one at the bottom all the way at the front. The MIL STD 1913 "Picatinny" rail runs atop the entire length of the handguard.

Longer handguards are in fashion, but for once fashion and function align—long handguards actually do something. First, they provide the maximum amount of area possible for mounting accessories—lights, lasers, vertical foregrips, angled front sight, angled foregrips, slings, monopod, bipod, tripod, hand stop, avalanche rescue-trained Saint Bernards, whatever. Secondly, the current accepted high-speed technique for employment of an AR in both the tactical and competition worlds is to get your support hand off that magwell and move it as far forward as possible. That way you are better able to manage recoil and drive the muzzle faster from target to target.

Between the slender M4 profile of the barrel, the lightweight handguard, and the minimalist stock, this rifle is light. Without a magazine, empty weight of my sample was five pounds 15 ounces. It feels very light for its length. With the stock fully extended the empty rifle balanced over the front receiver pin.

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 there was a tiny gap and a bit of play between the upper and lower on my gun if I grabbed and twisted, there was no rattle. There is a standard forward assist, brass deflector, and ejection port cover. There are pictogram markings on both sides of the lower receiver for the selector.

As for the bolt carrier group (BCG), ATAC is once again happy to point out that all of their parts meet or surpass Mil-Spec. The bolt is machined from Carpenter 158 steel, which is both the Mil-Spec for AR bolts and the industry standard. Here's a bit of gun-geek tech-speak, straight from the ATAC website: "Carpenter No. 158® alloy is a chrome-nickel alloy steel…. Fully treated, Carpenter No. 158 alloy attains

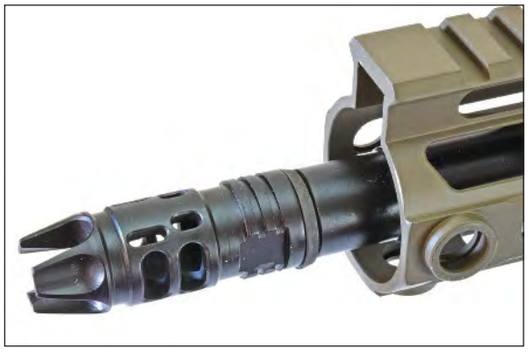
MFT's Battlelink stock is a minimalist design, and the body of it is all one piece. It has a rubber buttpad and a QD sling swivel socket on the underside.

With the ADER you get an oversize bilateral charging handle, and a traditional forged upper receiver with forward assist and brass deflector.

ATAC Defense makes the handguard, and puts their logo here. At the rear of the handguard on both side you can find QD sockets.

Through the skeletonized handguard you can see the low-profile gas block and the M4 profile on the barrel.

At the front of the handguard there are QD sockets at 3, 6, and 9 o'clock. The handguard is light enough that the rifle is under six pounds.



The EvolV muzzle device from MFT is meant to be a combination muzzle brake and flash hider. Tarr found it was a very effective muzzle brake, but didn't do much to kill flash.

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."

After machining, their bolts are HP/MPI (high pressure, magnetic particle inspection) tested. 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 chomemoly nickel low alloy steel. The gas key is also made to spec, installed with the proper bolts which are then staked in place.

In the ADER rifle, the bolt and carrier have a nickel-boron (NiB) coating, which is a nice brushed silver in color, but it's not done for looks. The NiB carrier is deliciously smooth in the hand. If you've never run an NiB bolt carrier group, the coating means they are both very corrosion resistant and inherently slick even without lube (but use lube. Always use lube). 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 an ambidextrous (more properly described as bilateral) charging handle made by ATAC that resembles the well-regarded Radian Raptor.

As for the lower receiver, ATAC broaches the magazine well in-house. The ATAC logo, a stylized A, can be found at the right rear of the handguard and the left side of the magazine well. Check out the left side of the magazine well, below the ATAC logo. Instead of the standard generic caliber and model designations you see with many manufacturers 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. They often build to order.

The bilateral safety selector is a modular unit. There is one long lever and one short one, and if you're a southpaw you can switch them. The main problem with bilateral units is a long right-side lever that pokes your trigger finger when you flip it to "Fire." You won't have that problem with this model.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the pricier ADER and ATAC's Basic and Basic Plus rifles is the trigger group. The other rifles come standard with GI-style trigger groups. Those provide reliable trigger pulls, but not light, crisp, or pleasant ones. The last ATAC rifle I tested with such a trigger group had an eight-pound trigger pull. With the ADER you get a drop-in cassette trigger made by ATAC Defense. It provides a crisp, single stage pull that is advertised at 3.5 pounds. They make three versions of this trigger—single stage, with a curved or straight trigger, or a two-stage trigger.

Upon delivery, the trigger pull on my sample was 6.0 pounds, and there was a slight hitch in it. Apparently there was a small burr in there somewhere. After about thirty pulls of the trigger, the hitch disappeared, and the crisp trigger pull dropped to 4.25 lbs. and continued to smooth out. The trigger and hammer pins tend to migrate in receivers when you have a cassette trigger installed, as there is no spring tension on them, and to eliminate that problem the ADER comes with anti-walk receiver pins.

The bolt catch pin is threaded, and the bolt release is oversized. The design of the bolt catch is very effective both for releasing the bolt or helping to lock it back, but every time I look at it I am reminded of a fragment of a potato chip. When you see it, you can't unsee it. You're welcome.

On the right side of the receiver the magazine release is both enlarged and slightly extended. The oversize paddle is grooved for texture. On the opposite side of the lower receiver you'll see that there's a magazine release there too, just underneath the bolt

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The upgrades from MilSpec are very obvious—the magazine release is oversize and extended, the bilateral selector is an unusual pattern, the bolt carrier has a nickel-boron coating, and over it all is an OD Green Cerakote finish.

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catch. Push the serrated rear of it, and it pivots to let the magazine drop.

The pistol grip is the Engage Version 2 from Mission First Tactical, which has a slightly more vertical grip angle which has been determined to be more ergonomic. As I like to store spare batteries and/or bolt in the pistol grip of my rifles I wish the pistol grip had a tradpoor instead of an open bottom.

At the rear of the rifle you'll see the Battlelink Minimalist Stock made by MFT. A lot of people like this stock, either because of its design/profile, or its light weight (5.8 ounces). As you can see from the photos it has a non-traditional look, L-shaped and polymer in construction, with a ribbed rubber buttpad. There are several slots for attaching a sling, but no QD sockets—or so it first appears. In fact, there is a QD sling swivel socket on the underside of the stock, near the front. I've never cared for the looks of this stock, but it works great. It is also very simple, and robust, and after spending time with it my appreciation for this stock has grown. My co-host on the *Handguns & Defensive Weapons* TV show, Rich Nance, managed to destroy a BCM buttstock behind the scenes while incorrectly mortaring a jammed AR (Mortaring an AR: slamming the butt on the ground while pulling back the charging handle to free a case stuck in the chamber. Do this with the gun vertical, NOT at an angle, for best results). I don't think he would have been able to do that with the MFT, as it is a one piece construction.

The stock rides on a MilSpec six-position receiver extension that is attached to the receiver via a castle nut that is properly staked.

During assembly at ATAC, 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.

When it comes to topping rifles like this with optics, there are two general 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, they'll be close enough to be an immediate threat to you, which means inside fifty yards, and perhaps inside your house. And red dots work very well for every other task (hunting, target shooting, etc.) out to 100 yards and maybe beyond. I can hammer a steel silhouette at 300 yards all day long using just a red dot if I've got a solid shooting position.

Magnified optics do not directly help you shoot better. They help you see better, which in turn 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. *[Cont. to page 32]*

The pistol grip is the Engage Version 2 from MFT, which positions your hand at a more vertical grip angle. If you look close, you can see the castle nut is properly staked.

Both the bolt and carrier have a nickel boron (NiB) coating, which keeps the gun running longer and makes it easier to clean. The oversize charging handle is made by ATAC Defense.

For a lot of his testing Tarr mounted a Holosun 507C red dot on the rifle, in a ScalarWorks Leap mount. Total weight of this combo is just 3.1 ounces, perfect for such a light rifle.

For running and gunning and just punching paper Tarr used FMJ ammo from Winchester (55-grain 5.56) and American Eagle (75-grain .223). The rifle ate everything without a hitch.

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Proponents of LPVOs follow the "better to have it and not need it" school of thought on optics. A 1-4X, 1-6X, 1-8X or one of the new 1-10X scopes will have all the magnification you'll need to engage targets out to the limits of the gun, optic, and cartridge. But they add weight to the gun, and potentially a lot of cost.

I've got guns set up both ways, and your intended use of the rifle should color your optic of choice. For accuracy testing off the bench I topped this rifle with the Trijicon 1-8X AccuPower, which they have recently renamed the Credo 1-8X in what I think is a very poorly done reorganization/renaming of all their excellent rifle scopes. The 8X top end magnification of this scope was more than enough to maximize the accuracy potential of this rifle, which was on par with most commercial ARs.

For running and gunning, I topped the ADER with a Holosun 507C in a ScalarWorks Leap 4 mount, specifically because the combo is very light (just 3.1 ounces) and I was putting it on a rifle that was very light.

Holosun (Holosun.com) optics are a lot more popular than you might think reading gun magazines, as they seem to do more sales by word of mouth than through advertising. These Chinese-made optics are well-designed and give great value for the money. The 507C is an open-topped optic with a circle-dot reticle (32 MOA circle/2 MOA dot). It is meant for pistols, and uses an RMR-pattern base, but like the Trijicon RMR and other small red dots, people have been putting them on ARs. Between the battery and the solar panels on the top you'll get up to 50,000 hours of battery life. It has an IP67 waterproof rating, and is rated for 5000Gs. If it's built to take the abuse of a handgun slide, sticking it atop an AR is a vacation in comparison.

ScalarWorks (ScalarWorks.com) quick-detach Leap mounts are very distinctive in profile, but the best and most unique thing about them is their thumb screw clamp with clicks—the ClickDrive. You can't overtighten it, it self-adjusts, and doesn't loosen under recoil, while being very light. I didn't even notice the weight on the rifle.

The ADER worked without a problem. However, the MFT combo brake/flash hider worked far better as a muzzle brake than it did a flash hider. A lot of the flash on muzzle brakes comes out the sides of the ports, and the three prongs do nothing to elminate that. They just reduce the flash coming out the very end of the muzzle device. But I still got flame shooting out sideways from the ports, visible in daylight. However, as a brake, the EvolV worked better at killing recoil than any brake I've tested in a while. The rifle wiggled during recoil, but there was no discernible muzzle rise.

I got some practice in, snapping the rifle up to my shoulder and engaging targets at urban distances, and the rifle stayed flat during rapid fire. Its light weight

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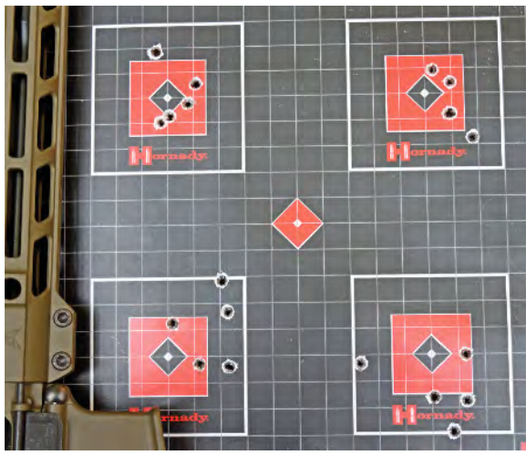
The ADER was just a joy to shoot, and Tarr found the OD Green finish grew on him.



Four typical groups shot with American Eagle's 75-grain .223 Rem TMJ load. They range from just under 1.5 inches to two inches, and averaged 1.77 inches. Not bad for bulk FMJ ammo out of a lightweight barrel.

Tarr spent some time working the ADER off his club's rifle barricade.

[Cont. from page 32]

allowed me to swing it quickly between targets, and not be bothered by the weight when I was running between positions. The crisp trigger allowed me to shoot up to my finger speed potential. This rifle was a lot of fun to shoot, and the more time I spent with it the more I liked its color.

The AR-15 has evolved over the past few decades. Some of that evolution has been internal, to improve reliability (M4 feed ramps, increased extractor strength), but many of the changes have been external. Gone almost entirely are fixed stocks, round polymer handguards, and fixed front sight posts. The ADER represents the most popular form of the commercial AR-15—a 16-inch barrel freefloating inside an aluminum handguard at the front, and a collapsible stock at the rear, with a rail atop the receiver for mounting optics.

The fascinating thing to me is the versatility of this platform. It is an excellent choice for personal defense—the rifle is light, handy, has very little recoil, lots of capacity, and all rifles are easier to aim than pistols, and hit far harder, especially when fed the right ammo. Anybody who doesn't think the .223/5.56 isn't an effective fightstopper is living in the previous century.

However, if I was planning on using this rifle for home/vehicle/personal defense, I'd probably swap out the muzzle brake for a straight flash hider, so there might be a small chance I'd have some hearing left after a dustup.

The rifle is great for having fun at the range or training new shooters, for many of the same reasons (but most especially the light recoil). My better half much prefers ARs to pistols, as they're easier to shoot and recoil is a non-issue.

Rifles like the ADER are also suitable for hunting—depending. I dropped a midsize boar with one shot in Florida with an AR very similar to the ADER, using appropriate ammo—Federal's 62-grain Fusion load, which features a soft-point bullet with a bonded core. ARs make great predator rifles, when topped with appropriate optics, and the modern design with its freefloating barrel has improved the average accuracy of the commerical American AR—most guns shoot between 1–2 MOA, which is all you need no matter what you're planning on using it for.

You might not have heard of ATAC Defense, but chances are you've seen their work for other AR companies. With their rifles, you now have a chance of seeing what this established shop can do with a free hand, and the ADER is an interesting rifle that performs. FN

ATAC DEFENSE ENHANCED RIFLE/ADER

Load	Bullet Weight (grain)	Velocity (fps)	SD	Avg Group (inches)
.223 REMINGTON				
Hornady V-Max	55	2,988	33	1.85
Federal Fusion SP	62	2,830	22	1.46
American Eagle TMJ	75	2,633	31	1.77
Black Hills TMK	77	2,604	25	2.03
5.56 NATO				
Winchester FMJ	55	2,959	34	1.67
ZQI FMJ	62	2,893	28	3.02

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.

ATAC DEFENSE ENHANCED RIFLE/ADER SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber:	5.56 NATO
Weight:	5 lbs., 15 oz
Overall Length:	32.25 in. (stock collapsed) 35.75 in. (stock extended)
Receiver:	Forged aluminum
Finish:	OD Green Cerakote (other colors available)
Barrel:	16.0 in., CMV, carbine-length gas system, 1/7 in. twist
Gas Block:	Compact
BCG:	Nickel-boron coating
Muzzle Device:	MFT EvolV
Stock:	MFT Battlelink
Pistol Grip:	MFT Engage V2
Handguard:	15 in. ATAC M-LOK compatible
Charging Handle:	Ambidextrous oversize
Trigger:	Single stage, 4.25 pounds (as tested)
Sights:	None
Accessories:	One 30-round magazine, lockable hard case
MSRP:	$1,369
Manufacturer:	ATAC Defense ATACDefense.com