

ATAC DEFENSE'S ENHANCED AR-15 IS
MADE WITH EXTRAORDINARY CARE.

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LEAD IMAGE BY YAMIL SUED



BETTER THAN MIL-SPEC



Premium charging handles are used on the Enhanced line of ARs. Note the oversize, ambidextrous latches.

LOCATED IN LUCEDALE, MISSISSIPPI, ATAC DEFENSE builds three different levels of AR-15 rifles. Ranging from the ATAC Defense Basic Rifle (ADBR) at \$1,039 up to the Basic Plus (\$1,109), and the Enhanced Rifle shown here (\$1,369), they are available in 5.56 NATO or .300 AAC Blackout.

As with every good American gun company, ATAC's got a pistol line to complement its rifles. These are AR-15s that are also offered in the same configurations as ATAC's rifles. All wear 10.25-inch barrels, and like the rifles, most are chambered in your pick of 5.56 NATO or .300 AAC Blackout. Of less common flavor are the 9mm pistols, in your pick of 4.5- or 8.5-inch barrels.

Let me just say up front that if the Enhanced line isn't ATAC's most popular, it should be. Take a close look at the rifle spotlighted here. For \$360 more than the Basic version, you get an ambidextrous

safety and oversized ambidextrous mag release button. You also get an oversized ambidextrous charging handle, a Mission First Tactical (MFT) Minimalist stock (my personal favorite AR stock), and an MFT Engage grip. In terms of form and function, you get a darned effective muzzle brake and a nickel boron coated bolt carrier group (BCG).

Plus, you get to pick from five different very popular Cerakote colors, including Black, Tungsten (shown here), Burnt Bronze, FDE, and OD Green. You also get to pick from several trigger types: either curved or straight with a 3.5-pound pull, or a two-stage go-switch with a 1.5-pound first stage and 2-pound second stage.

Yep, these are made to order, at least if you purchase online. The good news is, they typically get built and shipped to your FFL dealer within a week.

I received the rifle shown with an editorial directive to use and review. I confess that prior to opening the shipping box, I knew nothing about ATAC. Thankfully, as I examined the enclosed rifle, I became more and more impressed (the opposite has happened with other manufacturers in the past).

While researching for this review, I discovered a statement on ATAC's website: "We believe in holding a quality level that is far above 'mil-spec.'" Hallelujah, and amen.

Far too often, "mil-spec" is touted as some sort of goal or achievement. Nowadays, products are often far superior to mil-spec and offer better ergonomics, greater accuracy, and a significantly superior fit, finish, and feel. My pet peeve is mil-spec triggers. Modern, match-and-combat-grade AR triggers expose mil-spec triggers for the gritty, inconsistent, heavy-dragging travesties they are.

About the only realm where mil-spec is still entirely relevant is in ensuring reliability. But enough ranting.

Now here's the thing: Does ATAC achieve the manufacturing ethos it claims? Let's find out.

Unlike most AR assemblers, who simply source parts and put them together, ATAC machines its upper and lower receivers in house, of 7075 T6 aluminum, so as to control a good, snug upper-to-lower fit and accurate dimensions. As a matter of interest-perking fact, ATAC has been manufacturing AR parts for decades and private-labeling

them for other companies. Now, ATAC is building complete guns. The takeaway is that this isn't just another start-up AR-15 assembler. ATAC has tremendous back-stage cred.

Enhanced receiver sets, like the ones on our test rifle, also feature a threaded bolt catch pin, captive rear detent pin, and an upper-to-lower tensioning device. Upper receiver lugs are machined slightly large, and every receiver set is hand-fit. Expecting that with a tensioning device and hand-fit lugs, the rear receiver pin would be snug and hard to remove, I pressed on it. Out it popped. The receivers pivoted open easily.

That's awesome for maintenance and cleaning, but does it compromise the tensioned and hand-fit build claims? Perhaps. I closed the receivers, pressed the pin home, and cranked on the upper and lower receivers. Yep, there's a tad of discernable play.

Not that this is a big deal. Nearly all ARs have play between the upper and lower, and in the case of this ATAC, it isn't much. Personally, I like easy access to the innards of a combat-oriented carbine such as this and will take an easy-to-work-on fighting gun over a tight, stubborn son-of-a-sourdough biscuit any day.

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As mentioned earlier, the Enhanced line sports ambi fire controls. The safety rotates the traditional 90-degrees between settings and comes with one short and one long lever. That way, end users can pick their preferred length and install it for their strong-side hand.

An oversize, skeletonized magazine release button on the right side of the receiver sits just proud of its protective fences, making it superlatively easy to drop the mag when ready, but just guarded enough that it won't get bumped and the magazine inadvertently get ejected. On the left side, the release button is smaller but still easy to find and activate.

Because the bolt release is typically pressed or slapped with the left hand, whether shooting righty or lefty, it is the only fire control not present on both sides. It's got an oversize upper paddle and a nicely serrated lower tab to assist in sure, fumble-free manual lock-back.

Inside, the guts of the ATAC Defense Enhanced are selected for reliability and longevity. Bolts are machined from Carpenter 158 steel, which has long been the flagship standard in AR bolts. Each is magnetic-particle inspected.

Bolt carriers are machined from AISI 8620 steel and feature the classic "full auto" profile that's so well known for superb reliability. Nickel boron

and hard chrome finishes ensure wear resistance and make the parts easy to clean.

Up top, there's a big, beautiful charging handle. The spur on either side will unlock the latch, meaning you can grab and haul on either side to cycle the bolt. It's oversized, too, making it easy to use with big optics aboard or while wearing heavy gloves.

Long ago, I put an inexpensive mil-spec receiver extension — also known as a buffer tube — on a very nice AR build, thinking it was one place to cut cost, conscience-free. Little did I know that inside, the durned thing was neither round nor straight. Function was ... well, it wasn't. I purchased a

premium receiver extension made from premium aluminum and properly reamed inside, and I've never used a cheap one since.

ATAC doesn't use cheap receiver extensions, either. They're 6-position tubes made of 7075 T6 aluminum and are properly fit. Castle nuts are properly torqued and well staked. Inside is a 3-ounce weighted buffer and a standard, mil-spec spring.

Rearward is a collapsible MFT Minimalist stock. It may be set for anything from a 10.75- to 14-inch length of pull and is sleek, extremely light, and comfortable. A rubber butt pad helps it stick to your shoulder during rapid fire. Dual sling slots provide a place to permanently mount a sling, if you choose, and a robust QD sling swivel attachment cup provides options.

Said stock is complemented by MFT's Engage grip. It's hollow, sleek-but-not-slick, and positions the shooting hand perfectly.

Up front, ATAC ARs are fit with an M4 contour (sort of; it doesn't have a grenade launcher cut) 16-inch barrel made of 4150 chrome moly steel. Each 5.56 barrel is button rifled with a six-groove, 1:7 twist rate. Gas ports are optimized for reliability and smooth functioning with a mid-length gas system (more on that in a minute) and fit with .750-diameter (internal) gas blocks. Muzzles are threaded 1/2x28 and are compatible with all standard AR-15 muzzle devices and suppressors.

Mid-length gas systems are engineered to apply less of an abrupt, high-quantity injection of gas into the operating system than the original carbine-length gas system. As a result, recoil impulse is slower and milder, and according to many engineers, reliability benefits. Each barrel receives a low-profile, machined 4140 steel gas block and 304 stainless steel gas tube.

After testing and inspection, standard models are fit with an A2 flash hider. Barrels for Enhanced Rifles receive a muzzlebrake with three rearward-angled ports on each side.

Housing the barrel is ATAC's free-floating handguard machined from 6061 aluminum. Each is deburred, then finished in whatever Cerakote color the customer has chosen. Seven M-LOK attachment slots are machined into the rail at 3, 6, and 9 o'clock, and a 1913 Picatinny rail runs the full length of the handguard's top. Each rifle ships with a 30-round Magpul Gen 3 PMAG.



Handguards are free-floating around the barrel and gas system and are finished in Cerakote. M-LOK slots provide attachment points for accessories. A three-port muzzle brake tames jump during recoil and aids in fast follow-up shots.

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ENHANCED RIFLE

Type	Direct-impingement semiautomatic
Cartridge	5.56 NATO (tested); .300 AAC Blackout
Capacity	30 rds.
Barrel	16 in., 1:7-in. twist, 6-groove rifling
Overall Length	33-36.25 in.
Weight	6 lbs., 4 oz.
Stock	MFT Minimalist
Finish	Tungsten Cerakote (tested)
Bolt Finish	Nickel-boron coating
Trigger	Single-stage, 3 lbs., 12 oz. pull
Magazine	Ships with one 30-round Magpul Gen3 PMAG
Muzzle Device	Three-port brake, threaded 5/8x24
Sights	None, Picatinny full-length optic rail
MSRP	\$1,369
Manufacturer	ATAC Defense atacdefense.com



Ergonomics are ideal for both right- and left-handed shooters. The ATAC Enhanced's flat top optic rail marries perfectly with the full-length rail atop the free-floating handguard.

Excited to find out just what the ATAC Enhanced could do at the range, I installed a brand-new 4.5-22x50 Vortex Razor HD LHT (Light Hunting/Tactical) scope in a snazzy, red-anodized Warne XSKEL30R mount. It's a lot bigger scope than the svelte ATAC carbine needs, but all that magnification and the long-range features would, I figured, help me wring the best possible precision out of it.

For a bipod, I wanted to use my Valhalla by Spartan Precision. It's superbly stable and versatile and can be attached and detached in mere seconds. However, when I went to install the M-LOK compatible bipod attachment point, I discovered that the M-LOK slots in the ATAC's handguard are undersized. Either that, or the Cerakote finish bumped tolerances out of spec.

Wondering if it could be the bipod part, I tried other M-LOK accessories. None worked. It was

mildly frustrating, and all the more so because it was the first imperfection I'd found on the ATAC Enhanced firearm.

Finally, applying a bit of muscle, I managed to work a well-worn M-LOK base for my ultralight Javelin Pro Hunt Tac bipod into the ATAC's attachment points, and a hex-head wrench drew it down tight. Wondering if I'd ever get it back off, I gathered up a handful of ammo and headed to the range.

Facing straight into a brutal, cutting wind from the north, I got the ATAC zeroed at 100 yards and went to work, firing three consecutive three-shot groups for average, with each of several different types of ammunition.

Recoil is smooth, reliability proved stellar, and the rifle ran like a scalded cat. I found only one small fly — a gnat, really — in the ointment of

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PERFORMANCE

Barnes 85-gr. MatchBurner	Black Hills 60-gr. V-Max	Black Hills 77-gr. SMK	Hornady 53-gr. Z-Max	Hornady 75-gr. HPBT
Velocity (fps)				
2,503	2,832	2,630	2,833	2,516
Standard Deviation				
37	60	48	86	56
Extreme Spread				
11	19	14	30	20
Average Group (in.)				
1.23	1.68	1.63	1.78	1.69
Best Group (in.)				
1.04	1.35	1.23	1.41	1.57

Accuracy results are the average of three five-shot groups. Velocity figures are derived from a string of five rounds measured by a chrono 12 feet from the muzzle.



Bolts and carrier assemblies are manufactured of premium steel and finished in nickel boron and hard chrome. Both are naturally lubricious, easy to clean, and very wear-resistant.



perfection. The single-stage trigger has a small glitch or catch in it. According to my Lyman digital trigger gauge, the catch let go and the trigger moved through it somewhere between 3 and 3.5 pounds. Average pull weight to trigger release measured 3.75 pounds. Controlling the trigger consistently through that little glitch proved challenging. That said, it's a whole bunch better than a standard mil-spec trigger.

Of the five loads tested, one nudged near the 1-MOA mark. Possibly, with a match-grade trigger and windless conditions, the ATAC would achieve 1-MOA accuracy.

However, let's remember that this firearm doesn't have a heavy match barrel. It's a relatively slender tube, enabling maneuverability and a reasonable carry weight. Bare, the AR is just north of 6 pounds. As I see it, the ATAC Enhanced isn't a varmint rifle, and it's not a target rifle. It's a defend-your-castle kind of tool and a darned good one for the task.

All the other four loads tested averaged between 1.5 and 1.75 MOA; perfectly acceptable for a combat carbine.

With reluctance, I removed the big Vortex scope and packed the ATAC away for return shipping to the manufacturer. Were it mine, I'd install a Trijicon MRO or Aimpoint H2 red dot and train with it regularly. For an upper-crust personal protection weapon that you'll never have to upgrade, it's an optimal choice. 🦋