

Ben Battles

Lewis Machine & Tool Monolithic Rail Platform

*Shedding New Light
On The "Black Rifle"*

If you're a regular reader of *On Target*, you'll recall seeing the new Lewis Machine & Tool Co. Monolithic Rail Platform (MRP) upper receiver in the Editors' Choice Award section of our May/June 2005 issue. Editors' Choice Awards are reserved for the best of the best, but allotted space for each Editors' Choice Award makes it damn near impossible to give you the full skinny on a product like this. That's why we're revisiting the MRP for a more in-depth look at why it's such a significant stepping stone in the evolution of the original Eugene Stoner blueprint.

For those unfamiliar with the name, Lewis Machine & Tool Company (LMT) was founded in 1980 to provide the U.S. armed forces and law enforcement with high-quality weapons and components. It wasn't until the spring of 2004 that LMT entered the retail market with the revolutionary MRP, and a host of other unique and practical accessories.

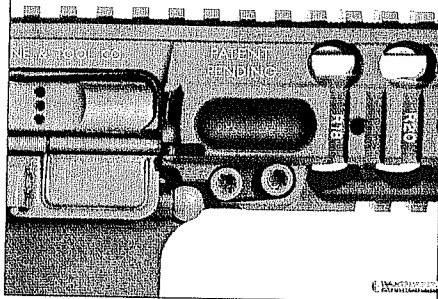
Versatility and adaptability were the goals when designer and LMT president, Karl Lewis, set out to build the MRP. The plan was to create an upper receiver—compatible with any mil-spec lower receiver—that incorporated into its design the ability to quickly swap barrels to suit the task at hand. After three years of research and development, and several prototypes, Karl got it "just right." Very few "new and improved" systems represent a true enhancement of the original AR blueprint, but in my mind the MRP is one of them.

What sets the MRP upper apart from traditional designs is its one-piece, forged-aluminum construction. From the receiver body, to the end of the handguard, the MRP is painstakingly machined from a solid chunk of aluminum. Each vent hole and Picatinny rail slot on the 4-rail forend is meticulously machined in a process that requires nearly five hours of continuous CNC machine work.

The advantages of MRP's one-piece construction are many, and include a free-floated barrel, rock-solid optics and accessories mounting, better heat dissipation, and a vastly reduced number of parts that could potentially malfunction (thirteen, to be exact), but the real advantage lies in MRP's fantastically clever quick-change barrel system. MRP upper

receivers are available in two versions: CQB-length (16.5-inch top-rail surface) and rifle-length (20.5-inch top-rail—tested).

The MRP's other significant departure from the Stoner blueprint is its interchangeable barrels. An MRP barrel is essentially an all-in-one affair, incorporating an integral gas block, gas tube, and pressed on headspace collar at the rear of the barrel. The headspace collar has an added, built-in gas tube support, and features a machined slot in the bottom where one of the two barrel-securing fixture screws index. Changing a barrel on the MRP requires about 30 seconds, and requires only a T30 torx-head wrench to tighten or loosen the two fixture screws holding the barrel in place in front of the ejection port. It's a clever setup, indeed, and provides a rock-solid



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means of "bedding" the barrel maintaining point of impact between barrel changes.

The MRP ships with a 1:7-inch twist barrel affixed with a standard A2 flash hider. Available barrel lengths include 10.5-, 14.5- and 16-inch models (all NFA rules apply to sub-16-inch barrels). Stainless steel barrels in 16- and 18-inch lengths are also available for an additional \$120. Also included are three heat-resistant, no-slip Picatinny rail covers, but contrary to what we stated in its previous article, the MRP does not include the bolt assembly or charging handle.

Our test rifle was shipped to us with the optional LMT enhanced bolt, bolt carrier and charging handle. LMT was also kind enough to supply us with three barrels: a 14.5-inch, a 16-inch and a stainless steel 18-inch, along with detachable front and rear LMT Tactical A2 sights, an LMT dual locking bar Vertical Battlegrip and the awesome LMT SOPMOD buttstock.

With a far-better cheek weld surface and a detachable rubber buttstock, the 5-position collapsible SOPMOD buttstock is a vast improvement over traditional M4-style collapsible stocks. It proved especially useful in placing my sight line where it need to be when shooting through a scope.

Our testing of the MRP included running ammo through all three barrels—not only to test accuracy, but also the differences in muzzle velocity. To squeeze every ounce of precision out the MRP and its barrels, I mounted a 10-power Weaver T-Series scope in a rugged one-piece mount, which stayed in place throughout barrel changes. Two premium loads were used for testing: both 60- and 75-grain Hornady TAP (Tactical Application Police). Hornady also offers similar loads—called TAP For Personal Defense—for the civilian market.

Starting with the 14.5-inch barrel, 5-shot groups ran from an average of 1.20 inches with the 75-grain to 1.90 with the 60-grain—not bad at all for an M4-length barrel! Moving to the 16-inch barrel provided very similar results, with the 75-grain averaging 1.10 inches, and the 60 grainers 1.70 inches. Stepping up to the 18-inch stainless-steel barrel brought the MRP into sub-MOA territory, and turned the tables with grain weight preference. The 60-grain TAP produced an average group size of .80 inches, with the 75-grain load coming in at just under one inch. Consistency between barrel changes was excellent—removing a barrel and reinstalling it again produced no noticeable change in point of impact—which was one of our initial concerns with the MRP's quick-change barrel design. I'm also happy to report that the MRP ran like a top throughout testing, with zero failures to properly feed, extract or eject.

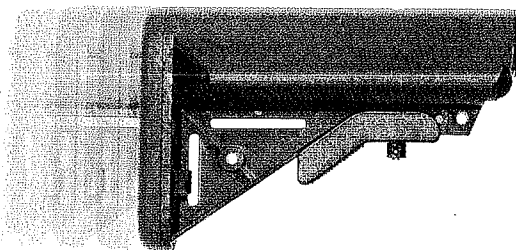
There was some variation in velocity among the different length barrels, but it wasn't significant enough to require any scope adjustments—all groups were shot with the 14.5-inch barrel's zero throughout testing. Average velocity for 14.5-inch barrel was 2,769 f.p.s. (60-gr.) and 2,522 f.p.s. (75-gr.). The 16-inch barrel produced 2,834 f.p.s. (60-gr.) and 2,625 f.p.s. (75 gr.), and the 18-incher cranked out 2,921 f.p.s. and 2,666 respectively.

When all was said and done, we were tremendously impressed with the MRP's consistency and adaptability. Whether it's used in a SWAT sniper role, as a police patrol carbine, in 3-gun competition, as a personal/home defense weapon, or in pursuit of the "red haze" in the prairie dog fields, the MRP can be configured to precisely and reliably take care of business. See the MRP at your nearest firearms dealer (CQB version \$1,289; rifle version \$1,489), or for more information contact Lewis Machine & Tool Co., Dept. OT, 1305 W. 11th St., Milan, IL 61264; Tel.: (309) 787-7151; Fax: (309) 787-7193; Web: www.lewismachine.net

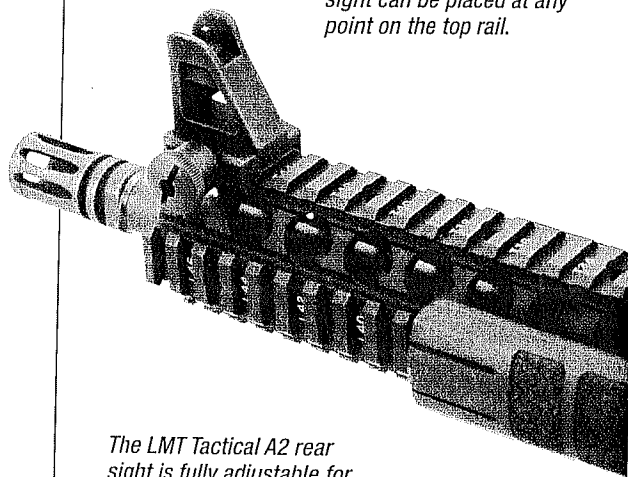


BEN BATTLES, *On Target's* editor, is also our in-house expert on Eugene Stoner designed rifles, living in New Hampshire's Mount Washington Valley.

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The LMT Tactical A2 front sight can be placed at any point on the top rail.



The LMT Tactical A2 rear sight is fully adjustable for windage and elevation.

