



## Presto! Change-O!

The AR-15 has proven to be the most flexible semi-automatic rifle/carbine platform on the planet. The constantly growing list of accessories we can screw-on, clamp, or exchange by removing a pin or two attests to that fact, and all in an easy to carry and maneuver package averaging around seven pounds. As if that were not enough, we can quickly change caliber by replacing the upper that contains the bolt, receiver, barrel, forestock, etc. This is accomplished by simply pushing out two pins and removing the upper assembly from the lower. The lower receiver has the buttstock, pistol grip, magazine housing and trigger/hammer group.

The list of upper assemblies available in various caliber options from various manufacturers that will fit the AR-15 .223/.556 lower receiver is surprisingly extensive. The available calibers include: .22 Long Rifle, .204 Ruger, 6 X 45mm, 7 X 45mm, .25 X 45 Sharps, .300 Whisper, .300 AAC/Blackout, 7.62 X 39 Russian, 5.45 X 39 Russian, .30 RemAR, 9mm Luger, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, 10mm Auto, 6.5 Grendel, 6.8 SPC, .458 SOCOM and .50 Beowolf. To function in the semi-auto mode all require magazine conversions and some require buffers made for the specific caliber. Complete uppers range from around \$450.00 to over \$1000.00 depending on the caliber.

Add to the list monsters like .338 Lapua, .408 CheyTac, .416 Barrett and .50 BMG (Browning Machine Gun). These behemoths are usually bolt action single shots. The Zel Custom Tactilite T2 bolt action model has a side feeding magazine and their setup is in the \$2,000.00 range at [www.tactilite.com](http://www.tactilite.com).

At this point I must admit I am sure to be missing some available calibers while others have been developed while this article was written. Plus, a craftsman like Kerry O'Day of MG Arms could create any number of custom upper

assemblies. See [www.mgarms.com](http://www.mgarms.com).

First, take a look at the current .223 upper to set a base line. A popular round is a 55 grain full metal jacket bullet leaving the muzzle at 3240 feet per second with 1280 foot-pounds of energy. Starting with the big boomers the .50BMG launches a 750 grain bullet at 2815 f.p.s. and generating over 13,000 ft.-lbs. of muzzle energy. I for one do not need to prove my manhood by touching this one off above a lower receiver weighing around two pounds. But, "different strokes," and if you can afford the upper you can afford the ammunition.

Saving money on ammunition while enjoying hours of practice is the reason to consider the .22 Long Rifle upper that

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sells in the \$500.00 range. The ammo cost helps pay for the upper while allowing practice with the same weight and dimensions as the host .223. There are dandy AR .22 rifles available from the likes of Smith & Wesson, Ruger and Mossberg for a little less money, but they weigh a pound or two less. Another option is the CMMG .22 conversion kit for around \$200.00.

The pistol caliber uppers for the 9mm, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, and 10mm Auto open up many opportunities. The vast bullet choices have great applications for hunting, self defense and options for less penetration in a home defense situation. The cheaper ball ammunition, when available, makes for fun practice and plinking with barely noticeable recoil.

The .204 Ruger has become the darling of varmint hunters. It was developed in a partnership with Ruger and Hornady from the .222 Remington Magnum. Hornady's catalog lists a 32 grain polymer tipped V-Max bullet that screams out at 4225f.p.s. and shoots flat

out to nearly 300 yards. Yes, the .223 is a superb varmint cartridge, but we are looking at options.

The .300 Whisper was developed and pioneered in 1992 by the wizard, J.D. Jones of SSK Industries. Jones is renowned for his decades of work on subsonic ballistics. He has developed "Whisper" cartridges ranging from 6mm to .50 caliber. The 300 Whisper is a highly efficient cartridge based on the 221 Remington Fireball case, necked up to 30 caliber. The subsonic load from Hornady pushes a .208 grain polymer tipped A-Max boat tail bullet at 1020 f.p.s. with very little recoil. This is the only tipped subsonic factory load on the market and perfect if we go through

all the hassle to acquire a silencer. Their 110 grain V-Max load travels at 2375f.p.s. and is a good choice for low recoil hunting.

The 6.8 mm Remington Special Purpose Cartridge was developed by [Remington Arms](http://RemingtonArms.com) in collaboration with members of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit as a possible replacement for the [5.56 NATO](http://5.56NATO.com). It is based upon the [.30 Remington cartridge](http://.30Remington.com) and falls between the [5.56 NATO](http://5.56NATO.com) and the 7.62 NATO in bore diameter and muzzle energy which makes for an interesting compromise. For those that hate the metric system the 6.8mm is the same diameter as the .270 Winchester. Remington lists a 115 grain jacketed hollow point boattail bullet in their Express Rifle lineup leaving the muzzle at 2800 f.p.s.

So many choices with more on the way. Most of the above can be researched and acquired from Brownells at [www.brownells.com](http://www.brownells.com). Complete uppers may be purchased and mailed to your location. The lower receivers must be transferred through a licensed gun dealer. Also, there are interchangeable lowers for the .308/7.62 platform, but that is another article. **T★J**

