

# Semi-automatic rifles: Not what they used to be

By JOHN JOHNSTON  
Special Contributor

The BAR, Browning automatic rifle, was designed by John Browning in 1917. It was a light machine gun that fired the .30-06 military round. At the time, our soldiers were in need of a hand-carried machine gun that could be used in the trench warfare of World War I.

The BAR was first issued to troops in 1918. Since that time, it has seen service in World War II, Korea and during the early stages of Vietnam.

To say it was a versatile, dependable and highly deadly weapon is an understatement. It has had a few minor changes over the years but was copied even by our allies.

Fast forward to 1967, the year Browning came out with its sporting semi-automatic rifle named the BAR. Browning saw a need for a hunting rifle that could get off follow-up shots easily and quickly. This gas recoil-operated rifle was a hit with hunters, especially in the Northeast, where hunting was done in thick vegetation and just seeing a deer made it a day to remember.

Because the rifle was gas operated, the recoil was reduced somewhat. Gases that propel the bullet from the barrel were practically bled off before they reached the muzzle. They were directed back to

the action to work the bolt, so the force of gases exiting the muzzle and causing recoil was reduced.

There were a few drawbacks to this system. The action had to be almost an inch longer than a bolt action and larger overall. The added weight was nice to help recoil, but not real desirable if one had to carry the rifle all day. The bolt had to be slammed closed to lock up the recoil lugs. The empty cases being ejected were very hot.

Over the years, I have owned and shot many of Browning's competitors' rifles, from the Remington Model 74 to the most expensive (at that time) semi-automatic sporting rifle, the H&K Model 940. Being a reloader and accuracy nut, these rifles proved quickly that a semi-auto hunting rifle was not my cup of tea. They would shoot less than two inches at 100 yards, which was sufficient for a hunting rifle but not for me. Mostly, I hated chasing the empty case.

Until recently I had never shot a BAR in any form. Browning sent a new BAR Long Trac Stalker for me to test. This model has an alloy action, synthetic stock and matte finish. It weighs just under seven pounds without optics. I could deal with this weight during a long stalk.

I know some of you may be a little leery of an alloy receiver, but remember alloy receivers are used on nearly all the new



PHOTO BY JOHN JOHNSTON

I tried some 150-grain reloads, which resulted in sub 1-inch groups. The load used Barnes TTSX bullets and IMR4895 powder. This load was a pleasure to shoot.

shotguns. These shotguns have a lot more recoil and are shot far more times than a hunting rifle. Besides, Browning is excellent about standing behind its products with superb customer service.

This rifle comes with shims that can be added to change the pitch of the stock up or down and side to side. This allows shooters to customize the fit of the rifle to their needs.

I mounted a Weaver-style one-piece scope base to the receiver and a Leupold 3x9 scope for testing. Loading the rifle is

easy. It has a drop-down floor plate like a bolt action but with a detachable magazine.

The trigger pull, which is very important to me, weighed in at 4.75 pounds. This may seem heavy, but it is so smooth it was no problem.

Shooting some factory 180-grain ammunition showed it was capable of groups in the area of 1.5 inches. The 150-grain ammunition was about the same.

The barrel has a 1 in 10-inch twist that See SEMI-AUTOMATIC, page 19

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