



SPECIAL OPS TACTICAL AURORA ELITE

A 5.56mm AR designed for go-anywhere tactical precision!

The AR-platform rifle market has grown exponentially in the last few years.

Current political realities have driven much of this growth, but the design's overall popularity as a hunting and sporting rifle has also contributed substantially to demand. Coupled with an explosive accessory market, the AR can be configured in so many ways it is almost mindboggling. From plinking with .22 LR to hitting targets at 1,500 yards with .338 Lapua, you can find an AR to cover it.

This increase in availability is fantastic for buyers, but it can make it difficult for builders. When demand surpassed supply, it seemed there was a new builder every week. As

that curve has started to flatten, some of those companies are starting to struggle, and a few have just disappeared. For those that remain, it becomes increasingly difficult to stand out from the pack in such a market. Larger companies simply shift production to a different gun, but local builders specializing in one platform have to get inventive. The proliferation of CNC machining has certainly helped, as you can build just about anything these days from a simple drawing. It allows small shops to truly customize their products, but even that is not much of a distinction. Those who want to stick around a while are going to need to innovate, and Special Ops Tactical (SOT) is on the right track.

Like many companies, SOT uses high-quality components with great attention to detail. But the company's ordering and delivery processes are truly unique and feel like they were made for this century. Garrett Potter, the president of SOT, is driven and dedicated to moving the company forward, not just capitalizing on the huge demand in the AR market. I believe that smaller builders are the future of firearms ownership, and SOT is proof.

Specializing in stainless steel, Special Ops Tactical builds quality AR rifles using either billet or forged receivers. Matching rails in several lengths are available, along with barrels and every other part necessary to build a quality rifle. Everything is machined

to the highest standards and is built with serious attention to detail. Garrett is dedicated to building the finest rifle possible at a reasonable price. He is also dedicated to making it as easy as possible for a buyer to get exactly what they need.

Using the SOT website, it is possible to complete the entire build process from your computer. Pre-configured uppers, lowers and completed rifles are certainly available, but the truly fun part is building your own rifle on the website. It is about as "computer age" as it gets—just hit start and with each click of the mouse your rifle will come together right before your eyes. Starting with your lower, you can choose a forged or billet model with various stock options. Each

By David Bahde

is equipped with a Geissele SSA trigger, and Battle Arms Development safeties are available. Moving through the process, you can choose your barrel length and gas system, the forend, pistol grip and muzzle device. With each click your chosen part is added and a clear picture of your build is provided. Want to try something else? Just back up and try again. You can even add sights and optics at the end. As each part is added, the total price updates in the corner. When you are done, add it to your cart and the build process is underway. You will get a call to confirm your order, and you can always call SOT to add any possible custom (Please turn to page 80)

The stainless steel Aurora Elite features billet upper and lower receivers, a 14.5-inch barrel, a Magpul stock and grip, and more custom-grade enhancements. Shown with a Bushnell Elite Tactical SMRS 1-6.5x24mm.

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touches not in the system. Working through the website's interface, it was possible to move back and forth with ease—I never had a glitch from start to finish. You can build your rifle in just a few minutes.

GUN DETAILS

SOT sent me one of its newest Aurora Elite stainless steel billet rifles for testing. It came with a nice gray Cerakote finish. The fit and finish was excellent, with no sharp edges and a smooth and even coating. A flared magazine well facilitates smooth magazine swaps, and the oversized triggerguard provides plenty of room for gloved hands. The lower features a Battle Arms Development ambidextrous safety as well as a Geissele SSA trigger. Magpul's CTR carbine stock is mated to the six-position buffer tube, and the MOE+ pistol grip rounds out the lower.

Special Ops Tactical's GPS handguard mates perfectly to the upper receiver. Continuous Picatinny rails run along the top and bottom. Short rails at the front and rear on each side facilitate lights and other accessories. The smooth area in the middle is perfect for comfortable handholds. The GPS covers a 14.5-inch, stainless steel, nickel-boron-coated barrel. Pinned to the end of the barrel is an SOT muzzle brake/flash suppressor to bring the length to 16.01 inches. The upper also features M4 feed ramps and a completely nickel-boron-coated M16 bolt carrier group. Completing the upper is a set of Magpul MBUS flip-up sights.

ON THE RANGE

I tested the Aurora Elite using two different Bushnell Elite Tactical scopes. Most of the close-quarters work was completed using the 1-6x24mm Elite Tactical SMRS using the second-focal-plane BTR-2 reticle. For accuracy testing and some longer-range work, I used the 1-8.5x24mm Elite Tactical SMRS scope with the same reticle mounted in the first focal plane.

I've been shooting ARs for a couple of decades and their *(Please turn to page 82)*

SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIAL OPS TACTICAL AURORA ELITE

Caliber: 5.56mm NATO • **OA Length:** 33 inches

Barrel: 14.5 inches (16.01 with pinned brake)

Weight: 7.4 pounds • **Stock:** Magpul CTR

Sights: Magpul MBUS • **Finish:** Cerakote

Action: Direct impingement semi-auto

Capacity: 30+1 • **MSRP:** \$2,500

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accuracy of late is pretty amazing. Early AR rifles were considered accurate if their groups were inside the size of a fist; any more precision required a target rifle. Given the billet construction of this rifle, serious accuracy was expected—and it delivered. Silver State Armory sent me some new 77-grain OTM ammo that the company said was “seriously accurate.” It did not disappoint here with a 0.55-inch group. Everything but the practice ammo grouped under 0.75 inches, and even the practice stuff held a bit over an inch. The muzzle brake does a pretty good job of controlling what muzzle rise there is, and it was not excessively loud. Moving out to 300 yards, the rifle was no less accurate with a group that measured 1.75 inches.

Swapping scopes to the 1-6x24mm SMRS, the rifle was completely reliable and very fast. All of my personal ARs use the Geissele SSA (with the flat trigger face), so the Aurora’s trigger felt familiar.

Doubles and triples were fast, with consistent brass ejection. Recoil was minimal with moderate muzzle blast—a bit more than a typical flash suppressor, but nothing like some of the muzzle brakes out there.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There were no malfunctions with PMAGs, Lancers and several different aluminum mil-spec magazines. This forend is perfect for me: it’s simple, slim and there’s no need to add rails. My SureFire Scout lights and X300 fit perfectly and worked

well. The forend also allowed me to mount my Blue Force sling. Magpul’s CTR stock is also one of my favorites since it facilitates optics rather well.

Special Ops Tactical delivered all you would expect from a high-quality rifle. The Aurora Elite is as well built as any I’ve used, including some of my custom rifles. Its accuracy was excellent, and it functioned perfectly. The Aurora Elite is definitely worth its price. For more information, visit specialoptactical.com or call 407-814-3801.

GUN

PERFORMANCE

SPECIAL OPS TACTICAL AURORA ELITE 5.56mm

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
DoubleTap 55 FMJ	2,985	0.75
Hornady 60 A-MAX TAP	2,784	0.70
Hornady 75 TAP HP	2,610	0.61
HPR HyperClean 55 FMJ	2,937	1.18
Silver State Armory 77 OTM	2,747	0.55

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in fps by chronograph, and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 100 yards.



David Bahde photo