

Scoping Out Small Arms

Here's What's on the Horizon as U.S. Carbine Competition Looms

By MATTHEW COX

LAS VEGAS — As the U.S. Army prepares for a possible carbine competition this fall, small-arms companies are getting ready.

Among them is Remington Arms, an American gun-maker known for sniper rifles. The company displayed the latest version of the Adaptive Combat Rifle (ACR) at the International Infantry & Joint Services Small Arms Symposium in Las Vegas. The National Defense Industrial Association put on the show May 18-21.

The ACR's modular design features multiple barrel length and caliber options, a gas piston operating system and ambidextrous controls.

"We are really designing it with the soldier in mind," Jason Schauble, vice president of military products for Remington, said at the show.

Remington and other small-arms companies across the country are preparing for the potential carbine competition later this year after Colt Defense, which makes the Army-standard M4, turns over the weapon's technical data rights in June. When that happens, the Army will have the opportunity to make major improvements to the M4 or buy a new carbine.

Army officials hope to have an updated carbine requirement approved by October. If that happens, the Army could issue a request for proposals for a new carbine late this year, weapons officials said.

The initial prototype of the ACR first appeared in 2007 as Magpul Industries' Masada. Magpul then signed a deal with Bushmaster Firearms International in 2008 to market it commercially.

Both Remington and Bushmaster, however, fall under an umbrella company known as Freedom Group, which decided to groom the ACR for a future Army weapons contract first.

To prepare the military version of the ACR, Remington has run the prototype through tests involving mud, sand and dust to ensure it will be reliable, Schauble said.

"Reliability is the first thing we care about over anything else ... as a former operator myself, reliability is what we worry about," said Schauble, a retired Marine captain who served with the 2nd Force Reconnaissance Company in Iraq in 2004 and 2005.

Remington has experience with

newer, Knight's Armament Company M110 semiautomatic sniper rifle.

With the ACR, shooters have the option of using four barrel lengths, which can be changed out in minutes, Schauble said.

The gas piston system on the ACR has two settings for use with or without a sound suppressor.

The ACR's upper receiver is aluminum; the lower receiver is made of a high-impact composite material. It has an ambidextrous magazine release, selector switch, nonreciprocating charging handle and bolt release.

The weapon also features a six-position, adjustable stock that folds for compact carry.

In addition to the ACR, Remington and Bushmaster are prepared to offer a standard M4-style carbine and one with a gas piston upgrade, Schauble said.

Army officials stressed that the service has to evaluate more than just the weapon. The larger equation also includes the soldier training, optics and ammunition, Brig. Gen. Peter Fuller, commander of Program Executive Office Soldier, said at the symposium May 19.

Lighter Machine Gun

The symposium also featured updates on existing military small-arms programs. One of the most significant is the Project Manager Soldier Weapons M240L, a lightweight version of the current M240B machine gun. The M240B is extremely reliable, but at 27.5 pounds it's proving too heavy for soldiers to carry in rugged terrain such as the mountains of Afghanistan.

WHAT'S BIG IN SMALL ARMS

These new or upgraded weapons were on display at the International Infantry & Joint Services Small Arms Symposium, put on by the National Defense Industrial Association in May.

COMBAT RIFLE



Remington Adaptive Combat Rifle
Caliber: 5.56mm, 6.5mm and 6.8mm
Operating system: Gas piston system
Rate of fire: 600-650 rounds per minute
Length: 35.5 inches with 14.5-inch barrel and stock extended; 25.75 inches with stock folded
Barrel length: 10.5 inches, 14.5 inches, 16.5 inches and 18 inches
Weight: 7 pounds with 14.5-inch barrel

FOREIGN RIFLE



Micro Tavor 21 assault rifle
Caliber: 5.56mm/9mm
Operating system: Gas operated
Rate of fire: 750-950 rounds per minute
Length: 23 inches
Barrel length: 13 inches
Weight: 6.5 pounds

MACHINE GUN



M240L machine gun
Caliber: 7.62mm
Operating system: Gas operated
Rate of fire: 650-950 rounds per minute
Length: 44.5 inches to 48.5 inches, depending on the barrel length
Barrel length: 17.6 inches and 21.6 inches
Weight: 20.5 pounds with titanium receiver and 17.6-inch barrel — 7 pounds lighter than the standard M240B

LAUNCHER



Metal Storm Multi-shot Accessory Under-barrel Launcher
Caliber: 12-gauge nonlethal and lethal projectiles
Operating system: Military grade lithium ion battery electronically initiates stacked projectiles
Rate of fire: N/A
Length: 15.9 inches
Barrel length: The five-shot tubular magazine extends 4 inches past the receiver forming the weapon's muzzle
Weight: 1.8 pounds

SOURCE: Defense News research

DEFENSE NEWS GRAPHIC BY JOHN BRETSCHNEIDER

As a short-term fix, the Army recently began fielding about 500 MK48 machine guns to forces deploying to Afghanistan. The MK48 is about 9 pounds lighter but lacks the durability of the M240B.

Weapons officials hope to shave about 7 pounds off the M240 by putting a titanium receiver on the weapon. The 240L will weigh about 20.5 pounds when equipped with a new 17.6-inch barrel, said Col. Douglas Tamilio, who runs PM Soldier Weapons. The standard barrel is 21.6 inches.

The plan is to send the first 52 M240Ls to Afghanistan sometime this fall, Tamilio said.

Futuristic Models

Metal Storm, a company known for its space-age firing system that relies on electronic ignition, unveiled its Multi-shot Accessory Under-barrel Launcher.

The launcher, called MAUL, mounts beneath the barrel of an M16 or M4. It resembles an M203 grenade launcher, but features a five-round magazine. The M203 has to be reloaded after each shot.

The 12-gauge projectiles are stacked end to end in the launcher. The shooter can fire nonlethal or lethal projectiles in a semiautomatic mode; no recocking is required.

The MAUL is designed to give troops and police a weapon that can mount beneath their standard weapon for situations when a shooter has to quickly switch from deadly force to crowd-control mode, Metal Storm officials said.

The symposium also offered a chance to look at foreign weapons such as the Israeli Tavor system, a family of assault rifles that the Israeli Defense Force used to replace its M16s and M4s.

The Tavor family features bullpup design, meaning the bolt assembly, magazine well and ejection port are located behind the pistol grip and trigger assembly.

This gives the weapon a "rear center of gravity, which enables a rapid acquiring of the target and the ability to fire the weapon with one hand," said Amihai Dekel of Israel Weapon Industries.

The newest version of the Tavor is the X95, formerly known as the Micro Tavor. The Israeli Defense Force began fielding the X95 to its special forces in 2008. It is chambered for 5.56mm, but it can be con-

War Trial Set for Airburst Weapon

By MATTHEW COX

LAS VEGAS — Soldiers will test the U.S. Army's experimental airburst weapon in the war zone this summer, service officials say.

The XM25, a shoulder-fired weapon that shoots exploding 25mm projectiles, is "going to be issued to a unit this summer for an assessment downrange in theater," Program Executive Office Soldier commander Brig. Gen. Peter Fuller told the National Defense Industrial Association's International Infantry & Joint Services Small Arms

Objective Individual Combat Weapon program the Army began working on in the 1990s to kill enemies hiding behind cover with special air-bursting ammunition. OICW was once a dual system with a 20mm airburst on top and a 5.56mm carbine on the bottom. Since then, the Army has dumped the 5.56mm portion and increased the caliber to 25mm.

Unlike the indirect-fire 40mm grenades used in the M203 or the M320, the XM25's 25mm rounds are shot in the direct-fire mode and are accurate out to 700 meters.

tremely accurate," said Col. Douglas Tamilio, who runs Project Manager Soldier Weapons.

Weapons officials would not say whether the XM25 is going to Iraq or Afghanistan. If all goes well, the Army will begin fielding XM25s "in the next couple of years," Tamilio said.

The plan is to have the XM25 supplement the two 40mm grenade launchers assigned to each nine-man infantry squad. "It's really designed to go one per squad, 10 for the rifle company," Tamilio said. ■