

AR-15

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UINTAH BRINGS AR-15s INTO YET
ANOTHER HUNTING SEASON.

UPPER

MUZZLELOADING

BY FRANK MELLONI
PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR



MUZZLELOADING UPPER



“NOBODY HUNTS WITH AN AR.” NOTHING MAKES THE hair on the back of my neck stand up worse than this phrase. It has become the battle cry of gun grabbers and ill-informed fudds who spend more time virtue signaling than hunting. I, for one, have harvested more meat with an AR-15 than all other firearms combined, and my story isn’t unique. The reason is simple: The AR is more adaptable than anything else on the planet. Find me a firearm that can shoot .22LR and, in less than a minute, fire .50 BMG. How about one that can start life as a semi-auto pistol and then end up as a bolt-action rifle? Yes, it is a veritable Lego set that can fire almost anything, even if you have to stuff it directly down the muzzle. That might sound abstract, but that is precisely what Uintah Precision had in mind when it created its muzzleloading AR system.

A Magpul MOE stock is perfect for carrying muzzleloading accessories.



The Uintah Precision muzzleloading upper pairs with any standard AR-15 lower.

Bursting onto the scene with their bolt-action AR-15 uppers, it didn’t come as a surprise that they were behind this product and that you could get there one of two ways. Just like their original offerings, buyers can pick up just the upper receiver and slap it on the lower of their choice. However, Uintah has grown since then and is now making full firearms, so that option is on

the table, too. If you go that route, your rifle will come with a solid billet lower receiver, Magpul furniture, and a 3-pound Velocity trigger. The bottom half will be a fully functioning AR-15 lower, and it can run any semiauto upper you might want during the off-season.

I have a safe full of AR-15s, so I had an upper receiver shipped directly to my home. The muzzleloading upper is based on a typical AR-15 upper receiver but with a few shortcuts that were taken during the milling process. You’ll notice that there isn’t a charging handle channel or an opening for a gas tube. Sure, this upper can be built from standard milling, but when you have 100-percent control, why not make it just right? A 24-inch, 1:20-inch twist, .45-caliber barrel is slipped into it and locked down with a barrel nut the same way any other AR barrel is installed. Uintah then completes the build with a 15-inch M-LOK handguard clad with 270 degrees of accessory slots and a continuous rail at the 12 o’clock position. Whether you’re a U.S. Navy SEAL hunting terrorists or an average Joe hunting coyotes, these features are critical.

I used a rifle lower that I built some years back from an Anderson receiver. I finished it with a RISE Armament RA-535 trigger and a Magpul fixed MOE rifle stock. I chose this one because the stock has a perfect compartment for carrying some of the accouterments required to fire a front stuffer, and it feels great against the shoulder. The



other reason I selected it was for the RISE trigger, which is on the list of compatible triggers that Uintah touts in some of their other uppers, so I figured it made sense to play it safe. In just a few seconds, I had the two halves pinned together and was picking out glass for range testing.

Pickings are slim these days for .45-caliber bullets, but I had a few 285-grain Power Belt ELR projectiles left over from another project. These pills are built to fly straight and far, changing the effective range of muzzleloaders. However, the trouble was that I couldn’t find load data for bullets this heavy in this caliber. So, using information from the manufacturer and data I found from Hodgdon, I extrapolated that 100 volumetric grains of FFG Triple Seven would be a safe load with enough velocity for hunting. Although there are other powders, I wanted something useful

with this Hodgdon product because I can pick up a can at every sporting goods store. It also cleans up easily, which is a big plus because I hate swabbing smoke poles with a passion. The last thing that I needed was 209 shotshell primers, of which I had a box squirreled away that might be a little older than I am. Nonetheless, they haven’t let me down yet, and I had faith that this time would be no exception.

Before shooting, I laid out the powder, primers, and bullets in an area safely behind my bench. I pulled the upper off and removed the bolt to peer down the bore. Using two sandbags, I aligned my reticle with the target to give me a crude zero for a starting point. Once satisfied, I put everything back together and prepared my first powder charge. Using a Traditions 5-in-1 Quick Loader, I measured a 100-grain charge and dumped it down



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the muzzle. Once it was down, I sent a bullet after it using the rod that is included with the upper. Uintah cleverly builds this into the area where you would typically find a gas block and tube.

After returning to the bench, I took my first attempt at seating a primer but, alas, my fingers were too fat to get the job done. To that end, I turned to a Traditions 209 Capper to complete the loading process. All that was left was to close the bolt and rock one down range. With a resounding “BOOM!,” I turned the range into a smoke show and observed an impact approximately 12-inches high. I continued for 9 more rounds (with a quick swabbing in between each group of 5) and calculated an average velocity of 1,786 fps with a

standard deviation of 21. When we crunch the numbers, that works out to 2,018 ft-lbs of energy, well within the threshold to take an elk on a late-season hunt.

Shooting the Uintah muzzleloading upper was just plain fun. The loading process is intriguing, and the brake makes recoil manageable. Furthermore, it felt like it was built to fit the human form because it was. Eugene Stoner knew what he was doing, and he wasn't bound to the materials of the 1400s when he created the AR-15. He took his time and built a design that fits the shoulder and face without any torsion while allowing our hands to work the way they are most comfortable. Call me crazy, but this might be one of the reasons that this design is the best-selling rifle in the country.

I fired another 15 shots and determined an average group size of 1.89 inches, which will do just fine for whitetail within the distances I plan to hunt. Rumor has it that if you pump the powder up a bit higher for this bullet, things tighten up drastically. I was tempted to play with it a bit to see, but until I have data like that in writing from a reputable source, I'm not jamming that down the



A rod is included with the upper for sending bullets down the barrel and stores where a gas tube would usually go.



A funnel prevents powder from exiting the muzzlebrake during loading.

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Primers are seated through what would be the ejection port on a standard AR rifle.

barrel and pressing my face against it. Besides, deer don't have scoring rings, and my load was plenty lethal already. With that, I zeroed my optic, sent another group downrange to confirm, and then started packing up for the long ride home.

Black powder and its substitutes are corrosive, so cleaning after each session is inevitable. Uintah did a fantastic job sealing off the lower from everything going on in the upper. This meant that I didn't have any work to do in the lower half. As for the upper, that required a little scrubbing but nothing extreme. I twisted out the breech plug with a conventional socket set to increase bore access and used ordinary dish soap and water to scrub it clean. After a few dry patches, I lubricated with CLP and called it a day on the barrel. While doing this, I had the breech plug soaking in the same solution, loosening just about all the fouling without effort. Some gentle brushing with a nylon brush was all that was needed before receiving the same CLP treatment. This left me with just the bolt, which I oiled and slipped back into the receiver after reinstalling the breech plug.

Uintah's muzzleloading AR-15 provides a shooter everything they need in a utilitarian platform. I found it to perform as well as any other

MODERN SPORTING MUZZLELOADER UPPER

Type	Muzzleloading AR upper
Caliber	.45
Barrel	24 in.
Twist Rate	1:20
Overall Length	42.5 in.
Height	6.5 in.
Width	1.91 in.
Weight	8.31 lbs.
Finish	Black oxide, Cerakote
Sights	None; integral rail
MSRP	\$1,098 (upper only)
Manufacturer	Uintah Precision uintahprecision.com



The bolt is easily removed from the upper for cleaning and maintenance.

muzzleloader that I've fired and even outshined a fair portion of them as well. Overall, I thought the design was spot on and carefully thought out. However, if I have anything to say with a Gen 2, I would like to see a larger opening to get a primer in. But to be fair, you can always crack it open for more access. Aside from that, I can also envision a small removable storage compartment to fill the empty magazine well. With proper molding, it could also safely offer a place to store an extra primer or two. The beauty of this system is that all of this is indeed possible, which only serves testament to this design's adaptability. 🦋