

Pros And Cons Of Modifying Your Firearms

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Most firearm manufactures build their weapons based on what they think most shooters will want.

But defensive, hunting, and target shooting all require specific adjustments, so it shouldn't surprise anyone that most shooters wind up modifying their weapon to get the most out of it.

In addition, there are likely to be aspects of the firearms that might not totally fit your particular shooting style, eyesight, or hand size. While this not a good thing to modify your weapons just to be different, or to see if it can be done, other adjustments may fall into the category of necessary.

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But how do you actually do it? Here are some modifications that you might take into consideration.

Pistols

Night Sights

These sights give you a good sight picture even in low light conditions, which increases your chance of hitting the target. Even though this can be very useful, bear in mind that the sights must first be activated by a light source. They are also incorporate Tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen.

Unlike other sights which can last for the life of the gun, night sights must be replaced every 8 – 10 years.

Fiber Optic Low Light Sights

Instead of using Tritium, these sights use small colored fiber optic inserts in the front and rear sights. Usually, the rear sight is green, while the front sight is red. They will only work if there is enough surrounding light.

Unlike the Tritium based sights, these will work as long as the fiber optic material is intact.

Trigger Spring Upgrade with After Market Trigger

This upgrade ensures the weapon to shoot easier and better. These upgrades can also address common complaints such as the trigger is hard to pull, excessive trigger creep, or the trigger is too light/heavy.

Some people prefer a lighter trigger for quick shooting, while others want a stiffer one to reduce the risk of accidental discharge when shooting or reholstering.

After Market Magazines

Even though the magazines that come with your gun are reasonable quality, the ones you can get after market are much better and are designed to give a lifetime of reliable service.

In many cases, the better quality magazines reduce the risk of malfunctions caused by bent magazines, faulty magazine springs, or followers. This increases the reliability of the weapon and also reduces the risk of damage to it. Always use match grade pistol magazines to get the most out of each unit.

Even though after market magazines are more expensive, they usually come with a lifetime warranty and are well worth the extra cost.

Upgrade the Pistol Grips

The easiest and fastest way to reduce felt recoil is to upgrade the pistol grips. Choose grips that fit your hands properly. This will also make the weapon more comfortable to shoot and improve accuracy.

If you choose slim grips, they will also make the gun easier to conceal, while thicker ones may give you a printing problem. To get the most options, try aftermarket grips that allow you to choose the side panel and back strap combinations.

AR-15 Rifles

Change the Upper Receiver to the Adams Arms Piston System

Piston driven AR-15's function better because the hot gasses released from firing are not constantly being dumped into the body of the weapon.

The second advantage is the weapon operates more cleanly with no blow back of powder and gas into the breach. Instead, you only have to be concerned about a small amount of powder residue in a tiny area around the piston. These advantages make for a more reliable weapon that can be shot longer during each session. You can also wait longer between deep rifle cleanings.

Even though the piston system improves the overall performance of the AR-15, the complete upper is quite expensive. Since it is not a standard part like the impingement system, you will also have a harder time finding spare parts when needed.



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If you are interested in this upgrade, there are two ways to go about it. First, you can buy a complete upper receiver and match it to the lower receiver that your rifle came with. Second, there is also a conversion kit that can be used to modify your existing upper receiver.

Nickel Boron Bolt Carrier Groups

Nickel boron coatings on the interior and exterior make it much easier to clean the bolt carrier group. All you will need to do is rub the bolt a few times in order to remove the fouling. Even though the rear bolt will still be a little harder to clean, it is much easier than it would be if you were still wrestling with a traditional phosphate bolt carrier.

Over the lifetime of the rifle, you will also find that nickel boron bolt carrier groups are also more dependable.

As with changing to a piston system, you will find that nickel boron bolt carrier groups can be quite expensive. To get the most for your money, choose Mil-Spec to ensure your system will be compatible with military parts.

Replace Springs

If there is one chronic problem with AR-15's, I'd have to say failure to feed issues are at the top of the list. While many people continue to believe bad magazines or fouling are the main causes, the AR springs may also be at fault.

Remember, it is the buffer and extractor springs that receive the most damaging wear and tear because they control the opposing reaction of the energy delivered by the gas.

Sadly, many weapons either have springs that are too weak to withstand this abuse and remain reliable, while others may have a buffer that is too light. The failure of these springs will render your

AR-15 about as useful for shooting as a paper weight.

When replacing the springs:

- Choose heavier ones that are on the recommended spring listings for your AR.
- Field test the AR to insure the proper functioning of the new springs.
- Always keep a spare part kit for every AR you own, including extra springs. You never know when something will break or wear out.
- Never put in new springs in the AR and then fail to function test the rifle.

Use Duracoat or Cerakote as a Protective Coating

These coatings will protect your rifle from friction related problems and moisture. The additional barrier against corrosive elements will extend the lifetime of the gun and ensure its reliability. In addition, these coatings offer a tactical advantage because they can be used in camouflage patterns. Even though these coatings can be relatively inexpensive to do on your own, it is also easy to make a mess. While it costs a lot more to have a professional do this job, it is worth the cost.

Upgrade the magazines – As with pistols, upgrading the magazines for your AR-15 gives you a chance to buy better quality units that will last longer. In this instance, I recommend the Magpul PMAG. It is to your advantage to avoid cheap, poor quality magazines, or ones that do not have a good reputation on the market. Not only will they cause endless malfunctions, they will seriously hamper the performance when the rifle actually does fire.

Pistol grip – Most people replace the standard A2 pistol grip on the AR-15 because it is too small for shooters with larger hands. For comfort and increased proficiency, try the Magpul or Hogue grips.

Triggers

Next to pistol grips, replacing the stock triggers is the most common upgrade for AR-15's. There are many designs to choose from as well as manufacturers. Do your research carefully and consider what you want to use the gun for when selecting a trigger upgrade. Here are some designs to consider:

- Single stage – These are heavier triggers that will fire after using steady pressure on the trigger until it fires.
- Two stage – A two stage trigger will allow you to pull the trigger part way, hold it, and then fire when you are ready. It is useful for hunting or defensive shooting.
- Match – Very lightweight trigger that improves accuracy when shooting targets.
- 3 gun competition – If you have pistols, rifles, and shotguns, matching the trigger with the one on your AR-15 may be of interest if you have a disability or need consistency across all weapons for some other reason.
- Adjustable – This trigger lets you set the weight, creep, and amount of trigger travel. This trigger is ideal if you want to test out different trigger configurations or want something that can be adjusted for different shooting types.
- Non-adjustable – If you already know what you are looking for in trigger weight and other factors, choose this one to save money vs the adjustable model.
- Straight or curved bow – This is purely a matter of personal taste. Some prefer a curved trigger, while others are more comfortable with a straight one.

Stocks

Most AR-15 rifles sold today come with, in my opinion, a mediocre, cheap Mil Spec six position stock. Replacing it with a collapsible stock can increase accuracy and also make the rifle much more comfortable to shoot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7uIYJN6OC0>

Video first seen on [chanderson1](#).

You will still need to choose the right size stock for your rifle's buffer tube. While a stock upgrade can give you a lot of advantages, you will need to do your homework to find a good quality stock. In this market, expensive doesn't always mean better, and you can very easily wind up with an over-priced piece of junk.

Bump Fire Rifle Stocks

Contrary to the beliefs of some individuals, bump fire rifle stocks do not turn your AR-15 into a full auto weapon. They simply use the recoil from the past shot to operate the sliding action a bit faster. However there are people that can pull a trigger faster, and more accurately than the bump stock users! Here are some other things to consider before pursuing this upgrade:

- Right now the BATF finds that this product is not a machine gun as defined under the Gun Control Act, 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(23), however this might change. If it does change, you will need to find out if pre-existing bump stocks will be grandfathered.
- The stock allows the AR to shoot between 400 to 800 rounds per minute.
- When shooting with the stock in the bump position, it will use more bullets and heat up a lot faster. As a result, it is likely to jam.
- Bump stocks will reduce accuracy.

80% Finished Receivers

Even though this isn't a modification of an existing gun, you can buy an 80% finished receiver and build your own. This receiver is usually made of aluminum.

Once again, contrary to popular belief, you cannot simply buy a kit and expect to produce a functional, reliable weapon with just a few hand tools and no experience in metal working. To finish the receiver, you must either install, complete or assemble the fire control group, trigger pin, hammer pin, trigger slot, and safety selector hole.

While the kit will include the instructions, jigs, drill bits, and parts, do not be fooled into thinking you can assemble with absolute ease. Drilling can go wrong very easily as can other assembly stages. If you are off in your measurements or make a mistake, the entire project will be ruined and you will have to buy a whole new 80% finished receiver.

About the only advantage you will get is you will not need an FFL to buy the receiver, and you will not have to fill out all the paperwork. As long as AR-15s are legal in your state, you will be able to own it where you live.

Pump Shotgun Upgrades

Stocks

These are the most common and useful upgrades for the pump shotgun. You can shorten the stock to reduce the overall length of the weapon without making it illegal. Pistol grip stocks, top folding, and collapsible stocks will all make the gun more accommodating for people with longer or shorter arms.

You can also try a complete stock replacement system that includes a 6 position collapsible stock with shell holder, front picatinny rail, and military length forend. Even though there are several different materials available, the best and most durable stocks are made from lightweight carbon fiber reinforced polymer.

Rail Systems

Upgrading to a M1913 Picatinny top rail with key-mod mounts at the 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions makes it easy to mount scopes and other accessories. When choosing a rail system, make sure it does not hang over the muzzle. An aluminum rail will keep the weight down without sacrificing the options offered by this rail upgrade.

Magazine Tube Extensions

Magazine extensions come in either 2 or 3 round capacities. When it comes to home defense, the addition of these two or three rounds can be a lifesaver.

This upgrade is also very easy to install and can be attached without making any modifications to the gun. Just remember that these extensions can extend past the muzzle. This can lead to a carbon buildup or discoloration of the magazine tube.

Upgrade the Barrels

If your pump action shotgun comes with the capacity to change barrels, you may want to have shorter and longer lengths on hand. This will make your weapon suitable for different purposes without needing to buy a whole new gun. You can use shorter barrels for home defense, and then longer ones for hunting.

Regardless of the length of the barrel, changing them out is no harder than cleaning the shotgun; and can be done with no tools. Just remember different barrel lengths have advantages and disadvantages:

- Longer barrels improve accuracy, however they are harder to maneuver in tight spaces and weigh more than shorter barrels
- Shorter barreled shotguns have a shorter sighting plane, more noise, more muzzle flash, and more recoil, all of which reduce accuracy and make them harder to manage when firing.

When you buy a new gun, that is only the beginning of a journey to make it as useful as possible for your needs. From customizing the gun so that it is more comfortable when firing to managing physical impairments, there are endless options to choose from.

As you consider the possible upgrades for your weapon, always keep in mind what you want to improve about the weapon's performance, the reputation of the manufacturer, how best to accomplish the upgrade, and the laws in your area.

Once you know all of these, look at the cost and figure out if these upgrades are truly worth your while, so you could keep your family safe!



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