

GANG OF 6.5 GRENDEL\$



Sabre Defence's XM15 SPR can pull serious brush-gun duty with its YHM flip-up sights, or mount an optic for precision at longer ranges.

NEW ARS with bullets that start slow, end fast, fly flat and pound bucks with power and sub-MOA precision way downrange!

“After introducing more than a hundred whitetails to my skinning knife, I’ve become a firm believer in the attributes of the .264 caliber (6.5mm) and rifles that shoot them.”



J&T Distributing's complete upper receiver in 6.5 Grendel and the Trijicon 5-20X scope is a MOA-capable rig.

By Jay Langston PHOTOS BY OLEG VOLK

» An AR is my favorite for coyotes, but I wanted a bit more than .223 Remington to chase whitetails. I’m in my fourth decade of shooting whitetails with a .308 rifle and other cartridges based upon the parent case, plus 6.5x55 Swedish, 7mm-08, and the .260 Remington as a long-range deer stopper. After introducing more than a hundred whitetails to my skinning knife, I’ve become a firm believer in the attributes of the .264 caliber (6.5mm) and rifles that shoot them. The 6.5 Grendel was built especially for an AR, and this cartridge and rifle combination has the terminal ballistics I like from a .264 bullet. The choice of AR packages is pretty broad. I tested five different models to see which would make a good whitetail rifle.



JPE's CTR-02's weight and muzzle brake made recoil feel like shooting a .22 LR. This is a half-MOA rifle all day long.

SPECIFICATIONS

JP ENTERPRISE CTR-02

BARREL:	Stainless, bull, 1:8 twist, 22 inches
OA LENGTH:	37 inches
WEIGHT:	10 pounds, 8 ounces
SIGHTS:	M1913 Picatinny rail
ACTION:	Semi-auto, gas impingement
FINISH:	Gray Duracoat receiver & handguard, stainless bbl.
CAPACITY:	25-shot magazine
PRICE:	\$3,550 (as tested)

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY	3-SHOT GRP.	5-SHOT GRP.
Alexander Arms 120 Nosler	2,656	.498	.825
Hornady 123 A-MAX (factory)	2,640	.370	1.180
Hornady 123 A-MAX/ BL-C2	2,616	.565	.902
Hornady 129 SST/ BL-C2	2,486	1.045	1.792

Note: Bullet weights in grains, velocity in feet per second by a Shooting Crony chronograph; Accuracy in inches for best 3-shot & 5-shot groups at 100 yards.

Grendel fans got a real boost when Hornady began offering factory loaded ammunition. Their 123-grain A-MAX loads improve ammunition availability and have helped ease the cost with a little friendly competition. In July, Hornady shipped a half million rounds of 6.5 Grendel and sold out in three days. Alexander Arms offers six different loads using Lapua brass. The lightest bullet Alexander Arms offers is a 100-grain Berger HPBT, and the heaviest is a 130-grain Swift Scirocco. A box of 20 rounds will cost \$30 to \$42, depending on load. Wolf also offers a 120-grain HPBT 6.5 Grendel load for about \$13 a box, which makes target practice more affordable.

I tested rifles by JP Enterprises, Sabre Defence, two Alexander Arms models, and a complete Grendel AR upper receiver from J&T Distributing.

For testing these rifles, I settled on two factory loads; Hornady's new 123-grain

A-MAX load and the Alexander Arms 120-grain Nosler boat tail. My first handload was a 129-grain Hornady SST driven by 29.8 grains of BL-C2 powder in Hornady brass. The second handload was the Hornady 123-grain A-MAX and 30.5 grains of BL-C2 in Lapua brass. Both loads were ignited by Federal 450 primers. The course of fire was a minimum of five three-shot groups and five five-shot groups. Since I shot these tests on five days in weather conditions that varied between rain and 75 degrees or 99 degrees and 90 percent humidity, I chose to pick the best five groups for each rifle to make fair comparisons. Velocities were measured 10 feet from the muzzle with a Shooting Chrony.

JP ENTERPRISES

John Paul Gangl, owner, loaned me one of his personal match rifles in 6.5 Grendel to review. His Competition Tactical Rifle (CTR-02) is an impressive work of AR art.



SPECIFICATIONS

J&T Distributing HBAR Complete Upper

BARREL:	Anodized, HBAR, 1:8 twist, 20 inches
OA LENGTH:	40 1/4 (tested w/Bushmaster lower w skeleton stock)
WEIGHT:	7 pounds, 11 ounces
SIGHTS:	M1913 Picatinny rail
ACTION:	Semi-auto, gas impingement
FINISH:	Anodized
CAPACITY:	25-shot magazine
PRICE:	\$625 (as tested)

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY	3-SHOT GRP.	5-SHOT GRP.
Alexander Arms 120 Nosler	2,670	.502	.925
Hornady 123 A-MAX (factory)	2,662	.656	1.339
Hornady 123 A-MAX/ BL-C2	2,654	.771	.936
Hornady 129 SST/ BL-C2	2,498	.485	.960

Note: Bullet weights in grains, velocity in feet per second by a Shooting Crony chronograph; Accuracy in inches for best 3-shot & 5-shot groups at 100 yards.

“I find myself shooting my ARs a lot more than my bolt-action deer rifles, so come deer season I might just be better prepared when old mossy horns steps out.”

The upper and lower receiver is machined from 7075 T6 billet covered with a Duracoat titanium gray finish. The barrel is a polished stainless JP Supermatch air-gauged, button-rifled cryogenically treated 22-inch version with a JP Tactical Compensator. Beneath the hand guard was a thermal dissipator to help keep the barrel cool. A Magpul PRS stock fitted with an Accu-Shot monopod helps make fine adjustments to shooter fit and steadiness.

An extended charging handle and movable bottom sling studs make practical sense. The swivel studs move on a track within the hand guard, which makes moving a bipod forward or backward to adjust the sight picture up or down a little more convenient.

You know you have significant hardware in your hands when you heft this rifle. As tested, this rig came fitted with a Horus Vision Falcon variable scope that ranged from 5X to 20X. To complete the rig, it has a holo sight above the scope and a bubble level to prevent canting. This rig without optics or magazine weighed about 10-1/2 pounds.

It performed well with any load fed it, digesting all four loads and printing tight groups. The combined three-shot averages for all was .618, with all five-shot groups averaging 1.002 inches. It had a slight preference for the 123-grain A-MAX Hornady handload, which averaged .432 for three shots, and .663 for five-shot groups. The tightest three-shot group measured .370 with the 123-grain Hornady A-MAX handload, as well as printing the best five shot group, an impressive .553.

The version I tested has an overall length of 42-1/2 inches. The trigger pull was a crisp single-stage 3.5 pounds.

J&T DISTRIBUTING

A sister company of Double Star, J&T Distributing has been in the AR parts business for 30 years. J & T sent a 20-inch HBAR complete upper in 6.5 Grendel for



The Sabre Defence XM15 averaged 1.9 MOA for all 5-shot groups combined at 10 yards.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sabre Defence XM15 SPR

BARREL:	Anodized, fluted, 1:7.5 twist, 18 inches
OA LENGTH:	38 3/4 (stock extended)
WEIGHT:	6 pounds, 15 ounces
SIGHTS:	M1913 Picatinny rail, YHM flip-up
ACTION:	Semi-auto, gas impingement
FINISH:	Anodized receiver, quad-rail handguard
CAPACITY:	25-shot magazine
PRICE:	\$2,699 (as tested)

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY	3-SHOT GRP.	5-SHOT GRP.
Alexander Arms 120 Nosler	2,468	1.126	1.955
Hornady 123 A-MAX (factory)	2,462	1.358	1.946
Hornady 123 A-MAX/ BL-C2	2,452	1.419	1.913
Hornady 129 SST/ BL-C2	2,428	.485	1.306

Note: Bullet weights in grains, velocity in feet per second by a Shooting Crony chronograph; Accuracy in inches for best 3-shot & 5-shot groups at 100 yards.

testing. The barrel's twist was 1:8, pretty standard for this cartridge. The barrel was fitted with a Phantom A2 flash suppressor and a free-floating steel tube handguard.

I mounted it on a Bushmaster lower receiver fitted with a skeleton stock and a two-stage Bushmaster match trigger that broke at a crisp 4 pounds.

Attached to the Bushmaster lower, this rig weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces without a magazine. Adding a Trijicon 5-20X scope and rings upped the total weight to 9-3/4 pounds.

My first range session ended when I chambered an Alexander Arms 120-grain Barnes TSX load for a sighter. On chambering, the bullet's ogive stuck, and that bullet in the bore ended my shooting with this rig that day.

The following sessions proved that the J&T barreled upper was a shooter. Averaging all four loads, it produced a combined

average of .688 for three-shot groups. The combined average for five-shot groups was 1.223 inches. Firing a total of 15 shots to produce 3-shot groups with the Alexander Arms 120-grain Noslers averaged .600 center to center. Similarly, the three-shot groups printed with the 129-grain Hornady SST handloads averaged .634. Switching to five-shot groups, I wasn't surprised that the J&T liked the 120-grain Nosler in the Alexander Arms load, too. It averaged 1.045 inches.

SABRE DEFENCE

As a U.S. government contractor supplying our military with M16 rifles, Sabre Defence knows about producing ARs. Their XM15 SPR is their sporting rifle gas-impingement version that can be had in 6.5 Grendel. The model I tested has an 18-inch chrome-moly barrel that measures 39-3/4 inches with the Magpul 5-position



SPECIFICATIONS

Alexander Arms GSR

BARREL:

Satern cut-rifled, 1:8.75 twist, 20 inches

OA LENGTH:

40 inches (stock extended)

WEIGHT:

9 pounds, 6 ounces empty

SIGHTS:

M1913 Picatinny rail

ACTION:

Semi-auto, gas impingement

FINISH:

Anodized receiver, composite handguard

CAPACITY:

25-shot magazine

PRICE:

\$3,100 (as tested)

PERFORMANCE

Note: Bullet weights in grains, velocity in feet per second by a Shooting Crony chronograph; Accuracy in inches for best 3-shot & 5-shot groups at 100 yards.

stock fully extended. Sabre opted to speed things up a tad by rifling their barrels with a 1:7.5 twist. The barrel has straight flutes to help dissipate heat. Without a magazine or optics, this model tipped the scales at 8 pounds, 13 ounces.

The Sabre XM15 SPR incorporates a mid-length gas system and free-float quadrail handguards. Its Yankee Hill Machine sights are rugged, and provide a good backup system to optics. I like the clean lines of the front sight, which folds down to the same level as the top of the quad rail. The single-stage match trigger breaks at 4 pounds with about .056 creep and a slight over-travel. This rifle is fitted with a gill muzzle brake, which helps reduce recoil. It comes equipped with a Harris bipod and adaptor.

At the range, the Sabre averaged 1.741 when averaging all three-shot group averages, and it printed an average of 1.960 for all five-shot groups with the four test loads.

SPECIFICATIONS

Alexander Arms Tactical 14.5

BARREL:

Stainless, fluted, 1:7.5 twist, 14.5", 16.25

OA LENGTH:

35 (stock extended)

WEIGHT:

6 pounds, 6 ounces

SIGHTS:

M1913 Picatinny rail, front military post

ACTION:

Semi-auto, gas impingement

FINISH:

Anodized, composite handguard

CAPACITY:

25-shot magazine

PRICE:

\$1,250 (as tested)

PERFORMANCE

Note: Bullet weights in grains, velocity in feet per second by a Shooting Crony chronograph; Accuracy in inches for best 3-shot & 5-shot groups at 100 yards.

The best three-shot average came from the 120-grain Nosler loaded Alexander Arms ammunition, which measured 1.288 inches. The best of the 5-shot group averages was produced by the handload of the 129-grain Hornady SST on top of 29.8 grains of BL-C2 powder. This handload averaged 2,428 fps. The tightest three-shot group for this rifle was a respectable .485-inch.

ALEXANDER ARMS TACTICAL 14.5

I tested two models by Alexander Arms. One target-grade model, and the other was an easy-to-carry tactical carbine.

The Tactical 14.5's barrel length is just that, 14.5 inches with a permanently fixed A2 flash hider that takes the total barrel length just beyond a non-NFA weapon

length of 16 inches. The Tactical 14.5 is mil-spec and has a chrome-lined barrel made by Sabre Defence. It is fitted with a standard raised front sight gas block. The barrel is 1:7.5 twist, has an M4-style feed ramp and 9/16-24RH muzzle threads. Naked, this carbine weighs 6 pounds, 6 ounces. The total length is 35 inches with the 5-position stock fully extended.

At the range, the stubby barrel sacrificed about 200 fps velocity when comparing the same loads in 20-inch-barreled guns.

Averaging all 3-shot groups, the Alexander Arms tactical carbine posted a 1.741-inch grouping. The 5-shot groups averaged 1.920 inches. This rifle had a preference for handload with 31.5 grains of BL-C2 pushing a 123-grain Hornady bullet, which averaged 1.289 inches for five 3-shot groups. The 5-shot group average with this load was slightly larger at 1.56 inches.

ALEXANDER ARMS GSR 20

The telling difference in the GSR series of Alexander Arms rifles for the 6.5 Grendel is their Satern cut-rifled barrels. Some major components of this rifle include its 1:8.75 twist rate barrel, a billet side-charging upper, Magpul PRS stock, and a precision single-stage tactical trigger that breaks like an icicle at 3 pounds. The total weight for this rifle is 9 pounds, 6 ounces, and the Bushnell 3200 Elite 7-21X mil dot scope added another 29 ounces.

This rifle was a treat with which to punch paper. The 3-shot group averages tallied a fine .700 inches, with the 5-shot groups averaging 1.039 inches for all loads. This rifle had a distinct preference for Hornaday's new 123-grain factory-loaded ammunition. The average for five 3-shot groups went into .516 of an inch. The 5-shot groups for this same load stayed within .762 inch.

There's no doubt that an AR is a fun gun to practice and plink with on a lazy summer afternoon. Putting a lot of shots down range helps improve our proficiency in the field. I find myself shooting my ARs a lot more than my bolt-action deer rifles, so come deer season I might just be better prepared when old mossy horns steps out. ☺

FOR MORE INFORMATION

alexanderarms.com, sabredefence.com

jtdistributing.net, jprifles.com

leupold.com, trijicon.com

bushnell.com, horusvision.com

hornady.com, FederalPremium.com

Lapua.com, hodgdon.com