

AR15 Magazines Comparison

by Scott Vandiver

During the last AR15/M4 Gunfighting course I ran there was an assortment of magazines used in the class. Many of the manufactures I was familiar with but there were a few new ones. From my experience in shooting 3 gun matches I knew reliability is a key factor in choosing a magazine. I would pick reliable magazines over extended capacity any time. I also noticed what the students were doing to their magazines to improve the grip of the magazine. By grip I mean texture of the surface and removal from a mag carrier. Floor plates or base plates are also an optional upgrade as well.

In the class we had several military surplus mags of 20 and 30 round capacity, some old and a few were rebuilt with available kits that contain a new spring and an improved follower. We also had new military style from Brownells. All the military stuff ran as it was designed. There are a few things to know about used military mags. They were designed to be used 20 times and discarded. This may be the reason so many are on the surplus market. When buying used magazines be sure to inspect the spot welds. These will break and render the magazine useless. Also inspect the feed lips for damage; if the mag is dropped on the feed lips they can bend and cause a feeding problem. The older magazines have an aluminum or black plastic follower and newer mags have either a green or orange anti tilt follower.

Polymer mags were in use by several students; there were Pmags, Thermold, Ramline, Sig Sauer and the One Source Tactical TSD mags. The Ramline mags are made of a low quality polymer and the feed lips would expand and cause feed problems, they went to the scrap bin quickly. The Thermold mags ran well for the first day but started breaking the feed lips on the second day. This turned in to double feed city for one shooter. The Sig Sauer mags have a special feature in that the can be attached to each other so the spare mag is carried at the ready similar to a magazine clamp. I like this feature but the mags were not feeding reliably.



Here are three magazines to stay away from. Right is a cheap metal magazines with bent feed lips. Center is the Ramline universal with weak feed lips and the left one is a Thermold with a broken Feed lip.

The Pmags ran fine and we had no issues with them other than the cover plate can be hard to remove and slow down a reload. The One Source tactical mags have an

aggressive stippling on the lower part of the mag and the feed lips are steel. This combination is the best I have seen. They ran flawless for the entire class. When it is hot and the humidity is up, we sweat buckets in the Georgia heat. Sweaty hands had no problems gripping the TSD 15 mags.



Here are the 2 best choices for AR magazines. Both ran flawless in the AR Gunfighting Class this summer. Right is the Pmag with the window. During the class I don't think anyone looked at the window during drills. It was only used during a break in the action.

Left is the TSD 15 mag with steel feed lips and textured housing.

I have read about and seen Pmags that have been stippled with a wood burning tool to improve the grip surface. The TSD 15 is good to go as is.

In the past I have used and witnessed guys using 90 and 100 round drums for the AR. The older version of the snail drum that hangs off one side of the carbine is cumbersome and did not run well. The dual drum beta mags I saw in a competition did not run well either. I had 2 newer versions of extra high capacity mags to run after class that prove to be reliable and fun. The first was a Pmag with a Nordic components extension. This added 18 rounds to the 30 round mag for a total of 48, the cost of the mag and extension was about \$45. The extension added 8 inches to the magazine length and made too tall to shoot prone. The mag would still fit in the standard mag carrier it just stuck out of the top too far to use the flap or cord retainer. The other was a Surefire 60 round mag. The Surefire was a little harder to load, it did operate well and ran without fail. The only drawback to the Surefire was the slick metal of the magazine body and it will not fit a standard mag carrier. It did fit a double mag carrier as long as it did not have a divider in it. The Surefire also comes in a 100 round version. The 60 rounder is definitely a good piece of gear to have, they run about \$120 with the 100 round mags about \$150. The 60 is a little longer than a standard magazine and the 100 is about 5 inches longer.



Here are 3 choices for higher capacity magazines that work. Left is a Pmag with an extension, Center is a Surefire 60 round mag and the right one is 2 military mags clamped together

I saw a lot of different magazine modifications as well. There were several different floor plates in class like the mag pull and ranger floor plates and an improvised pull made from para cord. I liked the ranger plate since it could be used in the magazine prone position, were the loop style floor plates were a bit more trouble. There were also mags with grip tape or Camo tape on them to prevent sweaty hands from slipping.



The left mag is equipped with a ranger floor plate that worked well. The 20 round mag has grip tape applied to improve the grip on the slick aluminum. I always carry at least 1, 20 round magazine in case I need to get into a lower prone position.

Next is the Mag-pull rubber loop. This works to remove the mag from a pouch but was not stable for the magazine prone position. The right mag has a para-cord loop and grip tape applied as a field expedient method to grip the magazine. This had no effect on the magazine prone position.

I started this article before the Colorado Shooting and the facts came out about his magazine jamming. The truth is that we must protect our families and if the police or a citizen is using inferior equipment they should know it before go time. Test your gear and if it fails repair or replace it.

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