

No More mouse gun

Lewis Machine & Tool steps onto the big-dog porch with a new .308 version of its Monolithic Rail Platform Rifle.

THE .223 sucks. Yeah, yeah, I know. The .223 Rem. or 5.56x45mm NATO has been our primary combat cartridge since 1964, which is close to 50 years. It's second only to the .30-'06 cartridge in U.S. military history. I know it's a fine varmint round, great on coyotes and prairie dogs out farther than I can see. And yeah, I know highly accurized ARs have even made good headway into Camp Perry service-rifle matches. But there's an inescapable fact: On the battlefield, the .308 kicks its puny little .22 ass.

Why? Very simple. It shoots through stuff.

By John Fasano
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Photos by Ichiro Nagata

Bigger is better! LMT up-sized their Monolithic Rail Platform rifle to .308.



I spoke to a trooper with numerous deployments to Iraq, and that was his statement: "It shoots through stuff." To be specific, he was singing the praises of M80 full metal jacket 147 gr. 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge for social work in the Sandbox. With 2,560 foot pounds at the muzzle, the M80 ball load has nearly twice the energy of even the heaviest 5.56mm loading of 77 grs. at a measly 1,293 ft/lbs. In fact, at 300 yards the military .308 load still has 1,275 ft/lbs. of force.

What does that mean? It means the .308 hits as hard at 300 meters as the 5.56 does at the muzzle. That's power. Power to stop the enemy. Oh, and that's one of the lighter bullet weight loadings for the .308 versus the heaviest available for the .223!

That's why Illinois-based Lewis Machine & Tool, which made their bones providing SOCOM, military units, and law enforcement agencies throughout the country with their fine M4-styled Defender 16 rifles and CQB MRP rifles in 5.56mm and 6.8 SPC, has expanded their product line to include the first user-interchangeable, barrel-monolithic rail-system rifle chambering the .308 Win. caliber—the LMT .308 MWS (Modular Weapon System).

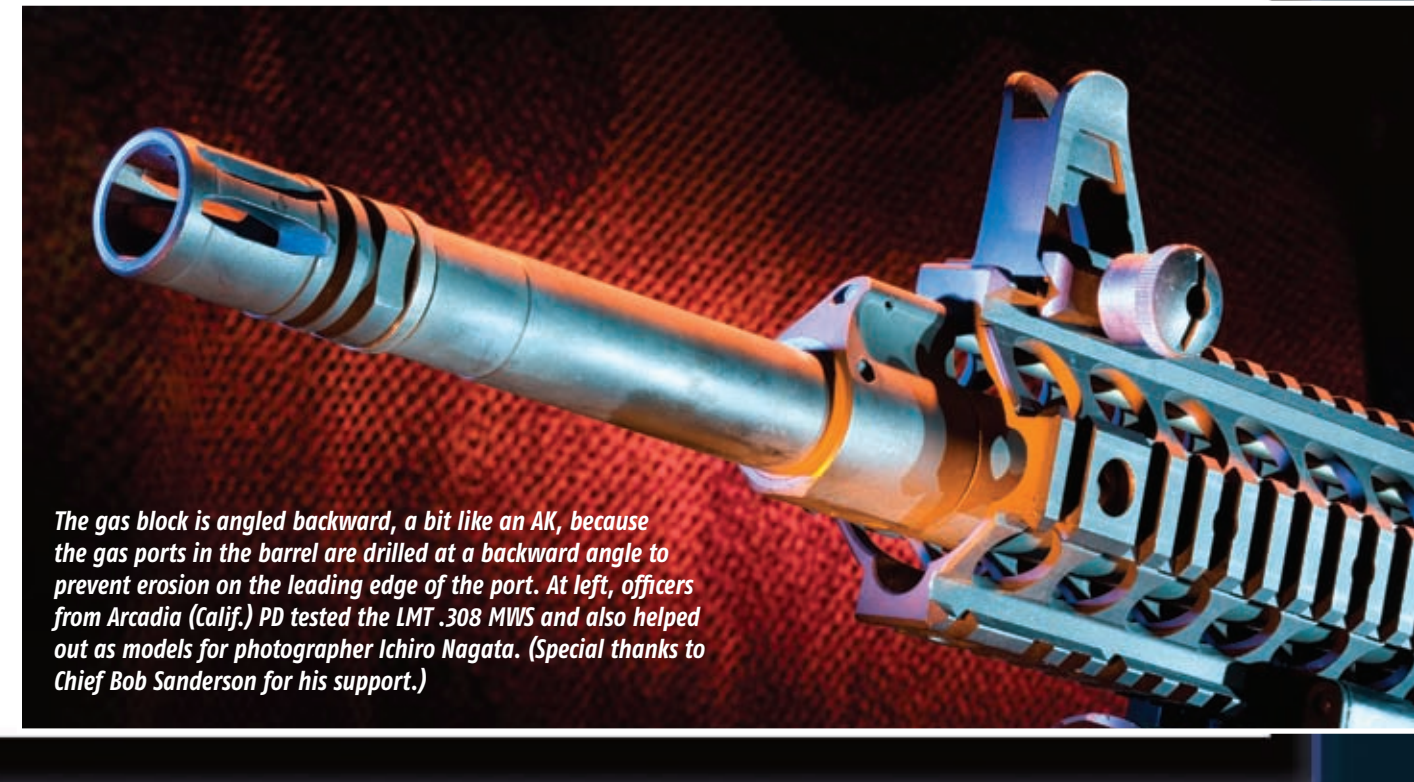
Owner Karl Lewis put the company on the map with the development of the original interchange-

able barrel LMT CQB Monolithic Rail Platform (MRP) system. In rifle or carbine lengths, the CQB MRP is notable for its lightweight upper receiver machined from a single piece of aluminum, and the new .308 MWS rifle raises the bar with 19" of rail space on the top rail and 9.25" of rail space on the two side rails and bottom.

Not Just "Bigger"

More than just a scaled-up version of the same design, the .308 MWS is the result of years of testing to create the finest .308 rifle based on the Stoner AR pattern, offering operators the benefits of the monolithic rail and true user-interchangeable barrel system in a big-bore battle rifle. Just like its .223 little brother, the new .308's one-piece upper has eliminated all play between the forend and the receiver, creating a solid, unitized base for optics and night vision systems, as well as supplying a feel that standard, separate forend M4s can't match.

While the rifle will not be available until the first quarter of 2010, I was able to procure one of the prototypes. The .308 MWS came complete with LMT's removable iron sights, the torque wrench necessary to swap barrels, and TangoDown rail covers. Attention to the desires of potential shooters was shown



The gas block is angled backward, a bit like an AK, because the gas ports in the barrel are drilled at a backward angle to prevent erosion on the leading edge of the port. At left, officers from Arcadia (Calif.) PD tested the LMT .308 MWS and also helped out as models for photographer Ichiro Nagata. (Special thanks to Chief Bob Sanderson for his support.)

in the inclusion of a Magpul adjustable stock and great little perks like an ambidextrous magazine-release button.

Like the 5.56mm MRP, the .308 model's receiver includes Mil-Std 1913 rails at 12, 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions, machined as an integral part of the upper. With rails running on each of the four sides, the MRP offers plenty of real estate for accessories, such as vertical pistol grips, bipods, optics and SureFire WeaponLights, and allows the operator to mount NVDs and power extenders on the same plane as their day optics. The 20-round magazines are true Stoners—run off of actual Stoner design original AR10 mags, not the current-day ArmaLite AR-10 mags.

While the barrels on the .308 MWS are as easily interchangeable as those on the 5.56mm guns, I was surprised that the test gun, prototype serial #000003, came equipped with a heavy 1:10 twist, 16-inch barrel. I was expecting it to arrive with an 18- or 20-plus-inch tube, but LMT was responding to the results of a survey of potential purchasers given out at the last

SHOT Show and posted on their website. They found the most requested barrel length was 16 inches.

While some think a barrel length of 16 inches doesn't take full advantage of the caliber, many tactical bolt-gun shooters have found that short, stiff barrels with less "whip" and better harmonics can be just as accurate as the longer tubes out to 200 and 300 yards. And the chrome-lined, machinegun carbon-steel barrel on the LMT, at .813" diameter, is heavier than the .775" barrels available on the same competitive 7.62mm ARs.

Test Firing

We took the prototype .308 MWS rifle to Taran Butler's private training Facility in Simi Valley, Calif., to see what it could do. Butler is a five-time Three-Gun World Champion (Tactical Class) and a world-class AR-15 shooter. After giving the MWS the once over, we cleaned and lubed the rifle with Weaponshield, what is purported to be the latest evolution in firearms lubrication. The LMT's bolt carrier group



LMT has upgraded its .308 MWS with an ambidextrous safety on the right side of the receiver and an ambi magazine release button on the left side. Note the enlarged bolt hold-open lever on the left side as well.

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and inside of the receiver were coated with Weapon-shield, and then the excess was wiped off. The lube bonds in a micro-thin layer to the metal, actually increasing lubrication as it is used.

I knew I would want to go prone with the heavy .308, so we replaced the standard rail covers with TangoDown's new SCAR-style low-profile rail panels and mounted the rugged and simple to use TangoDown ACR (Advanced Combat Bipod) on the bottom rail.

To check out the accuracy of the rifle, we removed the front and rear iron sights and mounted a U.S. Optics SN-3 3.2-17x scope in a pair of U.S. Optics' heavy-duty 30mm rings. Machined from billets of

7075-T6 aluminum alloy, the rings are Mil-Spec hard anodized black, an exact match for the finish on the substantial U.S. Optics scope.

The SN-3 T-PAL is one of the finest telescopic sights available, with blazing bright optics and a massively strong, "bullet proof" body of 6061-T6 aircraft aluminum. Once mounted, the gun and scope were as one unit. The scope's Mil-Scale GAP reticle is located on the first focal plane, so the reticle enlarges as you zoom up to the scope's maximum 17x.

The Mil-Scale GAP reticle is eight mils wide and 13 mils high, but nine of those elevation mils are below the horizontal windage line, making hold-over

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Low-light tactics require both white-light capability, supplied here with a SureFire M900 vertical grip, and a passive night vision capability, addressed here with a "small" PVS-22 UNS night vision device. The UNS (Universal Night Sight) comes in a CQB version (small), a standard version (medium) and a long range (large) size. All of them utilize the existing day optic and require no change in point-of-impact.



With a U.S. Optics day sight and a TangoDown ACB (Advanced Combat Bipod), this marksman is pretty well set for anything in an urban setting.

for long-distance shots easier. Designed for heavy-duty rifles, the T-PAL allowed me to keep three-shot groups of Federal 168 gr. match well under an inch at 100 yards. Considering that we were "field firing" a roughly used prototype off a bipod, I know that production guns will shoot even better and be able to hold sub-MOA easily, with the proper ammo.

There is certainly more recoil sensation than in 5.56mm MRPs, but all the test shooters agreed that the .308 MWS delivered less kick than some 6.8 SPC loads in light M4 carbines. Emptying a full 20-round magazine at full-dump speed rocked you back, but the straight-line Stoner design kept 147 gr. military ball from the MWS on man-sized targets out to the 400-yard extent of Taran's range, proving the MWS could serve as a long-range precision rifle as well as a close-quarters weapon.





The heart of LMT's user-replaceable barrel is this quick-change interface. Two Torx screws are all that hold the barrel, yet it headspaces precisely and is locked in place. With the larger platform .308 receiver, you could switch barrels to a 7-08 or other .308-based cartridge.



Barrel Changing

While LMT didn't supply any alternate barrels, we wanted to see if the rifle was user-friendly when it came to swapping out the tubes. We made sure the weapon was clear and then removed the bolt carrier group and charging handle from the hexagonal cross section upper receiver. Two Torx head bolts are visible ahead of the magazine well on the right side of the rifle. Using LMT's supplied T-30 Torx wrench, we removed the front bolt entirely, then loosened the bolt closest to the ejection port with the prescribed three complete 360-degree turns. Grabbing the muzzle end of the barrel, it

pulled free of the upper receiver.

It should be noted that LMT drills their gas ports into the barrel at an angle slanting back toward the receiver from the bore line, giving the gas block a distinctive AK profile. Engineers found that drilling the port straight into the barrel led to gas erosion on the rear edge of the hole, eventually letting more gas into the port than the original design. By angling the gas port and tube, the propellant gas flowing behind the bullet enters the gas block at a more natural, efficient angle.

Re-installing the barrel into the upper receiver was a snap. The barrel was slid into the forend, and the gas tube and barrel were seated fully. The front bolt was then returned to its place and tightened with the pre-set torque wrench (which, by the way, would not always retain the Torx head bit, a problem LMT is working on), and then I tightened the rear bolt. Total time for the changeover: around three minutes.

Again, like its smaller sibling, the .308 will accept other calibers that fit in the .308 magazine's OAL. A 7-08 is an obvious candidate, as is a .243.

CQB Drills

For running close-quarters urban scenarios in Taran's kill house, we topped the .308 with Leupold's Mark 4 CQ/T 1-3x14mm combat optic. The ex-military shooters manned up in their combat gear and ran the LMT through an Iraqi training village. The gun is heavy— around 12 pounds loaded and scoped— so we strapped on a Gear Sector modular two-point sling. Slung with the butt up at high ready, the LMT was nimble despite its weight, a function of the solid feel of the unified monolithic receiver.

The big .308 came up fast, and the PRS stock got raves from every shooter. Fast and bright, Leupold's illuminated "dot in a circle" helped each shooter acquire the targets quickly— and run through my ammunition even faster.

The LMT .308 MWS then travelled to the Arcadia (Calif.) Police Department for a shot at working cops. Arcadia is a cutting-edge PD with a very progressive chief who encourages his guys to stay abreast of the latest equipment and makes sure his guys always have what they need to get the job done.

Arcadia SWAT and patrol officers ran the MWS


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through its paces with an Aimpoint Comp M4 red dot combat optics and a SureFire M900 Weapon-Light installed.

The SWAT officers felt strongly that the 16-inch gun should be supplied with LMT's "Crane stock," otherwise known as the SOPMOD butt stock. While the heavy PSR stock helped to balance the rifle—and would be perfect on a longer-barreled sniper version of the weapon—for urban and close-quarter work with body armor, the collapsible SOPMOD would be the way to go. I have to concur. In a perfect world, I would have two MWS .308s, one kitted out with a 24-inch heavy barrel with a PRS stock, and a 14-inch entry gun sporting the SOPMOD. Okay, I can dream,

can't I? Come the first part of 2010, I will be happy with any MWS in my safe!

By the time our sessions with the prototype were over, the retired grunts, long-time AR owners, and working SWAT operators all agreed that, since there is no flex between the upper receiver and the forend during high-volume stress firing, the shooter feels his weapon as a natural extension of his body. Solid and stable, the .308 MWS imparts complete mission confidence to the operator.

Karl Lewis and his people at LMT really did their homework on this .308-caliber Modular Weapon System. The years they have been planning and refining it show—in every facet of the weapon. 



With its one-piece upper receiver featuring a monolithic rail, the .308 MWS is ideal for mounting extended optics like this Aimpoint Comp M4S paired with a PVS 22 night vision device. Of course, the LMT can also accept a SureFire M900 WeaponLight.

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SureFire

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Active-shooter responders (left) could well be better served with a .308 than a .223, as the .30-caliber round can penetrate hard-cover much better.

The author (above) received the first .308 MWS from LMT for Combat Tactics.