



*“...Til I
can make
it on my
own.”*

— The Beatles

JOIN **ANDREA BOGARD** ON THIS
MULTI-ISSUE
JOURNEY AS SHE
TAKES AN AR-15 BUILD
FROM IDEA TO
#PEWPEW!



Do you ever have this desire to just do something yourself? I know I do. It's apparently genetic, because both of my sons have been known to glare defiantly and say, "I do it myself" on a somewhat regular basis. Anyone else? Just me? I digress.

I had this idea several months ago while perusing the gun department at a local sporting goods store. I needed a new gun (I use that term somewhat tongue-in-cheek), and I wanted something a bit different than what already graced my gun safes. I wanted a different platform to round out my current arsenal. Do you ever feel somewhat stagnate in your creativity? That's kind of where I was that blustery winter day in the Jay's Sporting Goods gun department. We'll call it a ballistic rut, for lack of a better term.

I was eyeing the rack of AR-style firearms behind the counter and dreaming about the possibilities. I didn't currently own one. Also, there were multiple ways to go about the process. Buy it as-is or configure everything from scratch. Caliber? Color? Barrel length? Stock design? Optics? My mind raced with the options and creative directions. I may have found the path out of my ballistic rut...

If you're reading this, it's possible that you may not be familiar with what I'm talking about. Let's chat!

First, "AR" stands for ArmaLite Rifle. The "AR" abbreviation is commonly misused to represent "assault rifle" or "automatic rifle." Both references are incorrect when referring to the fundamental platform and how it got its name. ArmaLite was the company that first produced this particular style of rifle in the 1950s. The primary market focus was military but, for a variety of reasons, sales were lackluster.

In 1959, the design was sold to Colt which produced the fully-automatic M-16 for the military and the similar semi-automatic AR-15 for the non-military markets. When the exclusive license expired in the 70s, other companies picked up the AR-15 platform concept and the already successful design exploded in popularity. While other gunmakers gave the platform their own names, the AR moniker became a commonly used reference for the basic design across a variety of brands.

So, why an AR? What's the appeal? For me it's the LBD (little black dress) of guns. You've got a blank canvas to accessorize and achieve whatever look you want! Is it a strappy heels blingy necklace kind of look? Then, trick that thing out! Custom cerakote, cutting-edge optics and leveled-up aesthetics. Or, are you looking for a sandals and subtle jewelry-type of presentation? Perfect. If so, go for clean lines, simple operation and classic interface pieces.

I'm looking for something somewhere in between. I want functional, shootable, huntable, rugged and fun. I also want something with crisp optics, consistent accuracy and factory-available ammunition. As I write this, I recognize the last one might be a tough find due to the current nationwide ammo shortage.

When I set out to buy a new gun, I make what I call a Caliber Cluster. This is basically a

disorganized written pile of goals, expectations and intended uses with a healthy dose of impracticality thrown in. Imagine something along the lines of "Well, I know that round needs a 24-inch barrel to maximize performance, but I want a 20-inch barrel instead!" Insert foot stomp here.

Let's take a look! First, I wanted something I could hunt with. I already have several bolt-action platform rifles that cover a variety of different species. I have a .350 Rem Mag (*left*) for big stuff at sub-250 yards. I have a Griffin & Howe Highlander in 6.5 Creedmoor that covers nearly everything in North America and beyond from coyotes to elk-sized animals at appropriate distances (check out the profile "I Want Moor" in the last issue!). I have a 7 mm Rem Mag that overlaps the 6.5 in many areas while sacrificing the "fun factor" – it's not as fun to blitz through a box of 7 mm Rem Mag as it is my beautifully-braked 6.5 Creedmoor. I have a .458 Win Mag – no fun factor, but effective on dangerous game (think Cape buffalo). I have a bolt-action .223 that is good for lighter game, but not overly inspiring to me (picture those super boring shoes you have in the back of the closet and never wear).

I wanted something I could hunt coyotes, bobcats, prairie dogs and miscellaneous critters with. I wanted something FUN to shoot! A plinker, if you will. But, a plinker with some teeth.

I wanted a purpose-built caliber for which factory ammo was readily available. While I know how to handload, I don't have as much time or desire at this particular stage of life. I want to walk into my local sporting goods store and buy a case of ammo and drive to the range or woods.

Accuracy. This is critical! It's no fun if you can't connect. I wanted a rifle/caliber that could shoot a wide enough range of bullets to both play and hunt as well as have a barrel configuration

Part I: The Caliber Cluster

