

# “...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!

## Part II: Let's Go Shopping!

Welcome back! In our last installment we discussed what “AR” stands for, looked at purpose and function of this firearm style, decided on a caliber and said “yes” to a project totally out of my mechanically-challenged wheelhouse.

So, what's the next step? Parts, parts and more parts!!! What goes into this platform and how do we find the pieces we need? Come along as we go through the parts we'll need and then chat about how to find that “just right” combination of goodies.

The first thing we start with is a **“Lower.”** This is the foundation of

break it down.

The lower houses the trigger assembly, sits above the pistol grip and has a port/well for the magazine. It's one half of the receiver, or the guts of the gun. There are lots of options for this. You can buy a completed lower that will just snap together via a few pins to whichever upper you select. Or, you can purchase what's called a “Stripped” Lower along with a “Parts Kit.” The second option is more labor intensive and can be kind of like a ballistics Rubix Cube.

Let's talk **Uppers.** The upper is the second half of the receiver. It manages/houses the barrel and bolt. You can

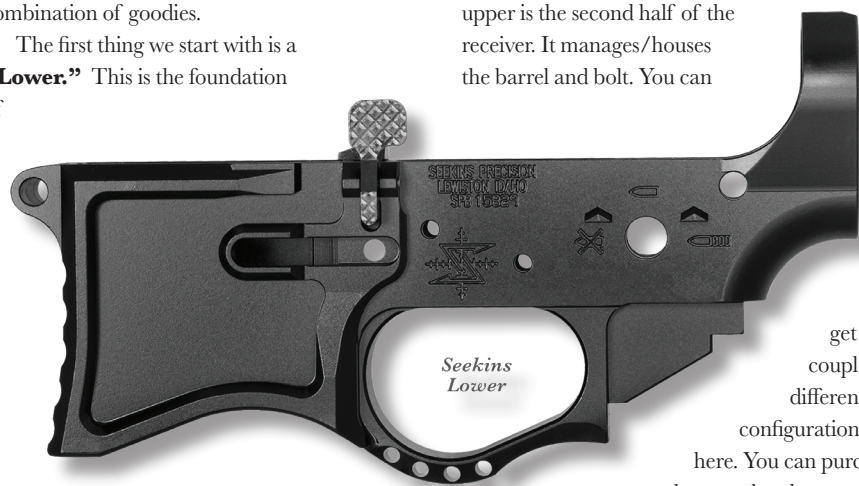
Next, we have the **Gas Block.** This is a component that can have tremendous impact on felt recoil, ammunition latitude, cycle time and overall reliability of your AR-15. A gas block is a metal fitting that goes over the barrel and gas port that regulates how much hot gas escapes the barrel. They are available in fixed or adjustable options.

A good fixed gas block will improve reliability, consistency and function. A well-made adjustable gas block will give you the ability to tune your AR like a musical instrument to achieve maximum performance.

While we're on the subject, let's talk barrels. You can get all different lengths, materials, finishes and end options. Length will vary based on caliber and purpose. Materials range from full steel to carbon wrapped options. For ends, you can get brakes, suppressors, barrel nuts or other configurations.

Our last large component is the stock. These can be highly adjustable, quickly collapsible or custom fit. Stock options are purpose built based on focus and intended use. Do you plan to do a lot of bench rest shooting? Then look at a higher comb, non-collapsible option to create greater stability. Will you be building up a deer rifle for the kids? Then something highly adjustable to accommodate a child's diminutive proportions is in order. As with most of the components above, once you define the purpose, the perfect product will present.

There are lots of smaller parts we'll discuss, as well, but these are the big ones we're going to tackle first. There's a lot of information to absorb, isn't there? I have to admit, at first it looked somewhat daunting. Literally hundreds of



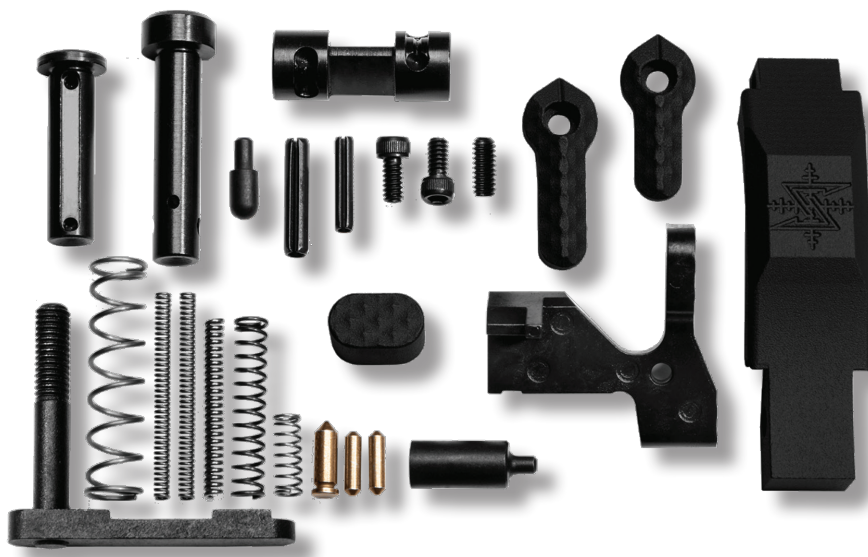
get a couple of different configurations here. You can purchase the completed upper

which has the bolt and barrel in one neat package. This method involves a pretty basic click and snap and presto! You have an AR receiver and barrel.

Another option is to purchase the upper structure, bolt and barrel as separate components so you can have ultimate control over the system. This means sourcing each one separately and fitting together.

this firearm style as well as the serialized part of the gun. If you're a rifle shooter, think bottom metal and fore-end. If that means nothing to you, no worries; we'll





options, so what do I choose? And why?

Let's look at this from another perspective. You've got a house or room to remodel. While mired in the thousands of paint samples, hundreds of flooring options and virtually unlimited design elements, the end product can seem overwhelming. So, what do you do? You pick that "one thing" that is really important to you and all other design elements flow as a result.

Building a gun is no different. So, what's that "one thing?" For me, it was the barrel. For you it might be stock design, color or trigger assembly. It's that one thing you just refuse to compromise on and design the rest of your build around.

Let's look at some brands and see what's out there!

My "one thing" is the barrel. I wanted a Proof Research brand carbon wrapped barrel in .204 Ruger. I have a Proof barrel on my Griffin & Howe Highlander in 6.5 Creedmoor and have been beyond impressed with the performance, consistency, reliability and accuracy. For example, when I shoot my current Proof barrel over a chronograph, I see single digit speed variations. This is incredible from a consistency standpoint!

Now I have my "one thing" on order. It's time to look at the other components. Let's recap, shall we?

Lower: I want to get a stripped lower with a parts kit. I want to know what pins go where and how to put everything together. I want to learn where all the little parts and pieces go and how they work. As an abysmal failure at Rubix cubes

and jigsaw puzzles, I have confidence this will be far more interesting.

Upper: If you'll recall, we can get a completed upper with a bolt assembly/upper housing and barrel or source them separately. I want to source them separately.

Here are my reasons:

I am getting the barrel directly from Proof Research.

I am selecting a bolt/carrier that has been recommended by Proof as functioning beautifully with their barrels from a specifications standpoint.

I am evaluating a side charge option for the upper/bolt carrier. This means that instead of having the T-handle at the rear of the receiver, there is a bolt handle attached to the right side (in this case since it's a right-handed rifle) of the bolt/carrier. My top choice for this component group is the JP Enterprises Side Charge kit.

Let's talk about that. I am not looking for a tactical rifle. I am looking for something I can hunt with successfully and shoot with precision. It's much easier to remain "in the gun" and effectively utilize my optics with a side charge. It will function much like a semiauto shotgun, ergonomically speaking.

Now that we have the barrel on order, let's look at the other components we need. At the moment, availability of parts is

reminiscent of the national ammo shortage. I am looking at a few different companies for the stripped lower: Seekins Precision, Alex Pro Firearms and San Tan Tactical.

All of these offer the stripped lower and corresponding parts kits. The biggest determining factors will be availability, trigger guard contour (I want a larger trigger guard because I want to safely wear gloves if needed) and where on the lower the safety mechanism is situated. Some locations are more ergonomically friendly than others. As noted before, this is the part of your gun that is serialized and registered as a firearm.

For uppers, I am looking for color and contour. I'd like to find a midnight bronze or sand/earth color to offset the black carbon barrel and matte black lower. As with lowers, availability will most likely determine which brand I end up within a certain set of parameters.

Let's talk gas blocks. I am going to go with an adjustable gas block so I have maximum control over performance and load capability. I am looking at the following brand options for adjustable gas blocks: SLR and Superlative Arms.

The last component we're going to focus on today is the trigger. If the trigger is sloppy, of poor quality or not comfortable, it doesn't matter how nice the rest of the gun is. I am going to go with a Trigger Tech 2-stage trigger. I have one in my Griffin & Howe Highlander and love how clean, crisp, adjustable and user-friendly it is.

We have the basics decided, so now it's time to start ordering. I'm so excited for those packages to start arriving! There are several things to still figure out, but we have what we need to get started.

By now, you've heard the term "purpose-built" quite a bit. This is a purpose-built gun built for a higher purpose. I want to "Make it



on my own," and I am! And, so can you! Check back in our next installment for how these things start to go together! ■

