



Pedro Ortiz, a self-taught gunsmith from Savannah, Ga. via Puerto Rico, holds the custom AR-15 that bears his name.

In assembling his own ideal AR rifle, self-taught gunsmith Pedro Ortiz adds the special touch that only a true master can bring to the table.

BY MARTY FISCHER

The Ortiz Custom AR-15

Without question the past five to six years have been both challenging and quite interesting in the personal defense and recreational shooting industries. And while they are basically a product of the same segment of the firearms industry, they can be both quite similar in many ways and strangely different at the same time. Certainly, the tactical gun segment of the market has been red hot for a number of years now, and there are obvious reasons for its popularity. Initially home defense was the main reason consumers invested in a tactical firearm before migrating over to competitive shooters and more recently into the hands of hunters, especially predator and wild hog enthusiasts.

The market has been saturated with new manufacturers with their AR platform models available in a variety of price points. Given the popularity of such guns, it was only a matter of time before tactical rifles went the path of all those designs before it, and found their way into the hands of skilled craftsmen looking to raise the AR's performance to that of a custom rifle.

It is the challenge to make a gun shoot farther and faster while significantly improving its performance—and even ergonomics—that drives some of these gun aficionados. One man who welcomes that challenge is Pedro Ortiz, one of America's finest gunsmiths. Ortiz is the owner of Ortiz Custom Guns in Savannah, Ga., and it is here that firearm performance is both demanded and expected.

Like many of the custom AR rifles on the market, the Ortiz rifle is a combination of the best parts available put together using knowledge

gleaned from experience that makes the difference. You see, Pedro Ortiz is not just a gunsmith. He has been an accomplished competitor in his home country of Puerto Rico, and despite not having any formal gunsmithing training, he is widely respected as one of America's leading experts in firearm performance.

Building for Performance

It was Ortiz's goal to assemble and produce a rifle that would deliver match-grade accuracy in a gun made for hunting. Such accuracy is important for predator hunters, who often take shots hundreds of yards in distance where bullet placement is critical to success.

The Ortiz Custom Rifle starts with a Geissele two-stage trigger, which Ortiz has further honed and set at 3.5 pounds. Ortiz has for years specialized in trigger work, starting in three decades ago when he modified Model 1911 triggers for most



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WHO IS PEDRO ORTIZ?

There aren't many gun shops that you can go into these days that don't offer at least a smattering of tactical firearms. Over the past five years or so, these military-style firearms have become the rage, as resident sportsmen gobble them up for home defense, hunting or target shooting. Recently there has been a run on rifle parts, as many shooters sought to assemble their own custom AR shooting platform. As you might expect, some gun shops and manufacturers started moving in the direction of producing custom rifles with superior overall performance as a goal.

Evolution of a Gunsmith

Pedro Ortiz of Ortiz Custom Guns in Savannah, Ga. has traveled the world in search of shooting perfection. His story began more than 40 years ago when he discovered that he had a fascination with firearms. As a 12-year-old lad, Ortiz lived in the tobacco and coffee-producing region of Puerto Rico, and it was there that he realized his passion for firearms and yearning to understand what made them tick.

"I never played any stickball or other ball sports," Ortiz said. "I lived in the country and instead of balls and bats, I got a BB gun. As much as I loved to shoot it, I found myself more interested in figuring out how to make my BB gun shoot faster, farther and with more accuracy. I was obsessed by it."

As a young man in Puerto Rico, Ortiz had a chance to work on many guns, especially Smith & Wesson Model 1911s.

"The 1911 was king in Puerto Rico in the late 80s and early 90s. There were lots of shooters in the country, and the 1911 was the handgun of choice," he said. "Initially, I started doing trigger work for competitive shooters, and the business just grew from there."

Strangely enough, Ortiz is completely a self-trained gunsmith. He has never had any formal training, but he says that his ability to close his eyes and see the gun work allows him to work on guns a bit differently from someone who does it strictly by the book.

Ortiz became an accomplished competitive shooter with many wins under his belt, but he readily admits that he got caught up with the party crowd in Puerto Rico as a young man. He enjoyed the fast-paced lifestyle, but it led to him becoming an alcoholic. There was only one way out, he surmised: a move to the states and away from everything that was a part of his lifestyle.

Once in America, Ortiz moved around a bit, doing some gunsmithing and even serving as an alcohol rehab counselor for a time. But his love of guns and how they operate drew him to Savannah, where he set up shop with Thunderbolt Guns for a number of years. Business was good, and he was recognized as one of the top gunsmiths in the region.

Perfecting the AR Platform

Over time, Ortiz realized that he wanted to be on his own and do his thing, so he founded Ortiz Custom Guns. The business features full gunsmithing services, as well as a showroom stocked with rifles, handguns and shooting accessories. Ortiz also handles firearm estate sales when they come up.

As with any entrepreneurial spirit, Pedro Ortiz is constantly searching for that little extra in a gun to make it perform better. That is why he decided to assemble his own perfect AR-platform rifle. In addition to utilizing the best individual products on the market, he adds the special touch that only a master gunsmith can bring to the table. That is what will make his AR special, and that is what will keep Ortiz Custom Guns at the forefront of shooting technology. —M.F.



The trigger assembly is the most important part of the gun according to Ortiz. He uses a Glessele two-stage trigger on his custom AR-15 rifles.

of the competitive shooters in Puerto Rico.

“Frankly the most important part of any gun is the trigger assembly,” Ortiz says. “It’s virtually impossible for a firearm to perform at its best in human hands if the trigger pull is not smooth and crisp.”

The second part of the Ortiz Custom Rifle is a Stoner AR-15 stainless barrel with the popular Wylde chamber.

Many shooters like the Wylde chamber because it has a longer throat than the .223 SAAMI spec, which allows safe usage of 5.56x45mm NATO approved ammunition.

This match grade barrel features a 1-in-8-inch twist with 5R rifling. The barrel is fluted for greater strength, less weight and accelerated cooling, and is made of 416R stainless. The barrel also features M4 Feed Ramps, a gas port

mid-length and is threaded ½”-28. The customer has the choice of an 18- or 20-inch barrel.

To assist in the cooling and handling of the gun, Ortiz selected the Troy Industries Alpha Battle 15-inch free floating rail. This modular handguard is lightweight and slim enough to feel great in the hands of most shooters. The popular rail is constructed of aircraft aluminum and finished with a mil-spec anodized coat. It can accept modular rail sections and can easily accept a number of tactical accessories.

With the popularity of the AR-platform rifle these days, you can bet that there are a number of stock options available, too. It is the stock configuration that comfortably allows the sighting eye to look through any chosen optic. Ortiz selected the Magpul PRS, which is short for Precision Rifle Sniper. This stock is similar to those used on the finest precision target rifles, but is designed to withstand the elements.

The Magpul PRS is fully adjustable for length of pull and comb height in order to ensure the best fit possible. The length of pull is adjustable from ¼-inch shorter to ¾ of an inch longer than factory dimensions. The comb height can be adjusted a full ¾

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of an inch, which allows an easy comb height fit for shooters of all shapes, sizes and genders.

One of the problems AR shooters may one day encounter is a broken or malfunctioning charging handle. Ortiz Custom Guns has addressed this concern by selecting a Vltor BCM Gunfighter Charging Handle for its custom gun. The Vltor BCM Gunfighter handle is machined from 7075 billet aluminum and finished with an anodized hard coat.

One of the features of a custom rifle is that it not only look good, it must also feel good in the hands of the shooter. To help ensure both of these physical

attributes, Ortiz added an Ergo Sure Grip Pistol Grip AR-15, which is made for left- and right-hand shooters. This grip is ergonomically designed to fit the shooter's hand more comfortably, which provides better recoil control. In many ways the grip is an extension of the trigger pull, since a comfortable grip of the gun greatly reduces mistakes when squeezing the trigger.

To complete the physical gun, Ortiz mounts a JP Enterprise Compensator, which serves to significantly reduce the felt recoil of the gun. Obviously muzzle jump can be a significant factor for second shot accuracy whether hunting predators or competing in

3-Gun, and Ortiz has recognized the need to keep the muzzle calm during operation.

To enhance the performance of the Ortiz Custom Rifle, Ortiz has also added a Harris 6-9 Bipod and a Burris Full Field II 3.5-10x50mm tactical scope to the standard model. The scope is seated in a Burris AR-P.E.P.R. one-piece quick-release scope mount. Burris P.E.P.R. stands for Proper Eye Position Ready, which means that as much as 2 inches of forward scope movement is possible for the shooter to achieve the perfect eye-relief distance.

Putting It All Together

Of course all of the "best of the best" parts are only as good as the sum of those parts once assembled, tweaked and made to be as perfect as possible. The Ortiz Custom Rifle is designed to be accurate at 350 to 400 yards, and Ortiz guarantees 1/2-inch M.O.A. or less at 100 yards using factory ammunition. According to Ortiz, the rifle will shoot a 4-inch group or less at 400 yards, again with factory ammo. Shooters are shooters, however, and as with all rifles, the proof has to be seen.

A recent trip to a gun range in late July proved to be a real test for the Ortiz Custom Rifle. It was almost 100 degrees on the range and there was a steady crosswind of more than 10 miles per hour.

Ortiz put the gun through its paces by shooting not on a bench, but from a standing position off of a BogPod with an AR rest. Using factory Winchester Match Grade ammo, the rifle performed as advertised.

The standard Ortiz Custom Rifle comes assembled as described and weighs 6 3/4 pounds without optics and approximately 8 1/2 pounds with optics. There are also numerous upgrade options available, which may be added upon request. The standard rifle retails for \$1,795. That's about the same cost as some more expensive assembly line models, but with Ortiz, the shooter gets a custom rifle that delivers unbelievably good custom performance. **GDTM**



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