



The big magazine for the big .50 BMG is part of the side feed system used with the SHTF50 conversion.

50

By Jerry L. Cannon

SLAMFEST

Getting a feel for this "odd looking" AR on a known distance range. To get the full benefit of the .50 BMG round you will need to look for a 1000 yard range.



Thousand-yard targets or 1,000-pound game, Safety Harbor's mag-fed .50 BMG conversion delivers!

» To some, the original AR rifle and its .22-caliber bullet are suitable for little more than "poodle shooting." And with an anemic 55-grain bullet, that may have once been true. But times change. Now the .223 can be loaded up with a 70-grain bullet, 6mm bullets up to 123 grains, the .308 up to 175 grains, the .458 up to 500 grains and there are calibers that will accommodate up to 750 grains. No poodle shooter here. But 750 grains on an AR rifle? Why, that is the same bullet weight thrown by heavy military weapons such as the famous Browning M2 .50 M2 heavy machine gun—and now by the AR rifle. Safety Harbor Firearms has not only made it possible, but also very convenient, to turn the AR rifle you already own into a .50 BMG (12.7x99mm) behemoth.

UPPER CONVERSION
Since 2003, Walt Keller has built a variety of specialty firearms and accessories at Safety Harbor Firearms. The one presented here is the .50 BMG SHTF50 conversion. The SHTF50 is the leader among the big bore conversions. Most noticeable in this big bore upper conversion is that it is magazine fed. The magazine that is included with the conversion is five rounds. The magazine mounts on the side of the receiver and rocks forward into the magazine well. Any .50 BMG upper conversion has to be stout and the SHTF50 is. The conversion receiver is machined from a 4130 chromemoly steel tube. The bolt head is machined from 4340 chromemoly and is a two-lug design. The body of the bolt is 4130 chromemoly tubing. The available



The easy way to cut cost while zeroing a .50 BMG is the LaserLyte Bore Tool. The green Kryptonite laser is easily visible even in bright sunlight.

scope mount is aluminum, with an M1913 “Picatinny” rail that is stepped for iron sights in the rear, and with a 20 MOA angle for the scope.

Although not widely known, the Mossberg Firearm Company is also a large manufacturer of barrels. Safety Harbor uses Mossberg barrels for their SHTF50. These barrels are 4140 chromemoly and are rifled with a 1-15 twist. A plain barrel is standard, with fluting an option. The SHTF50 is available in 18, 22 and 29 inches. The overall weight of the conversion obviously changes with the differing barrel lengths, the weights are: 12.0 pounds (18”), 12.5 pounds (22”) and 15.5 pounds (29”). The barrel is finished with an eight-port muzzle brake—a most-needed feature. Walter relishes showing off the effect of the SHTF50 and the muzzle brake by repeatedly shooting an 18-inch barrel conversion from the shoulder. Go to the Safety Harbor web site (www.safetyharborfirearms.com) and you can see Walt go at it for yourself.

A standard feature of the SHTF50 is the smooth, round aluminum hand guard. It is well ventilated to dissipate the heat from the barrel. The hand guard also has segments of Picatinny rail mounted towards the muzzle. On the top, a front iron sight can be mounted and on the bottom, a bi-pod. Safety Harbor manufactures their own heavy-duty, folding bi-pod. To open or close the bi-pod, just pull the leg away from



The “third round flinch” opened up a 3/4-inch group to a 2-3/-inch group. Mea culpa, Author.

the conversion and rotate. The bi-pod is a large square-footed design that supports the SHTF50 very well in all conditions.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

To mount the SHTF50, I grabbed an AR off the rack and went at it. There is minor work to be done at this point. First take off the standard upper and set it aside. It will not be needed. The most difficult part, if you can call it that, is to replace the standard AR hammer with the Safety Harbor heavy hammer and heavy spring. This requires drifting out the hammer pin and removing the standard hammer. The heavy

hammer is replaced and the same pin is reinserted. While at the AR lower, the standard buffer and spring are also removed. The spring’s recoil effect is not required in the bolt-action SHTF50. The hollow space in the stock tube is used by the rather large .50-caliber bolt. The SHTF50 conversion is then attached by the same two fore-and-aft pins that would secure the standard upper in place. The mil-spec trigger and safety continue to perform as before. To completely remove the bolt from the upper receiver, simply unscrew the bolt handle from the bolt body. The chosen AR had a standard A2 stock attached. This was a perfectly suitable stock for use with the large caliber.

SHOOTING AND RELOADING

With effective ranges easily reaching more than 1,000 yards, a powerful scope is required with this large-caliber rifle. A Mil-

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lett Buck Gold scope was available. With a 6x25x56mm side-focus feature, the Buck Gold was quite suitable for the task. With a standard 30mm tube and Millet rings, it was quick to mount to the SHTF50 Picatinny rail.

You have the SHTF50 upper. You have an AR lower. You have a scope and ammunition, so off to the range to get some shooting in. But getting all of this to come together for accurate shooting can get a little costly with .50 BMG costing many dollars per round. Therefore, prior to heading to the range, I acquired a LaserLyte .50 BMG Cartridge Bore Tool. This bore tool looks like a typical .50 BMG cartridge, but it has a green Kryptonite laser in the nose. The bore tool is loaded like a typical cartridge and when the bolt is closed the laser is activated. The bright green dot is very easy to see and it makes adjusting the scope quite easy. Remove the bore tool and you can begin refining your zero.

I selected the factory-loaded One Shot Ammunition that is loaded to the military

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A heavy caliber requires a heavy-duty bipod. The SHF simple design folding bi-pod quickly attaches to the lower Picatinny rail segment.



Included with SHTF50 conversion is a heavy hammer, to ensure a solid firing-pin strike and ensure primer ignition.

M33 Ball standards. The One Shot handled well. Off to the range, the LaserLyte Bore Tool quickly got me on paper. Windage was spot on. It was just a matter of elevation. In just a few rounds, I shot a 3-inch group, which would have been a 3/4-inch group,

lenges. For one, there is more powder and the results of a squib or over pressure load is spectacular. Also, the simple mechanics of sizing the 50 BMG requires a beefy approach. There is a lot of brass to move around on a bench press.

RANGE ETIQUETTE

There is very likely a time when you will take your .50 to the range, therefore, certain etiquette should be considered. To the uninitiated, a .50 BMG is rather intimidating, not just loud. Therefore, if the

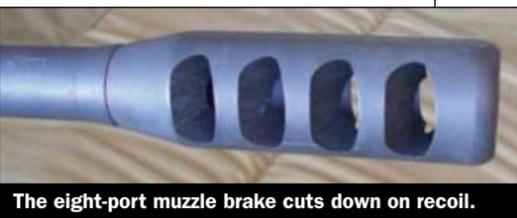
range is occupied by other shooters, it would be appropriate to introduce your .50 to the other shooters. Casually telling each shooter that you have a .50 caliber you intend to shoot is the best way. When you are in fact going to shoot, it is also appropriate to give all the other shooters a heads up that you are about to fire. Shooting the .50 from a bench can be done, but you should choose a bench far away from other shooters. The muzzle blast may overpower others. If possible or practical, shooting the .50 from the prone position lowers the muzzle blast away from others and may reduce the impact it has. In

the most extreme or generous case, you might offer other shooters a chance. Be comforted that the uninitiated will accept the first shot, but only the hardy will ask for a second helping.

Whether from the bench and especially from the prone position, eye protection is a must. I highly recommend wrap-around glasses or even sand goggles. The blast from a .50 BMG that near to your face kicks a lot of stuff into the air and potentially into your eyes.

A USEFUL CONVERSION

What is the .50 BMG upper conversion good for? Well, shooting, of course. Whether it is long-range accuracy shooting, reloading or just something new, the .50 BMG brings it. Hunting is a possibility, although on the North American continent there is not the thick-skinned dangerous game of the African continent. If you like long-range shots at game where losing some of the meat is not a major consideration, this caliber will deliver. For the overseas hunter, check first on local regulations as, in some countries, the possession of a military caliber cartridge is not permitted. Except for some state and local regulations, there is no legal restriction on purchasing and owning an upper conversion. Perhaps the best uses of the SHTF50 is for pure fun. “BOOM, BOOM, BOOM...” goes the .50-caliber fun! “BOOM, BOOM...” goes the Safety Harbor Firearm SHTF50 magazine feed upper conversion.



The eight-port muzzle brake cuts down on recoil.

were it not for my third-round flinch. No, this was not a characteristic of the .50 BMG. This was all my fault and I'll do it with a .308 just as easily. Call it excitement or anticipation. I just call it frustrating.

The 50 BMG can be reloaded. Many reloading companies manufacture reloading supplies, including Lee Precision. Lee combines a 50 BMG die set with their reloading press. Other than pulled 647-grain military bullets, the top of the line bullet for reloading is Hornandy's 750-grain A-MAX. Reloaders should understand that reloading the 50 BMG poses greater chal-

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