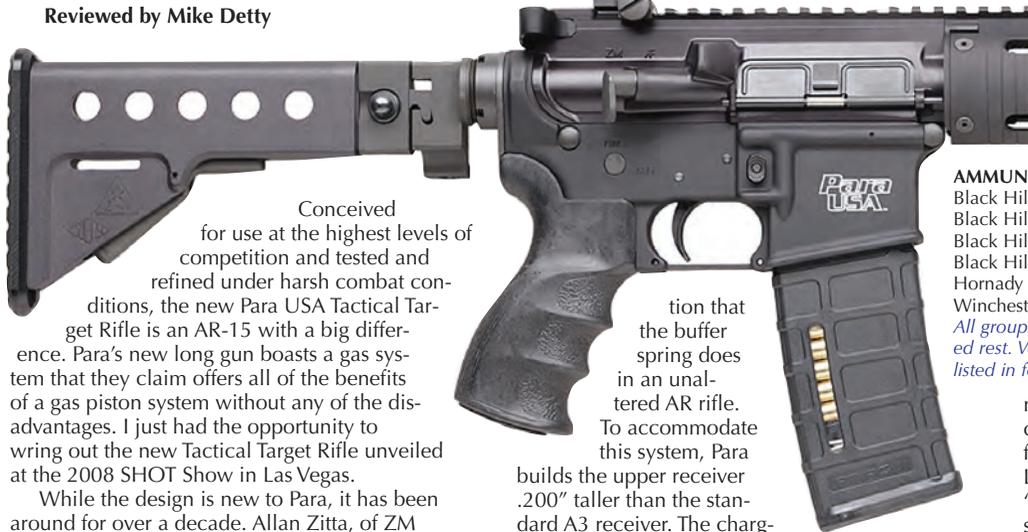


PARA USA'S TACTICAL

Reviewed by Mike Detty



Conceived for use at the highest levels of competition and tested and refined under harsh combat conditions, the new Para USA Tactical Target Rifle is an AR-15 with a big difference. Para's new long gun boasts a gas system that they claim offers all of the benefits of a gas piston system without any of the disadvantages. I just had the opportunity to wring out the new Tactical Target Rifle unveiled at the 2008 SHOT Show in Las Vegas.

While the design is new to Para, it has been around for over a decade. Allan Zitta, of ZM weaponry, licensed his Delayed Gas Impingement System (DIGS™) design to Para. IPSC, 3-Gun and Masters participants will either know Zitta or recognize his name as an active competitor. The foundation for the DIGS™ was formulated around 1994 as an answer to a timed precision-pistol event at the Master's Competition. At the time most shooters were using a Remington XP-100, a single-shot pistol chambered for .223, for this stage. Zitta modified an AR-15 by removing the buttstock and buffer tube assembly and fitted it with a short barrel. His first prototype was manually operated but subsequent versions were semi-automatic and allowed competitors to spend more time on target rather than manipulating the action. The pistol's action spring was relocated above the barrel around the operating rod. Zitta called his short-barreled AR-15 pistols Master Blasters.

The military invited Zitta to show them some of his prototypes and asked, when shown the Master Blaster, if he could outfit the pistol with a side folding stock. The LR300 was born. LR stands for Light Rifle and the 300 stands for the effective range of an 11.5" barrel with a 55-grain FMJ bullet. Zitta said, "Of course, that's not to say that it wasn't deadly at ranges beyond that. We had weapons that went over to Afghanistan in 2002 and spent time with a spec ops group. One operator came back and told of a 450 meter confirmed kill and one at 250 meters suppressed. All that and zero malfunctions!"

The heart of the DIGS™ system is the Op Rod. What we normally call the gas key, located on top of the bolt carrier, is extended for 10.5" on the Zitta design. The Op Rod extends through the upper receiver and slides over the abbreviated gas tube near the gas block. An action spring is wound around the Op Rod and performs the same func-

tion that the buffer spring does in an unaltered AR rifle.

To accommodate this system, Para builds the upper receiver .200" taller than the standard A3 receiver. The charging handle is also taller to accommodate these changes. Zitta spec'd the feedramps to be cut lower to allow for different tolerance stacks, between manufacturers, of magazines. Because the bolt carrier is shorter by 2.90," the forward assist is also moved forward to accommodate that change. A brass deflector has been built into the forward assist to keep brass out of the face of left-handed shooters.

The biggest advantage of the DIGS™ system is that there isn't any gas that enters the upper receiver. The bolt, bolt carrier, barrel extension and chamber area of the weapon stays cleaner even after tremendous amounts of shooting. Excess gas is vented through three ports on the right side of the bolt carrier and expelled through the ejection port. Because the action spring is relocated, the annoying "twang" that shooters experience with standard AR's/M-16's is eliminated. Moving the action spring above the barrel also helps to push the rifle back down on target instead of up and into the shoulder. Para claims that the Tactical Target Rifle is the fastest production tactical gun built.

Casually shooting the rifle at steel targets, I was unable to perceive any difference in my speed with the Tactical Target Rifle compared to conventional AR's. But then again, I'm a not a world-class competitor. Para's professional shooter, Todd Jarrett, had this to say about the Tactical Target Rifle, "For the past decade, one of my top-secret weapons in the competition world has been the Tactical Target Rifle. I have trusted it and used it exclusively for over 10 years. Its unique design lets me get on target faster, with accuracy and reliability unmatched in any other rifle. And it's just fun to shoot."

I should mention that Jarrett chose this rifle system long before there was any sort of licensing agreement between Zitta and Para Ord-

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