

>>>>>>>> AR-style pistol-caliber carbine — ultimate **CQB** and **DYNAMIC ENTRY TOOL!**

ASA 9mm M4 CARBINE

By Todd Burgreen • Photos by Steve Woods

IT is prudent to diversify any collection of long arms, whether for a law enforcement department or civilian. Most armories include chamberings such as 7.62x51mm (.308) or 5.56x45mm (.223) for rifles, but an alternate caliber worthy of consideration is the ubiquitous 9mm pistol cartridge. Many departments will appreciate the logistics of a 9mm carbine — not to mention

the ability to train with a 9mm carbine on indoor ranges where rifle calibers are often taboo.

Owner Joe Sirochman has rejuvenated American Spirit Arms (ASA) by imbuing an enthusiasm for customer service while stressing quality. Another of Joe's companies, JPS Manufacturing, had been making lowers, uppers, and barrels for previous ASA incarnations before closing up shop. One thing led to another and Joe decided to make the plunge into the firearm business, looking to retain the name recognition offered by ASA and working out a deal to buy out existing inventory and rights to the ASA name.

Combining the proven handling characteristics of the AR-pattern carbine with a controllable pistol-caliber chambering, the ASA 9mm provides an excellent patrol carbine option for law enforcement officers.

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A 4-position collapsible stock with a slimmer and more petite configuration is featured in the ASA as compared to the M4-style 6-position stocks seen today.



The ASA 9mm features a slim and lightweight barrel profile to help provide lively handling characteristics. Note the A1-style flash suppressor at the muzzle.



The 9mm carbine sports a flattop, A3-style upper receiver assembly for easy mounting of optics, although a fixed carry handle variant is also offered.



Note the lack of a forward assist assembly as well as the unique abbreviated ejection port/dust-cover door forward of the large shell deflector.



With its 9mm chambering, the ASA carbine is ideally suited for use with non-magnifying red dot-style optics such as this EOTech HWS unit.



Although the 16" barrel length would complicate its use, the ASA 9mm features a bayonet lug on the bottom portion of its fixed front sight base.

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ASA is a true manufacturer and not just an assembler of rifles, receiving ISO9001/AS9100 certification for quality. ASA's introductions before the 9mm AR have been well received, especially the innovative side-charging AR variant that was on the ASA drawing boards before Joe took over, but was finalized and put into production by his team.

GUN DETAILS

For many departments, the first urge toward a 9mm carbine is a short-barreled rifle (SBR) *a la* the Heckler & Koch MP5. However, many departments will not want to undergo the paperwork for a SBR—yes, even law enforcement departments have requirements for BATFE compliance even though it is not as stringent as civilian. Fortunately, the 16-inch barreled ASA 9mm still retains the handling characteristics of its short-barreled military predecessor.

The ASA 9mm is 36 inches in overall length and weighs slightly over 7 pounds. The collapsible buttstock offers a modicum of compactness, but more importantly ensures a user the proper length of pull no matter gear or equipment being worn. The ASA 9mm benefits from proven M16/AR-15 ergonomics, operating controls, ease of

accessorizing, sights, and other modifications that have evolved over the years since the original Colt 635 9mm submachine gun was introduced; not to mention broad familiarity with the M16/AR-15 platform in the shooting culture. The ASA 9mm carbine operates with modified Uzi magazines.

Some will question the utility of employing a pistol cartridge in a shoulder-fired weapon. Most engagements happen well within a 100-yard range in law enforcement or civilian settings, therefore handling and reliability playing more of a factor in quick, reactive engagements rather than specific caliber used. Also, less experienced shooters will find the lower recoil impulse and muzzle blast of a pistol caliber easier to manage, which often times will translate into better accuracy.

Differences between 9mm AR and 5.56mm AR is that the 9mm AR works via blowback operation, while the rifle-chambered AR works via gas impingement. The bolt carrier on the 9mm AR needs to be much heavier due to this operating method. It is one piece as compared to the 5.56mm rotating bolt head. The bolt still recoils into the buffer tube located in the stock; thus side-folding stocks are not an option with the 9mm ARs. The 9mm bolt face is integral to the bolt and the bolt itself is totally different in configuration due to making room for an ejector that protrudes up from the magazine block sliding along its length. Lastly, there are no rotating/locking lugs on the 9mm bolt face.

Even though chambered in the 9mm pistol cartridge, the ASA 9mm is a more

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SPECIFICATIONS

AMERICAN SPIRIT ARMS AR-15 M4

Caliber: 9mm • **Barrel:** 16 inches • **OA Length:** 36.1 inches • **Weight:** 7.61 pounds (empty)

Stocks: 4-position • **Sights:** Fixed front iron base, adjustable open rear

Action: Semi-auto, blowback operation • **Finish:** Nitron on upper, hard coat anodized aluminum lower

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Photo courtesy Todd Burgreen

For a range test, the author equipped the ASA with a Trijicon RX30 Reflex red dot backed up by an LMT detachable rear sight. The 9mm proved adept at dropping steel plates at CQB range, and the modified Uzi mag (below) performed without a hitch.

potent package than any handgun. Some of the advantages derived from the ASA 9mm, or any other pistol caliber carbine for that matter, is that it is far more accurate compared to any handgun. This is based on multiple points of contact when interfaced



with the shooter. This consists of shoulder, cheek, and hands spread further apart for more stability compared to when handling a handgun. The muzzle blast differential between a 9mm carbine versus obnoxious rifle muzzle signature is further accentuated in confined spaces—such as inside a home during a raid or if serving in a personal-defense role.

The advantage of having both a carbine and handgun chambered in the same caliber should not be casually dismissed either. Many more 9mm rounds can be carried in less space compared to rifle rounds. Two of the slim modified Uzi magazines fit into the same space as one M16/AR-15 magazine. The pistol caliber carbine is lighter than its 16-inch rifle brethren. There is an economic incentive in terms of the amount of 9mm rounds that can be purchased versus a rifle cartridge. This can be taken

advantage of with more training by any department; not to mention the ability to access indoor ranges. Training regimen is further enhanced by 9mm carbine ability to be used with steel plate targets without having to resort to specialty frangible rifle loads.

The ASA 9mm carbine tested featured a standard forend with A2 fixed front post and A4 flattop upper receiver. An A1-style flash hider is threaded on the chrome-moly 16-inch barrel with a 1-in-10-inch twist to stabilize the wide variety of 9mm bullet weights. The flattop receiver allows for easy mounting of optics, detachable carry handle or other form of iron rear sight. I mounted a LMT detachable rear sight in lieu of a carry handle. This retains the capability to mount an optic on the upper receiver's rail if a user wishes to co-witness optic and iron sights. The effective range of the 9mm carbine makes magnified optics pointless and mounting it would take away from the intended role as a lightweight carbine. Indeed, many would contend that open sights are fine in their own right with nothing more required. However, a Trijicon RX30 Reflex red dot was mounted. The RX30 Reflex

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PERFORMANCE

AMERICAN SPIRIT ARMS AR-15 M4 9MM

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
Black Hills 124 JHP +P	1,290	2.00
Hornady 124 TAP	1,150	2.75
CCI Brass 115 FMJ	1,045	3.50

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by Shooting Chrony chronograph, and accuracy in inches for three 5-shot groups from 50 yards with open sights.



Todd Burgreen photo

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sight with ARMS (RX30-23) levers allows for quick mounting/dismounting, while still retaining zero. The beauty of the Trijicon Reflex is that it does not require batteries to generate the aiming dot. The RX30 Reflex features dual illumination of fluorescent fiber optics and tritium lamp. It weighs less than 13 ounces, is designed for hard use by troops in the field and is made from aluminum with hardcoat anodizing. The Trijicon Reflex's 6.5-MOA dot aided in acquiring a fast aiming point at CQB ranges. The 6.5-MOA dot in the Trijicon Reflex proved more than capable of allowing me to reliably hammer steel man targets out to 150 yards.

As with most semi-autos, magazines are a crucial linchpin in reliability; this is especially so for the 9mm ARs. One modified 25-round Uzi magazine is supplied with the ASA 9mm AR. I had several already on hand, including C-Products 32-round magazines to augment the testing. Interestingly, the C-Products magazines did not fit into the ASA magazine well due to the small metal rib on the back of the magazine. No problems were encountered with the Uzi-modified magazines.

RANGE TIME

A wide range of 9mm loads was tested consisting of multiple bullet profiles, including 115-grain and 124-grain JHP, TMJ, and FMJ loads from Black Hills, CCI, Federal, Hornady, and Wolf. BlackHawk magazine pouches, bandolier and thigh-mounted sub-load SMG styles, were used to facilitate keeping magazines handy during range testing and magazine change drills.

The ASA 9mm shoulders well and is an easy transition for any shooter used to the rifle-caliber AR versions. Once the ASA 9mm proved reliable, it was then put through its paces on different rifle courses.

My visits to the range supported all my expectations regarding handling and reliability of the ASA 9mm AR. Several hundred rounds were fired downrange. The only loads that exhibited any issues involved cartridge cases not made from brass. The blowback operating method may be the cause (*Please turn to page 101*)

My visits to **THE RANGE** supported all my expectations regarding **HANDLING** and reliability of the **ASA 9mm AR**.

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for this with it being more susceptible to malfunctions if its operational timing is affected during the extraction/ejection process. The only issue discovered on the ASA 9mm was the spring on the ejection port cover became inoperable. This did not impact functionality as the cover remained open.

FINAL NOTES

The ASA 9mm proved very capable at handling a CQB-style course where most targets were 10 yards away with the stop targets placed further downrange. Transition between the multiple targets was effortless and the 9mm offered little in terms of recoil. As expected, the muzzle signature was minimal with the firing a 9mm from 16-inch barrel, because 9mm ammunition is loaded with a fast-burning powder for efficiency sake reflecting typical handgun barrel lengths. This same reasoning is at work nullifying any substantial velocity gain with the ASA's 16-inch barrel. Magazine changes, shooting from behind cover, transitions between shoulders and firing from unconventional positions put the ASA 9mm thru its paces. Strings of fire ranged from 15 rounds to 80 rounds with multiple targets placed at distances measured in feet out to over 100 yards. The recoil impulse of the 9mm AR is often commented on as being stouter than expected. This may be derived from the blowback operation method sending the heavy bolt vigorously to the rear. The ASA 9mm AR was pleasant to shoot and capable of fast follow up shots with minimal sight displacement.

A pistol-caliber carbine can never be compared across the board to a weapon firing a rifle round due to effective range and lethality of the pistol round. However, a 9mm carbine typified by the ASA 9mm is not a weapon to be ignored for use as a handy patrol carbine for law enforcement. Beyond a doubt the American Spirit Arms 9mm AR is much more potent than any handgun and should not be underestimated for what it offers in terms of effectiveness.

For more information:

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ARMS 800-428-9394 mountplus.com	LMT 309-787-7151 lewismachine.net
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