

MACHINE GUN ARMORY MK46 SAW 5.56MM



**ENHANCED
MIL-SPEC LIGHT
MACHINE GUN
FOR FIREFIGHT
SUPERIORITY!**

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PHOTOS BY JOHN HAFNER



This MK46 Para version features a lightweight sliding aluminum buttstock, integral battlegrip, custom Cerakote finish, and a 200-round belt. Show here with a Trijicon ACOG and RMR.

My spare time over the years has often been occupied with the restoration of old cars, and on occasion, old firearms. Locating parts for either can be a nightmare. Sometimes you can adapt another existing part, but at times you simply have to make it or have it made. Unless you have a machine shop at your disposal, it can be problematic. There are places that specialize in these rebuild issues that can be very helpful.

The U.S. Machine Gun Armory (MGA) is one of those firms that specializes in making parts that can no longer be found, in their case primarily for

military equipment. They are comprised of engineers, machinists and a few scientists that design and manufacture parts for in-service weaponry or other equipment that is no longer supported by the manufacturer. They also build parts that are stronger and/or improved over the original design by utilizing more modern manufacturing and design.

Military aircraft is a field where this is prevalent. The actual service life on many military aircraft extends many years, sometimes beyond the existence of its original manufacturer. Another area where this can be an issue is small arms. As companies create their "new and improved" version, they often drop

support for long-existing weapons that are still in service, many times after these weapons have been selected by police departments. In many cases, an agency will simply not want to make a change given that system has been working for so many years. As much as the market loves to change things out every year, police departments may just not be able to. So, they have to keep things running. One of those weapons is the M249 SAW and its variants.

M249 SAW

The M249 is the dedicated SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) fielded by many U.S. troops. It is a dedicated

machine gun firing from an open bolt, meaning there is no select-fire option. Once prepped for fire, it has a crossbolt safety that can be activated, but it is a full-auto-only gun. Its standard configuration can be fielded by a soldier or mounted on various vehicles. It has a fixed stock and longer barrel. Although chambered in 5.56mm, in its standard configuration it still weighs 22 pounds when loaded up with a 200-round drum. It also has the capability of accepting standard M16 magazines. It was officially adopted for use in the U.S. military in 1982.

There have been several adaptations to this system by various special opera-

tions units. The Para version added a sliding aluminum buttstock and shorter barrel, cutting a good 4 pounds off and making it a bit easier to "jump" with. The SPW (Special Purpose Weapon) was developed by USSOCOM and removed the carrying handle, magazine well (for M16 magazines) and vehicle-mounting lug. It added a full SOPMOD-compatible forend for lights and lasers and a detachable bipod.

The MK46 Mod 0 retained the standard fixed stock but changed the forend a bit and also added a thicker, fluted barrel system. These variants allowed special operations soldiers to use them for more specialized tactical operations.

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They also started to see some use in a few of the larger police departments. As a dealer in Utah about 10 years ago, we had an agency that ordered an MK46 for use in the upcoming Olympics, as well as for anti-terror operations. With the significant threat posed these days by terrorists and drug cartels, that interest is bound to increase.

Gun Details

Over time and continual use, many of the M249s have been worn out a bit, making them less reliable than necessary. One of the biggest complaints is warping of the receiver rails and this was almost uniform among those early weapons seeing the hardest use. This is one of the improvements MGA specializes in making for the M249 weapons they build. Although the welding was changed on many of the new issue weapons, MGA uses modern techniques to build an improved receiver that is stronger. This not only allows for a longer service life but also contributes to a tighter mechanism providing for greater accuracy. They also improved on the trunnion design. This is where the interchangeable barrel mates to the receiver. Given the way M249s are used, quick-barrel changes are a must and they can loosen from the receiver over time. The MGA design makes for a tighter fit and greater accuracy. MGA also builds their own trigger groups and many of the internal parts.

They have also added the capability to use different calibers. Much of the military is clamoring for an intermediate cartridge or short .30 caliber for use in this of type weapon. That includes calibers like the 7.62x39mm as well as the 300 AAC Blackout and other .223-based cartridges. MGA is working on several of these calibers, too, including Wilson Combat's new 7.62x40 WT.



Paired with a Trijicon ACOG, the MK46 SAW can send a high volume of accurate firepower downrange in a hurry. MGA's rendition is stronger and designed for greater accuracy.



MGA's lighter and more portable MK46 configuration feeds from a reliable 200-round box mag, which provides a significant advantage on the battlefield or emergency SWAT situation.



Although originally designed to be used primarily from a prone position, the MK46 and its other configurations can be shoulder-fired with ease. For a light machine gun, recoil is noticeably lighter and the weapon is easy to keep on target with help from a vertical foregrip.

Although this review focuses on the mil-spec MK46, they also make a closed-bolt select-fire version that may be the ticket for police agencies. Utilizing an HK G3-type trigger pack, it provides for closed-bolt operation along with safe, semi-auto, and full-auto selections. It can even fire burst groups for agencies that may require that. The closed bolt may provide heat issues for military operators but makes for a more accurate weapon and may be perfectly suited to police operations where sustained rates of full-auto fire are probably not applicable.

Range Time

I arranged to meet with one of the MGA's design engineers at the range. He brought several weapons with him, including a mil-spec open-bolt MK46 and a couple of closed-bolt select-fire weapons. Since this test focused on a tactical operation, testing was done in full kit from various positions as well as prone.

Given my lack of significant experience with a belt-fed machine gun, I spent some time getting familiar with the overall system, its operation, and the improvements MGA has made. Having fired a few over the years, I was no neophyte, but certainly no expert. Although some agencies will easily have a need for such a weapon, especially when fighting terrorists or drug cartels, it is not something most urban SWAT cops get to spend much time with.

Having a few friends that have fielded these in war, they seem to either swear by them or at them at any particular time. Looking at M249 SAWs in detail, they are kind of little machines with lots of "stuff" going on. It seems pretty clear that when they work, they probably work well, but

it is a bit frustrating when they don't. I certainly gained a whole new appreciation for a machine gun operator or weapons specialist, especially one on a Special Forces "A" team.

Given that this is a belt-fed machine-gun with no select-fire switch, accuracy testing was a bit different than most of my evaluations. Having significant experience with select-fire weapons and trigger control, "singles" were just about impossible, making the typical "group shooting" pure fantasy. Doubles, on the other hand, were pretty easy and triples were even easier. These were new guns loaded up with M855 green tip ammunition, so some time was spent breaking them and my trigger finger in. After a few trigger presses, several doubles and triples were sent downrange.

As a large man, recoil is not generally an issue for me, so controlling this weapon was surprisingly easy. Once placed firmly in the pocket, it pretty much stayed there. There really was no muzzle rise to speak of and the Elcan SpecterDR made aiming easy. Providing controlled and well-aimed fire, especially at what would be a police distance, proved very easy. Checking the target after the first few bursts, most of the shots were clustered around center mass within about a 5-inch circle.

The weight and balance of this weapon surprised me. Most of my time is spent wielding a 14-pound (fully loaded) FNH SPR A5 in various positions, so heavier guns are not new to me. That being said, it was surprisingly easy to move from prone to kneeling to standing positions. Holding it up off-hand, propped against a wall, there was no issue staying on target. The 200-round drum made for

SPECIFICATIONS MGA MIL-SPEC MK46

CALIBER:	5.56mm NATO
BARREL:	16.3 inches (with flash suppressor)
OA LENGTH:	30.75 inches
WEIGHT:	16.5 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Collapsible synthetic
SIGHTS:	Standard open
ACTION:	Open bolt, full-auto
FINISH:	Cerakote
CAPACITY:	200 (belt-fed)
MSRP:	\$8,866



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a nice rest on surfaces not suitable for the bipod. The stock made operation in full kit, including rifle plates, pretty comfortable. It is easy to see how someone using this system in the real world can become very attached to it. It brings some pretty significant firepower to bear that can be accurately applied in just about any urban operation. It is also a blast to shoot and the only issue that would come up for me is running out of ammunition too soon.

Since a couple of the select-fire

weapons were brought along, a few rounds were sent downrange with those as well. As a long-time HK user and master submachine gun instructor, their operation was pretty easy to pick up. The HK53 was one of my favorite weapons, so the feel of the trigger was familiar. After a few presses, it was pretty easy to get singles, doubles and triples with the selector on full-auto. With the steady application of trigger pressure on semi-auto, I produced a nice little 2-inch group. This isn't bad

with a 14.5-inch barrel that had just seen a ton of ammunition downrange on full-auto.

Final Thoughts

Within the tactical community, there is still a great deal of controversy surrounding the need for a belt-fed "machine gun" on a SWAT team. Most of it is populated with mythology, politics and just plain ignorance. Although this is greater at the administrative levels, it exists at the tactical command level as well. Those that will actually fight know better. There are simply times when this is a necessity.

After spending a good day with these weapons, there is no reason why they cannot be applied given proper training and policy. The accuracy of the MGA open-bolt gun was excellent, and doubles and triples were easy, controllable, and stayed on target. It was 100 percent reliable throughout all my testing. Given the select-fire option, it gets even better. Either way, if you are an agency that may see the real fight against military armed criminals, take a close look at the MGA M249/MK46 systems—they may just be required to win against the inevitable. Find out more by calling 801-833-4869 or visiting machinegunarmory.com

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MGA's select-fire MK46 rendition brings more capability to a SWAT team called out to take down terrorists. They also produce several SAW configurations with different chamberings, like 300 AAC Blackout and 7.62x40 WT.