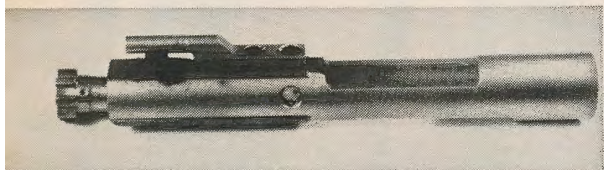


Above: Photo at left shows how the point of a cartridge is used to begin takedown; photo above shows magazine catch. At right is the test gun with the special base and Weaver rings installed, holding a Marble 4X scope. Total weight of the gun, 8 lbs.

Left: Indicator shows bolt release lever. Remington supplied the ammunition for the tests.

Below: Bolt of AR-15. Right: Steindler bench tests Colt's Sako actioned rifle.



## FIRST SHOOTING TESTS OF COLT'S TWO NEW SPORTING RIFLES—IN .223 CALIBER

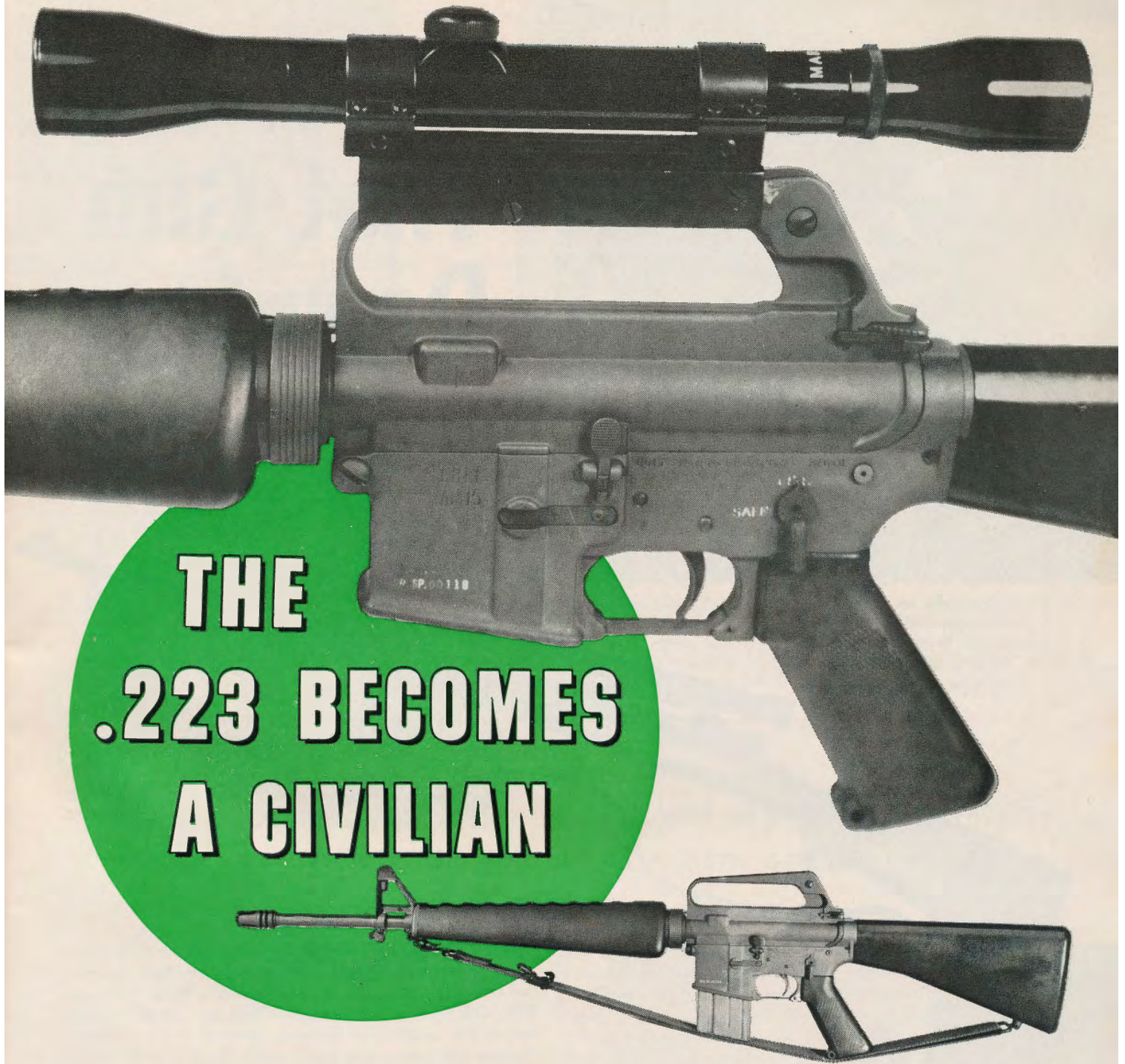
By R. A. STEINDLER

**D**URING THE LAST week of October of last year, I visited the Colt plant to get the low-down on the AR-15, then recently renamed by the military and hence designated as the M 16. Because of security reasons, the Pentagon did not permit clearance of some of the ballistics information that had filtered out from the Viet Nam battle areas where the AR-15 had acquired a considerable reputation. Certain facts were later officially released, were incorporated in my article "The Truth About the M 14" (GUNS, March 1964). At the time of my visit, Colt officials hinted that, sooner or later, they would have the .223 cartridge (also known in military circles as the 5.56 mm cartridge) in a sporter model. In January of this year

Tom Turner, of Colt's public relations department, called me to sound me out about a new gun Colt's had in the hopper—a civilian version of the AR-15 that would fire semi-auto.

When I expressed interest, Tom put my name down for a test rifle, and after some pleading, I was given assurance that their absolute latest—a Sako Deluxe rifle also chambered for the .223, would arrive at the same time. It did, and I had a ball with the guns. Ted McCawley of Remington came through handsomely with plenty of test ammo, and after function firing the AR-15, I took the gun to our staff gunsmith Paul Haberly. "Paul," I told him, "mount a scope on this AR-15 Sporter." Because of the carrying handle that





# THE .223 BECOMES A CIVILIAN

also acts as protection for the military peep sight that is being retained on the Sporter, several prototype mounts were made, and Paul finally milled a mount that would accommodate a Weaver base, yet allow continued use of the peep sight.

The Sako sporter is along the standard Sako lines—with but one exception. Scope mounting is not accomplished with the usual grooved mount, but the action is drilled and tapped. The Weaver #68 mounts fit fore and aft, and using a 4X Browning scope in Weaver mounts completed this rig. The box magazine of the Coltsman holds three cartridges, and with one in the chamber, the gun becomes a four shot rifle. Finish and bluing is of the highest quality, and rather

surprising was the heavy recoil pad since recoil of the .223 is minimal. The trigger pull, which is adjustable, was checked repeatedly; the trigger broke cleanly at 2.5 lbs. without creep or backlash; hooded front ramp sight and the folding leaf rear sight, graduated for 100. and 200 yard are standard. Scoped but without ammo, the Coltsman weighed 7.5 lbs., and the gun comes with sling swivels, but without sling. The safety indicator and the safety performed satisfactorily, and I had a ball shooting the Coltsman. Repeated 100 yard groups were fired with the Remington factory ammo, and six out of seven groups averaged 0.875 inches, center to center, five shot groups. For a factory gun, (Continued on page 64)



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**THE .223!**

(Continued from page 21)

this is exceptionally good accuracy, and the gun held its zero, even when the barrel was heated by rapid firing during a heatwave when the temperatures reached the low 90's.

The AR-15 Sporter, the model is designated as SP 1, was an interesting study in engineering. The military AR-15 fires full



and semi-auto. Converting a semi-automatic rifle of this kind into full auto would, for a great many skilled gun tinkerers, be child's play. In order to forestall objections by the ATU, Colt engineers revamped the firing mechanism to such an extent that conversion of the AR-15 Sporter into full automatic is completely out of the question. So much metal was removed that basement conversion to full auto is impossible, and making a completely new action would be the only way to convert the gun into a fully automatic rifle. The ATU men, according to Del Shorb, were "gratified with the work our engineers had done to forestall tampering with the gun."

The Sporter resembles the military rifle in all details, except for the full automatic firing feature and the fact that the web carrying sling on the civilian model is black, while the GI version of the sling is the standard OD color. Trigger pull, although measured at 7.5 lbs., does not appear to be that heavy. The minimum allowed trigger pull of the rifle is 5 lbs., the maximum is 9 lbs. In the AR-15 Sporter, the 55 grain Remington bullet churns up slightly better than 3100 fps., muzzle energy is over 1200 ft./lbs., but chamber pressure is under 52,000 psi. The scope mount with the Weaver mount, rings and the 4X Marble scope, did not make the gun top heavy, and although I tried to locate a shorter scope, preferably one of the military sniper variety, time was against me and I had to settle for a standard scope. Without ammo but scoped, the AR-15 Sporter weighed an even 8 lbs.; the magazine is blocked for five cartridges. It is possible to increase capacity of the magazine to 20 rounds for target shooting, and the job is accomplished easily and without tools. Take-down of the gun, with the exception of the front hinge screw, can be accomplished with one loaded cartridge to push out the various pins, but a punch is suggested because of the bullet's soft nose. Stripping instructions come with the gun, as do the complete instructions on how to adjust the peep sight.

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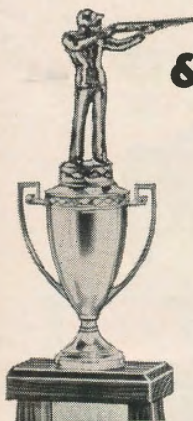


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A great many sporter rifles, in all kinds of actions, hardly group better than 2-3 inches at 100 yards, unless they have been tuned and the bedding of the barrel has been doctored up. There is nothing that you can do with the AR-15 Sporter—you can't glass-bed or free float, and this is strictly a shooting gun—and brother, does she shoot! At 100 yards, and firing as rapidly as the sight picture could be regained through the military peep sight, I fired a number of five shot strings. Center to center, the gun consistently grouped 3.5 inches, and with the scope, groups shrank to 2.5 inches.

Ballistically, the .223 cartridge is identical to the .222 Remington Magnum. There is little doubt that the availability of .223 ammo will create a demand for rechambering to this caliber, and the job should not be difficult, should prove successful if the conversion is from .222 or .222 Remington Magnum and if the original barrel has a 1 in 12 twist. Twists other than this will not stabilize the bullet adequately—an experience that Colt's had before settling on the 1 in 12 twist.

Colt is now planning to introduce a scope complete with base, but it will be some time before this becomes commercially available. A Colt spokesman told me that he already had reports from the field about the effectiveness of the AR-15 Sporter in the field, and small game, varmints, and even deer have fallen to the .223 cartridge. Had I anticipated that Colt's was interested in further field tests on game, I would have taken their Coltsman along to British Columbia—who knows, it might have collected a Boone & Crockett trophy!

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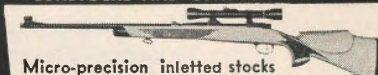


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