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## AR-15 Serial Numbers Pre- And Post-Ban ... Or, how to work on and buy AR rifles without getting yourself in trouble

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What with the Crime Bill (now the Crime Law) behind us, gunsmiths and retailers who deal in used firearms will be seeing AR's and their clones in a variety of configurations. The problem is, not all of these rifles will be legal under the very specific requirements of the current law. According to the law, a rifle is an "assault weapon" if it has a detachable magazine, and two or more of the following:

- 1. A folding or telescoping stock.
- 2. A pistol grip that protrudes conspicuously beneath the action.
- 3. A bayonet mount.
- 4. A flash suppressor or threaded barrel designed to accommodate a flash suppressor.
- 5. A grenade launcher.

This means that you can have a detachable magazine and one other of the features. Also, according to the law, you can't assemble such a rifle from parts on hand and a spare lower receiver, which I'll explain in greater detail, later. But, you can still own, sell, trade and repair the existing ones.

Can you still make them as rifles used in competition? Sure. For High Power competition, rifles without flash-hiders and bayonet lugs have been approved. For U.S.P.S.A. three gun competition, you can attach a compensator provided it isn't a flash-hider. For most compensators this isn't a problem, because they actually enhance the flash. But, some compensators (the Muzzle-Miser comes to mind) have flash-hiders incorporated into their design. You can't attach such a design to a Post-ban rifle, even if you don't use threads. A slip-on flash suppressor pinned in place would not be allowed.



Can you use a threaded barrel and silver-solder or weld the compensator to it? Theoretically, yes. But, I wouldn't. Underneath that compensator are threads, and the law specifically says no threads. A few minutes with a torch and off spins the compensator. Welded? That would be better, but I personally wouldn't. Epoxy? Get out of here. A few minutes with a propane torch and you're in a heap o' trouble.

Press it on, solder it, cross-pin it, use set screws, but, just to be safe, don't thread it on. Then again, a compensator isn't allowed for NRA High Power Competition, but that's a match rule, not the law.

The same rules apply when silver-soldering on a cap to cover the threads, with some idea of uncovering them if some

future event takes place and the law is changed. The thing to do, if you really want to do a Pre-ban upper to a Post-ban lower and the barrel is threaded, cut the threads off and re-crown the barrel. This is completely legal so long as the barrel was never installed onto the rifle when it had threads.

One case I heard of third-hand, is of a shooter who had his barrel threaded for a non-standard thread (not ½"-28tpi) to screw on his compensator on the theory that since a flash-hider couldn't be installed on the barrel, he was okay. I'm glad I don't know him personally, as I wouldn't look forward to telling him his setup is unlawful. The law says "no threads" not "you can't use the standard thread pattern".

One approach, used by JP-Enterprises on rifles they assemble, is to use a thumbhole-style stock to remove the "conspicuous pistol grip" and then install a threaded barrel. Hmmmmm. As enticing as it seems, stocks are too easily changed for me to be enthusiastic about this approach. If I had an okay in writing from the BATF for a particular stock design I might try it. I bet JP Enterprises does!

Obviously, if you have a mixed inventory *NEVER* mix uppers between Pre-and Post-ban rifles. Installing Post-ban uppers on Pre-ban lowers is allowed, but why would you? But, how can you tell just which kind of rifle you have? Suppose a customer comes in your shop with an AR-15 clone in need of repair or modification. How can you tell if it's a Pre- or Post-ban rifle. In some cases this would be easy, but if you're not familiar with the particular manufacturer it may not be so easy because AR-15's and clones fall into three broad groups. Pre-ban, middle group, and Post-ban.

When the law was signed, the various manufacturers were caught with shop floors full of rifles in some stage of assembly and the BATF made a slight change in how the law would be interpreted. Previously, a rifle was a serial numbered receiver. After the Crime Bill became law, they defined a rifle as an assembled rifle, or a parts kit together as a package.

That means, if you were making AR's and had 5,000 finished receivers in inventory, but had only enough parts to assemble 1,000 receivers into complete rifles, you now had 1,000 Pre-ban rifles and 4,000 Post-ban receivers in your shop, even though the receivers were manufactured before the bill had been signed into law. To make things even worse for identification purposes, the serial numbers may not have been in strict numerical order.

Also, add in this additional complication: if you as a retail customer or dealer had a lower receiver on hand that was manufactured before the law was signed, but you didn't have all the parts on hand to assemble it into a complete rifle, you could not now assemble it into a legal, Pre-ban rifle. If you had all the parts on hand before the bill was signed into law, you could still assemble it into a legal, Pre-ban configuration.

If someone comes into your shop with a box full of parts, and wants you to assemble it into a rifle, you had better see the invoices for the parts so you can verify that they were all purchased before September 13, 1994. Without invoices to prove when the parts were purchased, it would not be legal to assemble it into a Pre-ban rifle. However, if he has invoices to prove all parts were in his possession prior to the signing of the Crime Bill, then it's okay to build it. Can you fit a new upper to a Post-ban rifle? Sure. If it is a parts kit with a threaded barrel you'll have to cut off the threads and grind or file off the bayonet lug.

Can you still buy a barrel that's threaded? Yes. Just don't put it on a Post-ban lower. You can put a threaded barrel onto a Pre-ban rifle that needs a replacement barrel. Pre-ban guns were grandfathered in as part of the law.

If you are offered a bare lower that shows no signs of ever having been assembled, be cautious. You never know when it may be a test. Also, closely inspect every magazine of an over-10 round capacity that shows up in your shop. We've already had one wholesaler send us a pistol with a pair of "law enforcement only" marked magazines. Needless to say, we didn't even wait for the UPS truck to show up to get those back on their way to the factory. Hidden in that box of bargains someone is selling you from his dead Uncle's collection may be potential headaches.

My thanks to Reid Coffield, head of Brownells Technical Support Group, for his sage advice, encouragement and the opportunity to add to the collective knowledge of the gunsmithing community. I sincerely hope this keeps all gunsmiths out there out of trouble!

#### **AR-15 MANUFACTURERS**

I've assembled a short list of many of the manufacturers of AR-15 rifles and clones. Also included is the person that you can speak with if you need information on a specific serial number. If you are in doubt as to just when the rifle you're dealing with was manufactured you might want to make a phone call and find out. Just to be on the safe side.

#### **Armalite/Eagle - Armalite**

P.O. Box 299

Geneseo, IL 61254

(800)-336-0184 "Krista"

Post-ban cutoff right around 30,000. Because of the jumbled numbers, call Krista and she can tell you what status the rifle had when they last saw it.

#### **Colt - Colt's Manufacturing**

P.O. Box 1868

Hartford, CT 06144

(203)-236-6311 "Randy"

All "Match Target" rifles are Post-ban. Colt actually has serial number cutoffs, these are the last Pre-ban numbers in each series:

CC001616, NL004800, TA10100, CHOI 9500, SL027284, BD000134, GCOI 8500, SP380200, LH011326, ST038100, MH086025

#### DPMS -

Defense Procurement Manufacturers Service, Inc.

13983 Industry Ave.

Becker, MN 55308

(612)-261-5600 "Alicia"

Jumbled serial numbers, call to get the history of suspect receivers.

#### **Olympic - Olympic Arms**

620 Old Pacific Hwy.

Olympia, WA 98513

(206)-459-7940 "Tom"

Post-ban production is year-pre fixed, but they too, had receivers in the "float". Non-prefixed serial numbers are not a guarantee of actual Pre-ban status.

#### **Bushmaster - Quality Parts Co.**

999 Roosevelt Trail

Wingham, ME 04062

(207)-892-2005 "Pam"

Serials above 1063000 are positively Post-ban, otherwise call to be sure.

#### E.A.Co. - Essential Arms Co.

P.O. Box 121

Krotz Springs, LA 70750

All receivers were manufactured before the Crime Bill was signed. Almost everyone shipped before the signing. E. A. never assembled or sold complete rifles, so all receivers were shipped as receivers only. You're on your own. Closed up, and quit manufacture as of March 31, 1996.

#### **PWA - Pac-West Arms**

2729 Glenmore Ct. SE

Definite serial cutoff. Last Pre-ban lower is #35,222. All Post-ban receivers are given a year prefix.

**Editor's Note:** If you're looking for tools, parts and accessories for the AR-15 rifle and its many clones, then be sure to check the Brownells Catalog. We have over seven pages specifically dedicated to the AR-15/M16 rifle including a complete Armorers Tool Kit (Stock #080-216-000) that is used by the Colt Factory armorers and Military armorers the world over.