

# WINNING VERSA

By Joseph von Benedikt, Editor In Chief





# UTILITY

**Stag Arms's Model 3G rifle may be engineered specifically for fast-paced 3-gun competition, but it is also one of the most versatile ARs available on the civilian market.**

Through the reams of AR-15s that have poured *en masse* across the market scene in the past half-decade, I've kept a wary eye out for a company to get it just right. Recently, Stag did.

As often happens, competition shooters—in this case 3-gun competitors—influenced the configuration; in fact, the rifle is brought to market specifically to fill the needs of 3-gunners.

If you're not familiar with 3-gun shooting, it's a fun-filled competitive event in which competitors shoot three different firearms—rifle, handgun, and shotgun—against the clock.

The rifles used by serious competitors are almost exclusively ARs of some variation or other, and they frequently exhibit significant departures from the typical 16-inch-barreled M4 knockoffs and 20-inch-barreled M16 clones. Shooters have to adapt from fast and furious shooting at spitting distances to precise shooting at little targets way out yonder, and the dedicated rifles that

have arisen from the sport are, as a result of the vast variety of shooting demands, extraordinarily versatile. Me, I like versatility.

One might propose that the U.S. Army would already be employing the most versatile version of the AR possible. After all, the folks in the armed forces actually use the platform for what it's designed for, and they should have perfected it by now.

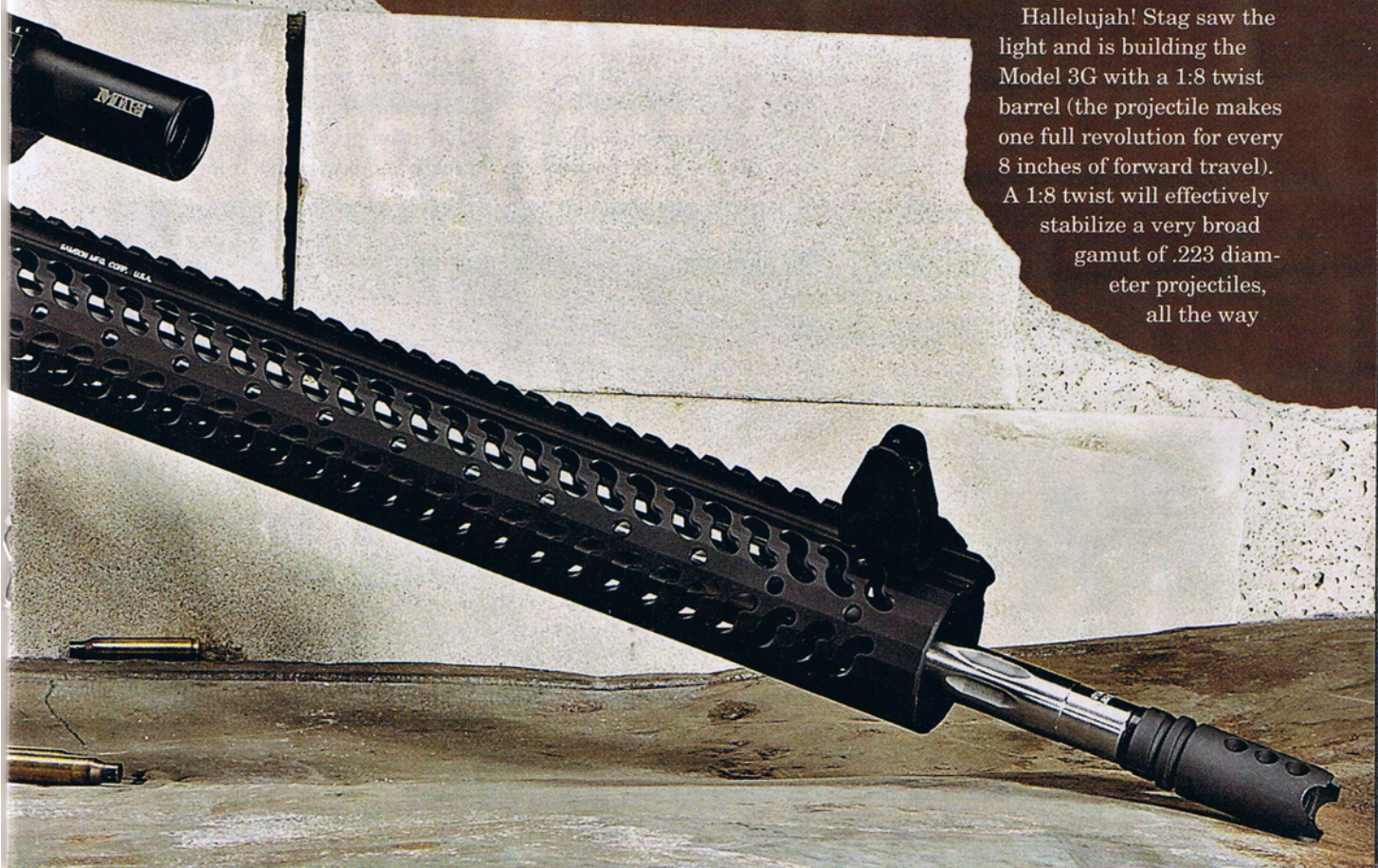
Well, they haven't.

Before you ream me a new one, consider that I make that statement from a considerably biased civilian point of view, and I will cheerfully concede that civilian needs are vastly different from those of the military. I will even concede that the M4 currently issued to America's bravest could arguably be perfect for military use. Arguably.

What's wrong with the M4? I'd rather address what is right about Stag's new Model 3G, thus indirectly slandering the M4 rather than coming right out and dissing it.

## Rifling Twist

Hallelujah! Stag saw the light and is building the Model 3G with a 1:8 twist barrel (the projectile makes one full revolution for every 8 inches of forward travel). A 1:8 twist will effectively stabilize a very broad gamut of .223 diameter projectiles, all the way





from 40-grain varmint bullets up through 80-grain long-range match bullets.

For too long AR manufacturers have been putting barrels with either an archaic 1:12 twist on rifles, which only stabilizes .223-diameter bullets up to 60 grains in weight, or the very prolific industry standard 1:9 twist, which

only stabilizes bullets up to 69 grains properly. The odd exceptional 1:9-twist barrel will marginally stabilize 75 grainers, but not the 77-grain projectiles that are becoming so loved by our Special Forces guys for the simple but important fact that the bad guys respond rather favorably (for the good guys) when perforated with them. Finally, those SF guys and every other soldier fortunate enough to be issued a current-manufacture M4 get a 1:7 twist in their barrels, which stabilizes those 77-grain killer pills delightfully, but spins a thin-jacketed lightweight varmint bullet so fast that it either fails mid-flight or



The new 3G features a 15-inch, free-floating Samson handguard; 18-inch, fluted E.R. Shaw stainless-steel barrel with a versatile 1:8 rifling twist; Stag's new, aggressive 3G Comp muzzle compensator; and offset Dueck Defense iron sights.

overstabilizes to the point that very intriguing—but not good—things happen to accuracy.

Competitive target shooters figured out a long time ago that there's a perfect middle ground—the capable 1:8 twist. Sadly, production manufacturers have been much too long in catching

on. Oh, sure, match-grade stainless tubes have been available in useful configurations for a long time, but usually as a more expensive option. Rifle purchasers had to specify that they wanted that 1:8 twist.

#### Barrel Profile

While a slender standard-weight barrel makes for a nice, lightweight rifle that is quick in the hands and rests easy on the sling, it doesn't handle heat well. Accuracy deteriorates under long rapid-fire strings—not good when attempting a long shot to close out your time at the end of an intense, high-shot-count 3-gun stage. Heavy-profile barrels

alleviate that issue, but present another in the form of too much rifle weight for comfort. In an effective effort to bridge the gap, Stag chose a fluted heavy profile, which provides accuracy-enhancing stiffness that shrugs off intense heat, yet is not outlandishly heavy. The stainless barrels are built by E.R. Shaw, a good, reputable barrelmaker.

#### Gas System Length

The smoothest operating system for AR rifles is the original, full-length rifle system, which is employed on Stag's Model 3G. Contrary to popular opinion, it is *not* more reliable than the shorter carbine length system, but it does have a smoother recoil impulse. Smooth is good, especially if you are a competition shooter working against a clock.

Unfortunately for shooters who like the maneuverability and compact nature of M4-type carbines with 16-inch barrels, full-length (rifle) gas systems and short barrels don't play nice. Enter the 18-inch barrel. It works well with the long gas system and offers the added bonus of increased velocity.

#### Handguard Length

Trial and error has proven that when attempting to shoot both quickly and accurately from a

## WHAT IS 3-GUN COMPETITION?

One of the fastest-growing disciplines in the shooting sports arena, 3-gun competition demands skill with rifle, shotgun, and pistol alike. It's a timed event, with the scores from multiple different stages combined for a total. The shooter who successfully completes all the stages with the lowest combined time wins.

Most of the stages (big matches will have up to 10 different stages) require the use of at least two and often all three firearms: rifle, shotgun, and handgun, promoting skill in transitioning and the ability to quickly shift mental gears. To make things even trickier, movement is usually required. For example, a shooter may engage several knockdown targets at close range with a shotgun, then run several yards and flop down prone in the friendly neighborhood cactus bed to dust a distant target with the rifle.

Obstacles and barriers natural to an urban landscape are part of the game, and shooters will find themselves shooting out of doorways and windows, over vehicles, and generally doing things they've always wanted—but were never allowed—to do.

Shooters are faced with a bewildering array of targets: steel "poppers" to knock over with the pistol or shotgun; cardboard torso silhouettes with scoring zones that must be engaged with the rifle or handgun; and steel ringers for long-range rifle shots. Hey, moving targets, too.

A 3-gun rifle must be able to do it all: double-tap a series of cardboard silhouettes at spitting distance and then reach out and ring a tiny gong at considerable range—with no time lost to transitions. Dedicated 3-gun rifles morph into marvels of versatility.

Far and away the most popular division is "Tactical." In Tactical, one optic is allowed on the rifle; pistol and shotguns are shot with irons only. "Limited" division allows only the use of iron sights, while "Open" is just that—anything goes as long as it's safe and caliber requirements are met.

"Heavy Metal" (also dubbed He-Man) division requires the use of a .30-caliber rifle, .45-caliber single-stack pistol, and 12-gauge shotgun. Many matches take it a step further and require the shotgun to be a pump action. All three HM guns must be fired with iron sights only.

Most folks tote their guns and gear around on a cart. All the ammo, magazines, holsters, etc., adds up to quite a load. For diehards, a new division is sometimes encountered called "Trooper," in which the shooter is required to carry all gear and ammo for the entire match on his person—no carts, caddies, or coolers allowed.

—Joseph von Benedikt



standing position, having your support hand extended as far as comfortably possible down the length of the rifle helps. Intuitive? Sure. But it's hard with a carbine-length handguard. In order to gain stability as well as natural, sure transitions between targets, 3-gun shooters have initiated a move to long—sometimes very long—handguards.

Stag's Model 3G utilizes a 15-inch (yes, that's 15!) lightweight free-float Samson Evolution Series handguard. It's an upside-down keyhole shape inside, which allows for a small diameter, comfy-in-the-palm handguard while still providing a channel for the gas system. Said gas system features a low-profile gas block in order to fit inside the handguard. An included assortment of short 1913 rail sections may be mounted at the shooter's preference and hung with all manner of gadgetry.

Other benefits of this long, smooth, round handguard and its ilk include a generous, nonabrasive

surface for resting the rifle on while attempting to make precise shots in a hurry and a greatly increased sight radius for those backup irons.

Disadvantages? There are some. Weight, potentially. Thankfully, Samson did it right, cannibalizing the Evolution rail to the point where it only weighs 11 ounces yet maintains necessary strength.

Another disadvantage occurs when a shooter goes prone; rests the front of the handguard heavily on sandbags, bipod, or such; and attempts to make a precise shot at long distance with iron sights. Due to the inherent flex in lightweight aluminum tubes, the forward end of the handguard—where the front sight is mounted—can and will flex in relation to the barrel. Accuracy is not affected, but point of impact is, which has much



Note the two heavy hex-head mounting screws that solidly secure the free-float Samson handguard to the barrel nut. A full-length upper rail offers ample mounting surface for various optics, but it's not actually needed with this quick-release Burris P.E.P.R. mount.

the same result.

This effect will rarely occur under common, unsupported shooting, and most importantly, receiver-mounted optical sights are completely unaffected.

#### Muzzle Compensator

To my surprise Stag's new 3G Comp is so effective that it actually





Serious competition shooting demands an excellent trigger, and Stag chose one of the best for its dedicated 3-gun rifle. The tiny "G" on it gives it away: It's a Geissele model S3G.

thrusts the muzzle *down* during recoil (which there isn't much of). While I found it a little disconcerting at first, once one becomes accustomed to it, it's much preferable to muzzle rise, which obscures your target and slows down follow-up shots.

Is it loud? Well, yes. Being a compensator, by nature it *must* be louder than a noncompensating muzzle device.

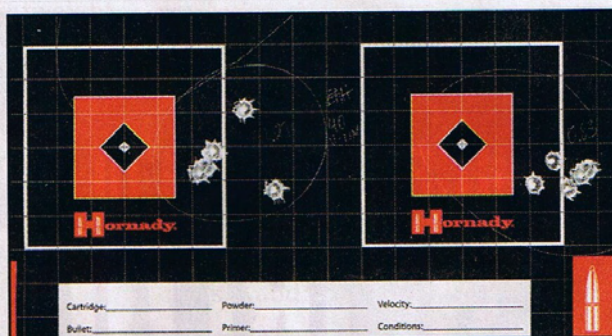
#### Geissele S3G Trigger

You know a manufacturer is pulling out all the stops when it puts a Geissele trigger (pronounced *guys-lee*) on a model as standard equipment. Known for Swiss-watch consistency and precision and Scandinavian-axe durability, Geissele triggers rank with the

finest of the fine and are considered premier gear by shooters on the 3-gun circuit.

The S3G (Super 3 Gun) model installed on Stag's 3G rifle is non-adjustable and is a rather unique combination of single-stage and two-stage trigger concepts. Developed to cater to 3-gunners needing something equally effective for fast action and long-range precision, it has what amounts to a very smooth, light two-stage-type take-up but then breaks without warning. No actual second stage. It's good for sweeping through the trigger on fast, controlled shot strings, and it certainly works well enough for distant targets, but I must admit that I found it disconcerting. In fact, I'll go so far as to say it's the single element of the Stag 3G rifle that I simply don't like. It's a fine trigger

These groups with the Black Hills 40-grain V-Max load measured 1.29 and 0.83 inches.



#### STAG ARMS MODEL 3G ACCURACY

	Velocity (fps)	Extreme Spread (fps)	Standard Deviation (fps)	100-Yard Accuracy (Inches)	
				(5 Shots)	(10 Shots)
<b>.223 Rem./5.56mm Nato</b>					
<b>Black Hills 40-gr. V-Max</b>	<b>3423</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>1.29</b>
Hornady 53-gr. Superformance	3229	78	27	1.38	2.60
Hornady 55-gr. Steel Match	2907	48	13	1.61	2.07
Remington 55-gr. FMJ	2964	---	---	3.01	3.37
Hornady 60-gr. TAP FPD	2863	51	15	1.63	1.81
Black Hills 68-gr. HPBT	2753	58	19	2.07	2.15
Federal Gold Medal 69-gr. HPBT	2716	80	22	1.69	2.64
Hornady 75-gr. TAP FPD	2572	116	35	1.66	1.90
Black Hills 77-gr. HPBT	2597	110	29	1.12	1.48

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of two consecutive five-shot groups without allowing the rifle to cool, after which the groups were overlaid to measure performance as a 10-shot string. Velocity is the average of 10 rounds measured 10 feet from the gun's muzzle with an Oehler 35P chronograph.



## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Model:</b>	3G
<b>Manufacturer:</b>	Stag Arms www.stagarms.com
<b>Type:</b>	Gas-operated autoloader
<b>Caliber:</b>	5.56mm NATO/.223 Rem.
<b>Magazine Capacity:</b>	30 rounds
<b>Barrel:</b>	18 in.; rifling: 1:8 twist
<b>Overall Length:</b>	36 to 39.25 in.
<b>Weight, empty:</b>	8 lbs. with Dueck sights
<b>Stock:</b>	Magpul ACS
<b>Grip:</b>	Magpul MOE
<b>Length of Pull:</b>	11.25 to 14.5 in.
<b>Finish:</b>	Parkerized
<b>Sights:</b>	Optional Dueck Defense
<b>Trigger:</b>	Geissele S3G
<b>Safety:</b>	Two position
<b>Price:</b>	\$1,600 (with sights), \$1,400 (without sights)

that works well for many shooters, but it's not for me. I prefer taking up the slack on a good two-stage trigger

and having a crisp, several-ounce wall to stage against before breaking the shot.

### Dueck Defense Angled Iron Sights

Offered as a \$200 option on the Stag Model 3G, Barry Dueck's RTS (Rapid Transition Sights) offer shooters the ability to transition instantly from a magnified optic for use on distant targets to irons for those up-close cardboard cutouts. They eliminate that "all I can see through my scope is cardboard" sensation and, by the way, work equally well on that sneaky coyote that pops up 11 yards away just when your scope is zoomed to 9X.

To use, simply roll the rifle a few degrees counterclockwise (for right-handed shooters) while maintaining your cheekweld. The irons will rotate naturally into view and, by virtue of proper design, provide correct, straight-above-the-bore sighting at the same height as M4


and M16A4 sights. They are fully adjustable for windage and elevation and are machined in the U.S. of 7075 aluminum-alloy barstock. Finally, they are reversible, so they work equally well for right- or left-handed shooters.

### Stock & Grip

Many 3-gun shooters prefer simple, fixed stocks for competition use. They're predictable and provide a stable, comfortable cheekweld. Stag chose instead a Magpul ACS collapsible stock, which I like for several reasons. It has a broad contact surface designed to provide a solid, consistent cheekweld (which many collapsible stocks lack). Its adjustability provides versatility for different size shooters. And it has built-in storage compartments for batteries, small tools, or other necessities.

The grip is likewise made by Magpul and is the proven MOE version with internal storage compartment.





Dueck Defense offset iron sights make transitioning from distant shots needing a magnified optic to close-up rapid-fire targets a cinch. Just rotate the rifle counterclockwise while maintaining cheekweld, and the irons roll right into view.

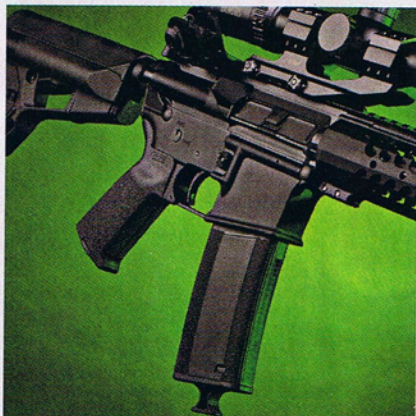
A basic storage cap is included; specialized storage cores for batteries, spare bolt and firing pin, and so on are available from [www.Magpul.com](http://www.Magpul.com).

#### What It Doesn't Have

Really dedicated 3-gun shooters tend to fit their rifles with all manner of labor-saving devices, such as oversize magazine release buttons; ambidextrous or oversize safety levers; oversize charging handle catches; and extended, trigger-finger-activated bolt releases. The Stag 3G has none of these. Why? Because although a solid foundational platform can be agreed upon as acceptable by the bulk of shooters, when it comes to the above-listed refinements competitors become very individual in their tastes. Stag wisely left the choice of small details up to the final owner.

I like the Stag 3G just the way it is. It has a clean exterior free of extended, enlarged bits and pieces sticking out to catch on bits of brush, home furnishings, and tweed jackets. In a word, it allows it to maintain versatility. Now if I was really trying to save fractions of time when shooting against a clock, I'd go ahead and dress it up exactly to my taste.





While many 3-gunners opt for a fixed stock, Stag chose to maintain versatility by using Magpul's collapsible six-position ACS stock with storage compartments. It's complemented by a Magpul MOE grip. The magazine is a Troy Industries Battlemag.

### Range Performance

A rifle may be perfectly configured, but if it doesn't excel at the range, it matters not—it's just another ho-hum rifle. Given the quality, Stag's Model 3G should shoot bullet weights from 40 grains to 77 grains reasonably well, with its favorite loads capable of five-shot, 1-MOA groups. It should shoot 10-shot strings without throwing any significant fliers. It should be lively in the hands and shoulder, balance, and point naturally. And it goes without saying that it must be 100-percent reliable.

There's only one way to find out. Mounted with a 4.5-14X 50mm Leupold VX-7, I fired two consecutive five-shot groups each with bullets ranging from 77 grains down to 40 grains in weight, measuring each group separately, and then overlaid as a 10-shot group to test how well the rifle stood up to increased heat. All performed adequately, and the Black Hills 40-grain load gave outstanding groups, proving once again that fast-twist barrels will shoot light bullets well. Accuracy averages are listed in the accompanying chart.

For a versatile optic more appropriate for 3-gun competition, I switched to a very cool, new 1-4X Burris MTac (see "Shooter's Update" on page 14 for more info) mounted in a quick-release version of the company's P.E.P.R. mount. I shot

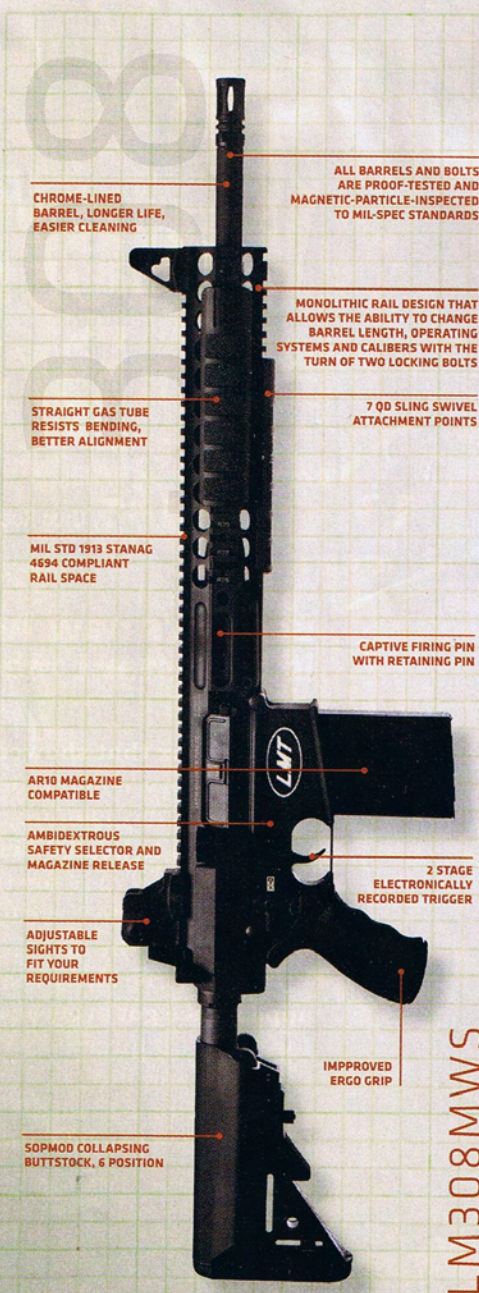
with it at 100 and 300 yards, using the Ballistic CQ reticle, with outstanding results.

Finally, to get a feel for the 3G's handling characteristics, I put my 10-inch steel Caldwell Magnum Rifle target out at 300 yards and an 18-inch round Shoot-N-C at 25 yards, loaded 10 rounds, and transitioned back and forth between targets with one shot at 300 through the optic, two shots on the 10-yard paper, one

at 300, and so on as fast as I could. Smooth as single-malt Scotch.

Throughout the testing, I never experienced a hiccup.

Well-configured for 3-gun competition? Yes. It's a great choice for seasoned veteran and newbie alike. But it's more than that. It's one of the most versatile ARs available. Whether you are a hunter, a home defender, a plinker, or a competitor, Stag's new Model 3G rifle will serve you well. **ST**



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