

# THE HYDRA

## STRIKES HARD WITH MANY HEADS

**T**he year 1969 was in full swing. Some of the songs playing on the radio were: “Good Morning Starshine,” by Oliver, “These Eyes,” by The Guess Who and “Grazing In The Grass,” by Friends Of

Distinction. The mini-skirt was all the rage. I was cruising around in my 1969 Chevy Biscayne with a flat 6-engine and 3-speed on the column. Gas was 36-cents per gallon. I got a tattoo, and life was good all the way around.



*The MGI Hydra can be had in many different calibers and conversion kits. Shown here are all the sample conversion kits Pat got to test for this article — he loved 'em all.*



**Here is the basic Hydra — all set up and ready to go in the .223 Rem/5.56 configuration. If this were all there was to the Hydra, it would still be an outstanding little carbine.**

**Pat Cascio  
Photos: Candi Cascio**

I was also introduced to the M-16A1 rifle in 1969, while in Infantry School in October at Ft. Lewis, Wash. Little did I know, that the M-16A1 would evolve into so many different variations on the civilian market as the AR-15, and that there would be as many different companies producing AR-15-style rifles more than 40 years later. For me, the M-16A1 was a real delight, especially after packing around an M-14 in Basic Training. I went into the military weighing a mere 135 pounds, and came out after AIT weighing in at 165 pounds of lean, mean, fighting machine.

There are more AR-15-style rifles on the market today than ever before. Truth be told, most of 'em are really pretty decent rifles. You can get just about any variation of AR you want — you name it, and someone is probably making it. You can even get an AR in several different calibers, with the .223 Remington and 5.56mm being the most popular.

MGI Military ([www.mgi-military.com](http://www.mgi-military.com)) is producing their own version of the AR-15 these days, and it's quite a bit different than most of the models out there. On initial inspection, the MGI Marck-15, or "Hydra" looks very much like many ARs, with a quad-rail Picatinny forearm, flattop upper receiver and telescoping stock. Ho-hum is the first

impression most folks get, that is, until they see me taking the Hydra apart and converting it to one of a number of different calibers and the conversion takes about a minute and a half to complete. Eyes are now wide-open, to those who thought I had just another AR-type of rifle.

### **It Does What?**

I've got to admit, I was skeptical when I first heard about the MGI Military Hydra. Laura Burgess, who does outside PR work for a number of companies in the firearms field, told me she just picked up MGI Military as one of her clients. I thought to myself, big deal — just one more AR on the already crowded market. However, Burgess wasn't about to let it go at that; about six months later, I finally got my sample Hydra.



**At first glance, the upper receiver on the MGI Hydra looks like any other AR-15-type rifle. It's only upon closer inspection, that you realize there is some "magic" involved in the Hydra.**



**In place of the typical Delta ring, which locks a barrel into an AR-type rifle, the MGI Hydra has a special locking ring that allows the barrels to be removed quickly and easily without any tools.**



**Shown left is the plastic cover over the locking levers, with the spring keeping the cover in place. Below is the plastic cover slid up and the barrel locking levers in the "open" position, so you can pull the barrel off the Hydra and put another caliber barrel in the upper receiver.**



**Top to bottom: complete Hydra set up in .223 Rem/5.56mm, AK-47 conversion kit, 9mm Colt sub-gun conversion kit and M3 Grease Gun .45 ACP conversion kit.**

I said to myself, this has gotta be a gimmick, the Hydra can't do what MGI claims it can do, and you simply can't change an AR from one caliber to another, in a minute and a half. Plus, the thing just isn't gonna work, if it can be changed from one caliber to another.

The mythical Hydra, is a 7-headed beast, and every head is deadly. If you cut off one head, it will grow back two more heads. Well, it appears that the

MGI Hydra is just as deadly as the mythical Hydra is. I hate to admit when I'm wrong — I'm kinda like The Fonz from "Happy Days." "Wrong" is hard to get out of my mouth. But I was wrong about the Hydra; it does all that it claims it will do! There, I said it — I was wrong!

My sample Hydra came set up as a 16" barrel carbine, with a telescoping stock and flattop receiver. The upper receiver had a rear sight, but I added

a flip-up rear sight for my testing. The barrel was also free-floated, and that meant some added accuracy. The forearm was a quad-rail setup, so I could attach all manner of accessories if I so desired.

Okay, this Hydra pretty much looked like many of the other ARs on the market with just a few twists. There is a sliding plastic cover on the lower portion of the quadrail, right at the base. This is where some of the magic



**Shown left is the triggerguard released, and above it is the lower receiver, sans any mag well. Mag wells simply slide into the groove on the lower receiver and lock in place — only takes a few seconds. Shown below, is the Hydra with the Grease Gun mag well attached to the lower receiver. To remove the mag well, simply unhinge the triggerguard, and press the mag release button, and the mag well slides right off.**





**Grease Gun conversion mag well.**



**AK-47 conversion mag well.**



**Hydra in the 9mm guise. Future conversion kits will allow use of Glock 9mm mags.**

comes into play. If you pull on the retaining spring on top of the plastic cover, you can then slide the cover up towards the muzzle end of the Hydra, revealing two levers. If you turn these levers outward, you can then pull the barrel off the upper receiver. What? Yeah, it's that easy — it only takes a few seconds and the barrel comes off.

The next step is to break open the upper receiver from the lower receiver by pushing out the push pins that hold these two parts together, just like any regular AR. You then remove the bolt/bolt carrier just like any other AR.

Now, a little bit more magic is involved. Using a paper clip or other similar "tool," you depress the pin in the front of the triggerguard and swing it down. Then, depress the magazine release and slide the magazine well up and off the lower receiver. Yeah, you read that right; the magazine well is a separate part of the lower receiver. You simply remove it by unhinging the triggerguard and depressing the magazine release, and then the darn thing slides right off. It's only under very close inspection that you can see the mag well is a separate piece from the lower receiver.

Mack Gwinn III, who operates MGI Military, also sent me conversion kits so I could change my Hydra from .223 Rem/5.56mm to a 9mm that takes the Colt sub-gun mags, or to a

.45 ACP that takes the old M3 Grease Gun mags, and best of all, at least in my eyes, is the conversion kit making the Hydra into a 7.62X39 rifle, that takes genuine AK-47 magazines. And, this is just for starters; there are about a dozen conversion kits available at this writing, with more in development. I'm looking forward to the conversion kit that takes the Glock 9mm and .40 S&W mags, as well as the Glock .45 ACP mags both should be in stock when this article appears in print.

### **Too Easy!**

Once again, I was a Doubting Thomas. Sure, the Hydra was easy to take apart, but putting a conversion kit on the gun had to be a little harder. Nope! I was wrong again! I slid the 9mm mag well onto the lower receiver and put the triggerguard back in place. I then put in the 9mm bolt and put the 9mm barrel into the upper receiver, turned the two locking levers into the up position and slid the plastic sliding lock down and secured it with the locking spring, and attached the upper to the lower. The gun was ready to go in 9mm now. Nah, can't be that fast and easy. I had my oldest daughter watch the video on the MGI website, with Mack Gwinn converting the Hydra from one caliber to another in a minute and

a half. My daughter was able to do it in about 2 minutes. After practice she can now do it in a minute and a half.

All conversions, from one caliber to another, on the Hydra are really just that fast and simple. I did learn though, that you had to pull back on the charging handle, just a tiny bit when pulling off the barrels in the 5.56mm and 7.62X39 — they have rotating bolt heads and they lock into the barrels in those calibers. The 9mm and .45 ACP conversion kits don't have bolts that lock into the barrels — they are direct blowback.

I spent the better part of an hour playing with the Hydra, converting it from one caliber to another before I headed out to the range, to see if the gun would even shoot. The gun shoots and shoot well — very well, I might add. The accuracy is there, to be sure, and it's slightly more accurate than the standard AR, and this is because the barrel is free-floated.

### **A Lot Of Shooting**

Over the course of a month, I shot the Hydra a lot. The gun is just a lot of fun to shoot! I fired a bunch of .223 Rem ammo from Black Hills Ammunition ([www.black-hills.com](http://www.black-hills.com)) and Buffalo Bore Ammunition ([www.buffalobore.com](http://www.buffalobore.com)), in the Hydra. I shot .223 from 55 to 69 grains through the 1:9" barrel, and the Hydra handled it



*The Hydra is ready to go with the 9mm Colt sub-gun conversion kit and 32-round mag. Pat liked this conversion kit the best — it was a whole lotta' fun.*



*The Hydra all set up with the AK-47 conversion kit installed. The Hydra is vicious and deadly, as one never knows what deadly caliber it may take — just like the mythical Hydra.*



*Looking for a little more knockdown power than the 9mm offers? Then convert your Hydra to shoot .45 ACP with the M3 Grease Gun mag conversion kit ... 30 rounds of .45 ACP is nothing to sneeze at.*

all. The “Sniper” load from Buffalo Bore was in a dead tie with the Black Hills 69-grain Sierra Match HP as the most accurate loads. If I did my part, I could put three rounds into 1-1/2" at 100 yards.

My favorite conversion on the Hydra is the 9mm unit. I put probably more 9mm ammo through the Hydra than any other caliber. The 9mm setup was deadly at 25 yards. I could make one ragged hole with the 32-round magazine loaded up. I fired a variety of 9mm from Black Hills and Buffalo Bore, including some White Box 9mm from Winchester. There really wasn't a “winner” with the 9mm conversion unit — all the 9mm ammo I shot through the Hydra would make one ragged hole — just that simple. I did like the Buffalo Bore +P+ 9mm loads in the Hydra. I could tell they were hotter and would make an excellent self-defense load.

The .45 ACP Grease Gun conversion unit was a lot of fun too. Only thing is the .45 ACP barrel didn't

come with a front sight. Not a big problem. I installed a LaserLyte K15 green laser to the quadrail and zeroed it for 25 yards. What's nice about the LaserLyte ([www.laserlyte.com](http://www.laserlyte.com)) K15 is that it is a green laser, and you can see it under bright sunlight during the day. The K15 can be switched on manually and left on, or you can attach the remote switch, which is what I did by plugging in the remote switch and placing a vertical forearm to the Picatinny rail. All I had to do was apply slight pressure to the on/off pad on the forearm grip to activate the laser.

I used a variety of .45 ACP from Black Hills, Buffalo Bore and Winchester for the .45 ACP conversion unit. All ammo fed and functioned just fine, and I was a little surprised that even JHP ammo fed without any problems. Just like the 9mm conversion unit, the .45 ACP Grease Gun conversion unit would place 30 rounds of .45 ACP into one ragged hole at 25 yards.

M3 Grease Gun mags are found in abundance, however, not all of them are built the same. I ordered some commercially made Grease Gun mags, which were advertised as being better than mil-spec surplus mags. Nope, they weren't. I couldn't even get them to lock in the mag well of the Hydra. And, I didn't think they were as strongly made as genuine mil-spec surplus mags were. So I ordered some genuine Grease Gun mil-spec surplus mags. They arrived still covered in heavy Cosmoline and it took quite a while to get 'em all cleaned up. Out of three mags, two worked without any problems, and the third one took a little bit of tweaking to make it run. This isn't the fault of the Hydra's Grease Gun mag well — it's just that many different companies made Grease Gun mags and not all were held to tight tolerances.

Last up was the AK conversion kit. I was really looking forward to testing this kit. Being able to use genuine AK-47 mags, instead of

converted AR-15 mags that almost never work and function properly. Well, I'm here to tell you, the AK-47 mags worked without any problems in the Hydra — mostly. I had some plastic AK mags, and it was a very tight fit; some of 'em wouldn't lock into the Hydra's mag well. I had to file on the mag-locking tab just a bit to get them to fit into the Hydra. Again, this isn't the fault of the Hydra. I've had to file many plastic AK-47 mags to get them to fit into my AKs — it's just one of those things.

Testing the Hydra with the 5.56mm, 9mm and 7.62X39 barrels, and getting 'em all zeroed took some time. Once I adjusted the rear sight for the proper windage, all I had to do was adjust the front sight on the other three barrels. When removing and replacing the various barrels, I didn't notice any change in the point-of-aim, point-of-impact once the sights were all adjusted. I had some concerns there might be some problems when switching from one caliber to another. However, once the front sights were adjusted on the various barrels, I didn't have to make any further adjustments. And with the .45 ACP barrel, sight-in was done with the LaserLyte K15 laser. I had it sighted-in for 25 yards, and it was almost the same point-of-aim, point-of-impact with the 9mm conversion kit installed, and pretty close with the 5.56mm and 7.62 barrels installed.

The full retail price on the Hydra, set up in .223 Rem/5.56mm is \$1,299, and that's not bad considering the quality of the gun — it's not a low-end AR by any stretch of the imagination. Conversion kits, in any caliber, run about \$550 each. So, you can have your AR just about any way you want it. You can go out and buy an AR in, let's say, .50 Beowulf for \$2,500 and you'd have a good gun — but it would only be in that .50 Beowulf caliber. Or you can buy a Hydra in .223 Rem/5.56mm, add a .50 Beowulf conversion unit, as well as another conversion unit and you'd still be at less than the \$2,500 price mark that you paid for the other AR in just one caliber.

I'm a big fan of the AR-15-type rifles, and the only ones I owned were in .223/5.56mm and 9mm over the years. With the Hydra, I can have it in any number of calibers, for a price that is more than reasonable for what you are getting. And, best of all, the whole damn thing works and works well.

The oldies radio station from Portland is playing "These Eyes" — I've gotta go, I'm about to day-dream back to my cruising days in Chicago, way back in 1969. 🖱️

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