GUN TEST

FNAR LIGHT BARREL .308

Semi-auto rifle with bolt-action accuracy in your sights—1 MOA or better!

By Walt Rauch

FNH USA, looking to come up with a precision accurate semi-auto rifle, reached back to an FN semi-auto sporting rifle that was first sold in 1967 under the Browning label, the Browning High-Power Automatic Rifle, which has continued on as the Browning BAR Mark II. Using this basic design, FN has reworked it into what is now the FNAR, at present chambered only in 7.62x51mm. Based on its origins, along with other similarly-sized cartridges, the FNAR could also be chambered for the .300 and .338 Win Mag rounds.

Paraphrasing from the FN USA website, every FNAR rifle must meet a 1-MOA (minute of angle) or better accuracy specification. The FNAR has an ergonomic tactical stock system and a steel detachable box magazine (10 and 20 rounds). The receiver is made with 7075-T6 aluminum alloy and has a hard coat and black anodized finish.

The FNAR shot the best group, 0.38", of the day with Black Hills Match Gold ammo.

Gun Details

The fluted barrel measures 20 inches with bore and chamber hard chromed, has a 1-in-12-inch rifling twist and the muzzle is relieved with a "target crown." The barrel exterior is manganese phosphate finished. FN claims the barrel will be available fluted or unfluted. The sample supplied here, the FNAR Light Barrel, has the lightweight fluted barrel.

FNH's purpose-built FNAR in .308 takes its time-proven Browning BAR hunting rifle roots to new heights with detachable mag, heavy barrel, and user configurable stock options.

Note the precision fluted barrel with chrome lined bore and recessed target crown.

The pistol grip stock can be fitted to the individual user via replaceable cheek piece and recoil pad. Both have three thicknesses to provide this option.

The FNAR has a crossbolt safety to the rear of the triggerguard, ambi mag release at the rear of the mag well and bolt release forward, just behind the forend.

The FNAR has a two-piece polymer stock, buttstock and forend with the latter encircling part of the operating system. The polymer stock, which has a pistol grip, has both a replaceable cheek piece and recoil pad. Both have three thicknesses so the user can fit the stock to his stature and preferred method of shooting.

After my gunsmith, Joe Venezia, installed the Burris 6x to 24x target scope with supplied scope rings, I found that for a good cheek weld I needed the stock to be a bit higher. Changing to a higher one took only a matter of minutes, as just two screws are used.

A Picatinny (Mil-Std-1913) rail is mounted to the top of the receiver, while three other such rails at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock are on the polymer forend. The forend and the pistol grip both have impressed checkering in their gripping areas.

I also attached a SureFire LED WeaponLight at 9 o'clock and a LaserLyte laser at 3 o'clock. The WeaponLight offers either a push button end cap or pigtail pressure switch. Using the latter made the light easy to use from a shooting grip. The laser had only a small button to operate it as it is intended for a handgun, but both the LED WeaponLight and laser were effective to 100 yards. To complete this package, I also attached a Harris bipod to the forward sling swivel stud.

The FNAR feeds from either a 10- or 20-shot all-steel magazine. Here, the 20-shot version was supplied and, as my gunsmith noted, the magazine appears to have been machined rather than stamped from steel.

Operating the FNAR is not complicated. Locking back the bolt requires you to push up on the bolt release, which is just to the right rear of the forend on the receiver. The magazine loads directly in and locks firmly. Releasing it is done by the ambidextrous magazine catch, which unfortunately, is so forward that I could not operate it while gripping the pistol grip. I either had to break my grip or push the magazine catch with my off hand.

The FNAR uses a gas system similar to that used for the GI M1 carbine. When a round is fired gas bleeds off, driving a piston rearward to operate the bolt, which unlocks after a short rearward travel. The empty case extracts by a hook extractor on the bolt's right side and is kicked out by a plunger pin on the left side. Empties landed a few feet to the right rear. When empty, the bolt locks back.

Representative three-shot groups fired at 100 yards with Burris target scope set on 20x and rifle supported by a Harris bipod.

One interesting touch…a red dot is on the right forward edge of the ejection port and, if a cartridge is fully chambered, the dot is visible behind the bolt handle. If not so chambered, the dot is obscured so that you can visually see if the bolt is fully seated.

While the bolt moves in a steel cylinder within the aluminum receiver, the trigger group is in a polymer housing and secured to the receiver with two removable crosspins for cleaning. The crossbolt safety, which blocks trigger movement only, is at the rear of the trigger housing and is easy to reach while having a full shooting grip on the pistol grip. It does require a determined push to move on and off, however. The safety is reversible. The trigger is grooved and its pull weight surprised me. It weighed out at 5.25 pounds, but broke so cleanly that I had estimated it to be in the 3-pound range.

Range Time

As to the shooting results, John Lysak, Joe Venezia and I began shooting GI National Match M118 ball to get the scope locked in. Once set, I loaded up with three rounds of Black Hills 168-grain Barnes X Bullet .308 Match Gold and fired a 0.38 of an inch group. John followed with a 0.63 of an inch three-round group using Hornady 155-grain TAP FPD. Then Joe used the CorBon 168-grain BTHP for a 0.88 of an inch group. I think the increase in group size was more due to not allowing the barrel to cool between ammo changes than the shooters' ability.

Finishing up, I loaded and shot six rounds of 150-grain FNJ Boat-Tail Federal American Eagle, then loaded and shot six rounds of Black Hills 168-grain BTHP.308 Match. I fired both sets as quickly as I could get the scope's cross hairs back on the target center (with the scope still set at 20x). Both groups measured 1-inch.

Final Notes

I can't finish without mentioning disassembly for cleaning. After reading the manual's instructions and cautions regarding possible flying springs, and knowing my gun room is already well-seeded with many such "lost" springs, I took a pass on doing so, only removing the forend.

The FNAR, for me, is definitely not a clean-in-a-foxhole rifle. What it is though, is one of the most, if not the most, accurate .30 caliber semi-auto rifles I've shot.

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SPECIFICATIONS
FNAR LIGHT BARREL

Caliber: .308 (7.62x51mm) • **Barrel:** 20 inches
OA Length: 41.5 inches
Weight: 9 pounds (empty) • **Stocks:** Polymer
Sights: None • **Action:** Gas piston
Finish: Matte black • **Capacity:** 10 or 20-shot mags • **Price:** $1821

PERFORMANCE
FNAR LIGHT BARREL .308

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
Black Hills Match Gold 168 Barnes X	2590	0.38
Hornady 155 TAP FED	2635	0.63
CorBon Performance Match 168 BTHP	2630	0.88

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by Oehler P35 Chronograph, and accuracy in inches for 3-shot groups from 100 yards.