

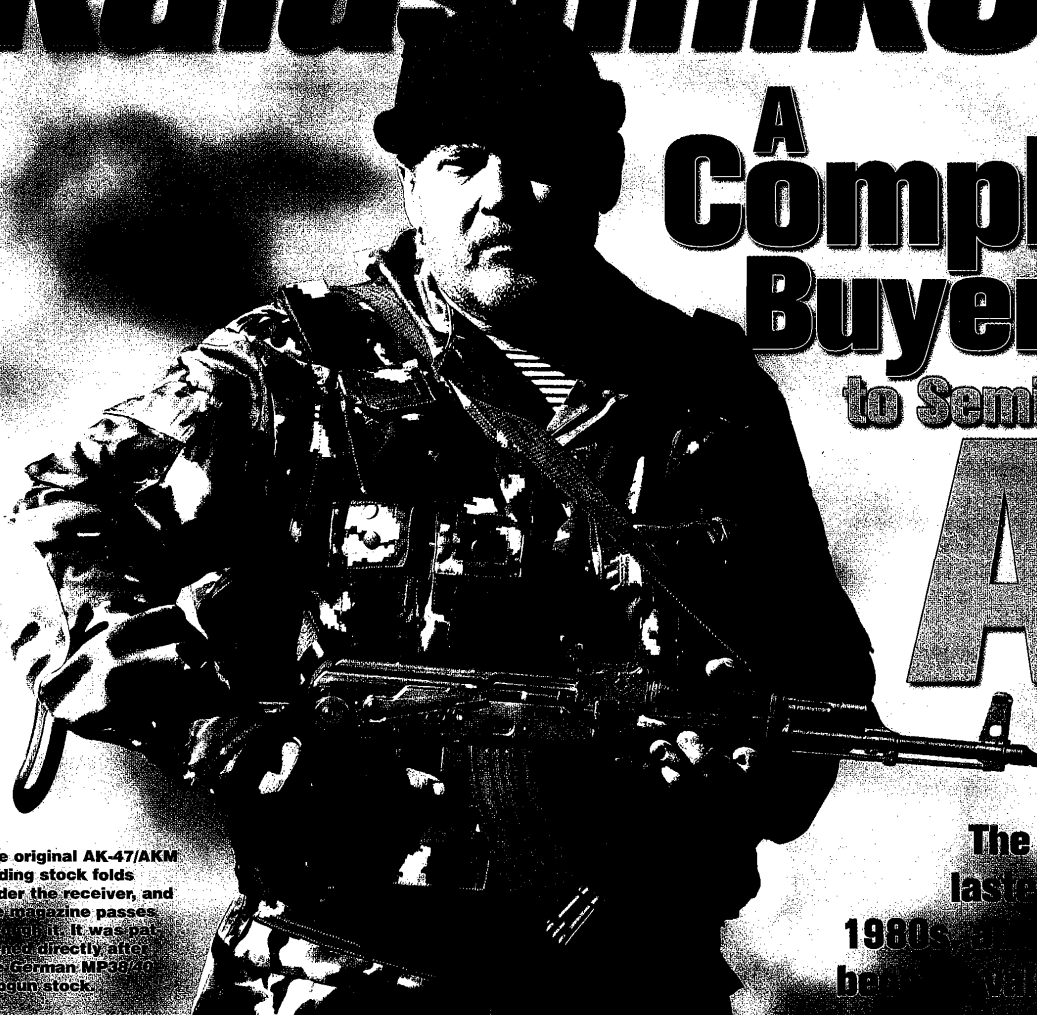
Kalashnikopies

A Complete Buyers Guide

to Semiautomatic-only

AKS

Text and photos by Peter G. Kokalis



The original AK-47/AKM folding stock folds under the receiver, and the magazine passes through it. It was not turned directly after the German MP38/40 subgun stock.

The golden age of AK copies lasted just a few years in the 1980s, and the copies sold then have become valuable collector firearms.

There is no more ubiquitous assault rifle than the Kalashnikov. It has been estimated that more than 100 million have been manufactured to date. Although principally associated with the present and former ComBloc nations, it will be encountered, to one degree or another, in nearly every country of the world. During the 1980s, tens of thousands of Kalashnikovs were imported to the United States in a semiautomatic-only format.

In that form, they were not "assault rifles," which, by definition, have selective-fire capability. No matter, the word "assault" became a sinister buzzword to anti-gun leftists in this country and their myrmidons in the media. No matter that they represented less than 3% of the firearms associated with crimes. They became touted by liberals with an agenda that included disarming the populace as "the criminals' weapons of choice."

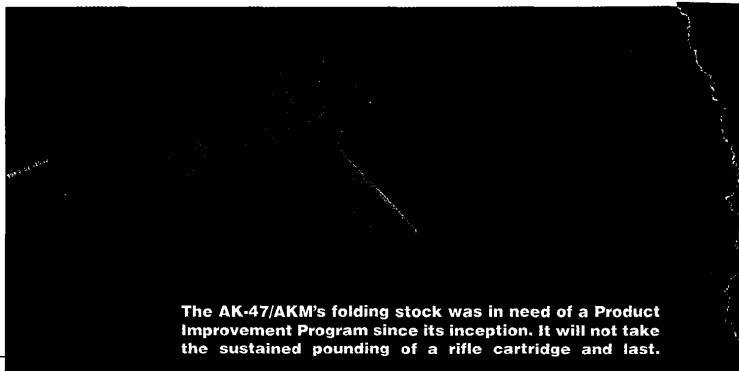
With an unrelenting focus placed on this outright lie by the mainstream media, the outcome was only a matter of time. Liberals are forever mesmerized by "feel good" legislation that has no real effect on a problem, as long as it doesn't impact upon their own personal rights and chattel property. First, 41st President George H. W. Bush banned the importation of a num-

ber of so-called "assault guns," which included all of the semi-automatic-only Kalashnikov types.

President Clinton and congress finalized the purging process by passing a "crime bill" that prevented not only the future importation, but domestic manufacture of firearms with such incredibly frightening features as pistol grips, flash hiders, folding stocks, bayonet lugs and magazines with a capacity of greater than 10 rounds. This latter ban has now sunset and domestically manufactured Kalashnikov-type rifles can once again be manufactured with some restrictions concerning the number of U.S.-made parts used in their fabrication.

But, those which were imported legally can be possessed and transferred freely,

except in the People's Republics of California, Connecticut and New Jersey and some Marxist municipalities here and there throughout the country. Various Kalashnikov models were imported from no fewer than five nations. How do they differ? Are some more desirable than others? While banning them had



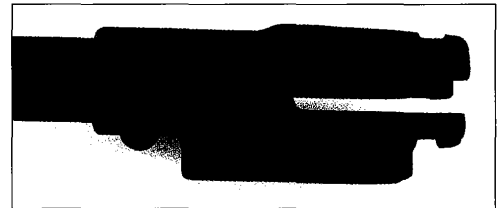
The AK-47/AKM's folding stock was in need of a Product Improvement Program since its inception. It will not take the sustained pounding of a rifle cartridge and last.



The first semiauto Kalashnikov to reach these shores was the Valmet M62/S, imported by Interarms. The M62/S was a decided marketing failure in this country.



The buttstock, plastic-coated steel tubing with a sheet-metal buttplate, was its single most grotesque feature. Since few were sold, it now will bring about \$3,400.



The three-pronged flash hider is pinned to the barrel and carries an integral bayonet lug for the Finnish knife/bayonet with its green leather, Lapp-style sheath.

The oversize, flapper-type magazine release lever has a large protective housing, which serves as the front of the trigger guard. Ribbed and oval-shaped, the black plastic pistol grip is totally unorthodox in appearance. Even more grotesque is the buttstock, which consists of plastic-coated steel tubing with a sheet-metal buttplate.

M62/S rear sights are mounted at the rear of the sheet-metal receiver cover. They are adjustable for elevation zero only and can be set in 100-meter increments from 100 to 600 meters with a 150-meter battle-sight position. As the receiver cover is of somewhat thicker gauge than that found on most Kalashnikovs, the rear sight rests securely and in this location provides a longer sight radius.

Enclosed within a protective hood, the round post front sight can be adjusted for windage zero more easily than on other Kalashnikovs, by merely turning opposing screws on the sight base. It came with a single-dot, flip-up luminous night sight on the front sight's housing. These night sights have by now lost all of their luminosity.

By the mid-1970s, Finland introduced an AKM-type rifle with a pinned and riveted sheet-metal receiver. Designated the M62-76, it was also imported in semiauto-only form as the M-76. Early specimens were identical in appearance to the M62/S except for the receiver, a more appealing pistol grip and the tubular buttstock, which was now hinged and folded to the left. It didn't help.

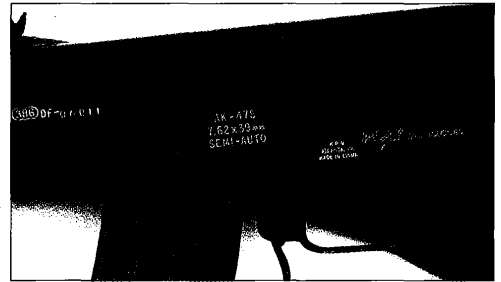
This well-made ugly duckling just didn't look like a Kalashnikov. Eventually a wooden-stock version was introduced, and the forearm was redesigned to include a heat shield over the gas tube. In this configuration, the M-76 was imported by Valmet Sporting Arms Division in Elmsford, N.Y.

If you want the version used by the Finnish army, it will have to be the M62/S as imported by Interarms. Since few were sold, the M62/S or the AKM-type with folding tubular buttstock will now bring approximately \$3,400 (this and all subsequent prices cited are for specimens in new condition) on the rare occasions

they are encountered for sale. Wooden stocked M-76 rifles are worth approximately \$2,500 to \$2,600.

In contrast, the next semiautomatic-only Kalashnikov imported to the United States was, in almost every regard, an exact duplicate of the Russian AKM. During the 1950s, the Soviet Union, as part of its military aid program, established the production of Soviet-pattern small arms in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

AKM rifles were manufactured at "Factory 54," the Maadi Company for Engineering Industries in Cairo. Key Egyptian personnel were trained in the Soviet Union, and the plant was supervised by Russians prior to their abrupt expulsion from Egypt at the hands of Anwar Sadat in 1972.



The AK-47/S Legend Series is a genuine AK-47. Nothing else like it was ever imported and today they are worth \$1,650 (fixed stock) to \$2,100 (down-folder) each.

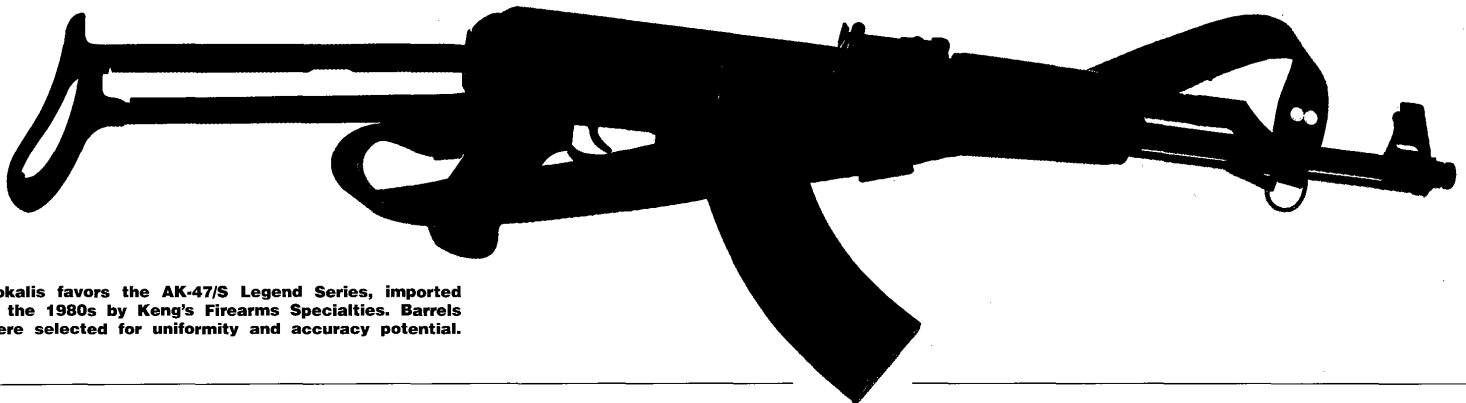
absolutely no effect on crime, it certainly increased their value, in some cases by a great deal.

Let's take a close look at them all and try to separate the wheat from the chaff. No need to concern ourselves with the method of operation or disassembly procedures, as they are almost identical in every instance, and I've covered that ground many times before. I will arbitrarily omit semiautomatic-only versions of the RPK since, without the full-auto option, these squad automatics, in my opinion, serve no useful function.

I'll also limit my discussion to those Kalashnikovs chambered for the original M43 7.62x39mm cartridge and subsequent 5.45x39mm round, leaving out the Israeli Galil and the 5.56x45mm NATO models of the Finnish Valmet and Chinese Kalashnikovs.

The very first semiautomatic-only Kalashnikov to reach these shores was the Valmet Valtion Metallitehtaat (or State Metal Works) M62/S, imported from Finland by Interarms in Alexandria, Va. Based upon the third model AK-47, the M62/S was a decided marketing failure in the United States. Although internally a Kalashnikov in every detail, except for its selector lever, magazine and mill-finished, forged receiver, externally it bears little resemblance to the Kalashnikov stereotype.

Its odd, but effective, three-pronged flash hider is pinned to the barrel and carries an integral bayonet lug that accepts only the indigenous Finnish knife/bayonet with its green leather, Lapp-style sheath. The gas tube is unprotected; there is a black plastic bottom handguard only.



Kokalis favors the AK-47/S Legend Series, imported in the 1980s by Keng's Firearms Specialties. Barrels were selected for uniformity and accuracy potential.



Top: pre-ban Yugoslav semiautomatic-only AKM-type rifles were imported by American Arms, Inc. and Mitchell Arms, Inc. and were equivalents (without the grenade-launching sights and gas cut-off) of the wooden-stocked M70B1 and folding-stock M70AB2. **Bottom:** Currently Century Arms is marketing a folding stock Yugoslav AKM with the grenade launching sights and gas cut-off, but with a U.S.-made receiver of standard wall thickness.

Designated as the "ARM" (Automatic Rifle Mistr), a semiautomatic-only version of the Egyptian AKM was introduced to the American public in 1982 by the U.S. division of Steyr-Daimler-Puch in Steyr, Austria. For all intents and purposes this is as close as most of us will ever come to a Russian AKM.

The laminated wood handguards and buttstock are correct in every detail. The lower handguard has the proper hand swells, and the buttstock has been reinforced with steel pins in all the right places. All the wood furniture was imported from Finland but finished in Egypt. The plastic pistol grip was injection-molded to the correct Soviet configuration.

The metal components are exactly those of the Russian AKM. Small recesses on each side of the receiver, directly over the magazine-well, serve as magazine guides and instantly distinguish this as an AKM. The four gas escape holes found on each side of the AK-47's gas cylinder have been omitted, and there are two gas relief holes on each side of the gas block where it mates with the gas tube. The bayonet lug is directly under the gas block.

Rear sights are graduated to 1000 meters (with a 300-meter battle-sight setting marked "P") instead of the AK-47's 800-meter maximum. An AKM muzzle brake was installed. The sheet-metal receiver cover has transverse ribs and a rolled edge over the ejection port. Chambers and bores are hard-chromed. All of the exterior metal surfaces have been finished with a baked-on black enamel over phosphate. Only the green web sling was of Egyptian design.

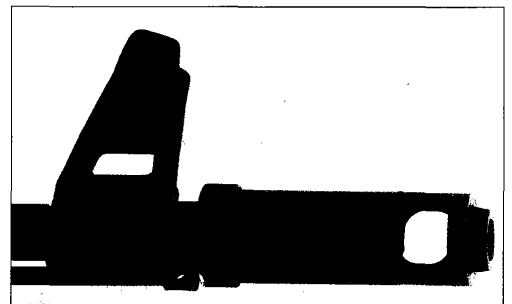
No doubt about it, except for the selective-fire option and markings on the receiver, this is a Soviet AKM. Yet no more than a few thousand were brought in before importation ceased. In 1986 about two-dozen semiautomatic-only Egyptian ARMs with a side-folding buttstock, similar in appearance to that of the East German MPiKMS-72, entered the United States via a small importer. Today Steyr/Maadi ARM rifles are worth about \$1,600. The folding stock variant is worth considerably more, and when one can be located it will fetch as much as \$2,500.

Why did the Steyr/Maadi ARM fail? There were two principal reasons. First, at the time it was being imported a supply of reasonably-priced ammunition was not available. Berdan-primed, noncorrosive, Finnish Lapua 7.62x39mm ammunition (usually headstamped "VPT" with two digits indicating the year of production) cost 45-55¢ per round. Norma's Boxer-primed ammo in this caliber was selling for 85¢ per round. Yugoslav ammunition was just starting to trickle into this country. Americans don't buy firearms unless they can afford to shoot them.

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Century Arms markets a semiauto version of the Romanian AKM. The receivers were imported with a magazine-well that would accept only an in-line 10-round magazine and subsequently modified, with BATFE approval, to accept standard staggered-column, detachable box AK magazines.



The muzzle device on this Romanian AK74 was permanently spot-welded in place to pass muster under the 1994 "assault weapon" ban that ended after 10 years in 2004.

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The SA M-7 Classic is a reincarnation of third type AK-47. Manufactured by Arsenal, Inc. in Las Vegas, this represents the highest possible quality in an AK.

Second, within a year after the introduction of the Steyr/Maadi ARM, the People's Republic of China (PRC) gained Most Favored Nation status with the United States, and Clayco Sports Ltd. of Clay Center, Kans., commenced importation of the first PRC semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs at a price substantially lower than the Egyptian version. Both rigid and folding-stock variants were imported under the designation "AKS". While these rifles were of the AKM type—that is, the receiver body had been fabricated from a 1mm-thick U-section of stamped sheet-metal, extensively supported by pins and rivets, numerous features of the AK-47 were retained.

The rear sight had a maximum elevation of 800 meters, and the 300-meter battle-sight setting was marked "D". The receiver cover was without transverse ribs or a rolled edge over the ejection port. There were four gas escape holes on each side of the gas cylinder. There were no hand swells on the lower handguard.

Handguards, pistol grip and buttstock on early Clayco AKS rifles were of reddish-brown plastic. This was quickly changed to black plastic in an attempt to broaden its appeal to American shooters. All exterior metal surfaces were salt blued. Bolts and bolt carriers were left "in the white" (unfinished) or phosphated. Clayco provided these rifles with only one magazine (blocked to accept only five rounds), plastic oil bottle, sling and buttstock cleaning kit. Spare magazines and bayonets were also available. Today, any of the Clayco Kalashnikovs are worth \$650 to \$750 each.

The semiautomatic-only Kalashnikov was off and running. Clayco dropped along the wayside, but several other importers picked up the slack, and rifles started to pour in from the PRC.

One of the more interesting was a sidefolder (PRC Type 56-2) with tubular buttstock struts that was standard issue with the People's Liberation Army. First imported by Pacific International Merchandising Corporation in Sacramento, California and manufactured by arsenal 626 (abbreviated as "66" in a triangle on the

receiver) in Hei Long Jing Province, it was fitted with a pistol grip resembling those of the Browning M1917A1 and M1919A4/A6 machine guns (apparently an export-only feature, as I observed these grips on PRC Type 56 rifles in Afghanistan). This rifle will presently bring between \$1,200 to \$1,300.

These rifles, fitted with a PLA-issue, AKM-type pistol grip were eventually imported by PTK International, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia, which represented the small arms products of Poly Technologies, Inc. All Poly Tech Kalashnikovs were manufactured at arsenal 386 in Fu Jian Province, although a few early specimens were produced at arsenal 416 (actually arsenal 976) in Shan Dong Province.

The original AK-47/AKM folding stock was in need of a PIP (Product Improvement Program) since its inception. A double-strut type, controlled by a large press-button release located above the pistol grip on the left side of the receiver, it folds under the receiver, and the magazine passes through it. Patterned directly after the German World War II MP38/40 submachine gun stock, it's adequate for firing the 9mm Parabellum pistol round, but will not take the sustained pounding of a rifle cartridge.

I once examined an early Soviet folding-stock AK-47 in South West Africa (now called Namibia) near the Angolan border. The stock latch was so worn that the rifle could be rotated 15° in either direction after the stock was securely braced against the shoulder—not very beneficial to the Kalashnikov's already limited accuracy potential.

Soviet designers addressed this problem in the caliber 5.45x39mm AKS-74 by designing a side-folding stock. PRC designers arrived at an even more robust solution. Their stock's skeletonized frame (as imported by PTK) was fabricated from a single piece of heavy-gauge sheet metal, bent and folded into the proper shape. Five horizontal ribs have been stamped into the buttplate portion.

There is a 4.75-inch-long, reddish-brown plastic panel on each side of the stock at the forward end. These panels have ribbed gripping surfaces and are retained by a threaded screw and pin. They serve as a compartment to hold the cleaning kit. Depress a spring-loaded pin on top of the stock and the cleaning kit will pop out to the rear.

The latch mechanism is operated by a checkered, spring-loaded release button on top of the stock. Press down on the button, and the stock can be swung to the right, where it locks in place. The button must be pressed again to open the stock.

The latch mechanism is quite substantial, and this stock is every bit as stable as a non-folding wooden stock. When folded, access to the trigger is maintained, although manipulation of the selector lever is somewhat more difficult. Both handguards and the pistol grip were injection-molded reddish-brown plastic.

All other features of the Type 56-2, as imported by PTK International, Inc., were those of the other PRC AKM-type rifles, except that there was no provision for the attachment of a bayonet. If you want the compactness of a folding-stock AK, then this is the one to acquire. These PTK side-folders now sell for \$1,200 to \$1,300.

PTK International also distributed rigid, wooden-stocked (PRC Type 56) and down-folder (PRC Type 56-1) versions of the AKM-style (sheet-metal receivers) Kalashnikov with cruciform-shaped folding spike bayonets. Either variant is now worth between \$1,200 to \$1,400.

A faithful semiauto copy of the third model AK-47 (Avtomat Kalashnikova obrazets 1947g or Kalashnikov assault rifle model 1947) was produced for PTK and imported under the designation AK-47/S Legend Series. Its cold-hammer-forged receiver required a total of 105 individual machining operations. Barrels were selected for uniformity and accuracy potential. Chambers, bores and pistons were hard-chromed. Polish and bluing of the external metal surfaces was exceptional. Both the bolt and bolt carrier were lightly phosphate-finished.

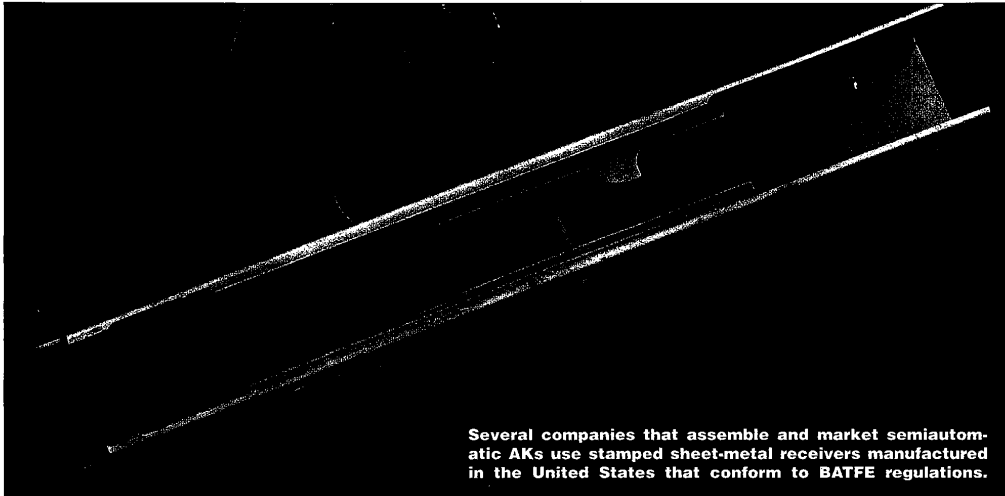
The wood buttstock, pistol grip and handguards were stained and varnished to an exact image of a Vietnam-era AK-47. Cross-checkering on the wooden pistol grip was crude and correct. An AK-47 muzzle nut was attached to the barrel. The front sight post had open protective ears instead of a hood with a hole for the adjustment tool (either is proper for the AK-47).

A Russian-style AK-47 bayonet was supplied with the AK-47/S rifle. It has an 8-inch satin blade with a spear-point shape and centrally-placed fullers. The blued-steel hilt has mahogany-stained wood grips (usually wood-fiber-impregnated plastic on

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The SA M-7 SF has a side-folding stock of the style in service with the Bulgarian armed forces. It's equipped with the conventional Soviet side optic rail.



Several companies that assemble and market semiautomatic AKs use stamped sheet-metal receivers manufactured in the United States that conform to BATFE regulations.

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Soviet specimens) held in place by two bolts and slot-head nuts at each end. A web hanger is attached to two metal loops at the rear of the blued-steel scabbard. Except for the selective-fire option, this is a genuine AK-47. Nothing else like it was ever imported and today they are worth \$1,650 (fixed stock) to \$2,100 (down-folder) each.

Rifles imported by PTK International, Inc., differed in one very important regard from all of the other caliber 7.62x39mm semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs imported to the United States: military-issue Kalashnikovs and their semiautomatic-only equivalents do not have spring-loaded firing pins.

If commercial or reloaded ammunition—usually with primers more sensitive than mil spec because of a thinner cup and sometimes a difference in the primer mixture—is fired in rifles of this type, the free-floating firing pin can, and eventually will, result in a slam-fire with ignition out of battery.

The resulting detonation can lead to self-destruction of the firearm and anatomical damage of varying severity to the shooter. At my suggestion, all Kalashnikov-type rifles distributed by PTK International, Inc. were fitted with spring-loaded firing pins.

Two other countries exported semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs to the United States. In 1986 Kassnar Imports, Inc., in Harrisburg, Pa., obtained a waiver from the State Department's restricted munitions list to import 7,000 AKM-type semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs from Hungary. Along with the model designation (SA 85M), caliber, importer and serial number, the left side of the receiver was marked with the state arsenal's logo, "FEG" (Femaru Fegyvar es Gepgyar in Budapest).

Available with either a downfolding or rigid wood stock, the wood furniture was cut from native blond beech (twice steamed, disinfected, dried to a humidity level of 10-12% and then oil-varnished with a waxed paste). The wooden pistol grip's shape was quite distinctive and taken from the plastic grip on the Hungarian AMD short-barreled assault rifle.

While the four gas escape holes on each side of the gas cylinder have been retained from the AK-47, the pinned and riveted sheet-metal receiver, the two gas relief holes on each side of the gas block where it mates with the gas cylinder, the muzzle compensator, sheet-metal receiver cover with transverse ribs and rolled edge over the ejection port, bayonet lug under the gas block, rear sight graduated to 1000 meters, and all other features are exactly as found on the Soviet AKM.

All exterior metal surfaces, including the bolt group and magazines, are finished with a matte black enamel baked over phosphate. Like all other semiautomatic-only AKMs, there is no auto safety sear or anti-bounce device.

Complete with three 30-round magazines, wire-cutter bayonet and scabbard, leather sling, two plastic lubricant bottles in a tray and the usual buttstock cleaning kit with jag tip, nylon brush and front sight adjusting tool, the Hungarian SA 85M could original-

ly be purchased for approximately \$400. They were all sold in less than a year. Now you can expect to pay from \$1,400 (fixed stock) to \$1,550 (down-folder).

Last, but most assuredly not least, were the Yugoslav AKMs imported first by American Arms, Inc. in North Kansas City, Mo., (in small quantity only) and then subsequently by Mitchell Arms, Inc. in Santa Ana, Calif. Marked as either the "Model AK" (American Arms) or "Model AK-47" (Mitchell Arms), these rifles are actually the semiautomatic-only equivalents (without the grenade-launching sights and gas cut-off) of the wooden-stocked M70B1 and folding-stock M70AB2, both of which are essentially AKMs with sheet-metal receivers.

The receivers of all other AKM series rifles are fabricated from a 1mm-thick U-section of sheet metal. M70B1 and folding-stock M70AB2 receiver bodies are constructed using a U-section of sheet-metal that is 1.5mm in thickness. This 50% increase in wall thickness substantially decreases the accuracy-reducing twisting and flexing of the AKM receiver, which is associated with the recoil and counter-recoil cycles. In addition, the barrel extension, which contains the bolt's locking recesses, is considerably more substantial than that of all other AKMs. There's no free lunch, however; the M70B1 weighs 8.2 pounds, empty.

There are some other interesting features on these Yugoslav AKMs. They are equipped with beta-light night sights—a flip-up at the rear with a horizontal tritium bar on each side of the open U-notch, and a flip-up with a single vertical tritium bar that blocks the round-post front sight.

A spring-loaded crosspin at the rear of the receiver, just below the receiver cover, must be depressed from the left side before the recoil-spring guide rod/cover latch can be pressed forward to remove the receiver cover. This feature is of dubious value.

All of the wood furniture is teak. Dense and attractive, it was never properly oiled, so I suggest application of a mixture composed of equal parts of linseed oil, turpentine and household white vinegar. Although standard-issue M70B1 and M70AB2 rifles come with ribbed, black plastic pistol grips, the semiautomatic-only versions imported to the United States were fitted with teak-wood grips from the M76 caliber 7.92x57mm sniper rifle (a highly modified version of the Russian Dragunov SVD). They may not look like Kalashnikov grips, but they exhibit excellent human engineering.

M70B1 rifles have no butt traps for a cleaning kit, but instead are equipped with a half-inch rubber recoil pad,

which increases the length of pull by .8 inches. That's a significant difference as, in general, the Kalashnikov's buttstock is too short for most Westerners.

All the steel components, except for the bolt group (left in the white), have been salt blued. With the exception of the receiver cover, which is that of the AK-47, all of the other features on the Yugoslav rifles are those of the AKM series.

Well-made and exhibiting above-average wood-to-metal fit, the Yugoslav AKMs were especially attractive because of their somewhat enhanced accuracy potential. Complete with one magazine, buttstock cleaning kit, twine pull-through and web sling, the M70B1 retailed for \$675, while the folding stock sold for \$698 when originally imported. They remain highly desirable and today, you will have to pay \$2,100 and \$2,850, respectively.

After the so-called assault rifle ban was in place, semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs from Egypt and China were briefly imported in a configuration that was acceptable to the BATF and supposedly made them suitable for "sporting purposes". They were equipped with thumbhole stocks, 10-round magazines, and had neither a bayonet lug nor a flash suppressor.

They did not appeal to U.S. shooters and sold poorly. Today they are worth little more than they originally sold for. Some of these rifles were acquired by collectors who used their receivers—illegally—together with surplus parts kits to assemble semiautomatic-only versions of exotic AKs.

Six or seven years ago, caliber 5.45x39mm ammunition began to enter the United States through importers like Wolf Performance Ammunition (Dept. SGN, 1225 North Lance Lane, Anaheim, Calif. 92806; toll-free phone: 888-757-WOLF; fax: 714-632-9232; website: www.wolfammo.com). This, in turn, led to the importation and manufacture of Kalashnikov-type rifles in this caliber.

Whether imported or manufactured in the United States, semiautomatic-only Kalashnikov-type rifles had a number of features in common prior to the sunset after 10 years of the assault rifle and 10-round magazine ban.

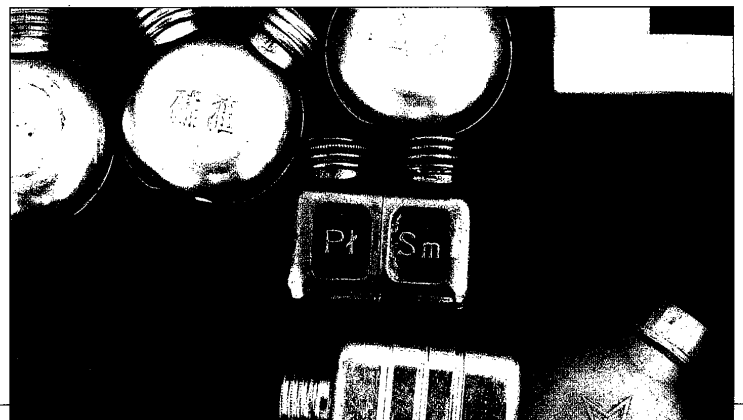
They all had fixed stocks, as folding stocks of any type were not permitted. The rifles had no bayonet lugs. Muzzle devices that could look like but not serve as flash hiders, were permanently attached to the barrel. Magazines with a capacity of more than 10 rounds had to be certified as pre-ban in origin. Most of the imported rifles were brought in with magazine wells milled for in-line 10-round magazines. These receivers were later modified by importers such as Century Arms International to accept pre-ban large-capacity magazines.

With the recent sunset of the assault rifle and magazines of greater than 10 rounds ban, the rules of play changed once again. First, keep in mind that the ban against importing so-called assault rifles is still in effect. Those imported in the 1980s have retained their value and will continue to appreciate in value into the foreseeable future.

Those manufactured in the United States may now have folding stocks of any kind, bayonet lugs and flash hiders of all types (providing they do not modify the sound pressure level in any way, i.e., be determined to be sound suppressors by the BATFE).

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AK oil bottles come in all shapes, sizes and colors and form a basis for collecting on their own. Most are fabricated from either plastic or galvanized tin.



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AK magazines come in many styles: 7.62x39mm: Soviet 40-round RPK, Bulgarian 40-round RPK, early slab-sided AK-47, ribbed steel, rare aluminum AKM, synthetic Norinco, Soviet glass-reinforced, rust-colored synthetic, and an assortment of 5-, 10- and 20-round types.

However, under U.S. Federal Statute 922r at least six of the following components for stamped receiver semiautomatic-only AKs and five for machined receiver weapons, must be made in the United States: 1) frames, receivers, receiver castings, forgings or stampings; 2) barrels; 3) mounting blocks (trunnions); 4) muzzle attachments; 5) bolts; 6) bolt carriers; 7) gas pistons; 8) triggers; 9) hammers; 10) disconnectors; 11) buttstocks; 12) pistol grips; 13) forearms or handguards; 14) magazine bodies; 15) magazine followers; or 16) magazine floorplates.

As a consequence of these regulations, a substantial array of fascinating semiautomatic-only, Kalashnikov-type rifles are currently being produced by a wide range of manufacturers ranging from Century Arms International, Inc. (Dept. SGN, 430 South Congress Avenue, Suite 1, Del Ray Beach, Fla. 33445, phone: 1-800-527-1252; fax: 561-265-4520, website: www.centurymarms.com) and Arsenal, Inc. (Dept. SGN, 5015 West Sahara Avenue, Suite #125, Las Vegas, Nev. 89146; phone: 1-888-539-2220; fax: 1-702-643-2088; website: www.arsenalinc.com) to custom manufacturers such as Marc Krebs (Krebs Custom, Inc., Dept. SGN, 1000 North Rand Road, #106, Wauconda, Ill. 60084, phone: 847-487-7776; website: www.krebscustom.com).

Century Arms International, for example, is manufacturing faithful semiautomatic-only versions of AKs ranging from down-folder Yugoslav AKMs to the exotic Hungarian AMD-65M (with a barrel extension to meet BATFE requirements for a rifle's barrel length). Arsenal, Inc. produces some of the highest quality Bulgarian-type AK-47 and AKM semiautomatic-only rifles ever seen in the United States.

It has truly become the best of all Kalashnikov semiautomatic-only worlds. The pre-import-ban AKs have continued to appreciate in value and a whole new generation of Kalashnikov-type weapons has become available with the sunset of the assault rifle and large-capacity magazine ban.

AK Magazines

Kalashnikov magazines come in several different configurations and, in my opinion, the Yugoslav variants are the worst. In

outward appearance they are the standard 30-round, blued, all-steel magazines with reinforcing ribs on the sides of the body. However, the magazine follower is raised on the left side to block the bolt group in the rear position after the last round has been fired.

Since there is no hold-open mechanism in the receiver, as soon as the empty magazine is withdrawn the bolt group will jump forward into battery. That's dumb. These magazines are more difficult to remove, because the full force of the compressed recoil spring presses the bolt group against the magazine follower and, after insertion of a loaded magazine, the bolt group must still be retracted manually. Just use standard Kalashnikov magazines in the Yugoslav AKM.

These ribbed magazines will be encountered either blued or painted black. With one exception (other than the Yugoslav), the country of origin cannot be determined. Finnish steel magazines have a rectangular steel ring on the floorplate to secure them to the soldier's LBE (Load Bearing Equipment).

Early Soviet AK-47 steel magazines had slab-sided bodies without reinforcing ribs. They are uncommon. Even more uncommon is a Russian ribbed magazine made of aluminum. It was fielded briefly when the AKM was introduced in an effort to reduce the overall weight of the system. However, they proved to be insubstantial and were recalled and turned to scrap.

More recent Soviet 7.62x39mm magazines were fabricated from a glass-reinforced, rust-colored synthetic. Molded in two parts, the magazine body was assembled using a viscous, two-part epoxy resin adhesive. The adhesive residue was removed by hand-grinding. They were marked with a factory code and either the Russian five-pointed star, arrow-in-triangle or, more rarely, star-in-shield.

Most of the Soviet "red" plastic magazines in this country came from either Afghanistan or South Africa. They were followed by a magazine with a body of dark-brown butyrate plastic (also called ABS) of the type commonly used in appliance manufacture in the United States. The two body components, probably vacuum-formed, were heat-molded together rather than glued. There are very few in the United States.

The new AK100 series magazines are made from black, fiber-glass-reinforced, thermosetting (this indicates that heat is used to cure the resin) polyamide (epoxy-based resin). Injection-molded polyamides are super industrial-strength synthetics well known for their resistance to high temperatures, corrosion, wear, chemicals and radiation. Lighter than steel, they have a higher tensile strength than aluminum.

Chinese Type 63 20-round, ribbed steel magazines can also be used in the Kalashnikov. However, like the Yugoslav magazine, the follower has been raised to operate a hold-open mechanism, and the bolt group will be held rearward until the empty magazine is removed. A small quantity of these were imported by Keng's Firearms Specialty, Inc.

I have fired tens of thousands of rounds through several hundred Kalashnikovs of every make and configuration in at least four different calibers (7.62x39mm, 5.45x39mm, 5.56x45mm NATO and 7.62x51mm NATO) without a single stoppage of any kind. There is no more reliable assault rifle. Easily maintained

and almost idiot-proof, Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov's creation will always remain one of the great classics in the history of modern military small arms.

To be sure, it's far from perfect. Its selector lever is far too noisy (although this can be partially corrected by wrapping mono-filament fishing line around the lever). Ejection is far too violent, and cases will be thrown up to 30 feet to the right and front.

While this may irritate reloaders searching for their empties, it's a far more serious consideration for those firing from cover and concealment. There's no hold-open mechanism, but that's a debatable feature. Trigger pull weights will vary between 3 to 6 pounds, with an average of about 4 pounds. But, you travel a long, creepy road to get there.

However, the Kalashnikov rifle needs no test and evaluation from me to demonstrate its merits and idiosyncrasies. That would be the kind of pompous joke, which only the popular gun press would perpetrate on its readers. However, I must make note of the fact that the 5.56x45mm NATO versions I fired in Izhevsk, Russia displayed noticeably greater accuracy than any of those chambered for the 7.62x39mm and 5.45x39mm rounds. They were the accuracy equal of the M16 and any other assault rifle I have fired that was chambered for this cartridge.

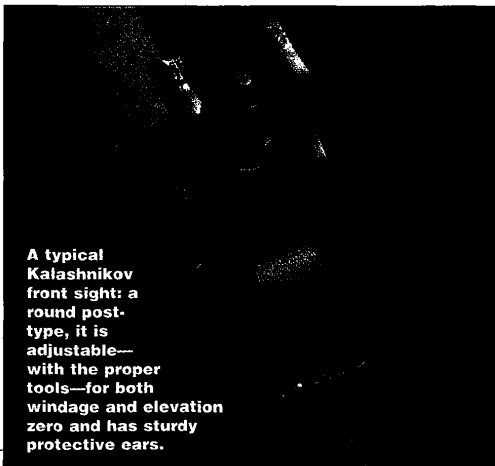
It has long been suggested that the AK's incredible reliability (I once fired 400 rounds through a North Korean AK-47 that later proved to have the rear portion of a broken case resting in the bottom of the receiver to the rear of the trigger mechanism) was partially at the expense of its accuracy potential.

It now appears to me that this may have been mostly a consequence of the mediocre ammunition produced by Eastern Bloc factories. The 5.56x45mm NATO ammunition I fired at the Izhmash test range was manufactured by Fabrique Nationale. All the more reason to use Black Hills 7.62x39mm ammunition, which has demonstrated exceptional accuracy potential.

No weapon system I have ever examined has been without flaws, but the Kalashnikov shines through its peculiarities. More than good enough, it has proven itself on almost every battlefield in every conflict since World War II.

Which of the 1980s-era semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs is best? Those who want the version closest to Russian original must select a Steyr/Maadi. If you want to maximize the system's accuracy potential, then you should opt for the Yugoslav M70. For me the PTK Legend Series AK-47/S is especially attractive, as it is an authentic reproduction of the Vietnam-era AK-47.

All of them will continue to escalate in value. It is unlikely that any will ever be imported again anytime in the foreseeable future. The best source for the early pre-ban semiautomatic-only Kalashnikovs remains Gene Guilaroff (Dept. SGN, ArcLight Unlimited, P.O. Box 173, Alvaton, Ky. 42122; phone: 270-622-7309). SGN



A typical Kalashnikov front sight: a round post-type, it is adjustable—with the proper tools—for both windage and elevation zero and has sturdy protective ears.