

ARCHIVING AN AR15

AR15 Maintenance

[part three of three]

Glen Zediker

I've had a lot of questions from our soldiers about how to keep their rifles running in the sand. I take those questions very seriously. Likewise, a tactical operator can't exactly keep a rifle around that's dripping off oil.

Here's old-school but, guess what, it works. Graphite powder works well dusted over the bolt and carrier and also on the trigger group and other sliding parts, like bolt stops and magazine releases. It's dry. As a bone. It needs looked in on though. Since it's dry, and since it's a powder, it will displace. Wipe or brush it out and replace it. Other lubes that can be effective in a powder form are molybdenum disulfide, tungsten disulfide, and boron nitride. Graphite costs a lot less and works just as well in this application. Brownell's has a graphite that's the right micron size and quality for our needs.

Here's (relatively) new, or at least to us. This is T-9. It's a spray developed by Boeing for use on, of course, aircraft. It's waterproof and dries, well, dry. It's good and easy. Spray on, wipe off for a dry coat; spray on, leave on for a film-coat effect. It's proprietary but proper in a firearms application. It's been getting a lot of use in the sand pit. Recommended. Get it from Brownell's.

ORIGIN: This is a jist of an article series I did for another magazine on maintenance for AR15s. I added a few things that I don't send to magazines due to space concerns.

The last two bits were on the cleaning and care of the competition- or frequent-use AR15. For a rifle that's fired a good number of rounds and then rested only until the next outing, which might be as soon as the next, day, week, month, or so, it was pretty much rinse and repeat. Scrub it out, dry it off, fill it full of slick stuff, shoot it, scrub it out, dry it off, and so on.



That's not the way everyone runs their rifles. Every rifle needs to run, though, at least at some time. I absolutely do not recommend following a routine shoot-and-clean procedure for an AR15 that needs to be kept ready to run but that might not be fired for a good long while. There are two ways of preparing such rifles for such storage, because there are two ways they need to awaken from deep sleep. The first is eyes wide open quickly and hitting the ground running; the next is slowly, hitting the snooze button and sipping coffee until it's dang good and ready to chamber and eject. The first is what law enforcement or military ops folk, or a homeowner who keeps a carbine for personal protection, needs to consider. The next is what someone like me who has a boat-load of guns, and shoots only three or four with regularity, needs to know to do.

An AR15 that's stored for ready use needs a different set of lubricants, and also a correspondingly different outlook from its owner.

There's yet another take on AR15 reliability with respect to its capacity to function, frequently, in harsh environments. I get e-mails from sand-land from soldiers wanting a recommendation on how to keep their M16s running under the dust and grit they encounter 360 degrees 365 days a year. Those, I hope you know, I take very seriously.

No semi-auto rifle can run dry for long. It needs a lube coat between metal-to-metal contact areas or points or it may not work at all, or at least won't for long. Metal-to-metal wears one or the other, and especially when the metals are of different materials. The effects of running metal against metal are increased friction, which leads to increased heat, when can then lead to surface





Brownell's has a product that's a very effective dry lube. Action Magic II works especially well on triggers, ejectors, extractors and things that need to keep a reliable coating in place. A problem with powders is getting such parts coated such that they stay coated. This one stays. It's two parts and tough. This, by my experience, is the most lubricious (my cousins say "slick") of all the dry lubes I've yet tried. It's hard to do large areas with it, though, but in conjunction with something like T-9 or graphite powder for the buffer and carrier, it's a star component in maintaining a ready rifle.

This stuff works pretty well, but not well enough. Lemmesplain. I've used it to protect all manner of metal parts and can't say I've seen any rust on them, but this, as well as Birchwood-Casey Sheath and similar, eventually turns into a glaze that's dang hard to remove. I won't use it inside a barrel bore.

Before using a dry lube, it's really important to thoroughly clean the parts it will go on. If you don't then some of the grunge left behind might loosen and dirty up the works. Corrosion protection may be somewhat compromised running dry lube. As long as a part is coated it should be okay, but none of these give the protection of wet lubes.

Barrel? After cleaning, a patch carrying a light wipe of lightweight rust preventative, which can be as simple as plain old gun oil, should take care of it. I would not recommend or advise the use of any dry or powdered lube anywhere inside a barrel, chamber included. What matters is, first, getting a barrel cleared of all firing residues that cause corrosion, and then also not using a copper solvent when you clean the barrel. It's often the trace residues left behind by these products that are going to expedite corrosion over time. Clean the bore and chamber with a petroleum-based solvent or an abrasive paste. And make daggone sure you clean the chamber!

Component selection has a little to a lot to do with how well an AR15 will run without oil and grease. Plated components help. Plated bolts and carriers, for instance, are less likely to skid to a stop than phosphate- or oxide-coated parts. Chrome or titanium-nitride has a smoother finish that is effectively more lubricious on its own. A standard trigger group also takes more from the elements than a competition-use assembly. Don't put a "match" trigger in a carry gun.

I wouldn't rely on any AR15 until it's had at least 500 rounds through it. Of course, part of that is function testing but the rest is getting some wear and seat on the parts. The rifle doesn't have to be fired with no or minimal lube during these "break-in" rounds. The parts will still find their own tracks. Lubricant doesn't stop metal from wearing, no more than oiling a whetstone stops a knife from sharpening.



Long-term storage is pretty simple, or can be, but with a more complex decision to be made at the get-go. It's a lot easier to store a rifle fully protected than it is to get it back ready for use.

For burial at sea, the first thing is to clean it, really well. Get it down to nothing but metal. Coat it over with either synthetic grease or a serious barrier agent like cosmoline. Right. That still works better than anything. I use paint brushes. Put it aside. Forget about it. It'll keep. One of the fortunate things we have going for us is that the AR15 doesn't have near as many corrosion-prone parts as other rifles.

For more routine storage, like for a few months, it's mostly important to clean the bore down to the steel, and, as said, don't use a copper solvent. It's dang near impossible to really get rid of the residues that leaves behind. And don't shoot moly-coated bullets. That's



another coating that's virtually impossible to fully remove and corrosion tends to emanate from underneath residual moly. I am talking only about longer-term issues on these warnings. I use copper solvents and shoot moly-coated bullets in my main competition rifles. I also scrub the fool out of any rifle I want to put up for a spell that's been subjected to these goods.

Again, most parts on an AR15 will be well-protected if they're cleaned and coated with just about any product that doesn't encourage corrosion. That's not the same as one that inhibits corrosion, but good enough is okay. Usually. The environment matters more, and matters most. Isolating the rifle from or improving the conditions under which it's stored, should keep most pieces in the gun safe. Desiccants have their place, and that should be in and near where firearms are stored.



Here's the it. Cosmoline and a sealed Triple-Tough baggie with a Rust Blox square and you're set for the next ice age. Cut the bag to fit length and iron that bad boy shut. The Rust Blox release a corrosion-inhibiting vapor, for about a year. That's where the Cosmoline comes in. I put Rust Blox in my safes. Brownell's has all this.