Smith & Wesson
M&P15VTAC

The shooting world is full of "experts." My favorite is the gunfighting expert who has never been anywhere near a gunfight. Viking Tactics President Kyle Lamb is not one of these folks. As a retired Sergeant Major with more than 21 years serving in some of the U.S. Army's most elite units, Lamb has been deployed to real-world combat zones, as he puts it, "From Mogadishu to Mosul." Out of this experience comes the Smith & Wesson M&P15VTAC Carbine, a collaboration between a top-notch manufacturer and a real-world operator.

At first glance, it is obvious the VTAC is not just another AR. Unlike many models, the VTAC sports a combination of factory parts and aftermarket accessories—a blend of an off-the-rack rifle and a high-end custom version. The VTAC comes complete with a sling, light mount, light and a single Magpul PMag 30-round magazine. Its flat-top upper receiver allows mounting a variety of optics and auxiliary iron sights.

Each feature on the rifle fits into Viking Tactics' doctrine of gunfighting. First and foremost is simplicity: ARs can be accessorized to the point of impracticality. The M&P15VTAC sports clean lines and a slick overall appearance with minimal parts to snag on gear and other real-world obstacles. After a "good sighting system," all Lamb adds to an AR is a sling, a light and a vertical grip. "Grams are ounces and ounces are pounds," Lamb explained. As a result of watching the grams and ounces, this 6.5-pound carbine is light, handles well and, most importantly, is easy to shoot.

One of the most visibly prominent features of the carbine is the VTAC/JP Enterprises free-float handguard. A black textured finish provides plenty of purchase, but is not so aggressive as to tear the shooter's skin. Elongated slots allow mounting Picatinny rail sections in nearly any position desired, without having the entire fore-end covered with sharp rail teeth. Three short rail sections suitable for mounting sights, lights, lasers or foregrips are included.

The fore-end is complimented by a six-position adjustable VLTOR stock. Similar in design to the Crane/SOCOM stock, the VLTOR provides an excellent cheek weld and can be adjusted to accommodate shooters of all sizes. The grip is a standard M4 type. For mounting a sling, the VLTOR stock includes both a molded-in sling slot and ambidextrous female attachment points for push-button, QD sling swivels.

If nothing else, a fighting carbine should be versatile. The VTAC's 16-inch, standard-weight barrel features a 1:7-inch twist, which will stabilize just about any .223 Rem. projectile on the market. The barrel is made of 4140 steel and both the bore and the 5.56 NATO chamber are chrome-lined. Not only is 16 inches the legal minimum for non-NFA rifles, it provides a manageable overall length without compromising ballistics. The muzzle sports a SureFire FH556 flash hider.

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1. A SureFire FH556 flash hider tops off the M&P15VTAC's muzzle and also serves as a mount for SureFire suppressors.
2. Sling swivels can mount inside the slots in the fore-end and on the stock to attach the included VTAC padded sling.
3. Two tubular compartments in the VLTOR stock allow the user to store up to six CR123 batteries.
4. A distinctive VTAC/JP Enterprises free-float handguard provides superior purchase and multiple slots for mounting Picatinny rails.
5. The carbine's JP Enterprises speed hammer and single-stage trigger provided a light, 4.1-pound pull and greatly benefitted accuracy.

On Target
Accurate, reliable and versatile package featuring custom touches

Off Target
Carbine-length gas system

One of the better-known products developed and marketed by Viking Tactics is the VTAC two-point sling. This fully adjustable, padded nylon sling is a comfortable and practical way to carry a fighting rifle. The shooter can adjust the sling from a hands-free position holding the firearm tight across the chest, to a longer loop for transitions by using the weak hand to manipulate a single pull-tab. This excellent sling comes with the Smith & Wesson M&P15VTAC.

Completing the system, the carbine comes with a Viking Tactics light mount and a SureFire G2 flashlight. The mount attaches to one of the included rail sections and can be used in conjunction with a variety of tactical lights. It is simple, strong and works effectively.

Functionally, the carbine follows the tried-and-true Stoner design with a direct-gas-impingement, carbine-length gas system and a 5.56 NATO chambering. The bolt carrier and gas key are chromed. Two of the non-standard elements of the M&P15VTAC are the JP Enterprises speed hammer and single-stage match trigger. The trigger broke at 4.1 pounds with the slightest bit of creep, little take-up and a positive reset.

Given the versatility of the twist rate, I felt it was important to test a variety of bullet weights and types through the VTAC Carbine. Among the loads was a 70-grain ASYM load that uses Lake City brass and replicates the brown-tip ammunition currently used by U.S. Special Operations units. ASYM calls it a barrier load, so I shot it through every hard target I could find including steel, wood and concrete blocks—with outstanding results.

The combination of the VTAC Carbine and a Trijicon ACOG optic provided a light and effective package capable of engaging close-range and intermediate-distance targets with ease. Using a variety of shooting positions, there was no problem making consistent hits on a standard IPSC-style targets out to 300 meters.

Accuracy was very good. The VTAC was capable of sub-MOA accuracy with at least two of the loads tested. The groups the rifle produced with both the ASYM 77-grain load and the Barnes 55-grain VOR-TX load are better than many I've seen from accurized bolt-action rifles. This level of accuracy out of a 6.5-pound rifle makes the M&P15VTAC a natural choice for 3-gun or tactical carbine matches.

With today's versatile optics, the M&P15VTAC Carbine would be just as effective at clearing a room as it would taking a several-hundred-yard shot. This package bridges the gap between purpose-built long-range rifles and short-barreled carbines designed for CQB use. In a crowded AR marketplace, it stands out as unique in many respects. The VTAC is a real contender for anyone looking for a factory-built tactical or competition AR. Turns out real-world experience counts.

—Keith Wood

Specifications — Smith & Wesson M&P15VTAC Carbine

Manufacturer: Smith & Wesson; (800) 331-0852, www.smith-wesson.com
Action Type: Gas-operated, semi-automatic
Sights: None; Picatinny rail for mounting optics
Caliber: 5.56 NATO
Capacity: 30 rounds
Receiver: 7075-T6 Aluminum
Barrel: 4140 chrome-moly steel; 16 inches
Rifling: 6 grooves; 1:7-inch RH twist
Trigger: JP Enterprises single-stage; 4.1 pounds pull weight
Stock: VLTOR six-position adjustable
Length: 35 inches (stock extended)
Weight: 6 pounds, 8 ounces
Accessories: SureFire G2 light with mount, VTAC padded sling, 30-round Magpul PMag magazine, hard case
MSRP: $1,989

Shooting Results

Load	Velocity	Group Size		
		Smallest	Largest	Average
ASYM Precision Tactical Match Grade 77-grain OTM (BTHP)	2,529	.406	1.013	.803
ASYM Precision Tactical Match Grade 75-grain OTM (BTHP)	2,526	1.229	1.896	1.551
ASYM Solid Defense X Barrier (SDX) 70-grain TSX	2,604	1.206	1.488	1.378
Barnes VOR-TX 55-grain TSX	2,882	.729	1.031	.984
Federal Premium 69-grain BTHP	2,740	1.069	1.664	1.458

Velocity measured in fps 10 feet from the muzzle for 10 consecutive shots with a Competitive Edge Dynamics M2 Chronograph. Temperature: 33 degrees Fahrenheit. Accuracy measured in inches for five consecutive, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest at 100 yards using a Trijicon 3.5x35 ACOG.

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