



Most common and widely available type of lower is **FORGED**

By far the most common and widely available type of lower is the forged lower. These lowers start out as a solid block of aluminum and are forged into the general shape of the final product by large hydraulic hammers. From there, manufacturers will finish the product on a CNC machine. This part of the process allows the manufacturer to impart some uniqueness or certain desirable qualities to the lower, such as removing sections of material to lighten weight, or adding cuts that stray from the look of a standard MIL SPEC receiver for some visual aesthetics. One of the benefits of the forged lower receiver lies in the way compression forces in the forging process work to strengthen the product. It's also a relatively quick manufacturing process compared to other aluminum construction methods, so this style of lower can be mass produced most easily.

Billet lowers are also common. A billet lower is also machined from a solid block of aluminum – called a billet – however the entire process of making a billet lower is something like creating a sculpture. This process doesn't involve large forging hammers pounding out the shape, but rather material is removed from the billet slowly and methodically until all that remains is a functioning lower receiver. Billet lowers are generally more expensive because of the time-consuming and comparatively costly process of making them, but they can also be even more aesthetically pleasing and extremely lightweight. Billet lower manufacturers take advantage of the manufacturing process to get creative with the design of their lowers and the results can be pretty awesome. An increasingly popular example of that is a skeletonized lower receiver, which is a lower with a significant percentage of the material removed so that what remains is a "skeleton" of a lower. These are extremely lightweight and good for competition builds and race guns. If you're choosing a lower receiver based on how cool it looks, or how lightweight it is, you're probably going to want to check out a billet lower.

The last method of making aluminum lowers is to cast the lower, using liquid metal poured into a mold. As the material cools and hardens, the lower is removed from the cast and finished on a CNC machine. During the cooling process, the material forms a loose crystalline structure which means cast lowers are weaker than lowers made by the other two methods of manufacturing we've discussed. Cast lowers are not widely available, and most quality AR lower manufacturers do not use this method to make their products. Primary Arms doesn't sell any cast lowers, and that's because we would never choose to build an AR-15 with a cast lower. There's just no reasonable need to do so when stronger, more reliable lowers are available and affordable. But if you do ever come across one at a gun show or your local firearms store, it is important to know that it's certainly the weakest construction, and not up to military specifications.

The U.S. MIL SPEC requirements for lower aluminum lower receivers require the part to be finished by hardcoat anodizing. This chemical process gives the part durability, as well as improved lubricity. By placing the lower in a sulfuric acid bath and applying an electrical current, an even layer of aluminum oxide forms over the entirety of the lower. It's uncommon to find commercially sold receivers that haven't undergone the anodizing process, however many manufacturers are taking the finishes of their products a step further than the MIL SPEC baseline. For example, WMD Guns uses their patented NiB-X Nickel Boron coating on the entire receiver, which improves lubricity, corrosion resistance, and friction coefficient while giving the part a smooth, shiny finish.



Ever-growing variety of colors are available

Many other proprietary coatings exist and can impart incredible design effects and color combinations to give your rifle a custom look that is personal to you. Duracoat, Cerakote, and other popular coating processes are layered on top of an anodized receiver using one of an ever-growing variety of colors. Flat Dark Earth, Burnt Bronze, Coyote Tan, OD Green, and other commonly found colors are being accompanied now by less battlefield-worthy colors like titanium blue, tungsten grey, pink, red, and many more. With these coatings it's now easier than ever to make your standard Black Rifle stand out from the crowd. Manufacturers can use these coatings to really up the level of creativity, making custom looks like the Spikes Tactical SANDBOX finish, which features a worn-in FDE color with black elements showing through the finish to create a truly battle-born look straight out of the factory.

The last type of receiver has taken off in popularity over the last number of years due to their budget-friendly price point and extremely light weight. Polymer receivers, like the ones from Tennessee Arms, can be the subject of some controversy on internet forum boards or out on the shooting range. Make no mistake, though, these products aren't plastic toy guns. Tennessee Arms, one of the industry-leading manufacturers of polymer lower receivers, is so confident in their product that they stand behind them with a lifetime warranty. With a guarantee like that, it's easy to see why more people are giving polymer lowers a chance to prove themselves. Some of the biggest benefits of polymer lowers are the fact that they're incredibly lightweight, cheap to buy, and due to the fact that the colors of these lowers are inherent to the material, you'll never scuff the color off like you could with coated aluminum. Primary Arms offers these marine-grade brass-reinforced in a variety of color options for a cost-effective way to start your next build.

TYPES OF AR-15 LOWERS

Lower receivers can come stripped, with zero internal parts installed, partially complete, or fully complete with the receiver extension and other parts completely installed. Some options, usually stripped lowers, are cost-effective enough to purchase multiple at a time and begin a few new builds or have them as spares in the future. It's not out of the ordinary to see stripped lower receivers from quality brands for as little as \$50. However, they can certainly cost far more and often do – especially for receivers that have more unique looks or have lightening cuts made to them. Many manufacturers have begun making lower receivers built to accept pistol-caliber magazines for AR pistol builds as well. Part of the enjoyment of owning an AR-15 for many people comes from purchasing a stripped lower, parts, and the requisite tools and building the lower, and rest of the gun, for themselves. Don't be afraid to dive in and begin a build! There are a variety of resources online to help you through the process, including on our Primary Arms Blog, and our Primary Arms customer service team and product specialists are always glad to be of assistance.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR AR

What if you want something more than just a plain ol' black rifle? Something that allows you to showcase a little of your personality out on the range? In addition to some of the unique options we've discussed like skeletonizing and applying colored top coats their receivers, firearms companies are getting creative with ways to set their products apart from competitors.

The general shape of a MIL SPEC receiver can be enhanced with elements like a larger flare around the magazine well, or an oversized and integrated trigger guard to provide some extra aesthetics as well as functional improvements. A flared magwell makes it easier to reload, and a winterized – or oversized – trigger guard makes it easier to operate the firearm with gloves on. Other physical modifications can be purely cosmetic and aesthetic, intended to provide a little flair to your build.

Companies generally want to show off their logos and will feature them prominently on a lower's roll marks, stamped or etched into the magazine well of the lower. It's becoming easier than ever to find specialty roll marks or laser engraved lower receivers that feature cool looking, culturally relevant, or even humorous elements. If you can think it up, and want it on the side of your lower, there's likely a company that will put it on there for you -- or better yet, already has. A perfect example of this is Spikes Tactical, who produces many custom roll marked lowers like the "Snowflake" lower, which has roll marks picturing a unicorn that comes color-filled straight from the factory. Another is Spike's Punisher lower, which features the punisher skull, filled in with white, and pictograms around the safety selector filled in with red. Bravo Company Manufacturing has lower receivers with laser engravings available for each branch of the military, and other popular symbols like crosses and coats of arms.

Roll marks and physical aesthetic features can impart a certain amount of personality to a rifle, and with the standardization of the platform making one lower receiver often otherwise indistinguishable from the next, the addition of a cool looking feature could be the basis for choosing one lower over another. With so many options to choose from, shop around and find one that looks cool. Then start your build!

SO WHICH AR-15 LOWER SHOULD I BUY?

When it comes to AR-15 parts and accessories, there is no shortage of options on the market today. It is entirely up to you how much you want to spend, what parts will give your lower the look and performance you desire, and what's available to you when you need it. If this is your first build, we suggest a stripped lower receiver, well within your price range, and a lower parts kit so that you don't break the bank on your build and have money left over for ammunition to feed your new complete rifle. If you're like most of us here at PA, before too long you'll end up with a whole collection of parts that find their way into one build or another over time. And spare parts laying around unused is always a good excuse to go buy another lower receiver and give those lonely parts a home!

A lot of top brands will offer receiver configurations to fit nearly any budget, allowing you to buy the brand you know without breaking the bank, or to get the best of the best. We'll break it down by price point to help you choose what brand is right for you.

Budget-Friendly Brands:

- [Anderson Manufacturing](#)
- [EDC Tactical](#)
- [Ghost Firearms](#)
- [Matrix Arms](#)
- [Tennessee Arms](#)

Moderately Priced Brands: High-End Brands:

- [Aero Precision](#)
- [Black Rain Ordnance](#)
- [CMMG](#)
- [Foxtrot Mike](#)
- [New Frontier Armory](#)
- [Rise Armament](#)
- [Spike's Tactical](#)
- [2A Armament](#)
- [American Defense Manufacturing](#)
- [Battle Arms Development](#)
- [Bravo Company Manufacturing](#)
- [Fortis Manufacturing](#)
- [F-1 Firearms](#)
- [JP Enterprises](#)
- [Seekins Precision](#)

Purchase Options

rkguns.com

Only AR Lower receiver offered:

ATI Omni Hybrid Multi-Cal AR-15 Stripped Lower Receiver - **\$29.99**

Receiver is polymer and gets mixed reviews. Frequent problem is the takedown pin holes are not properly drilled & positioned to attached a standard upper receiver. Recommendation: **Do not buy.**



Nordic Gun & Pawn – Wildwood, FL (East side on 301)

Anderson Manufacturing AR-15 Stripped Lower Receiver - **\$39.95**

Anderson Manufacturing builds rifles, pistols, and parts utilizing the latest in computerized manufacturing. By keeping manufacturing in house, Anderson can offer quality, American-made products at an affordable price, backed by a limited lifetime warranty.



The Anderson Manufacturing Stripped Lower Receiver is a MIL-SPEC, semi-auto lower ideal for your next custom build! Manufactured from high-strength 7075-T6 forged aluminum and MIL-SPEC hardcoat anodized for durability. Precision machining ensures drop-in installation of all MIL-SPEC components.

Features:

- 7075-T6 forged aluminum
- Type III hardcoat anodized black
- Marked Multi-Cal
- Open ear design
- Accepts 3/4" and 1" Grip Screws
- Non RF85 lower
- Weight: 0.68 lbs