

PRODUCT REVIEW

AK-74

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AK-74: SELF-LOADING SERVICE RIFLE (5.45x39MM)



Polish wz. 88 Tantal

The AK-74 (c. 1974) was developed in Russia to replace the AKM (c. 1959) with a small caliber assault rifle that was more controllable in automatic fire and allowed soldiers to carry more ammunition for the same weight. This was largely in response to the adoption of the small caliber M16 rifle by the US Army as its standard issue rifle in 1967 (replacing the M14 rifle which used the heavier 7.62x51mm round), which used the light 5.56x45mm round.

The 5.45x39mm round is flatter shooting than the 7.62x39mm round used in the AKM and AK-47 (c. 1947) and a little more accurate, but as the smaller, lighter and faster 5.45mm steel core bullets readily tumble when they hit (which tends to cause a lot of damage) they have markedly less penetration through commonly encountered cover than 7.62mm steel core bullets,

which is why most people favor the 7.62x39mm round.

The original AK-74 had a triangle shaped sheet metal folding stock, while the later AK-74M (1991) is fitted with a stronger but bulkier polymer folding stock. Both fold to the left side of the receiver so won't fold flat if a side mounted optical sight is fitted.

I recommend the wz. 88 Tantal (c. 1988), a Polish variant which uses a compact but tough wire type folding stock (wrap it with paracord for comfort) which was chosen over the triangle stock because the later was not strong enough for use with rifle grenades, and folds to the right side of the receiver. It is the only AK-74 variant designed for use with rifle grenades. The Tantal has more parts commonality with the AKM than the AK-74 and can (unlike any AK-74) be fitted with an AKM fixed buttstock.

Early imports of the semi-auto Tantal into the US by Century Arms were fitted with barrels that had oversized 5.56mm bores (5.45x39mm chamber), which resulted in keyholing and poor accuracy as the loose fitting 5.45mm bullets would tend not to be fully stabilized by the rifling. Barrels with 5.56mm bores were used as they were cheap (replacing original barrels in poor condition), thus fitted to the rifles after being given 5.45x39mm chambers. A flaw long since corrected, with rifles imported by Century Arms now having a "C" prefix added to the receiver serial number to show they have the correct sized bore.

The AK selector/safety lever is poorly located, which can be addressed by fitting a Mark VI Enhanced AK Selector Safety Lever from Krebs Custom.

The Fuller rear sight mod from Rifle Dynamics will make aiming easier and faster.

AIMPOINT MICRO H-1



A small red dot sight like the Aimpoint Micro H-1 is ideal for use on an AK-74 as heavier sights will have a negative effect on handling. The CR2032 watch battery lasts 50,000 hours (over 5 years) of continuous use (best left on so it is always ready to use).

The best way to attach it to an AK is via a dedicated mount from Sabreworks that makes the KOP System, wherein a base (KOP Platform) replaces the rear sight block. Bases slide into a groove, are retained by a steel pin, and all incorporate a rear sight.



RECOMMENDED ACCESSORIES

Handbook

AK Handbook. [Blackheart International]

Log Book

Firearm Usage & Maintenance Log Book. [Blackheart International]

Maintenance Video

AKS - MAK90 - AKS 47 Semi-Auto Rifles. [AGI]

Cleaning Kit

Cleaning Kit 5.45 RUSS [K-Var Corp.]

Cleaner/Lubricant

Slip 2000 725 / Slip 2000 EWL. [Slip 2000]

Broken Shell Extractor

5.45x39 Broken Shell Extractor. [C.J. Weapons Accessories]

Telescopic Sight

POSP 4x24V Optical Sight. [BelOMO]

Front Sight Tool

Magna-Matic AK47 Front Sight Tool. [Magna-Matic Defense]

Dry Fire Rounds

A-Zoom 5.45 x 39mm Snap Caps. [Lyman Products Corporation]

Ear Plugs

EarPro EP3 or EP4. [SureFire]

Sling

Tactical Sling (TAS-AK). [Eagle Industries]

HOT TIP

Training magazines can suffer metal fatigue to their springs so don't use them for combat.