The AR500 Platform, Explained

Why Big Horn Armory Built It – And What It Delivers.

There's a question that follows any serious firearms manufacturer long enough: what comes next?

For Big Horn Armory, the answer arrived the way most honest answers do — not from a market study, but from a conviction. By 2008, BHA had already set out to build the most capable lever-action rifle they could conceive, chambered in .500 S&W Magnum. The Model 89 that emerged from that effort became what it is today: one of the finest big-bore lever guns ever made, built in Cody, Wyoming, to a standard that rivals custom work.

But power has a way of asking bigger questions. Once you've built a lever-action that can stop a charging Cape buffalo, the question becomes: what does that capability look like in a platform built for rapid fire? What does .500 S&W Magnum energy feel like when it feeds from a box magazine and cycles on its own?

Big Horn Armory didn't find an existing answer on the market. So, they built one.

It Started with the Cartridge

Building a semi-automatic rifle around .500 S&W Magnum presented an immediate engineering problem: the cartridge has a large, prominent rim. Rims that work beautifully in revolvers and lever actions create feeding headaches in semi-automatic box-magazine designs. BHA didn't reach for a compromise. They engineered a new cartridge entirely.

The .500 Auto Max is, at its core, a rimless .500 S&W Magnum. The rim is turned down to case diameter and the cartridge headspaces on the case mouth instead — two changes that preserve every performance characteristic of the parent cartridge while making it fully compatible with the semi-automatic AR architecture. The bullet diameter, the case capacity, the load data: all of it carries over directly from decades of proven .500 S&W Magnum development.

What changed is what mattered. The .500 Auto Max feeds reliably from a box magazine. It headspaces correctly in an AR action. And it extracts cleanly, even at maximum pressure loads, because the AR10-sized bolt carries a proportionally larger extractor claw than anything in the AR15 world. The geometry was purpose-designed to the cartridge, not retrofitted after the fact.

That decision, to build a new cartridge rather than adapt an existing one inadequately, is what made everything else possible.

Power That Scales with the Mission

The .500 Auto Max is the most versatile cartridge in its class, and that versatility is one of the AR500's defining advantages as a platform.

Factory loads reach 4,000+ foot-pounds of muzzle energy at the muzzle; figures that put it in genuine dangerous-game territory. Handloaders can exceed that, or dial the cartridge down substantially for lighter applications. Bullet weights range from 200 grains all the way to 700 grains across factory and handload options. No other cartridge in a semi-automatic AR platform comes close to that spread.

What that range means in practice: the same rifle that's loaded for a 200-yard deer hunt can be reconfigured for dangerous game without changing the platform. The same gun that harvests a hog in dense Texas brush can be set up for African plains game. The AR500

doesn't ask the shooter to compromise the mission to fit the rifle. It adapts.

Several manufacturers — Buffalo Bore, Steinel, Underwood, Defiant, Aria Ballistics and Colorado Cartridge — supply more than thirty factory loadings. Starline produces the brass. Load data mirrors .500 S&W Magnum, which means generations of established handloading knowledge transfers directly. This is not a cartridge without an ecosystem. It is a cartridge that's been purpose-built with one.

Ergonomics Built for the Platform, Not Around It

The AR500 is built on the AR10 frame. That choice was deliberate, and it cascades through every ergonomic advantage the rifle delivers.

The mass of the AR10 platform does real work in managing .500 Auto Max recoil. Combined with a purpose-tuned heavy buffer, a calibrated recoil spring, and a thick recoil pad, the AR500 distributes the recoil impulse in a way a lighter platform simply cannot. BHA tuned the buffer weight and spring rate specifically to the .500 Auto Max's recoil impulse. This isn't a generic build that happens to be chambered in a large cartridge. It's a system where the cartridge and the platform were engineered to each other.

The AR500 NEXT GEN ships with an adjustable buttstock. That's a sentence that sounds unremarkable until you consider what it means on a rifle chambered in a cartridge this powerful. Proper length of pull affects recoil management, cheek weld, and shooting fatigue across a long day in the field. An adjustable stock means the rifle fits the shooter's body, their clothing, and their optic setup, not the other way around.

The M-LOK free-float handguard, full-length Picatinny top rail, ambidextrous safety selector, and match-grade Rise Armament Rave 140 trigger at 3.5 pounds single-stage are the details that make a rifle livable over a season.

Follow-Up Fire: The Platform Earns Its Keep

This is the conversation that matters most for anyone who has spent time considering what a semi-automatic big-bore platform actually offers.

When the AR500's trigger breaks, the gas system drives the bolt rearward, extracts and ejects the spent case, compresses the recoil spring, and strips a fresh round from the magazine on the way forward.

The shooter's job is to manage recoil and reacquire the target. That's it. No stroke, no throw, no lever; nothing between the first shot and the second one except the shooter's own preparation.

The adjustable gas block is what makes this reliable across the full .500 Auto Max load spectrum. Running a light 200-grain load? Adjust the block. Running a 700-grain maximum-pressure hunting round? Adjust the block. Adding a suppressor? Same solution. The AR500 cycles what it's fed, tuned to the load in the magazine, not to a single factory specification that may or may not match what the shooter brings to the field.

BHA validates this before every rifle ships. Each AR500 is hand-cycled with dummy rounds to verify the feeding sequence, then live-fired with a full magazine. The rifle that arrives at an FFL has already proven it works. It's BHA's manufacturing standard.

Modularity: The AR500 NEXT GEN and a Platform That Adapts

The most recent evolution of the AR500 — the NEXT GEN — addresses the question BHA heard most consistently from the field: can I run this upper on my existing AR10 lower?

The answer is yes. The AR500 NEXT GEN upper is compatible with any standard DPMS-High pattern AR10 lower receiver. Shooters who already own a compatible lower can add .500 Auto Max capability without a complete rifle purchase. In states where new AR platform rifles face purchase restrictions, this matters considerably; a NEXT GEN upper on an existing, compliant lower opens access that a complete rifle purchase cannot.

Making this work required solving a specific engineering challenge. The original AR500 lower incorporated a proprietary integrated feed ramp that a standard AR10 lower doesn't replicate. BHA's solution: a polymer insert for the ASC SR25 magazine that recreates the necessary feed ramp geometry without requiring any modification to the lower. Months of testing across bullet profiles and ogive designs went into validating it. The result is consistent, reliable feeding

from a platform that plays by standard AR10 rules.

The M-LOK handguard and Picatinny rail mean the AR500 accepts the full ecosystem of AR-compatible accessories: optics, lights, bipods, slings, and anything else a mission demands. The rifle a shooter runs today can be reconfigured for a different season, a different quarry, or a different role.

The Bottom Line

The AR500 exists because Big Horn Armory asked a question no other manufacturer had answered with the rigor it deserved: what does a purpose-built, semi-automatic, big-bore rifle look like when it's engineered from the cartridge up?

The answer is a rifle that starts with a cartridge designed specifically for the platform, delivers 4,000+ foot-pounds of energy on demand, cycles reliably across a bullet weight range no competitor in its class can match, fits the shooter rather than demanding the shooter fit it, and grows with the mission rather than constraining it.

It is not a novelty. It is not a lever gun with a gas system bolted on. It is the result of starting with a blank page and a conviction, and not stopping until the answer was worth putting the Big Horn Armory name on.

That answer is built, tested, and shipped from Cody, Wyoming.

Go big or go home.

Explore full specifications, configuration options, and in-stock availability at bighornarmory.com.