

As the readily accessible owner of many gun forums I get literally dozens of emails each week from folks who request my recommendations on firearms, ammunition, holsters, caliber choices, and questions regarding the defensive mindset and the role it plays in responsible carry. In order to best serve the needs of those who have not yet figured out what works best for them I decided it was time to present my personal recommendations on the forum for future reference.

This guide is provided as a starting point only. While not absolute, it is intended to provide solid and proven recommendations to anyone who trusts my opinions. While there may be better choices out there for others, these are the choices that I happen to believe in most and are therefore the best recommendations that I can make. **This is not intended to spark debate over what is better than what**; it is a simple collection of my thoughts and opinions on what works for carry and what doesn't. Please do not take offense to my recommendations as they are just that; my recommendations based on **my opinions** formed by formal and informal testing of the products discussed. For example, you may feel adequately protected by a .25 ACP but I cannot in good conscious recommend that particular caliber to **anyone** in **any** application.

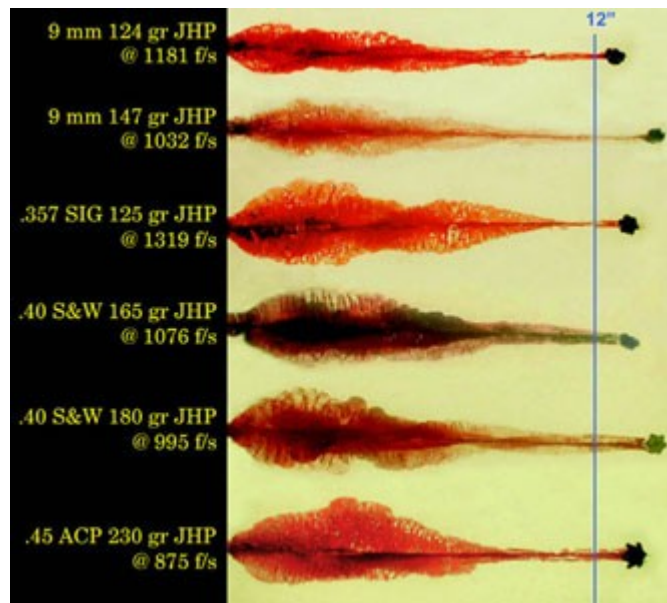
With that out of the way, I'm proud to present:

## Beginner's Guide To Carry

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The first thing to learn (which will be demonstrated later) is that in regards to concealed carry, **everything** is a compromise. You sacrifice caliber for capacity or overall size, features for cost, sight radius for concealability, etc. Get used to this concept now as it will be a factor in every decision you make from this point. There is no perfect gun, there is no magic bullet, and despite my best efforts (in this message) there is no one size fits all.

### DEFENSIVE TOOLS



### CALIBER/BALLISTIC SCIENCE

This has to be the most heavily debated topic of any given gun related forum. Starting as "9mm

vs. .45" during WW2, with many new caliber choices the caliber wars continue to rage. Some believe in big bullets...some believe in lighter, faster bullets with higher simple energy numbers...some believe in shot placement....all are equally mistaken. The potential effectiveness of any bullet in a defensive shooting is always an issue of probabilities that factor in caliber, weight, velocity, shot placement, (resulting in penetration and expansion), and even the physical condition (drugs, rage, size, etc.) of the threat you are attempting to neutralize. You will hear of threats dropping immediately from a .25 ACP and you will hear of threats that continued to fight despite a solid .44 Magnum hit but these are rare exceptions and should never be considered representative in any way of overall **stopping power potential**. They are nothing beyond extremely rare incidents that have minimal impact on the overall averages used to calculate overall **stopping power potential**.

If you remove the human element (your ability to shoot, for example) and limit your comparison to bullet performance its hard to argue with "bigger is better". Despite lower simple energy numbers, bigger and particularly heavier bullets carry more **stopping power potential** and this is clearly substantiated in history.

Around the turn of the century (1900) the US army replaced the M1873 peacemaker .45 Long Colt revolver with a much lighter and faster .38 Long Colt (in a double action revolver). In 1902 during the American-Philippine war the US Army was sent into battle in the Philippines against the Moros Tribesmen where for the first time they faced enemy soldiers on heavy opiate based drugs of that era. US soldiers emptied their .38 Long Colts into the advancing tribesmen who continued to advance most often spearing and even beheading the US soldier before falling dead from their gunshot wounds. It quickly became obvious that the lighter .38 Long Colt was not up to the job of stopping the Moros Tribesmen. The Army replaced the newly issued .38 Long Colts with the recently retired M1873 Peacemaker .45 Long Colt that was put back into service.



Just as it had in the previous century, the .45 Long Colt proved itself by dropping the Moros Tribesmen most often with a single shot (yes, a single torso hit from the .45 Long Colt proved superior to 5 and 6 shots from the .38 Long Colt!). This is documented US history and there is no disputing it. The .45 Long Colt played a crucial role in winning the war, and this directly lead to the development of the .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (.45 ACP) which served our troops equally well through two world and many smaller wars.

In and of itself with all else being equal (shot placement, etc.) hitting a threat with a 230 grain .45 caliber slug is not the same thing as hitting that same threat in the same place with a 115 grain .355" slug despite its considerably higher velocity. With typical handgun velocities at typical defensive handgun ranges bigger simply **is** better....but how much better is the question, and at what cost? 20 years ago there was significant difference in ballistic performance of the 9mm compared to the .45, but modern ballistic science has brought the 9mm closer to the .45 than ever before. While I still believe bigger is better (you don't shoot elephants with small and fast

bullets, you shoot elephants with big, heavy bullets), it's hard to argue with a 147 grain 9mm bullet that penetrates 14" and has been shown to expand to .72" (147 grain federal HST).

Although true and accurate, does the example of the Moros Tribesmen mean that everyone should carry the .45? **Absolutely not.** Although the .45 would serve **anyone** very well just as it has throughout history, this does not make it the superior choice for **everyone**. .45 caliber weapons are either relatively large or they have very limited capacity and this limiting factor rules out the .45 for many. To confuse the issue even more, although I firmly believe that all things equal bigger is better, all things are rarely equal when you factor in the human element. Although the 180 grain .40 offers slightly more stopping power potential than a 124 grain 9mm that does not necessarily make it a better choice for carry due to many reasons. If you find the .40 recoil uncomfortable you probably won't be able to hit with it with as much confidence as you would with the 9mm. Capacity is another issue, especially when you factor in cover fire. Is it better to have 8 rounds of .45 in your weapon or 16 rounds of 9mm? The answer to this question will be as unique as the individual in question. The following is a comparison of caliber with my assessment of each round:



#### .22 LR **Good:**

- Weapons are small.
- Ammunition is cheap and plentiful.
- Adequate as a backup weapon.

#### **Bad:**

- Not adequate as a primary weapon.

**Notes:** - If you carry this caliber for a backup weapon, carry CCI Mini-Mags.



#### .25 ACP **Good:**

- Weapons are small.
- Better than nothing.

#### **Bad:**

- Not adequate as a primary weapon.
- Not adequate as a backup weapon.

- Ammunition is extremely expensive.

**Notes:** - Please don't carry this caliber. I have literally witnessed the .25 ACP knock over Coke bottles at 50' instead of breaking them.



**.32 ACP**

**Good:**

- Weapons are small.
- Better than nothing.
- Adequate as a backup weapon with FMJ ammunition.

**Bad:**

- Despite its relative popularity, the .32 ACP is **not** adequate as a primary weapon.
- Ammunition is relatively expensive and choices can be limited.



**.380 ACP**

**Good:**

- Weapons are small.
- Adequate as backup weapon with FMJ ammunition.

**Bad:**

- Despite its popularity the .380 ACP is **not** adequate as primary carry weapon with any ammunition.
- Ammunition is relatively expensive.



**.38 Special**

**Good:**

- Adequate as a primary carry weapon in 158 grain +P loads.

- Adequate as a backup weapon at standard pressures.
- Compact weapons.
- Economical to shoot.
- **Very** popular caliber with many great choices in weapons and ammunition.

**Bad:**

- Limited capacity (revolver).
- Marginal when loaded at standard pressures.



9mm Luger

**Good:**

- Excellent as a primary weapon in 147 grain loads or 125 grain +P/+P+ loads.
- Ammunition is cheap and plentiful!
- Most popular handgun cartridge in the world offering a nearly unlimited selection of weapons.
- High capacity even in compact designs.

**Bad:**

- Marginal performance from light loads at standard pressure.

**Notes:** - The 9mm Luger has been around a little longer than the .45 ACP and has attained unmatched global acceptance. Most every modernized nation in the world today issues combat side arms chambered for the 9mm Luger. Because the 9mm is considerably smaller and lighter than the .45 the weapons chambered for it are able to carry more rounds, as are the soldiers who carry them. 147 grain loads make the 9mm a truly viable defensive caliber and this is the ammunition I recommend if your weapon will cycle it reliably. If choosing 115/124/125/127 grain loads, carry only +P.



357 Sig

**Good:**

- Excellent as a primary weapon.
- This round just **sizzles** - 125 grains @ 1450 fps!
- Penetrates hard objects like no other handgun round.

**Bad:**

- Ammunition cost literally twice as much as 9mm.

- Ammunition selection is limited in most areas.
- Generous recoil (relative).

**Notes:** - Were it not for cost, the 357 Sig would be the best recommendation I could make for carry. The US Secret Service chose this round to protect and defend the President of the United States.



### .357 Magnum

**Good:**

- Excellent as a primary weapon.
- Most versatile handgun round with huge ammunition selection.
- Can practice with cheaper .38 Special ammunition.

**Bad:**

- Limited capacity (revolver).
- Generous recoil (relative).



### .40 S&W

**Good:**

- Excellent as a primary weapon.
- Economical to shoot.
- Large ammunition selection.

**Bad:**

- Snappy recoil (relative).

**Notes:** - Offering the perfect compromise (without compromising performance) between the 9mm and the .45 ACP, it's quite hard to find fault with the .40 S&W. The .40 was born indirectly due to LE rejection of the 9mm after the famous FBI shoot-out in Miami in 1986. Offering more stopping power potential than the 9mm and more capacity than the .45, the .40 fills the gap between the two perfectly. You really don't give up much stopping power potential compared to the .45, and you aren't losing much capacity compared to the 9mm. The .40 is the ideal carry caliber.



## .45 ACP

### Good:

- Ballistically superior as a primary weapon.
- Big, heavy bullets.
- Effective even in FMJ.
- +P not required for superior performance.
- Abundant ammunition selection.

### Bad:

- Weapons are either large or have limited capacity.

There are other calibers worth mentioning because they are viable defensive rounds, yet I don't typically recommend them for various reasons.

**Super .38:** While ballistically superior to 9mm, the choices in the Super .38 platform (both in weapons and ammunition) are few and far between. Dealers who do stock ammunition offer a very limited selection and what they do have is extremely expensive. The Super .38 is a hand loader's caliber.

**10mm:** Ballistically the 10mm has stopping power potential matching (and in some loadings exceeding) the .45 ACP. Though the 10mm is thought by many to be the ultimate caliber, instead of expanding this platform the 10mm has been downgraded to the point that most 10mm loads available are only marginally better than .40 S&W while costing twice as much. There are a couple decent 10mm loads out there but they most always require placing an order and waiting. Like the Super .38, the 10mm is a hand loader's caliber.

**.41 Magnum:** The .41 Magnum is a beautiful round with beautiful ballistics that never found the glory it deserves. Although it would serve anyone **very** well, industry support for this round is dying.

**.44 Magnum:** "The most powerful handgun in the world" generates some **very** impressive ballistics but I don't feel weapons chambered for .44 Magnum are (typically) practical for carry.

There is an almost infinite number of calibers not mentioned, but these are the only ones I would even consider for carry.

## WEAPON SELECTION

A (if not **the**) most critical aspect of concealed carry is the weapon that you choose. With so many choices (service/compact/sub-compact autos and revolvers with an almost infinite number of calibers to choose from) it is both very difficult and very easy to find the weapon that fits you best. Finding a weapon of adequate caliber that you can carry with comfort and employ with confidence can make **the** crucial difference if you're ever involved in a defensive shooting.



Glock 19/23/32

It is my personal opinion that the ultimate concealed carry handgun is the compact Glock, available in three versions: the Glock 23 (.40), the Glock 19 (same gun, in 9mm), or the Glock 32 (same gun, in .357 Sig). With the right ammunition (covered later), any of the three calibers offered in the compact Glock will provide you with adequate stopping power potential to stop most any human threat. The compact Glock is the **perfect** size for concealed carry offering a grip that is substantial enough to provide adequate control while being compact enough to easily conceal. While the Glock is thicker than many single stack weapons, thickness isn't bad and they offer literally twice the capacity of single stack weapons. Although there are many very reliable weapons to choose from, I believe that in adverse conditions Glocks are the most reliable handguns in the world, bar none. Glocks draw criticism on the "issue" (seems to be important to some...for what reason I have no idea) of aesthetics but should you find yourself forced to shoot to defend your life you (like me) will find beauty in proper function. Another great asset of the Glock handgun is the simplicity of use. If carried properly (condition 0 - round in the chamber) to employ a Glock you put the front sight on the bad guy and you pull the trigger. That's it. An instinctual procedure that you have practiced since you could point your finger and yell "bang!". Glocks have no manual safeties which I believe to be an asset because under the stresses of a defensive shooting only the highly skilled will have the presence of mind to disengage the safety. You don't have to be highly skilled to survive a defensive shooting, you only have to put your bullets into the threat and the Glock enables you to do that with confidence.

While I believe the XD, the M&P, the P99, the P2000, and **many** other weapons offer comparable reliability, none are truly comparable in offering the "perfect" size for carry along with an amazing trigger system. The compact Glock offers the best overall package in offering the perfect size, an excellent trigger, superior capacity, and ultimate reliability.





### Smith & Wesson Military & Police

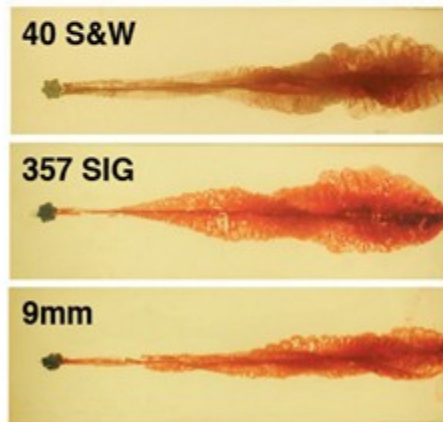
Another weapon I recommend highly is the M&P from Smith & Wesson. S&W took the Glock and gave it a decent grip angle. Somehow they messed up the trigger, but its not bad and I hear a trigger job makes it even better. Having almost everything I love about the Glock (except the trigger) with a decent grip angle makes this weapon a perfect match **if/when** you can conceal it. As a service size weapon it doesn't conceal as easily as the compact Glock which is why its not my first recommendation. Still, I carry this weapon anytime I can dress around it. The M&P is extremely dependable, very accurate, and is a pleasure to shoot. It's quickly becoming my favorite handgun. If you plan to carry a service size weapon, **you want the M&P!**

Although a compact version is available, the compact version is not a good match for me as it irritates me anytime my pinky finger isn't firmly connected with the grip.

### AMMUNITION SELECTION

# FEDERAL<sup>®</sup>

## Premium<sup>®</sup> HST



We spend a considerable amount of our time searching for the magic bullet in the magic caliber that stops any threat instantaneously. Sadly no such bullet exists, particularly at handgun velocities. Just as with handguns, there are many excellent choices in ammunition. Sadly, there are just as many poor choices and it's easy for the uninformed to get swept up by clever marketing which leads to carrying inferior ammunition. Not every one can carry a S&W .500, but you **can** make the most of the caliber you have by keeping a few things in mind.

First off, you **don't** want any type of frangible handgun round. The marketing claims try to justify the need by making you fear over-penetration. Don't buy into the fear tactics! Neutralizing a determined threat requires one aspect of bullet performance (**bullet** performance, not shooter performance) more than anything else; **penetration**. You stop a determined threat either through bleed-out (can take several minutes, **bad** idea to depend on bleed-out!) or through disrupting their ability to function by hitting a major organ such as the heart. Reaching vital organs require penetration and **frangible rounds do not offer adequate penetration**. In ballistic gelatin at point blank range, frangible ammunition penetrates about 5" and that doesn't factor in clothing and it certainly doesn't factor in bones like the sternum or ribs. With frangible rounds the best you can hope for is bleed-out so **avoid frangible rounds**. For evidence to support my recommendation, [CLICK HERE](#) (link includes graphic x-ray images of shootings).

There are other new concepts on the market such as a lead ball inside of a hollow point. Marketing can work wonders with these loads but again I encourage you to disregard the hype. Instead of a hard hitting projectile, bullets of this type divide the kinetic energy of your load into two projectiles meaning neither of them will penetrate as well as a single bullet. Two projectiles that don't penetrate adequately leave you again waiting for bleed-out.

Don't over-complicate this, it doesn't have to be difficult! Assuming adequate caliber (.38 special +P and up), all you need is a jacketed hollow point in the heaviest popular weight available for your caliber.

- .38 Special +P - 158 grain JHP
- 9mm 147 grain JHP

- 357 Sig - 125 grain JHP
- .357 Magnum - 158 grain JHP
- .40 - 180 grain JHP
- .45 acp - 230 grain JHP

Some believe in lighter, faster bullets due to their superior simple energy numbers. This is a flawed understanding of ballistic performance. A lighter bullet with comparable charge will **always** have higher velocity generating higher simple energy numbers which on paper makes the lighter bullet appear superior. The gelatin on the other hand, shows the opposite to be true. The heavier bullet of comparable diameter will **always** penetrate deeper than the lighter, faster bullet despite its lower simple energy. To make my point I will compare the .44 Magnum handgun to the .223 rifle load. On paper the .223 is superior due to its higher energy numbers but would you use .223 as bear defense? Absolutely not. Simple energy is only a factor worth considering when comparing two bullets of the same weight.



### Federal HST (Hydra-Shok Two):

**Good** - The Federal HST is the absolute best recommendation that I can make for .45, .40, and 9mm (the HST 357 Sig is considerably slower than Corbon's 357 Sig load). I have tested .45 acp +P in 230 grains @ 950 fps, .40 in 180 grains @ 1010 fps, and 9mm in 147 grains @ 1000 fps. I have tested this bullet in many bullet catchers including wildlife cadavers and have come to

believe that this bullet is the most consistent expander with penetration equally consistent with Corbon. To make it even more desirable, the HST appears to feed just as reliably as the original Hydra-Shok. If there ever were a "magic bullet", it's the Federal HST.

**Bad** - Federal (the company, not the government) policy forbids the sale of HST to anyone outside of military, law enforcement, or private security. It is still available to civilians if you're willing to shop around various websites.

## Corbon

**Good** - Corbon is **hot!** the 230 grain .45 ACP +P load is 950 fps (same as HST above). the 125 grain 9mm is 1250 fps, and the 115 grain 9mm consistently chronographs in excess of 1400 fps. The 125 grain .357 Sig Corbon consistently chronographs in excess of 1450 fps and is my favorite round for this caliber. Corbon offers extremely reliable penetration with very good expansion.

**Bad** - Although the 230 grain .45 ACP +P load is a very good round, the bullet profile makes it a finicky feeder in my 4"/4.25" 1911s (it does feed reliably in my polymer .45s). the Corbon .40 isn't available in 180 grains and the 9mm isn't available in 147 grains.

## Federal Hydra-Shok

**Good** - Proven design that feeds well in most **any** weapon.

**Bad** - The Hydra-Shok is **so** proven that it's actually out-dated by modern ballistic standards. Hydra-Shok ballistics are **always** weaker than other modern premium defensive loads. There are no +P loadings, and even the standard loadings are slower than other premium standard loads. In addition to the standard Hydra-Shok loads, the Hydra-Shok "Low Recoil" loads should be labeled "Marginally better than a pellet gun".

## Speer Gold Dot

**Good** - Reliable feeder, reliable penetrator to 12", reliable expansion.

**Bad** - I find no real fault in the Gold Dot, but I don't much care for how conservatively it is loaded. It's not weak and it's not exciting; it falls somewhere in the middle (357 Sig down loaded to 1350 fps, no 230 grain +P). If I were to carry the Gold Dot bullet it would be in "Double Tap" loadings that are safe to shoot but available in exciting velocities.

## Winchester Black Talon

**Good** - While the Black Talon doesn't live up to its over-blown reputation, it is a very reliable feeder, reliable penetrator to at least 12", and it expands quite nicely. Notably impressive is the 147 grain 9mm load and the 230 grain .45 acp.

**Bad** - The Black Talon is no longer produced so any that you find is at least 10 years old and is ridiculously over-priced for what it is (six petal Winchester Ranger SXT).

There are many other loads available but my testing is limited to those listed above, so my opinions are also limited to them. The Winchester Ranger SXT is a good load but I base that on my Black Talon testing.

## HOLSTERS



Holster selection is absolutely critical to successful carry. If you cannot carry your weapon comfortably, you won't want to carry it at all. Your weapon should also be readily accessible and a quality holster makes this possible. To minimize wasting money on holsters you won't wear for one reason or another you need to **spend** money. Buy a quality holster to begin with or you will be miserably uncomfortable and will be less likely to carry at all times.

There are many different styles of holsters that I will try to explain:





### **IWB (Inside Waist Band)**

An IWB holster is worn inside the pant waist line keeping most of the weapon covered by your pants. Typically this is covered by a loose shirt. Another variation is the **TIWB (Tuckable Inside Waist Band)** which is an IWB holster with special attachment clips or loops that allow you to tuck your shirt in over the weapon and holster. If remaining concealed is a priority do not waste your money on any type of tuckable setup. I find that pulling the shirt tight around the weapon to tuck in causes printing anytime you aren't standing perfectly still. Also the draw from a tucked holster is cumbersome and slow.

There are many fine choices in IWB holsters, but there are many more poor choices. If you get a quality IWB holster you will have a positive carry experience. If you get one of lesser quality you will grow to hate it and ignorantly dismiss IWB carry as an option. The absolute finest IWB holster that I have found is the above pictured VM2 available from Milt Sparks for about \$100. [CLICK HERE](#) for the manufacturer's website. The downside to the VM2 is the difficulty involved in getting one. The manufacturer currently limits the number of orders taken and if you **are** able to place your order it takes six months before your holster arrives. It is certainly worth the wait, but knowing this doesn't make the wait any easier. When you need a holster, you don't want to wait 6 months to get it. You may be lucky enough to find an online vendor (listed on the manufacturer's site linked to above) who has one in stock, but expect to pay about 20% over retail. This is still much cheaper than the 300% over retail that these holsters sell for in online auctions. The reason these holsters command such a price is simply because **they are just that good**. If you want to carry IWB, you want to carry in a VM2 from Milt Sparks.



### **OWB (Outside Waist Band)**

An OWB holster is worn on the belt outside of the pants and includes variations of holsters that use the belt as well as holsters that use a paddle (see "PH" below) that slips between your pants and your hip to hold the holster firmly in place.



There is certainly an abundance of OWB holsters, none finer than the above pictured CQC/S from Lou Alessi. Just as the VM2 above, the CQC/S is truly a custom holster that takes at least 6 months to receive from the date of your order. If you intend to carry OWB the CQC/S is worth any wait at any price. There is no manufacturer's website, but you can [CLICK HERE](#) to email Lou Alessi himself.





### **OBC (Off Body Carry)**

OBC is a holster that is carried such as a purse, a day planner, etc. This is the least preferred method of carry, but it's better than leaving your weapon in the car. If you choose to carry OBC, make certain that your holster is secure and cannot be snatched from you or sat down and forgotten.



### **SH (Shoulder Holster)**

With a SH the weapon is hung from the weak shoulder providing either a vertical or horizontal cross draw. Although the preferred holster in action films, I find SHs to be somewhat uncomfortable, restrictive, and cumbersome. You should try one on before purchasing.



**CPS (Concealed in Plain Sight)**

CPS holster references any holster designed to conceal a weapon in plain sight such as a fanny

pack or a Safepacker. Many people on gun forums claim these holsters expose that you are carrying a weapon but having used fanny packs for years and the Safepacker for nearly a year (occasionally) I firmly disagree. People either don't take notice, or don't care enough to ask. I have many friends that don't know I carry and have never been asked about either my Safepackers or my fanny packs. It's a **great** alternative to standard holsters. [CLICK HERE](#) for the Safepacker manufacturer's website. [CLICK HERE](#) for the Galco (fanny packs) website.







### **SOB (Small Of Back)**

SOB holsters are OWB holsters with roughly a 45 degree cant worn in the small of your back. This method of carry is very easy to conceal except for bending over. It is however, rather uncomfortable while driving and if you slip and land on your back your spine is going to hurt from landing on your weapon. Even with the potential for falling on the weapon I still utilize this method of carry occasionally.

There are many fine SOB options available, [CLICK HERE](#) to see my full review of the Galco SOB holster to fit my Glock 19.



### **CD (Cross Draw)**

The cross draw holster is typically worn OWB on the weak side for strong arm draw. The benefit to the cross draw is ease of access and comfort while sitting.

When I was looking for a CD holster i was pleasantly surprised to find excellent quality in a readily available, off the shelf holster. [CLICK HERE](#) for the manufacturer's website featuring the Sky Cop from Desantis Holsters.



### **PH (Pocket Holster)**

Pocket holsters keep your weapon canted properly while carrying your weapon in your pocket. They are also designed to break up the print of a gun in the fabric of your pants. Other benefits include preventing negligent discharges as well as keeping pocket lint out of your weapon. I don't personally use any pocket holsters, but I know several who do with great success.



### **Thunderwear/Smart Carry**

Basically an open top fanny pack worn under your pants, this type of holster works well in limited applications such as wearing shorts with no shirt. In typical clothing the holster works but drawing is slow and somewhat cumbersome.



### **BB (Belly Band)**

The belly band holster consists of an elastic or fabric band with pockets for your weapon(s) and a Velcro closure that is worn around your belly. I've never owned one and cannot really comment on them with authority, but I suppose I can see where it would come in handy.



### **AH (Ankle Holster)**

Ankle holsters are for carrying small weapons on your ankle. Although functional, ankle carry is cumbersome and should be reserved for backup weapons only.



## OVERVIEW

Ultimately each person must find a combination of caliber, weapon, ammunition, and method of carry that works for them on an individual basis. You don't buy a weapon because your favorite actor used one in his last movie. You don't buy a weapon because your "friend who works at the gun store says its the best". You don't buy a weapon because its "pretty", as beauty in defensive weaponry comes from proper function. You buy the weapon that fits your hand best and points naturally for you in the largest (preferably service - .38 special +P/9mm/357 Sig/.40/.45) caliber that you can shoot well and then with rare exception **you dress around your gun**. You choose a holster around the way you dress, but you dress around the gun that fits your hand best be it a Derringer or a S&W #29. Having more than one weapon of adequate caliber and capacity from which to choose enables you to choose your gun around your dress for those (hopefully rare) times when dress dictates what you can and cannot carry. Carry only quality, defensive premium JHP ammunition from known mainstream manufacturers. Avoid ammunition with words like "Spec Ops", "Terrorist Killer", or anything comparable. A firearm without ammunition is absolutely worthless so carry at least one spare magazine or speed-loader with additional ammunition. Some choose not to carry spare ammunition because statistically a defensive shooting is over after only a few rounds are fired but if ruled by statistics we wouldn't carry anyway; **statistically** you will never be forced to shoot for your life. The extra magazine on your belt can be inconvenient at times. It can poke you when you are driving or be a minor inconvenience in general but carry it anyway. Once you get used to it being there it will provide a small but noticeable additional layer of comfort through security. If you ever **do** need it the inconvenience of carrying it will disappear completely. Don't find confidence in your weapon or ammunition from marketing hype. Find confidence through your own testing that will consist of extensive trial and error. Dedicate yourself to finding what works best for you now so that if you are ever shooting to defend your life you will have every possible advantage on your side.

## DEFENSIVE MINDSET

The best equipment available is worthless without the proper training and mindset to support and properly employ it. Anyone who carries should train at every given opportunity with credible NRA certified instructors offering defensive combat courses.

As part of learning the science of defensive handgun combat you must become intimately familiar with the laws regulating all aspects of firearms carry as well as the legal criteria required to justify a defensive shooting. Don't let a liberal prosecutor do to you what the attacker failed to do; prepare yourself by knowing the laws that govern you. [HANDGUNLAW.US](http://HANDGUNLAW.US) is a great place to learn where your carry permit is honored as well as provide links to the laws that regulate carry and firearm usage.

### Rules to LIVE by

#### **1- Always be armed**

Always, without exception. Trouble doesn't schedule an appointment before stopping by, and you should always be prepared for it. We don't expect our house to burn down, but we keep fire extinguishers anyway. We don't expect to wreck our car, but we click our seatbelts anyway. On that quick trip to the store we don't expect to be assaulted, but we had better prepare for it anyway else we place ourselves at the mercy of others.

**Example #1-** While living in North Carolina I was walking to my kitchen at 1 am. As I rounded the corner wearing only a towel I found myself 5 feet away from a crack-head who was trying to force his way into my glass back door. I had to then make a mad dash back to my bedroom to

retrieve a firearm, temporary leaving my kids' bedrooms between myself and the crack-head. Had I been properly armed I would not have subjected myself and my children to this vulnerability. Having learned this lesson, I now take a Fobus paddle holster and a Glock to the bathroom with me. A Fobus paddle works great in a tightly wrapped towel for that walk from the shower to your bedroom.

**Example #2-** In another incident I was loading my 2 year old daughter into her car seat in the back of my Jeep Wrangler when I noticed a look of fear on her face. She was terrified and pointing behind me. Instinctually I drew my handgun as I turned to find 4 men who had formed a semi-circle around me. Had I not been armed I'm quite certain that I would have lost my money, my vehicle, possibly my life, and worst of all most likely my daughter who was buckled into the back seat.

With a firearm you at least have a chance. If you don't have a firearm you're at the will of those who do. Choose the largest caliber that you can shoot effectively and dress around it. Always, without exception.

## **2- Remain alert and aware**

No matter the situation, your first and best option is always to avoid trouble. This is possible only if you are aware of your surroundings. No weapon can protect you if you didn't see the first strike coming. Continually scan your surroundings and observe anything that appears threatening or out of place. Whenever possible, identify and assess a potential threat before it becomes a full blown threat. In the event that you cannot avoid trouble, at least you can prepare for it.

Remain aware while focused on other tasks. When you must pay attention to some other task (such as entering/exiting your vehicle) continue to scan and observe your surroundings. It's easy to get distracted while loading bags of groceries or buckling your child into your car seat. In all reality these are the times when you should be paying special attention to your surroundings, as predators tend to prey on you when they know you're distracted (see Rule #1, Example #2). I recently witnessed a lady loading Christmas packages into her SUV. She first buckled her child into her car seat, cranked her SUV to get the heater going, and then proceeded to load the packages in the back. When she finished she then took her cart 100 feet or so to the cart return, totally oblivious to anything that was going on with her child or vehicle. Although nothing bad happened, the gross vulnerabilities to both her child, her vehicle, and even to herself were inexcusable.

## **3- Practice**

Proficiency is critical to survival. Emergency situations rarely afford adequate time to think a situation through completely. Should you find yourself justified in using deadly force to stop an illegal attack you must be able to draw and fire your weapon instinctually and effectively without pause or delay from your own limitations or ineptness. Tactical maneuvers are just as important as marksmanship, and both should be practiced together. Practice marksmanship first. Once you've mastered your ability to hit your target effectively, practice drawing your weapon. Practice stealth draws as well as speed draws. Once you've mastered drawing your weapon, practice tactical maneuvers. Draw your weapon and fire two shots into your target. Reassess the remaining threat level, and then re-holster your weapon. Repeat this as many times as it takes to master this sequence with both good speed and good accuracy. Once proficient, set up multiple targets with varying ranges. Practice drawing your weapon, fire 1-2 shots center mass into each target, and reassess the remaining threat before re-holstering your weapon. Repeat this procedure as many times as you can. Don't try to rush speed. Speed will come naturally with practice. Purchase an air-soft gun similar to your carry weapon. Practice holding your air-soft weapon on target while you travel forward, backwards, laterally, and while you walk up and down steps. Once you master it with air-soft, repeat your training with your carry weapon. Once you have truly mastered tactical maneuvers with your weapon, continue to train. If you don't continue

to practice you will lose the skills you worked so hard to gain.

#### **4- Remain sober**

Not only do drugs (prescription, illegal, alcohol, etc.) slow your reaction times, they also hinder your judgment as well as your awareness (which violates rule #2). Anyone taking any type of drug should not be carrying a firearm anyway (which violates rule #1).

#### **5- Secure your perimeter**

No matter where you are, secure your immediate perimeter. Whether traveling in your vehicle or sitting on your couch watching the game make certain that your doors are locked. Get a security system and arm it. Although you'll need to bypass motion sensors while you're inside your home, at least you'll have door and window sensors armed. Small dogs don't offer much protection, but they tend to be the most aware and will let you know that trouble is coming before larger dogs sense it. The most ideal recommendation I could give would be two German Shepherds outside with a Pomeranian, electronic burglar alarm, and firearms inside.

Few parts of our routine make us as vulnerable as showering. While necessary, it focuses our attention as well as blocks our senses. It's difficult to hear over the water, and difficult to see through the steam and curtain. This is why shower scenes are included in so many horror movies. When I shower I take a firearm and a dog into the bathroom with me (although the dog comes along on her own). I lock my bathroom door, keep a Glock on the toilet tank, and use a clear shower curtain.

#### **6- Avoid crowds**

Sometimes this is obviously impossible, but when possible it's advisable. Bad things happen in large crowds, and most organized events have strict policies against carrying firearms anyway (in violation of Rule #1).

#### **7- Face the threat**

Sit with your back against the wall so that you can see anyone who walks into the room.

Avoid urinals. While standing at a urinal not only is your back to the room but you're typically so focused on what's directly in front of you that you're completely oblivious to what anyone is doing directly behind you. Use a stall instead, and close/lock the door behind you. While this may seem like trapping yourself in, at least you'll be facing forward when you open the door to exit the stall, thus paying attention to anyone else in the room.

#### **8- Blend in**

If you find trouble in a crowded place, try to blend in as much as possible with others without drawing any undue attention as attention draws fire and makes a stealth draw more difficult.

#### **9- Avoid walking while talking on a cell phone**

Cell phones tend to make us oblivious to our surroundings, thus violating rule #2. We have laws against driving and cell phone usage for the same reason.

#### **10- Keep strong arm free**

While carrying bags to your vehicle try to keep your strong arm free. In the event of a stealth draw it's much more conspicuous to sit your bags down to draw a weapon than it is to simply draw

your weapon.

## CONCLUSION

I have made this guide as complete as possible, and will update it from time to time as new things develop. If you notice something that should have been included, please [EMAIL ME](#) with your ideas. I hope that you have found this guide beneficial in some way.

Although I firmly believe that personally ensuring the safety and security of yourself and your loved ones is your **responsibility**, carry is a deeply personal decision that each person must make for themselves. Carry bears a tremendous responsibility that must not be taken lightly and education is the key to understanding the scope of that responsibility. You must fully understand and accept that responsibility in its entirety before you ever draw your weapon. I encourage you to join, read, and participate in the discussions on [ConcealedCarryForum.com](http://ConcealedCarryForum.com) where you'll find yourself in the company of others who have taken the same steps you are taking now and are always willing to guide and assist.

Be safe, be responsible, be alert, and be ready. Welcome to concealed carry!

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