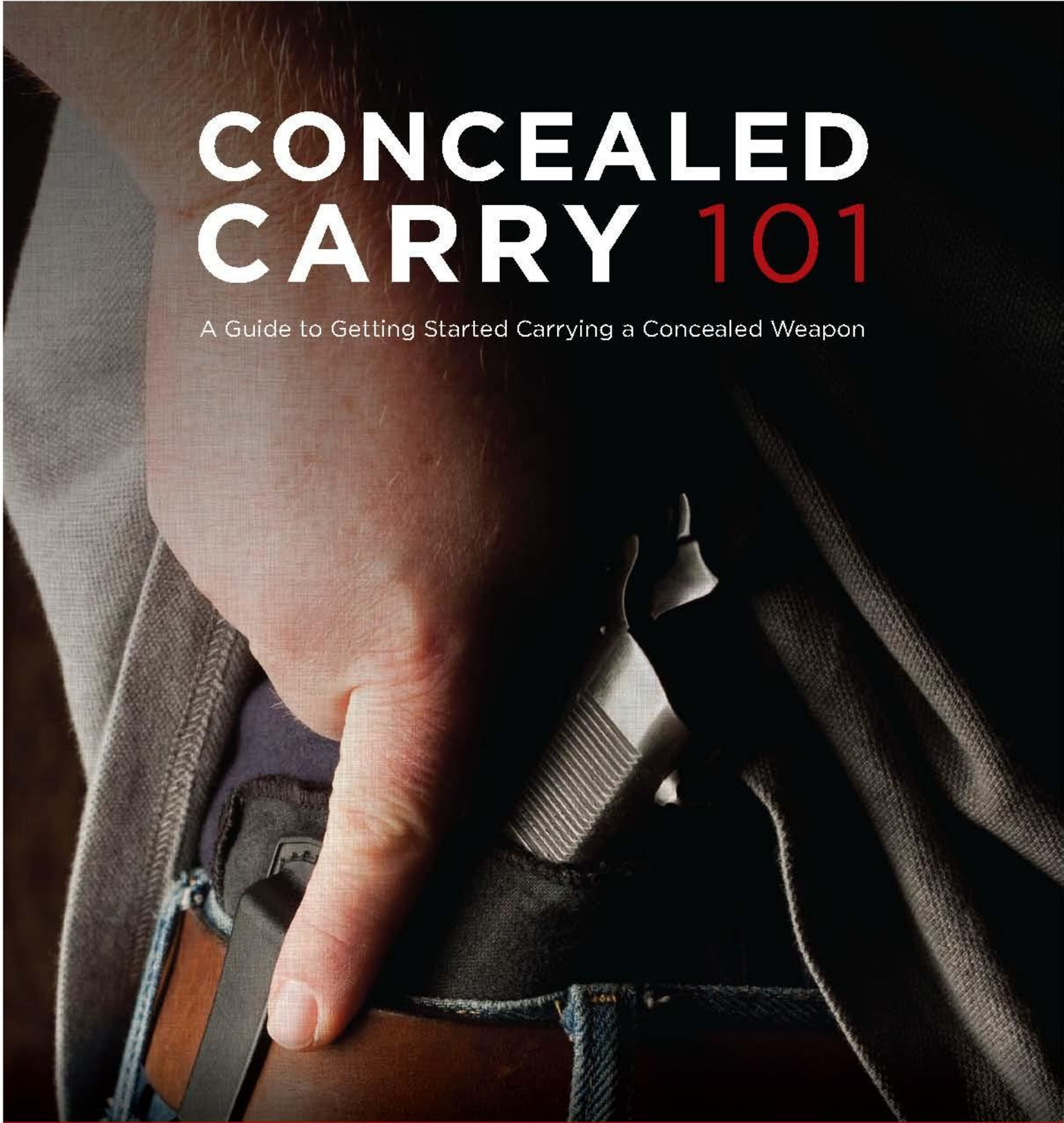




CONCEALED CARRY 101

A Guide to Getting Started Carrying a Concealed Weapon

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Before we get started, it's important to properly define our topic. Concealed carry is the act of carrying a handgun in public in a concealed manner. Concealed carry, at the time of writing, is legal in 49 states in the United States, with Illinois being the only state to deny its citizens the right to carry a concealed handgun¹.

In this book we will cover everything you need to know to get started carrying a concealed weapon successfully. We will not cover the legalities of obtaining a concealed carry permit, as the process varies state by state. For that, you can see one of the many great resources online (see our chapter on Resources) or contact your local police department. In most states, the process is fairly simple.

Why Carry a Handgun

If you're reading this, chances are you have already decided to carry, and most likely you know why you are carrying. If not, take some time to think about it.

Carrying a handgun is a serious choice, and you should only do so if you are prepared to take on the responsibility. You must be proficient with the handgun that you choose to carry, and you must be willing to actually use the weapon if the situation arises. We carry to protect not only ourselves, but those around us as well.

Practicality

We also carry a handgun because of its relatively small size and weight. A rifle or shotgun would be a better choice for self defense, but they do not conceal very easily. Rifles and shotguns are much larger and much heavier, making them impractical for day to day activities. If you are heading into a war zone, then you are very certainly going to want a rifle. But most of us don't live or work in a war zone, and so a handgun is a better choice.

It will be important to remember this distinction as we discuss the various handgun and caliber options and the pros and cons of each choice. "Good enough" will be relative, and as we have already established, choosing a handgun in the first place means we are "under gunned".

Intended Audience

This book is intended for those who are new to concealed carry. However, it contains many helpful reviews of holsters and guns, as well as tips that even someone experienced in concealed carry might find useful.

¹ (US Handgun Laws, 2011)

Goal

The overall goal of this book is to give you the tools you need to be able to successfully carry a concealed handgun a *high percentage of the time*. Your handgun will do you no good sitting at home. You'll often hear this expressed as "the first rule of a gunfight is to have a gun". In order for you to have a gun, you must find the right balance of size and weight, as well as find a carry method that suits your body and the way you dress. The following chapters and the advice within are geared toward helping you find this balance. There isn't one magical right answer for everyone, but there are some options that work for most people. These options will be presented throughout, but it our hope that you will explore these options with an open mind and find what is right for you.

Typically, when someone is new to concealed carry, they have to try many different methods of carry, several guns, and a box full of holsters before they find a combination that works well for them a high percentage of the time. This book aims to circumvent much of that process, helping you to find that winning combination the first time, saving you time and money.

Chapter 2 Gun Safety

Before we get into discussing concealed carry methods, holsters, guns, calibers, etc, it's important for us to first discuss safety. I'll be the first to admit that guns are a lot of fun, but they are not toys. If misused, they can most certainly kill you or someone you love. Therefore they must be treated with care and respect.

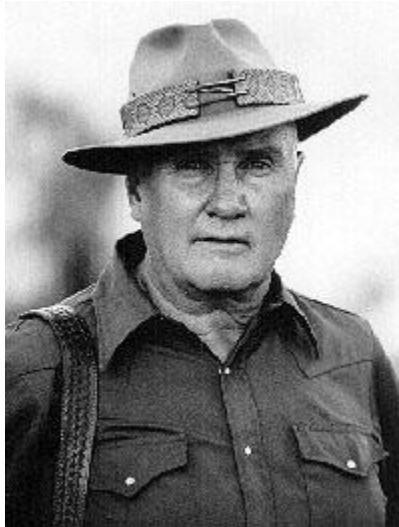


Figure 1 - Colonel Jeff Cooper

Colonel John Dean "Jeff" Cooper (May 10, 1920 - September 25, 2006) was an avid hunter, prolific author, history professor, and Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Marine Corps.

Colonel Cooper pioneered many things, one of them being "The Four Rules" of gun safety, which are based on his works. We will discuss the four rules in the remainder of this chapter. If these four rules are followed, you are virtually guaranteed to never have a problem with gun safety.

Rule #1: Treat All Guns As If They Are Loaded

If they gun is always treated as if loaded, you are sure to avoid accidents where you did not know the gun was loaded.

Rule #2: Never Point a Gun at Anything You Do Not Want to Destroy

This one sounds like common sense, but it's really not for most new shooters. A gun is only ever pointed at things we want to destroy (or at things that wouldn't be a big deal if destroyed, like the floor).

Rule #3: Keep Your Finger off the Trigger until Ready to Fire

Guns don't fire themselves. This is worth mentioning, as you'll find that a lot of people who are not familiar with guns will say things like "I don't even want to touch it" when confronted with a gun. This is understandable – they don't understand how guns work. The simple truth is that 99.99% guns will not (and most often *cannot*) fire themselves. Therefore you should always keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to fire.

Rule #4: Be Absolutely Sure of Your Target and what's Behind It

Hitting a target, especially for new shooters, can be challenging. Once a bullet leaves the gun, you cannot bring it back. Therefore you must be absolutely sure of what you're shooting at, as well as what's *behind* and *around* what you are shooting at, because you might miss, and bullets can pass through whatever it is you're aiming at.

Training

Now that you understand the 4 basic rules of gun safety, let's talk about training. Training is very important to having a safe experience with firearms of any kind. If you are new to shooting, then the first thing you should be looking for is a basic gun safety course offered in your area. You can find gun safety course through the NRA website (see chapter on Resources). In the gun safety course you will learn a lot of the safe handling of firearms, and come away with an even better idea of what handgun might be right for you.

If you know someone responsible that you trust who can teach you the safe operation of firearms, then that's fine too. That's how I learned. Just be sure that this person is knowledgeable, responsible, and is going to take the time to explain everything to you in a way that you can understand. It does no good for someone to talk over your head using gun lingo and acronyms that you don't understand (see our chapter on Terminology for more information on terms and acronyms).

Once you have the basic gun safety down, consider taking a pistol self-defense course through a reputable gun training company like Gunsite or Fortress Self-Defense (again, see Resources). There are many reputable companies offering this training. Defensive pistol training will give you a solid foundation that will give you confidence in your defensive abilities when carrying a concealed handgun.

Chapter 3 Terminology

Like nearly everything in life, concealed carry comes with its own set of terms and acronyms. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but will cover some of the more common terms and acronyms that you may run into in as you visit gun shops, gun shows, gun forums, and gun websites.

It's important to not skip this information. You don't need to memorize it by any means, but it's important to understand the different types of handguns that are available so that you can choose what's right for you.

It's also very important to understand the different caliber options so that you can choose the right caliber for your weapon, skill level and preferences, as there are pros and cons to each choice.

Concealed Carry License Terms

- CCW – Carry Concealed Weapon
- CHL – Concealed Handgun License
- CHP – Concealed Handgun Permit
- CDWL – Concealed Defensive/Deadly Weapon License
- CWP – Concealed Weapon Permit
- CWL – Concealed Weapon License
- CCP – Concealed Carry Permit
- CCL – Concealed Carry License
- LTC – License To Carry
- LTCF – License to Carry Firearms
- CCDW – Concealed Carry Deadly Weapon
- CPL – Concealed Pistol License

Handgun Terminology

- Handgun – a firearm designed to be held and operated with one hand.
- Revolver – a repeating firearm that has a cylinder containing multiple chambers and at least one barrel for firing.
- Semi-automatic pistol – a type of handgun which uses a single chamber and barrel, with a mechanism powered by the previous shot to load a fresh cartridge into the chamber.
- Automatic Pistol – a technically incorrect term used to describe a semi-automatic pistol.
- Self-Loading Pistol – semi-automatic pistol.
- Autopistol – semi-automatic pistol.
- Autoloading Pistol – semi-automatic pistol.
- Stopping power – the ability to cause a penetrating ballistic injury to a target, or the ability to stop an attack.
- Muzzling – when the muzzle of the gun is pointed at a person. You should never do this unless you intend to shoot. See the chapter on Safety for more information.
- Capacity – the number of rounds the magazine (pistol) or cylinder (revolver) holds. In terms of pistols, capacity will most often be represented like this: 6+1. This notation means that the magazine holds 6 with 1 in the chamber.

Handgun Acronyms

In order to keep this list manageable for new shooters, only the very basics will be covered

- DA – Double Action. This is a semi-automatic pistol where the hammer or striker may be either thumb-cocked or activated by pulling the trigger when firing the first shot.

- SA – Single Action. This is a semi-automatic pistol must be cocked by first operating the slide or bolt, or, if a round is already chambered, by cocking the hammer manually
- DAO – Double Action Only. This is a semi-automatic pistol where, once a round is chambered, each trigger pull will cock the hammer, striker, or firing pin, and will additionally release the same to fire a cartridge in one continuous motion.
- DA/SA – Double Action/Single Action. This is a semi-automatic pistol where the first round is fired in double action, and subsequent follow up shots are fired in single action.

Ammunition Acronyms

- Ammunition – the bullet, together with the primer, propellant and casing.
- Cartridge – one “piece” of ammunition, usually called a bullet in movies.
- Round – one “piece” of ammunition, the same as a cartridge.
- FMJ – Full Metal Jacket
- FP – Flat Point
- HP – Hollow Point
- JHP – Jacketed Hollow Point
- MC – Metal Cased
- ACP – Automatic Colt Pistol
- +P – Cartridge loaded to a higher pressure than industry standard.
- +P+ - Cartridge loaded to even higher pressure than +P.

Common Handgun Calibers

The following are common handgun calibers, from smallest to largest. For the purposes of this book, we will only discuss the calibers in bold. See the chapter on Calibers for more information.

- .25 ACP
- .32 ACP
- **.380 ACP**
- **9x19mm Parabellum (9mm)**
- **.40 S&W**
- **.45 ACP**

Holster Terminology

- 3 o'clock – holster position on the right hip
- 6 o'clock – holster position in the middle of your back
- 9 o'clock – holster position on the left hip
- 12 o'clock – holster position in the middle of your stomach

- Holster Cant – when the holster is tilted forward or backward to facilitate comfort, concealment, or drawing.
- FBI Cant – typically a 15 degree cant forward made popular by the FBI.
- Kydex – a line of thermoplastic acrylic-polyvinyl chloride alloy sheet grades. Basically, a very strong plastic material that can be molded to make holsters.

Chapter 4 Calibers

In this chapter we will cover some of the caliber options you have for concealed carry. We will not cover every caliber available. Instead, we will only focus on the most popular calibers for concealed carry handguns.

Each caliber discussed here has both pros and cons. With a larger caliber, you get better theoretical stopping power, but you give up magazine capacity and/or increase the size and weight of the gun. With a smaller caliber, you give up theoretical stopping power, but get an increase in magazine capacity and/or decrease the size and weight of the gun.

Because of this tradeoff, you need to choose the right caliber for you based on more than just the size of the bullet.

Chart Key

The following terms are used in the performance charts to follow.

Expansion – expanded bullet diameter (ballistic gelatin).

Penetration – penetration depth (ballistic gelatin).

PC – permanent cavity volume (ballistic gelatin, FBI method).

TSC – temporary stretch cavity volume (ballistic gelatin).

.380 ACP

The .380 ACP (380 for short) is the smallest of the calibers discussed here. It is our recommendation that this be the smallest caliber you choose for concealed carry. It has the same bullet diameter as the 9mm, but will less bullet weight, velocity and energy.

The 380 has been around since 1908, and saw popularity in and after World War II, due largely to the Walther PPK, which was issued to German officers. The Walther PPK is without a doubt the most famous 380 pistol as it was signature gun of the fictional James Bond.

Performance

Performance of several popular self-defense loads for the .380 ACP²

Figure 2 - .380 ACP

Manufacturer	Load	Mass (grains)	Velocity (ft/s)	Energy (ft lbs)	Expansion (inches)	Penetration (inches)	PC (in ³)	TSC (in ³)
Cor-Bon	JHP +P	90	1050	220	0.58	9.0	2.38	15.7
Federal	HydraShok JHP	90	1000	200	0.58	10.5	2.77	21.0
Winchester	Silvertip JHP	85	1000	189	0.63	6.5	2.03	10.6
CCI/Speer	JHP	88	1000	196	0.36	17.0	1.73	9.1
Hornady	XTP	90	1000	200	0.44	11.8	1.73	9.1
Federal	FMJ	95	955	193	0.36	17	1.73	8.7

Assessment

While the 380 is the smallest of the recommended calibers for concealed carry, some will argue that it's good enough to get the job done, while others will argue that it's too underpowered to be effective. Perhaps Massad Ayoob said it best when he said "Some experts will say it's barely adequate, and others will say it's barely inadequate."³

At the end of the day, it has to be your call. It is our opinion that if the 380 is all you can carry, then you should carry the 380.

² (Wikipedia - .380 ACP, 2011)

³ (Ayoob, 2007)

9mm

The 9×19mm Parabellum (9mm) cartridge was designed by Georg Luger and introduced in 1902 by the German weapons manufacturer Deutsche Waffen- und Munitionsfabriken (DWM) for their Luger semi-automatic pistol. For this reason, it is commonly called the 9 mm Luger cartridge, differentiating it from the 9mm Makarov and 9mm Browning (.380 ACP) cartridges.⁴

Whatever you call it, the 9mm is, according to many, the most popular handgun cartridge in the world, and for good reason. The 9 mm cartridge has been manufactured by, or for, more than 70 different countries and has become a standard pistol caliber for NATO and other military forces around the world.

Performance

Performance of several popular self-defense loads in 9mm.⁵

Figure 3 – 9mm

Manufacturer	Load	Mass (grains)	Velocity (ft/s)	Energy (ft lbs)	Expansion (inches)	Penetration (inches)	PC (in ³)	TSC (in ³)
Cor-Bon	JHP	115	1,350	465	0.55	14.2	3.4	38.5
Speer	Gold Dot JHP	124	1,310	472	0.70	13.25	5.1	37.6
Federal	HydraShok JHP +P+	124	1,220	410	0.67	13.4	4.7	44.8
Remington	Golden Saber JHP	147	990	320	0.62	14.5	4.4	33.2
Winchester	Silvertip	115	1,225	383	0.72	8.0	3.3	16.7
Winchester	WWB JHP	147	990	320	0.58	15.9	4.2	19.6
Winchester	FMJ	115	1,155	341	0.36	24.5	2.5	10.6

⁴ (Wikipedia - 9mm, 2011)

⁵ (Wikipedia - 9mm, 2011)

Assessment

The 9mm is a great choice for self-defense. It offers more power than the .380 ACP, but can still be found in very small concealed carry handguns. Of the calibers discussed here, and at the time of writing, it is also the cheapest, meaning you can train longer and more often for the same amount of money.

.40 S&W

The .40 S&W was developed jointly by major American firearms manufacturers Winchester and Smith & Wesson. The .40 S&W was developed from the ground up as a law enforcement cartridge designed to duplicate performance of the FBI's reduced velocity 10mm cartridge which could be retrofitted into medium-frame automatic handguns. It uses .40-inch diameter bullets ranging in weight from 125 to 200 grains. A number of .40 S&W loads with hollow point bullets offer a good combination of expansion and penetration.⁶

The .40 S&W is extremely popular in the United States among law enforcement. The reason for this is that it is judged by many to be more powerful than the 9mm, with larger magazine capacity when compared to the .45 ACP.

Performance

Performance of several popular self-defense loads in .40 S&W.

Figure 4 – .40 S&W

Manufacturer	Load	Mass (grains)	Velocity (ft/s)	Energy (ft lbs)	Expansion (inches)	Penetration (inches)	PC (in ³)	TSC (in ³)
Cor-Bon	JHP	135	1300	507	0.56	9.8	2.4	69.1
Warrior Arms	T.A.C. JHP	135	1440	622	0.55	10.9	4.8	72.8
Double Tap	Gold Dot JHP	155	1275	559	0.76	13.0	5.9	48.5
Federal	HydraShok JHP	155	1140	447	0.68	13.3	4.8	47.9
Warrior Arms	T.A.C. JHP	155	1286	569	0.75	13.1	4.9	47.7
Remington	Golden	165	1150	485	0.68	12.0	4.4	41.1

⁶ (Wikipedia - .40 S&W, 2011)

	Saber JHP							
Winchester	Ranger SXT	180	990	392	0.72	13.0	5.3	29.1
Winchester	FMJ	180	950	361	0.40	25.0	3.1	14.6

Assessment

The .40 S&W is an excellent self-defense caliber in terms of effectiveness. It does, however, have a couple drawbacks. The first is that, compared to the 9mm, it has a noticeable increase in recoil. For experienced shooters, or stronger individuals, this may not be an issue. But if you are new to shooting, or small in stature, this is something to consider.

Second, handguns chambered for the .40 S&W will hold fewer rounds when compared to its 9mm counterpart (same make of gun, the only difference being the caliber). This is just simple physics, as the .40 S&W rounds are larger than 9mm. For example, the Glock 26, which is a subcompact 9mm, holds 10 rounds in its flush fitting magazine (flush fitting meaning the magazine doesn't extend past the bottom of the frame). The Glock 27, which for all intents and purposes is the same gun, but chambered in .40 S&W, holds 9 rounds in its flush fitting magazine. Does that extra round matter? That's up to you!

Third, .40 S&W ammunition will cost more than 9mm ammunition. So if you have a limited training budget, as most of us do, you will not be able to train as much or as often with your .40 S&W.

.45 ACP

The .45 ACP is a cartridge designed by John Browning in 1904, for use in his prototype Colt semi-automatic .45 pistol and eventually the M1911 pistol adopted by the United States Army in 1911.⁷

The .45 ACP was made famous by the aforementioned 1911. There is perhaps no more popular handgun in the entire world than the 1911. It has been in production now for over 100 years with relatively few design changes. It was adopted by the US Army and is still in use today. This is, by all accounts, an amazing track record that cannot be overstated. 1911 fans are many and varied (this author among them), and for good reason.

Performance

Performance of several popular self-defense loads in .45 ACP.

Figure 5 - .45 ACP

Manufacturer	Load	Mass (grains)	Velocity (ft/s)	Energy (ft lbs)	Expansion (inches)	Penetration (inches)	PC (in ³)	TSC (in ³)
Federal	HydraShok JHP	230	850	369	0.78	12.0	5.73	428.4
Remington	Golden Saber JHP	230	875	391	0.75	14.3	6.32	25.4
Cor-Bon	JHP	185	1,150	544	0.7	11.3	4.35	28.6
Winchester	Silvertip JHP	185	1,000	411	0.79	12.0	5.88	30.2
Winchester	Ranger SXT	230	900	414	0.78	13	6.21	25.4
Remington	FMJ	230	835	356	0.45	27	4.29	9

⁷ (Wikipedia - .45 ACP, 2011)

Assessment

The .45 ACP is the largest caliber discussed here. However, much like the .40 S&W, this larger caliber comes at the expense of a potential increase in recoil, and most often, the size and weight of the handgun. It's for these reasons that the .45 ACP is not recommended for those who are new to concealed carry.

That does not mean that the .45 ACP is a bad choice – far from it. The .45 ACP is an excellent fight stopping caliber, and if you can conceal a weapon large enough to chamber the round, and are proficient enough to stay on target and manage the recoil, then the .45 ACP would be an excellent choice for you.

Caliber Recommendation

Self-defense expert Rob Pincus, in his latest book *Combat Focus® Shooting: Evolution 2010*, outlines four reasons why he recommends 9mm for personal defense, which are detailed below.

1. The Myth of the “One Shot Stop”, Part 1: Faster Strings of Fire are Better

I don't believe that it is likely to take only one shot to stop your next threat. With this in mind, the “data” that we collect (and sometimes obsess over) about the difference in potential terminal performance from one bullet to the next or the relatively few examples we have of single pistol hit results in human beings suggests to me that we should plan on multiple shot strings of fire. If we are planning on needing more than one shot and we know that we want to stop the bad guy as soon as possible, then it makes sense that we should seek the fastest string of fire possible. Physics dictates that the 9mm is going to be a more manageable round (lower recoil) than the .40 S&W out of any particular firearm. So, no matter how much you train and how much you practice, everyone should be able to shoot a string of Combat Accurate 9mm rounds faster than they can fire a string of .40. Of course, if you consider a 4x8 sheet of plywood your “combat accurate” area, you're going to have to go to a relatively long string of fire to be able to measure a difference in time, but if you stick with a probable target size (high center chest) at a plausible distance (10-15'), it shouldn't be hard to see a difference at a reasonable number of rounds (3-6).

2. The Myth of the “One Shot Stop”, Part 2: Higher Capacity is Better

Again, keep in mind that we are counting on needing more than one round. In any given size package, 9mm firearms hold more rounds than their counterparts chambered in .40 S&W. This gives you a greater potential for defense against one or more targets for the same practical cost in size & weight.

3. Negligible Difference in Practical Wounding Potential

*Pistol bullets really aren't great stoppers. There is a reason that hospital emergency rooms successfully treat Gun Shot Wound patients on a regular basis. Having talked to many EMTs and trauma doctors, and examined a significant amount of pictures/medical reports, there is a negligible difference between the wounding capacity of the 9mm and the .40 S&W. The idea of “energy transfer” is misplaced in regard to wounding potential because the net amount of energy contained in a pistol bullet is pretty low when we think about really having dramatic effect on a human body (knocking someone down, for example). The damage that is done is created through cutting and crushing. The difference of a few grains of weight, a few feet per second of speed or a millimeter (literally) of diameter are not worth giving up on the faster strings of fire or the higher capacity mentioned above. While the .40 S&W round, especially in heavier versions, has more potential for penetration of intermediate barriers, the data on actual personal defense shooting suggests overwhelmingly that there are not likely to be any hard barriers to be penetrated. (Law Enforcement Officers face barriers much more often, presenting a stronger argument for the .40 in the role of police duty gun). Tom Givens' *Lessons From the Street* DVD is a great example of real world self-defense shooting data of the type that should be influencing our choices.*

There is also a large body of testing evidence that modern bonded hollow points in 9mm will penetrate an adequate amount of tissue to cause a maximum amount of damage inside a human body. In fact, manufacturers such as Winchester are now designing their defensive rounds to have consistent performance across the most common defensive calibers (9mm, 40, .45, .38). I recently participated in a ballistic gelatin demonstration of that company's PDX1 line of ammunition and saw for myself that they are achieving this goal.

It is important to note that I am not arguing that a single .40S&W bullet doesn't hold more potential to stop in any event, rather I believe that the small increase in potential is not worth the absolute known detriments in recoil and capacity. As I discussed in point number one, for all shooters, at some point, there will be a moment when they can fire one more round of 9mm in any given period of time. That extra round's capacity to wound will far outweigh the miniscule difference in potential for any individual bullets.

4. Lower Cost, High Value Practice

It is significantly less expensive to shoot 9mm in training than it is to shoot .40... that means more reps and more training in general for any given budget. This is the last reason I'm going to offer here, but there is no doubt that it is a factor in favor of choosing the 9mm. This is not an argument for training with loads that aren't what you actually carry just because of budget (training with a .22lr, for example), it is an argument for training with your actual carry caliber and carry gun as often and as realistically as is practical.

There you have it. Those are the four primary reasons that I now recommend 9mm as the personal defense round of choice, have been converting my own personal .40 S&W firearms over to 9mm and would never purchase a .40 S&W firearm for personal defense if I were starting all over today. I let anyone who asks me about defensive guns or bullets know how I feel today, despite years of recommending the .40 and talking about how it was a great compromise between the 9mm and .45. In the mid-90's I was wrong about the advantages of that round and I have definitely changed my mind about the inadequacies of the 9mm. Acknowledging that I was wrong in the past, is the only way that I can share what I now believe is the best recommendation I can give.

I think Rob makes a very compelling case for the 9mm. This is not to say that every other choice is wrong however, because that's just not the case. You should carry the caliber that you are comfortable with. As previously mentioned, if you can only carry a .380, then by all means carry a .380. The .40 and .45 are also good choices, as they most definitely "get the job done", but often in larger form factors with reduced magazine capacity.

As long as you can carry a high percentage of the time with your chosen configuration (carry method, holster, gun and caliber), then there's nothing wrong with your choice. If, however, you find that you cannot carry a high percentage of the time, then chances are there is something that is keeping you from carrying, and most of the time this ends up being the size and weight of the gun. If that is the case, then you should consider choosing a smaller gun, which usually means a smaller caliber.



As cliché as it sounds, the best gun in a fight is the gun that you have. Find something that you can carry a high percentage of the time, because just about any gun is better than no gun at all.

Chapter 5 Carry Methods and Holsters

In this chapter we will discuss some of the more common ways to carry a handgun concealed, and the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, as well as a sample of the holsters available for each option. This will of course not be an exhaustive list of options, but rather some of the options that have, in our experience, worked well. As always, choose what is right for you and your situation.

Decision Factors

The following are factors that you should consider when selecting and purchasing a holster for concealed carry.

- Safety – how well the trigger guard and any applicable safeties are protected.
- Retention – how well the gun is held in place by the holster.
- Concealment – how well the holster and gun can be concealed.
- Comfort - ability to wear a gun for an extended period without excessive discomfort.
- Draw ease – how well the holster allows for the handgun to be drawn.
- Durability – how well the holster will hold up over time.
- Ease of re-holster – how easily the gun can be re-holstered with one hand.
- Adjustability – how well the holster can be adjusted for cant or position.
- Price – how affordable the holster is for your situation. Prices vary by holster type, make, and materials. Some people prefer to have multiple holsters for each gun, whereas other will have to get by with a single holster.

A Note on Comfort

One of the most important criteria in achieving our goal of being able to carry a high percentage of the time is finding a carry method that is comfortable for you. If you are uncomfortable, chances are your gun will get left at home. Comfort will be largely driven by having the right holster for your body and chosen carry method. This means that in general, buying the cheapest holster that you can find is not going to give you a high level of comfort.

Outside the Waistband (OWB)

Outside the waistband is where the holster sits outside of your waistband. There are many different outside the waistband holsters that you can try, but the best option for concealed carry is the pancake style of holster. A pancake holster typically attaches to your belt and rides close and conforms to your body.

OWB Advantages

An OWB holster provides the fastest presentation of the handgun when drawing of the holsters discussed here. They are extremely popular, meaning there are countless makes and options available, in many different materials, in many different price ranges.

OWB Disadvantages

This speed comes with the disadvantage of being the hardest to conceal. Because the entire handgun and holster ride outside of your pants, you must have a cover garment that will cover the entire handgun. This of course can be done, but may take wardrobe adjustment to pull it off.

OWB Holsters

As mentioned, there are many different OWB holster options available. Here are some examples of pancake style OWB holsters that we recommend.

Galco Concealable Belt Holster

The Galco Concealable Belt Holster is an all leather holster that fits into your belt, and is a pancake style holster with a bit of a twist. Its unique two-piece construction is contoured on the body side to the natural curve of the hip, keeping all the molding on the front of the holster, allowing for significantly more comfortable carry and a narrower profile than an ordinary pancake type holster.

This holster costs around \$100, but is very well made and works very well for the type.



Figure 6 - Galco Concealable Belt Holster

Crossbreed SnapSlide

The Crossbreed SnapSlide is a leather and Kydex hybrid holster. Like the Galco, it has a flat back that allows the holster to ride close to the body. The tall and wide platform of the SnapSlide is also very stable and will not sag or droop away from the body in the grip area as so many generic belt holsters tend to do. Your gun stays flush against you and out of the way, completely hidden under a loose garment until you need it.

This holster is much cheaper at around \$50 depending on the options you choose. Crossbreed holsters are also well made, and leather/Kydex holsters are some of my favorite holsters.



Figure 7 - Crossbreed SnapSlide

Inside the Waistband (IWB)

Inside the waistband is where the holster sits between your pants and your body, where your pants cover part of the holster. This is a very popular carry method, perhaps the most popular, with civilians carrying concealed handguns. Like OWB, IWB has many holster options available in many materials and price ranges.

IWB Advantages

The main advantage of carrying IWB is how well this carry method conceals the handgun. Because the holster is partially covered by your pants, you only need to conceal the grip of the handgun. This can be done in many different ways, the easiest of which is a shirt or cover garment.

Another advantage is that many IWB holsters are also “tuckable”, meaning that your shirt or over garment can be tucked into the holster providing protection against printing, or the handgun outline showing through your shirt or cover garment.

IWB Disadvantages

The disadvantage of this carry method is that for some people, it’s uncomfortable. Another disadvantage is that some holster materials (nylon and to some extent leather), after drawing the handgun, the holster can collapse, meaning that the opening for the gun closes making re-holstering harder. This disadvantage is mitigated by choosing an IWB holster made from Kydex, but can again sacrifice some comfort.

Recently several different companies have started making leather/Kydex hybrid holsters, where the holster backing is made from either cowhide or horsehide, with molded Kydex providing the cover and retention. These holsters are extremely comfortable, and do not collapse when re-holstering, meaning that both disadvantages of this type of holster virtually disappear. It’s for this reason that we strongly recommend this style of IWB holster.

IWB Holsters

The following are great examples of IWB holsters.

Crossbreed SuperTuck Deluxe

The Crossbreed SuperTuck Deluxe is a leather and Kydex hybrid holster that is extremely comfortable. As the name suggests, this is a tuckable holster in that your shirt can be tucked into the space between the clips and the leather backing, giving you added concealment.

Crossbreed holsters are very well made, and will cost around \$70 for cowhide (pictured) and around \$85 for horsehide, depending on options.



Figure 8 - Crossbreed SuperTuck Deluxe

Theis Holsters

Theis (pronounced Tice) Holsters are another leather and Kydex hybrid holster. They are basically the same as the Crossbreed SuperTuck Deluxe, but at a lower price. They are available in either cowhide black (pictured) or natural horsehide.

Theis Holsters are also very well made, and will cost around \$55 for the cowhide and around \$65 for the horsehide.



Figure 9 - Theis Holster

High Noon Holsters Split Decision

The High Noon Split Decision is an all leather holster that is a low cost, high value option for those who want a quality holster at the lowest possible price. If that's you, this is your holster. The Split Decision is a tuckable, non-molded holster made of thin cowhide. The holster features a 15 degree cant forward, meaning that the gun will be angled toward the front of your body when worn on your side.

The Split Decision isn't as comfortable as the Crossbreed or the Theis holsters, but is reasonably comfortable, and represents great value. This tuckable holster sells for under \$40.



Figure 10 - High Noon Split Decision

Shoulder Holster

A shoulder holster consists of two straps connected in a manner similar to a backpack, with the actual holster mounted to a strap on the right or the left side. Shoulder holsters are designed to position the handgun in either a vertical position, with the barrel pointed generally toward the ground, a vertical position, with the barrel pointed generally upward, or in a horizontal position, with the barrel pointed generally behind the wearer.

Shoulder Holster Advantages

Shoulder holsters are typically comfortable, as they distribute the weight across the shoulders instead of directly on the belt. They can also be very concealable if an over garment is worn.

Shoulder Holster Disadvantages

The disadvantage is that you have to wear an over garment like a sport jacket (men) or a cardigan sweater (women). This is not always a good option, particularly in warmer climates. Also, some people do not like the horizontal position that most shoulder holsters use, because this position lends itself to the wearer muzzling either themselves or someone behind them when drawing and holstering.

Shoulder Holsters

Galco Classic Lite

The Galco Classic Lite shoulder system is a very comfortable and affordable shoulder holster system. It uses premium steer hide to enable the cost saving, while still providing a quality shoulder system. The gun is held in a horizontal position, with an extra magazine carrier on the opposite side.

As mentioned, the Galco Classic Lite is an affordable option if you're looking for a shoulder system. At around \$85, it really is good value. Galco makes quality holsters, and other options are available.



Figure 11 - The Galco Classic Lite

Bianchi X16 Agent X

The Bianchi X16 Agent X shoulder system is an unlined shoulder holster made from premium cowhide. It has a figure-8 suede harness with magazine pouches on the opposite side.

The Bianchi X16 Agent X is a more expensive option at around \$130 because of the higher quality leather used. Like Galco, Bianchi makes quality holsters, and other options are available.



Figure 12 - Bianchi X16 Agent X

Ankle Holster

Ankle holsters, as the name suggests, are strapped around the ankle or the ankle area of the leg. They are typically worn on the inside of the opposite leg. So for example, if you are right handed, you would wear the ankle holster on the inside of your left leg.

Ankle Holster Advantages

Ankle holsters, when worn with pants, conceal extremely well. They can also be very comfortable when you aren't engaged in a lot of physical activity.

Ankle Holster Disadvantages

The main disadvantage of ankle holsters in my experience is that they tend to move around a lot when running or jumping. Another disadvantage for some is that you must wear pants to conceal them, which can be tough in a warm climate. Also, some people find ankle holsters uncomfortable.

Ankle Holsters

Galco Ankle Glove

If you are looking for an ankle holster, the Galco Ankle Glove is the one we recommend. It is an extremely comfortable ankle holster. The Ankle Glove's wide neoprene ankle band and Velcro closure offer extended wearing comfort and unmatched security. Additional comfort is provided by sheepskin padding between the holster and ankle. It also features a reinforced thumb break for speed of draw and detailed molding for firearm retention.

The Ankle Glove may be worn with or without the optional adjustable calf strap (sold separately).

Constructed of premium saddle leather stitched to a neoprene band, the Ankle Glove accommodates ankles up to 13" in circumference.

The Galco Ankle Glove is also very affordable at around \$70.



Figure 13 - Galco Ankle Glove

Pocket Holster

Pocket holsters are holsters that are small enough, and for guns small enough, that they will fit into either your pants or coat pocket.

Pocket Holster Advantages

The main advantage to pocket holsters is that they are great for concealment. They are also very convenient for a lot of people, as no special thought is needed when deciding how to dress for the day. You can simply put the small handgun in the holster and then put the holster in either your front pants pocket or coat pocket and you're ready to go.

Another great advantage is that in a situation where you feel threatened, you can put your hand in your pocket on the grip of your handgun, ready to draw if needed, without escalating the situation or drawing attention to what you are doing. Pocket holsters allow for a more "casual draw", which can be very advantageous.

Pocket Holster Disadvantages

Since pocket holsters must fit into a pocket, they can only conceal a gun large enough to fit into a pocket (make sense right?). So as is often in life, its greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. That being that you cannot carry just any gun, you must carry a very small gun. The good news is that small guns can also be very good concealed carry handguns. See the chapter on pocket carry handguns for more information.

Pocket Holsters

DeSantis Nemesis

The DeSantis Nemesis is one of the most widely used pocket holsters. The reason for this is that they are simple, well made, durable, and they work. The inside of the holster is made of slick pack cloth for a low friction draw, whereas the outside is made of a highly viscous sticky nylon material.

The DeSantis Nemesis is very affordable at around \$20.



Figure 14 - DeSantis Nemesis

Remora Holsters

Remora holsters are very much like the DeSantis Nemesis. They rely on friction to retain the holster inside of your pocket. The textured outside of the holster is made with a non-slip rubber material that also resists moisture well.

Remora holsters are also very affordable at around \$25 depending on options.



Figure 15 - Remora Holster

Popular Holster Makers

Bianchi International

In 1958 John Bianchi had a vision of what he thought a duty holster should be and set out to develop a line of products that carried out that vision. Since that time almost 50 years ago, Bianchi holsters, belts and accessories have been used in police, military and sporting applications the world over.

The world is changing and we are very aware of that at Bianchi International, which is why our product line continues to evolve to keep pace with today's customer demands. We are continuously researching new materials, developing new designs and entire new product lines to meet these changing needs.⁸

<http://www.bianchi-intl.com/>

Safariland

For more than 45 years Safariland™ has produced some of the finest and most innovative products for the law enforcement, competitive shooting and military industries. In 1964, following his father's request for a custom holster, Neale Perkins launched a holster business from his garage in Sierra Madre, California. He named his new company after the African safaris he and his father enjoyed together. From these humble beginnings, Safariland quickly went from making a few hundred holsters to more than 5,000 within a few months.⁹

Desantis Gunhide

In 1972, when I started making holsters by hand on the kitchen table, it was never my intention to make it my life's work. Thirty-eight years later DeSantis Gunhide® has grown to be one of the largest holster manufacturers in the world. We are very proud of our position in the industry and will continue to work hard to remain at the top. Quality control has been, and always will be, our number one priority. A major part of our philosophy is to provide products that not only look appealing but also function flawlessly.

DeSantis Gunhide® is synonymous with innovative designs, high standards of craftsmanship and dependability. From the streets of Amman, to the bridges of London and the jungles of the Amazon, our products can be found in all corners of the earth. DeSantis is, and will remain, a trusted name. We take great pride in our products and in our newest facility on Long Island, NY.¹⁰

<http://www.desantisholster.com/>

BLACKHAWK!

BLACKHAWK! was founded in 1993 by former Navy SEAL Mike Noell. BLACKHAWK!'s meticulous obsession with quality has made it the ops gear of choice for Special Operation units worldwide.

⁸ (Bianchi, 2011)

⁹ (Safariland, 2011)

¹⁰ (DeSantis, 2011)

Mike Noell's US Navy experience provided him the inspiration for the gear BLACKHAWK! now manufacturers. While operating 60 clicks inside of Northern Iraq, he had to hump "a ton" of gear by foot in an enemy minefield. The pack failed, dumping his gear into the mine-ridden ground. "If I get out of this one alive, I will make this stuff the way it needs to be built so none of my buddies have to go through this," he remarked to a fellow operator. Upon entering the private sector, that's exactly what he did, making gear and packs in a garage, and growing ever since.¹¹

<http://www.blackhawk.com>

Galco Gunleather

Galco International was founded by Richard N. Gallagher in 1969 as a small family business in Chicago, Illinois. Known then as "The Original Jackass Leather Company," Gallagher specialized in holsters constructed of horsehide.

In 1980 the name of the company was changed to Galco International, and in 1983 the business was moved from Chicago to its present home in Phoenix, Arizona. Already famous for high quality and innovative designs, Galco gained worldwide notoriety when the Jackass shoulder system became a "recurring character" on the popular 1980's TV series Miami Vice. In the new century, Galco continues to be a favorite choice of Hollywood, appearing in more films and TV shows than any other holster maker.¹²

<http://www.usgalco.com>

Crossbreed Holsters

Crossbreed Holsters, LLC was started in 2005 by Mark Craighead. An avid shooter, re-loader and CCW permit holder, Mark was introduced to firearms by his father as a young boy. His interest and involvement with firearms, and particularly handguns, continued throughout the years. Through much trial and error, Mark became familiar with holsters, learning what worked and what didn't.

After collecting the proverbial "box of holsters" Mark decided to design his own and incorporated the best features and discarded all of the non-functional design elements.

The result of these efforts saw Mark making a new breed of holsters and selling them from his own garage. Within just a couple of years, Mark's holsters were achieving such popularity that his company, Crossbreed Holsters, gained national recognition as a maker of some of the best and most functional concealment holsters available. Each holster is made by hand by craftsmen personally trained by Mark. Crossbreed Holsters currently occupies a 2400 square foot commercial facility and employs 7 craftsmen, and 2 administrative staff with Mark overseeing all daily operations. They make each holster by hand, right here in the USA.¹³

¹¹ (BLACKHAWK!, 2011)

¹² (Galco, 2011)

¹³ (Crossbreed, 2011)

<http://www.crossbreedholsters.com>

Theis Holsters

My holsters are hand crafted in my small one man shop in Arkansas. Every chance I get it is a 2 man shop, because my grandson Jake, loves helping his papaw!

I custom make each holster one at a time building them to perfectly fit your gun. My holsters are tuckable, durable and extremely comfortable for all day wear. They are designed to be worn around the 4 to 5 o'clock position for optimum comfort. I make them in black cowhide or in natural horsehide which is a light tan, and use just the right size leather to match the size of your firearm. I use heavy duty Kydex or metal belt clips to hold your holster firmly in place. I have 6-8 holes in the leather for you to move the clips up or down to adjust the cant and ride height of your weapon. If you have any Questions Click Here to view my Frequently Asked Questions or contact me and I will get back with you as quickly as possible. You won't hear from a secretary or a receptionist, because I don't have one. I believe you need to hear from the man that will be building your holster.

In most cases I can get your holster to you in a 7 to 10 business days. My holsters are Kydex with 8-9 oz Premium Cowhide or Horsehide backing.¹⁴

<http://theisholsters.com>

¹⁴ (Theis, 2011)

Chapter 6 Carry Positions

Once you have chosen a carry method, you might need to choose a carry position as well. For example, if you choose Inside the Waistband (IWB), where inside your waistband will you put the gun?

Holster positions are usually discussed using clock hour hand positions. Using the clock system, 3 o'clock represents your right hip, 6 o'clock represents the middle of your back, 9 o'clock represents your left hip, and 12 o'clock represents the middle of your stomach.

Another important concept is cant. Canting your holster forward or backward can make all the difference in terms of comfort and concealability.

Chapter 7 Choosing a Carry Method

Now that we have discussed various carry methods and holsters, how do you decide which is right for you? You probably have one or more carry methods in mind that you think might work. The best way to figure out if it truly will fit you is to actually try it. The best you can do is to eliminate the carry methods that you are pretty sure will not work for you, and then try the carry method that seems the most likely to fit you.

The key to finding a carry method that works for you is perseverance. Often the carry method you think will work best for you isn't for one reason or another. One popular mistake that people make is choosing small of back carry because that is what they saw on a TV show or movie. Then they try it out, and find that every time they sit down, the pistol is grinding into their back. Or worse, they fall, and become seriously injured because they fell on their pistol (which hurts by the way).

Now that isn't to say that small of back carry is wrong for everyone. It's not. It depends on you!

Hybrid Systems

When exploring different carry methods and holsters look for hybrid systems. This means that you should look for a carry method and holster that can perhaps work in more than one scenario. For example, let's say you have decided that the two most likely carry methods for you are Inside the Waistband (IWB) and pocket carry.

In order to pocket carry, you have to have a pistol suitable for pocket carry, so let's say you chose the Kahr CM9 (see the chapter on pocket pistols for more information). What you can now do is buy a single holster that can work for both pocket carry and IWB. An example would be the Remora Holsters (see the chapter on Holsters). You can of course buy two holsters, but by buying a single holster that serves double duty, this will allow you to try two different carry methods for the price of one.

If then you decide that pocket carry isn't for you, but you really do like IWB, then perhaps it will make sense at that point to purchase a better holster like the Theis Holster reviewed here.

Some other considerations are how do you dress? Do you wear a lot of tight fitting clothes? If so, then you will need to either change the way you dress or you can forget about IWB carry, as there isn't going to be room between your body and your pants for a pistol and holster.

Climate Considerations

Do you live in a warm climate and wear shorts virtually every day? If so, then ankle carry isn't going to work for you. Some good options in warm climates are:

- Pocket carry with cargo shorts. Remember the pockets need to be large enough to accommodate the gun, holster, and your hand.

- IWB – you can comfortably carry a compact, subcompact or pocket pistol in an IWB holster with just a t-shirt covering the holster. Just be sure to adjust the holster so that it buries somewhat deeply so that there is less of the pistol that prints.
- OWB – this is less likely to work for you, but can still be done with compact, subcompact or pocket pistols. You will need a longer cover garment, such as a vest or button of the front shirt.

Do you live in a cold climate? If so, then you have many more carry options, as you will typically be wearing more clothes than our warm climate counterparts. In colder climates, all options are on the table, just be sure to not bury your pistol so deeply under all of those layers that you cannot access it in an emergency.

General Home Run Options

Here are some general options that work for most people:

- Pocket carry – just about everyone can make this one happen. Cold climate? Use your coat pocket or your pants pocket. Warm climate? Cargo shorts. Just be sure to have pants/shorts large enough to make it work.
- IWB – with the invention of the leather and Kydex hybrid holsters, IWB has become one of the most comfortable carry methods available. Make sure your pants are 1-2” larger than needed in the waist so that your gun will fit, and give this a try.
- OWB – this is probably the most comfortable carry method for me. Granted, it’s harder to conceal, but if your situation allows for it, OWB is very comfortable. Give the leather and Kydex Crossbreed holster a try and I think you’ll agree.

Chapter 8 Full Size Handguns

In this chapter, we will cover the full size handgun category, as well as some popular choices for full size concealed carry handguns. These handguns are the largest guns reviewed here, and are not as popular for concealed carry as compact, subcompact or pocket pistols, simply because their increased size and weight makes them more difficult to comfortably conceal. Typically full size handguns are chosen for open carry or home defense.

Advantages

Generally speaking, full size handguns are more accurate and easier to shoot than smaller handguns. The reasons behind this are simple physics. They are more accurate because they typically have better triggers, longer barrels and have more size and weight, thereby reducing recoil and muzzle flip. All of this means that you can put more rounds on target more quickly. As fighting tools, full size handguns are better than smaller handguns for most people.

Disadvantages

The main disadvantages are that they are harder to conceal and can be less comfortable than compacts, subcompacts and pocket pistols. It's just that simple. They are larger, therefore there's more gun to cover up. Because they are larger and heavier, they are not as comfortable as smaller handguns.

It's for these reasons that for new shooters, choosing a full size handgun for concealed carry is not recommended. Nevertheless, if you can comfortably conceal a full size handgun, there is no doubt that they make a better self-defense tool.

Glock 17



Figure 16 - Glock 17 Gen4

The first handgun we will discuss is the Glock 17. The Glock 17 is one of the most popular handguns in the world, and has been in production since 1982. Since 1982, Glock pistols have grown to where they now command 65% of the market share of handguns for United States law enforcement agencies as well as supplying numerous national armed forces and security agencies worldwide.¹⁵

The Glock 17 is a 9mm, semi-automatic, polymer framed pistol this is now in its fourth generation (Gen4). Over the years, the Glock 17 has evolved, but still largely remains the same pistol that was designed all the way back in 1982. The reason for this is simple: if it isn't broke, don't fix it!

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	17+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Hammer-forged, female type polygonal rifling with a right-hand twist
Overall Length	7.32 inches
Height	5.43 inches
Weight (unloaded)	22 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-17 round, optional 19 and 33 round

Overview

Glock makes great guns. They are reliable, accurate, lightweight for the size, and relatively inexpensive. They are simple to operate and will, for most people, run forever. One of the features of Glocks that I really like is the interchangeability and availability of magazines. You can carry the Glock 17 with a 17

¹⁵ (Wikipedia - Glock 17, 2011)

round magazine, and if things really got bad (zombies?) you can switch to 33 round magazines. That's a lot of firepower.

Reliability

Glock reliability is legendary. There have been many Glock torture tests over the years, and all of them have concluded that Glock guns are some of the most reliable handguns found on the market today.

One of the more famous ongoing torture tests was and is conducted by Chuck Taylor, a noted author and firearm instructor. He reports that he now has over 160,000 rounds through his Glock 17, and it's still being used.¹⁶ He does not report how many stoppages he has had over the years, but for a gun to last that long is simply amazing.

Chuck's findings aren't unique – there are few pistol manufacturers who have the same reliability track record as Glock.

Accuracy

Accuracy is also very good with Glocks. Glocks have polygonal rifling in the barrel, which is non-standard, but provides better barrel life over thousands and thousands of rounds, however, most people don't shoot nearly enough for that to matter. Opinions on whether the polygonal rifling increases accuracy or not are varied, but most people are able to achieve outstanding accuracy with Glock pistols.

¹⁶ (Taylor, 2011)

Smith & Wesson M&P9



Figure 17- Smith & Wesson M&P

The Smith & Wesson M&P (Military and Police) is a polymer-framed, short recoil operated, locked breech semi-automatic pistol introduced in the summer of 2005 by Smith & Wesson. It uses a Browning-type locking system. While targeted at law enforcement agencies, the M&P is also available on the commercial market.

Since introduction in 2005, the M&P has grown in popularity. At the time of writing, it is used by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and 276 police departments in the United States, as well as numerous police and military units around the world.¹⁷

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	17+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Melanite stainless steel
Overall Length	7.63 inches
Height	5.5 inches
Weight (unloaded)	24 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-17 round

Overview

The Smith & Wesson M&P is in many ways very similar to the Glock 17, but has a few distinct differences. The first is the trigger. Both have good triggers, but they feel very different. The M&P, like

¹⁷ (Wikipedia - Smith & Wesson M&P, 2011)

the Glock, is a striker fired trigger, and measures slightly heavier at a 6.5 lb trigger pull. This extra lb is not noticeable in my opinion. In fact, to a lot of shooters, the M&P trigger feels better. It has a more noticeable take up, that is the distance the trigger travels before a sharply increased resistance is felt.

The bottom line on trigger pull is that it is mostly subjective, so you will need to try out the difference for yourself and decide which feels better to you.

The M&P, like the Gen4 Glock 17, features interchangeable backstraps for shooters with different sized hands. It also has an industry standard Picatinny rail for accessories such as a light or laser, instead of the Glock proprietary rail on the Glock 17.

Reliability

Reliability is going to be outstanding with the M&P. ToddG over at pistol-training.com recently did an endurance test on the Smith & Wesson M&P 9mm. During the course of his testing, Todd fired over 60,000 rounds through his M&P, and had only 2 stoppages.¹⁸

By any standard, this is nothing short of phenomenal reliability. Most people will never shoot anywhere near 60,000 rounds in their lifetime total, let alone with the same gun. For one thing, who can afford that much ammunition? But it's nice to know that your pistol can handle it.

Accuracy

Accuracy, like reliability, is way above average. We can again turn to the same pistol-training.com endurance test to demonstrate accuracy, as Todd conducted detailed accuracy tests before, during and after the endurance test. Not only was the pistol very accurate out of the box, but even after more than 60,000 rounds fired, accuracy was still outstanding. In Todd's final check, he was able to achieve 1.5" groups at 25 yards.¹⁹

¹⁸ (Pistol Training, 2011)

¹⁹ (Pistol Training, 2011)

Chapter 9 Compact Handguns

In this chapter we will cover the compact category of handguns as well as two handguns in this category. The compact name can be a bit misleading, because a lot of people, both new and experienced, feel that these guns aren't anything close to compact. The naming convention comes from the fact that compact guns are smaller than full size handguns.

Advantages

While they aren't as big as the guns in our full size category, they are still full sized in the sense that most people can fit their entire hand on the grip of the gun. They also have fairly large magazine capacities. Both guns discussed in this chapter have standard magazine capacities of 15 rounds.

Compact guns are very popular choices for a couple of reasons. First off, you will often hear people describe them as big enough to "fight with". This comes from the belief (and rightly so) that smaller guns are harder to use in a gun fight, but that this size of gun can still be adequately large enough to properly control. The second most common reason is that many believe that anything larger is just too hard to conceal.

Another plus for compact handguns is that they are good "all around" handguns, in that they can be used also as home defense weapons. This book does not cover home defense weapon choices, but typically when a handgun is chosen for home defense, size isn't a problem since you don't have to worry about being able to conceal it.

These reasons are of course subjective – you need to decide for yourself. But for many people, compact handguns are home runs in that they can "do it all", from open carry to duty carry to concealed carry to home defense.

Disadvantages

The disadvantage is that for many people, a compact handgun is still simply too large comfortably carry concealed a high percentage of the time. The gun ends up getting left at home, doing you no good.

Glock 19



Figure 18 - Glock 19 Gen4

The Glock 19 is just a smaller Glock 17. In the civilian market, this is possibly the most common Glock model that you will find (anecdotal evidence), and is carried by a lot of police departments worldwide. This goes back to the all around capabilities of compact guns. They work equally well in open carry as they do in concealed carry.

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	15+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Hammer-forged, female type polygonal rifling with a right-hand twist
Overall Length	6.85 inches
Height	5 inches
Weight (unloaded)	21 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-15 round, optional 17, 19 and 33 round

Overview

Nearly everything we talked about with the Glock 17 applies to the Glock 19. They are reliable, lightweight, accurate handguns. They have been in production for a long time, and are very popular, meaning there are a virtually unlimited number of holsters, sights, and modifications available.

The magazines are interchangeable with the Glock 17, meaning you can carry your Glock 19 with a 15 round magazine, but carry 17 round magazines as spares. And if the zombies come, well you have 19 and 33 round magazines available too.

Reliability

As mentioned, Glock reliability is legendary. There have been many Glock torture tests over the years, and all of them have concluded that Glock guns are some of the most reliable handguns found on the market today.

Accuracy

Accuracy is also very good with Glocks. Glocks have polygonal rifling in the barrel, which is non-standard, but provides better barrel life over thousands and thousands of rounds, however, most people don't shoot nearly enough for that to matter. Opinions on whether the polygonal rifling increases accuracy or not are varied, but most people are able to achieve outstanding accuracy with Glock pistols.

Walther PPQ



Figure 19 - Walther PPQ

The Walther PPQ, which stands for Police Pistol Quick Defense, is a semi-automatic pistol developed by Carl Walther as a potential replacement for the Walther P99. It is available in either 9mm or .40 S&W. This is a relatively new gun, but is so good that I am including here as an option for you to consider.

The PPQ isn't a complete new design from the ground up, as it takes design features from both the Walther P99QA and the Walther P99 RAD. Because of this, the PPQ maintains compatibility with both P99 sights and P99 second-generation magazines and other accessories.

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	15+1
Barrel	4
Overall Length	7.1 inches
Height	5.3 inches
Weight (unloaded)	24.5 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-15 round, optional 17 round

Overview

The new Quick Defense trigger on the Walther PPQ is simply amazing. The PPQ has a pre-cocked striker fired action. The trigger pull is a smooth 5.5 lbs, with a clean break after just .4 inches of travel. This part is fantastic, it really is, but even better is the trigger reset. It's just .1 inches. Put together, this is the best trigger I've ever used on a factory pistol that wasn't a single-action 1911.

After the Quick Defense Trigger, the next best selling feature of the Walther PPQ in my opinion is the overall ergonomics of the pistol. I have always thought that Walther has gotten ergonomics right on their pistols, and the PPQ is the best yet. It simply fits your hand like a well worn glove. Included with the pistol are small, medium and large interchangeable backstraps for different size hands.

All controls are fully ambidextrous, and the pistol has a Picatinny rail for attaching accessories like a light or laser.

Reliability

Reliability should be excellent with the PPQ. In my testing thus far, the PPQ has not had a single failure of any kind in just under 1,000 rounds of shooting with very little cleaning. The P99 that the PPQ derives from was a very reliable pistol and the PPQ looks to be following along the same lines.

Accuracy

Accuracy has also been outstanding, mainly because of a couple of reasons. First, as mentioned, the Quick Defense Trigger is outstanding. Second, the ergonomics are also some of the best I've ever felt. Put together, you are very comfortable when shooting, and with a crisp, predictable trigger, achieving excellent accuracy is not a problem.

I have not noticed any practical difference in accuracy between the Glock 17 and Glock 19 in my testing.

Chapter 10 Subcompact Handguns

In this chapter will discuss subcompact handguns as well as cover some pistols for your consideration. Subcompact handguns are smaller than compact handguns, and are very popular in the concealed carry market. The reason they are so popular is that subcompact handguns are really what people want or think when they hear the term compact handgun. In this chapter we will look at three popular choices in subcompact handguns – the Glock 26, the Smith & Wesson M&P Compact, and the Ruger SR9 Compact.

Advantages

If you are like most people, concealing a full size or compact handgun day in and day out is difficult, especially in summer. If that's you, subcompact handguns might be a good fit. They are larger than pocket handguns, but not so large that they cannot be concealed easily.

Disadvantages

The main disadvantage is that for some people, they are too small to obtain a proper shooting grip and to shoot well.

Glock 26



Figure 20 - Glock 26 Gen3

The Glock 26 is a 9×19mm "subcompact" variant designed for concealed carry and was introduced in 1995, mainly for the civilian market. It features a smaller frame compared to the Glock 19, with a pistol grip that supports only two fingers, a shorter barrel and slide, and a double-stack magazine with a standard capacity of 10 rounds.

A factory magazine with a +2 baseplate gives a capacity of 12 rounds. In addition, factory magazines from the Glock 17, Glock 18, and Glock 19, with capacities of 15, 17, 19, and 33 rounds, will function in the Glock 26. More than simply a "shortened" Glock 19, design of the subcompact Glock 26 required extensive rework of the frame, locking block, and spring assembly that features a dual recoil spring.²⁰

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	10+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Hammer-forged, female type polygonal rifling with a right-hand twist
Overall Length	6.3 inches
Height	4.17 inches
Weight (unloaded)	19.75 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-10 round, optional 12, 15, 17, 19 and 33 round

Overview

Some people refer to the Glock 26 as the "Pocket Glock", but in my opinion it's too large for pocket carry. Can it be done? Sure! But most people are going to opt for a smaller gun for pocket carry. The Glock 26 shares many great features with the larger Glock 19, including reliability and accuracy.

²⁰ (Wikipedia - Glock 17, 2011)

The Glock 26 is very popular in the concealed carry market, and is also used by many police officers and government agencies around the world as a deep concealment or back up weapon.

Reliability

As mentioned, Glock reliability is legendary. There have been many Glock torture tests over the years, and all of them have concluded that Glock guns are some of the most reliable handguns found on the market today.

Accuracy

Accuracy is also very good with Glocks. Glocks have polygonal rifling in the barrel, which is non-standard, but provides better barrel life over thousands and thousands of rounds, however, most people don't shoot nearly enough for that to matter. Opinions on whether the polygonal rifling increases accuracy or not are varied, but most people are able to achieve outstanding accuracy with Glock pistols.

The Glock 26 is no different. Even though it is a small gun, accuracy is excellent.

Smith & Wesson M&P Compact



Figure 21 - Smith & Wesson M&P Compact

The M&P Compact shares many great features with the full size version. It has a Picatinny rail, interchangeable backstraps for different sized hands, functional 3-dot sight, and the same great trigger. The name compact is confusing in this context, as we are classifying it as a subcompact. You can see from the specifications below that it is roughly the same size as the Glock 26.

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	10+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Melanite stainless steel
Overall Length	6.7 inches
Height	4.3 inches
Weight (unloaded)	21.7 ounces
Magazine(s)	2-10 round, optional 12 and 17 round

Overview

The Smith & Wesson M&P Compact is a great option for those who do not like the feel of the Glock 26 grip. It comes standard with a flush fitting 10 round magazine, as well as a magazine with an extension for your pinky, as these guns are small enough where most people cannot fit their entire hand on the pistol grip. The pinky extension gives your pinky a place to rest of that is what you're looking for.

Reliability

As mentioned, M&P reliability is excellent. See the full sized M&P review for information on one of the more well known M&P torture tests where over 60,000 rounds were fired through a full sized M&P with

only 2 stoppages. Granted, the M&P Compact is not the exact same gun, but in my experience, you can expect the same sort of reliability from the M&P Compact.

Accuracy

Accuracy with the M&P Compact is excellent for a subcompact handgun. Subcompact handguns are not as easy to shoot as larger guns, simply because there's less grip to hold onto and less gun to soak up felt recoil. The M&P series has a great trigger and low bore axis, meaning that the bore axis (where the round is fired from) sits very low into your hand. This is a good thing, as it helps to reduce felt recoil, making you a better shooter.

Ruger SR9 Compact



Figure 22 - Ruger SR9c

The Ruger SR9 Compact (SR9c) is lighter and dimensionally smaller compared to the full-sized SR9, but it has the same grip width (measured across safety levers) as the full-sized SR9. The manual safety, adjustable rear sights, and updated version of the trigger are all present in the compact version also. In contrast to the SR9 recoil spring assembly the SR9c pistols are fitted with a dual recoil spring assembly.

The SR9c is normally supplied with two magazines. The standard 10 round compact magazine features a flat bottom floor plate, with an extended floor plate also included. The second magazine is a full-size 17 round unit featuring a grip adapter that transforms the short compact SR9c grip into a full-sized grip.

Additional retraction grooves (serrations) are located on the front sides of the SR9c slide, making it easier to operate and press-check the slide. The Ruger SR9c was chosen as the Shooting Industry Academy of Excellence's Handgun of the Year in 2010.²¹

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	10+1, 17+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Overall Length	6.85 inches
Height	4.61 inches
Weight (unloaded)	23.4 ounces
Magazine(s)	1-10 round, 1-17 round magazine

Overview

The Ruger SR9 Compact is a great gun. The Glock style trigger pull is very good, and much better than previous version of the SR9. The SR9c has a very low slide profile which holds the barrel axis close to the

²¹ (Wikipedia - Ruger SR9, 2011)



Figure 23 - Ruger SR9c Magazine Extension

shooter's hand and makes the Ruger SR9 more comfortable to shoot by reducing muzzle rise and allowing for faster aim recovery in rapid shooting sequence.

One of the really cool things about the SR9c is that it comes with a flush fitting 10 round magazine, but it also comes with a 17 round magazine with a grip adapter that makes the gun essentially like the full sized SR9. This means that you can carry the gun with the 10 round magazine, and carry the 17 round magazine with grip adapter as a spare.

The other notable feature of the SR9c is the feel of the gun. While the width measurements are roughly the same as the Glock and the M&P, the SR9c feels thinner in hand because of the way it's contoured. Some people love the feel, some do not. The pistol has a unique reversible strip on the back of the grip that allows you to change the way the grip feels by simply pulling a pin and reversing the strip.

Reliability

The SR9c does not have the track record that the Glock or the M&P have, but in my testing the SR9c has been excellent.

Accuracy

Accuracy is every bit as good as the Glock and M&P in my testing. This is due to a very clean and crisp trigger pull, a slim, comfortable grip, and a low bore axis that reduces felt recoil.

Chapter 11 Pocket Handguns

In this chapter we will discuss pocket handguns and cover some examples for your consideration. Pocket handguns are basically any handgun small enough to carry in your pocket. Since everyone's pockets are different, this definition will vary slightly from person to person, but generally speaking, the pistols discussed here are considered pocket handguns.

Advantages

As previously mentioned, pocket handguns can be very comfortable to carry, as they are small and lightweight. When carried in a pocket, they conceal extremely well. They even have the advantage of not printing very much, depending on the holster you choose.

Another advantage is the versatility of many pocket handguns. Just because the pistol is designed to be carried in your pocket, that doesn't mean you have to. If you are more comfortable carrying, for example, IWB or ankle, most of the time you will have many holster options available to you. Because the gun is so small, it can be carried virtually anywhere and in any manner.

Disadvantages

Because pocket handguns are small, they tend to be harder to shoot overall. This is especially noticeable when shooting at any distance beyond, say 7 yards or so. This is gun and shooter specific of course, but generally speaking, smaller guns are harder to shoot accurately, and harder to control in rapid fire.

Ruger LCP



Figure 24 - Ruger LCP

The Ruger LCP (Lightweight Compact Pistol) is a subcompact, .380 ACP pocket pistol manufactured by Sturm, Ruger.

Weighing less than 10 ounces this is Ruger's first entry into the field of pocket pistols. The pistol has a glass-filled nylon frame, a two-finger grip, and a through-hardened blued steel slide. It uses a tension spring for the lightweight hammer and has a locked breech mechanism. It features a Glock style extractor and incorporates an external slide stop. The sights on the LCP are small and fixed.

Specifications

Caliber	.380 ACP
Capacity	6+1
Operation	9mm short recoil-operated locked breech semi-automatic pistol
Barrel	Hammer-forged, female type polygonal rifling with a right-hand twist
Overall Length	5.16 inches
Height	3.6 inches
Weight (unloaded)	9.4 ounces
Magazine(s)	1-6 round

Overview

The Ruger LCP is amazingly small and lightweight. This gun is not meant for long range shooting, but rather for close up “social encounters”. The sights on the LCP are very small and not very useful. The trigger pull is a long double action only trigger, but is relatively smooth and easy to stage for accuracy. As a pocket pistol, it doesn’t get much better.

Reliability

The LCP is one of the more reliable .380 ACP pocket pistols on the market today. Because there's less margin for error, small guns tend to be less reliable than larger guns. Therefore it's imperative that if you are going to purchase a pocket pistol for self-defense that you pay attention to the reliability history of the gun you're considering.

You can expect to have greater than average reliability with the Ruger LCP among pocket pistols.

Accuracy

As mentioned, the sights on the LCP are basically non-existent. And even though you won't be winning any blue ribbons for long range accuracy, the LCP is still very accurate for a pocket pistol. In distances of 10 yards or less, certainly within the parameters of most social encounters with potential bad guys, the LCP is a very accurate pistol.

Kahr CM9



Figure 25 - Kahr CM9

The Kahr CM9 is the value line version of their popular PM9 pistol. The CM9 is the same size as the PM9, which has been in production for years and has a dedicated following.

The CM9 saves cost by using a barrel with conventional rifling, a pinned front sight and a metal-injection-molded (MIM) slide stop level. Additionally, the CM9 only ships with one six round magazine, so you'll want to order a couple more magazines. Aside from this, the other differences are largely cosmetic.

Specifications

Caliber	9mm
Capacity	6+1
Operation	Trigger cocking DAO; lock breech; "Browning – type" recoil lug; passive striker block; no magazine disconnect
Barrel	3.0", conventional rifling; 1 – 10 right-hand twist
Overall Length	5.42 inches
Height	4 inches
Weight (unloaded)	15.9 ounces
Magazine(s)	1-6 round, optional 7 and 8 round

Overview

The Kahr CM9 is a very shootable small pistol. If you have shot many small pistols, you know that they are most often harder to shoot than larger pistols, and a lot times downright uncomfortable. This isn't the case with the CM9. For a small pistol, it shoots very well.

Even though the CM9 shoots very well, if you shoot more than 100 rounds in a single range session, you might find, as I did, that the checkering on the front of the grip just below the trigger guard bites into your hand. Now this isn't a problem if you're only going to shoot 25-50 rounds at a time, but if you're like me, that's just a warm-up. I fixed this "problem" by ordering some excellent Talon Grips that were custom fit for the CM9.

One of the major advantages the CM9 has over many of its competitors in my opinion is the trigger. The CM9 simply has a fantastic trigger. The mechanism is double action, but is very smooth with a clean break, and is easy to stage for accuracy.

Reliability

Reliability has been 100 percent with my CM9 since day 1. Kahr has a specific way it recommends that you break-in your pistol, as these guns are machined to extremely tight tolerances. One of the recommendations is a minimum of 200 rounds before the pistol will function reliably. If you visit many gun forums, you'll find a lot of debate on this issue, as to whether or not a gun should have a break-in period. You can decide for yourself. I recommend that you shoot more than 200 rounds through your chosen carry weapon before you declare it reliable anyways.

Accuracy

Accuracy with my CM9 has been great for its intended use. This isn't a long range pistol by any stretch, but as previously mentioned, it has an excellent trigger. Because of this excellent trigger, the CM9 is fairly accurate. I didn't have any trouble shooting 2-3" groups at 7-10'.

Chapter 12 Choosing a Handgun

Now that we have discussed the various handgun types (full-size, compact, subcompact and pocket) and discussed several options for each type, let's talk about how to choose what's right for you.

Choosing a handgun is a very personal thing. A lot of times you'll find that people say "handgun X is the only right choice" or "everyone should just get handgun X". Well that's that the case. There isn't one right answer, or the market would have figured it out and there would only be one type of gun sold.

So when choosing a handgun, it's important to remember that this is your choice, not mine, not your friend's, and certainly not someone on some internet gun forum who doesn't like your choice. Remember our goal: finding a system that works for you to allow you to carry a high percentage of the time.

Choose Handgun Type

The first step in determining what gun is for you is to decide what handgun type you want. For most people this will be a semiautomatic pistol, but others this will be a revolver. Whichever choice is right for you is a good choice! Revolvers are becoming less and less popular, but that doesn't mean that they do not work. They've been around a lot longer than semiautomatic pistols!

Choose Handgun Caliber

One you know what type of handgun you want, figure out what caliber you want. The reason I suggest choosing a caliber next is that gun makes and models are not available in every caliber. Choosing a caliber will further reduce down the number of options you need to consider, making your decision easier. For example, if you decide that on the .45 ACP will do for you, then you will have pretty much eliminated all pocket pistols, and a good number of subcompact pistols (though certainly not all).

If you are new to shooting, we recommend the 9mm as good starting point and an all around good performer. See our chapter on Calibers for more information.

Choose a Handgun Size

If you've already read our chapter on choosing a carry method, then perhaps you've already picked a handgun size, but if not, give it some thought. Can you wear enough clothing to conceal a full-size or compact handgun? Do you wear clothing loose enough to allow pocket carry? Is inside the waistband or outside the waistband right for you?

Try to narrow it down to one or two handgun sizes if this is your first concealed carry pistol. And if it is your first concealed carry gun, we recommend that you choose a pocket or subcompact pistol, as these have the highest track record of success achieving our goal of carrying a high percentage of the time.

Test Drive

The test drive is an important step often skipped when purchasing a handgun, especially when purchasing a first handgun. Once you have figured out the type, caliber and size of handgun that you are looking for, you can start your research online. There are many websites like Monderno.com that specialize in gun reviews, and many reviews can be found in video format on YouTube. Narrow your list down to a handful or less of guns, and then see what's available.

I recommend visiting your local gun shops at this point. Explain to the person behind the counter what you are looking for, and then try out the gun by dry firing it. See how it fits your hand. The gun needs to feel good in your hand, and the trigger needs to feel good when dry firing (see the chapter on Safety).

Ideally at this point you would be able to try the gun at the gun range before buying it. This is difficult a lot of times, as there aren't a lot of ranges that rent out guns. But they do exist, so call around and find out if there is one near you that will let you rent out the gun you're looking to buy. If you can try it out at the range first, great. If not, you can at least feel comfortable with the amount of research and thought you put into your selection. Handling and dry firing the gun prior to purchasing will tell you a lot, but there is no substitute for range time.

Chapter 13 Conclusion

In this book we have covered many topics, including safety, terminology, calibers, carry methods and holsters, handgun types and examples, and how to choose a carry method and handgun. If you're new to concealed carry, we've covered a lot!

Hopefully this book provided answers to questions you have on how to get started with the many decisions you need to make, or at least helped you figure out what questions to even ask yourself. If you have specific questions about your situation, visit us on the web at <http://monderno.com> and we will do our best to try and help. You can also connect with us on Twitter and Facebook if that works better for you.

This can seem like a lot of information if you're new to shooting, but don't let that discourage you! Like everything in life, there's a learning curve. The important most important thing is safety – you can choose the wrong holster, and that's an easy fix, but make sure you get safety right the first time and every time. Also consider taking a self-defense course from a reputable instructor. If you have this solid foundation, most of the time everything else will work itself out.

Thanks for reading!

Chapter 14 Resources



Monderno

<http://monderno.com>



Monderno on Twitter

<https://twitter.com/monderno>



Monderno on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Monderno/230636277009365>

Handgun Laws by State

<http://handgunlaw.us>

Open Carry by State

<http://opencarry.org>

NRA-ILA

<http://nraila.org>

Fortress Self Defense
Consultants

<http://www.fortressdefense.com>

Gunsite

<http://gunsite.com>

Find NRA Course

<http://www.nrainstructors.org/searchcourse.aspx>

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