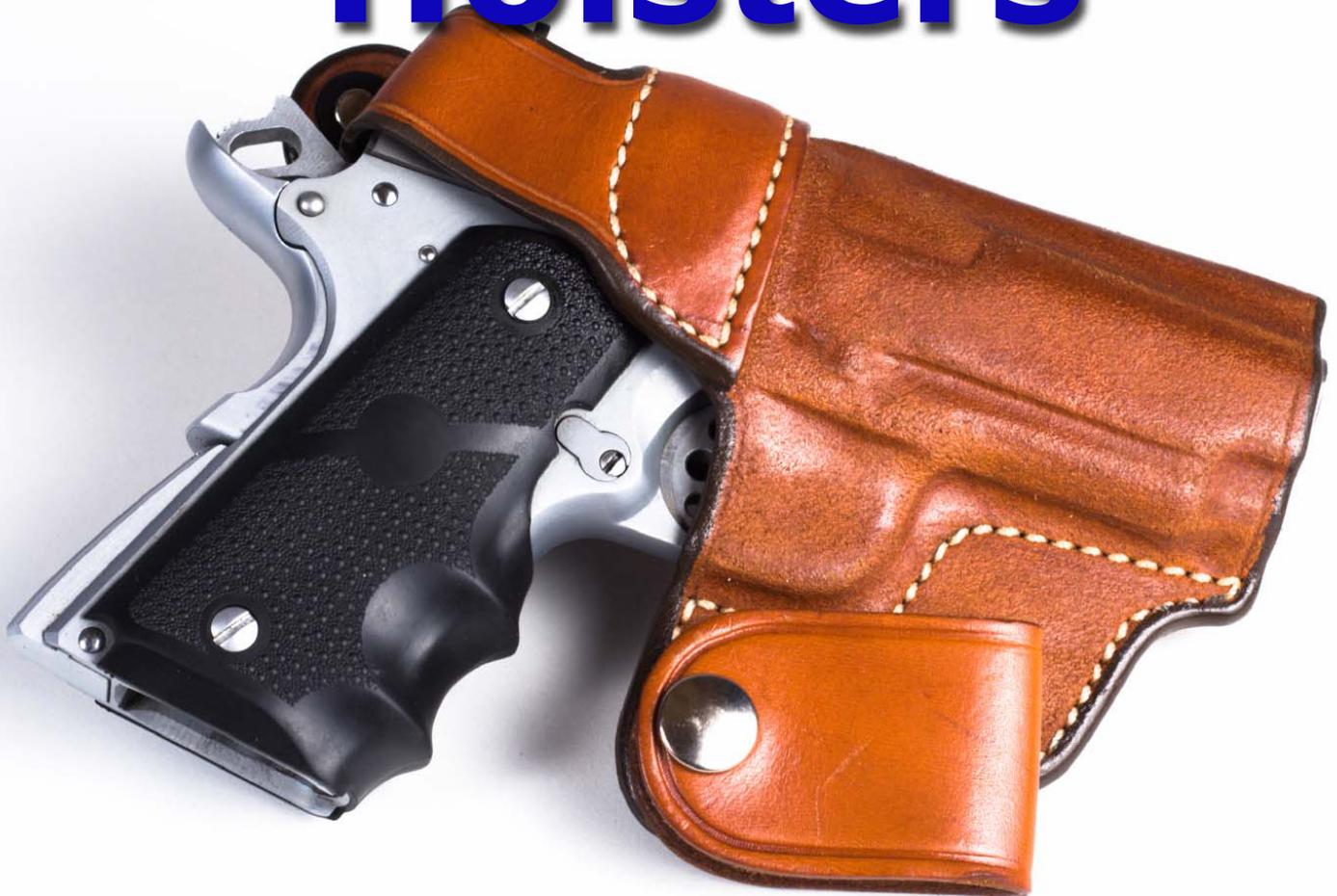


Introduction to Concealment Holsters



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Carrying a concealed weapon is a very personal thing- Only a very few people need to know if a private citizen is armed. For the most part, this knowledge is reserved for family members, a few close friends, and colleagues. Of course, the weapon should never be shown off to acquaintances or fondled or brandished. Some inexperienced citizens may be prone to this activity, especially if carrying a weapon concealed is something new and exciting.

The firearm should never be seen in public. A carelessly displayed firearm can prompt general panic and may result in a confrontation between police officers and the citizen carrying the firearm. A situation like this is not only tense for all concerned, but may escalate to the person being detained or (if the officer believes the person to be a threat) even a shooting by the officer involved. At the very least, it is likely to be embarrassing for the citizen who carelessly exposed his firearm.

To avoid the possibility of a concealed weapon being discovered, a citizen must choose an effective concealment system. This will depend on the firearm being properly housed in a holster that fits the weapon, the wearer and the situation. An effective system will prevent *printing* (when the outline of the pistol or holster can be discerned through a layer of clothing such as a shirt or jacket).

When choosing a carry system, many factors must be considered. The first factor is concealability versus speed versus accessibility.

In other words, the firearm must be effectively hidden, available, and easy for the wearer to access and deploy quickly. Each one of these factors can either help or hinder the other two. For example, a holster may be so well concealed that it is difficult to access and, therefore, cannot be deployed in a speedy fashion.

The wearer's task is to determine the relative importance of each factor and then select a carry system that will fulfill the requirements to a satisfactory degree. For example, if the wearer determines that concealability is the first priority, a particular design of holster may be chosen that can be worn where the pistol will not print through clothing and the wearer is unlikely to inadvertently expose the pistol to others. Usually, accessibility is sacrificed for concealability. However, if too much consideration is given to concealability, the gun may be next to useless due to the sacrifice of accessibility and speed of deployment.

Certain holster designs will be easier and faster to draw from than others (this is often a personal consideration).

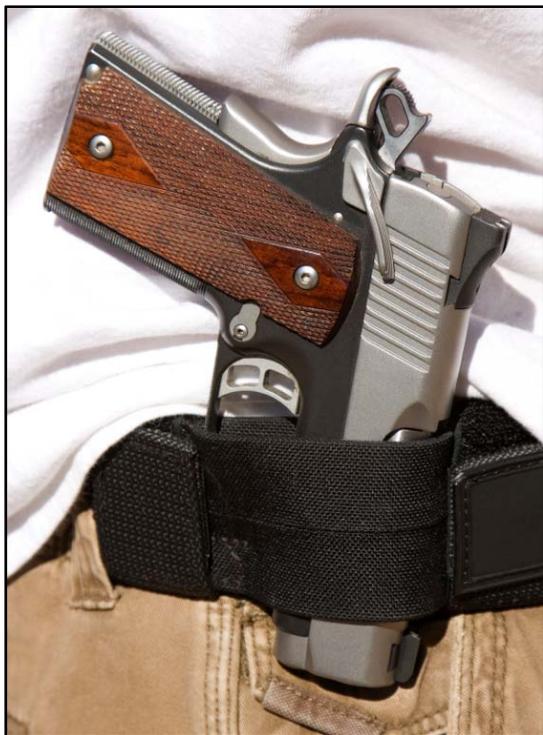
The author has decided against documenting speed of access due to the personal nature of holsters, weapons and carry positions. It will serve no purpose to report how fast the author can access a weapon. The question is, how fast can each citizen access their own weapon?

An accessibility feature that cannot be ignored is the ability to obtain a shooting grip before the gun is drawn from the holster. A good

“Nothing will be gained from a quick, improper draw that results in a quick miss.”

shooting grip is a primary factor between a hit and a miss. Nothing will be gained from a quick, improper draw that results in a quick miss.

Remember, speed may be improved upon through practice, but concealability and accessibility are inherent to the chosen concealment system.



Another safety concern focuses on the trigger guard. Should it be covered by the holster?

Another factor to consider is comfort. To be comfortable, the holster must fit the wearer's body shape utilizing the body's natural curves to the highest degree. For example, people of slight build may have trouble concealing a weapon in a horizontal shoulder holster because either the grip or barrel may protrude past the body's silhouette. Even if a carry system offers the ultimate degree of concealment, accessibility, and speed of deployment, if it isn't comfortable, it may not be effective. Discomfort may cause a person to take the system off at every opportunity. If the

system isn't worn, the gun is hardly accessible. Discomfort may also cause the wearer to keep touching the weapon or shifting and adjusting the system, thereby telegraphing to observers that a gun is concealed.

Everyone has different areas of sensitivity. Quite often the wearer must go through a trial and error process in order to find a comfortable holster. The goal is to find a gun and holster combination that will become an extension of the wearer's body. Maximum comfort is obtained when, like a comfortable pair of shoes, the wearer no longer consciously "feels" the system.

A final concern is safety. The holster should be fitted for the weapon and be capable of proper retention. Remember, during concealed carry, the muzzle of the gun is very close to the body and may even cover some parts.

A prime safety rule to follow is: *"Never point the firearm at anything you don't want to destroy"*.

This includes while the pistol is in the holster and during the drawstroke. This rule is certainly sound, but many concealed carry systems violate the rule, either all, or some of the time as the wearer goes through the normal range of movement. For example, a belly band holster doesn't cover a body part while the wearer is standing, but will do when they are seated. Another example of when covering the body may occur while drawing the weapon is when using an inverted shoulder holster. As the weapon is drawn it will be pointing at the wearer's other arm.

Another safety concern focuses on the trigger guard. Should it be covered by the holster? Yes, in order to avoid a negligent discharge of the weapon. A quality holster will cover the trigger guard.

Does this mean a system should not be chosen if deficient in a specific area? Not necessarily. That is a personal decision. If a person feels comfortable with the system, and is trained in its use, there should be no problem. However, all systems are not for all people. The ultimate goal is to use one holster for all occasions: walking, running, driving, sitting, etc. The one holster concept enables the wearer to refine the drawstroke into an instinctive grasp. However, changes in the weather, or from formal to casual attire, often require a variety of holsters and modes of carry. For example, a shoulder holster may be chosen in cold weather, an inside the waistband(IWB) holster in the summer, and an ankle holster in the spring. One solution is to pick a holster that is convertible to different carry styles.

The wearer should always practice the different accessibility movements prior to instituting a concealed carry change. It is a wonderful feeling to execute excellent form and lightening speed when reaching for a weapon that is now carried elsewhere. There is a lag time when reaching from one location to another, and in a self-defense situation this can mean the difference between life and death. When changing from habitually carrying the weapon in one location to another, there is a certain amount of practice in drawing the pistol that should take place. This is done not only to insure a smooth drawstroke, but also to reprogram the wearer to automatically access the new location instead of the old one. Remember, training takes over under stress.

The reader will notice the author has deliberately ignored the cost of concealed holsters. An effective, dependable, quality weapon should be carried in an effective, dependable, quality holster. It is unwise to spend top dollar on a fine weapon and then skimp on a carry system. Remember, a concealed handgun is carried for self-defense purposes, only the best is acceptable. Why chance carrying the handgun in a potentially

unreliable holster? Failure may result in death. Also, prices will vary depending on the procurement source, so it's wise to shop around.

What constitutes a good holster design? First, the holster must be crafted to fit a specific handgun and should tuck the weapon into the body to enhance concealment. Do not try to use one holster for several handguns unless the holster is especially designed for a variety of frame sizes and action types. Using a holster that doesn't fit the weapon is unacceptable. A loose fit may allow the handgun to fall out during any type of body movement or it may cause the whole system to shift away from its original position. An overly tight fit may preclude the drawing of the weapon. This condition may result when the holster tension screw is tightened excessively. Improper fit may cause excessive wear on the pistol's finish or cause it to ride away from the wearer's body, compromising concealment. Most quality holsters are marked by the manufacturer to indicate the specific model, or models of pistol that it will fit. If the wearer has several holsters and weapons it is advisable to make sure the holster is clearly marked, stating the weapon for which it is intended. Always read the manufacturer's instruction sheet and follow all warnings.

Concealment holsters are constructed from natural materials like cowhide or horsehide, or from synthetic materials like nylon or plastics. Major components may be constructed using one material or a variety of materials. Leather offers stability over a wide range of temperatures, neither freezing hard nor softening. Cowhide is also scuff and crack resistant. Horsehide is becoming popular due to its light weight and ability to hold a hand shaped form for many years. For the traditionalist, there is nothing like the buttery smoothness, fine finish, spicy aroma and soft creaking sound of a fine leather holster.

Holsters made from synthetic materials such as kydex or ballistic nylon offer long service, resistance to weather conditions, slow deterioration, strength, and are reasonably priced. In many designs, the open top of the holster is reinforced with a steel or plastic insert to prevent the holster from squashing flat when the pistol is drawn. This enables the pistol to be reholstered with one hand--a necessary feature when the other hand is required to hold a flashlight, phone, etc.

Sight tracks are a nice feature because they keep the weapon aligned in the holster and prevent the sights from snagging. A quality holster will not bleed dye onto the wearer's clothes as a result of perspiration, rain or normal wear. New leather holsters are often a little snug and may require a breaking in period. In order to insure the pistol can be drawn and replaced smoothly, it may be necessary to insert and remove the pistol dozens of times into the holster to get the leather to stretch slightly. **THIS MUST ALWAYS BE DONE WITH AN UNLOADED FIREARM. ALL SAFETY RULES APPLY. THE PISTOL MUST ALWAYS BE POINTED IN A SAFE DIRECTION, FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER.**

Next, look for retention capabilities. Retention in concealment systems refers to the ability of the holster to house the weapon in a secure manner, but still be easily accessible. Retention isn't intended to thwart firearm take away attempts like some conventional duty type holsters. The concept for concealment holster retention is the ability to prevent the weapon

from falling free while the wearer is conducting a normal range of body movements such as walking, running, climbing stairs, sitting, bending over, crossing legs, reaching over the head. Retention types include friction fit, thumb breaks, straps, snaps and tension screws. Remember, no holster provides 100% retention. Don't depend on the holster alone to provide retention, the wearer must also do their part. For example, if the wearer knows they are about to jump, it may be necessary to place a

hand on the holster or the weapon. However, the wearer must have confidence in the ability of the retention device to perform satisfactorily under normal circumstances. Otherwise, habitual checking of the weapon's status may telegraph to others that the wearer is carrying a concealed weapon. A good retention device has a positive "on, off" which requires a minimum number of independent moves. It is the wearer's responsibility to become intimately familiar with manipulation of the device. If this isn't done, the draw sequence may be nothing more than a series of slow, jerky movements. To enhance speed and accessibility, if the holster

has some kind of strap or snap, the wearer may decide to release the retention device whenever danger is perceived. However, the wearer shouldn't rely on this because many dangerous situations cannot be identified in a timely manner. It is better to learn to use a holster where the drawstroke includes unsnapping any retention device. This requires practice on the part of the wearer.

“..If this isn't done, the draw sequence may be nothing more than a series of slow, jerky movements..”

There is a plethora of concealed holster styles available today, and new styles and variations are constantly being developed to meet public demand. But the human body has not changed, and there are still three main carry positions: waist, shoulder, and ankle. This article will cover as many styles as possible, even delving into the unconventional. Remember, the ultimate choice of a concealed carry system is wholly personal.

SHOULDER HOLSTERS

One of the most popular designs of concealment holsters are shoulder holsters. Hollywood has been instrumental in advancing their popularity. These holsters are considered by some to be very exciting and perhaps even romantic--a poor reason to choose any system, although they do offer some advantages.

There are generally two types of shoulder harnesses: single loop and double loop. A single loop system goes over the shoulder and under the armpit on one side only and requires a number of support straps to keep the system stable. A double loop system requires few or no additional support straps. Shoulder holsters suspend the handgun vertically (barrel pointed straight down, grip facing forward), horizontally (barrel pointed to the rear of the wearer, grip facing down), or inverted-upside down (barrel pointed straight up, often into the armpit:-grip facing to the rear). In all three positions, the weapon is suspended on the non-shooting side (left side for right-handed people, right side for left-handed people) in the natural hollow of the body, between the shoulder, arm pit, and waist line, so that the pistol is drawn by reaching across the body. Be aware that many people will become upset if they see the weapon in the horizontal position, because it is pointed at them. Forget trying to explain that the weapon will not discharge by itself. Of course, this situation only occurs when the holster is visible to others. This is another good



The weapon is positioned off the waist enabling seated access as when sitting at a desk, driving, wheelchair confined, etc.

reason for wearing a garment over the pistol and holster.

Shoulder holsters are made from leather, synthetic materials or a combination of the two. Suede leather makes an excellent harness material, due to its strength for supporting heavy handguns and ability to conform to the body, particularly the shoulders. Also, suede may not print as much as heavier leather or nylon. A natural color suede harness will not bleed dye onto clothing. Nylon may have the tendency to slip and slide around during the wearer's normal range of movement, while suede has the tendency to stay in place.

Shoulder holsters have five advantages: First, the chest and arm helps conceal the weapon. Second, the weapon is positioned off the waist enabling seated access as when sitting at a desk, driving, wheelchair confined, etc. They

are a good choice for pregnant women, due to this off the waist position. Third, the weapon can be drawn while the wearer is occupying a number of confined spaces such as sitting on the toilet, at a table, in a car, etc. Fourth, when using the toilet, other holsters must be placed inside the dropped trousers, on the toilet tank, on the floor or placed on a door hook. These locations may offer some security from unauthorized access, but may also be inaccessible to the seated person. The shoulder holster, however, may still be worn. Fifth, the handgun's weight is supported by the wearer's shoulders and back. This weight distribution makes concealed carry comfortable for long periods of time. Finally, the shoulder holster enables access from most positions.

Shoulder holsters have three disadvantages: First, they are clothing dependent; a jacket, coat, vest or other outer garment must be worn to conceal the holster. This is often awkward in hot, humid climates. Wearing a coat during the summer months may be uncomfortable and attract unwanted attention. Incidentally, in environments where the wearer is likely to sweat a lot, a stainless steel or polymer weapon is less likely to rust than a traditional blued steel firearm. Pullover-style garments such as a sweatshirt are not conducive to this system, and require practice to reach up under the outer garment and draw the pistol. Additionally, guns with an exposed hammer or large target-style sights may snag on clothing during the drawstroke.

To expedite the drawstroke, the outer garment may be partially unzipped or unbuttoned. If the garment is fully undone, as in the case of say, a jacket, the drawstroke may include the non-shooting hand sweeping the jacket aside. Remember, light clothing is generally faster to move than heavy clothing. A drawstroke that requires reaching across the body in cross draw fashion is considered slow compared to other methods. This may be true for vertical and upside down models, but the horizontal carry

may be faster because the weapon is nearly on the line of sight upon drawing.

The shoulder holster is best suited for small revolvers or semiautomatics. There is some conjecture that since the shoulder holster suspends the weapon high up, near the average person's line of sight, it is easy to spot. Naturally, if the handgun is improperly concealed, it will be readily spotted. The key is proper adjustment and suitable attire. There are several considerations to keep in mind when adjusting a shoulder holster: First, it will soon be discovered that shoulder holsters are often made to fit the "average man". Some may find this system uncomfortable. Male bodybuilders or well-endowed women may not be able to reach the weapon. People of small stature may not be able to tighten the suspension straps enough to tuck the handgun into the body. Experimentation with several manufacturers and styles may be necessary. For example, a vertical suspension model may or may not be easier to reach than a horizontal or inverted model. The harness adjustment system may help or hinder the fitting process. There are generally three adjustment systems: metal screws, Velcro, and elastic. Proper adjustment is paramount to comfort, concealment, access, and drawstroke. An improperly adjusted shoulder holster can be very uncomfortable (chafing the neck, limiting movement, restricting circulation, causing back pain). Improper adjustment can also affect concealment. The holster may partially show and a loose holster will flap around during the normal range of movement and momentarily print through clothing. The muzzle may protrude behind the wearer, the grip may stick out from a jacket, support straps may show or print, etc. An improperly adjusted system that is too tight or too loose will either restrict movement by the wearer, or permit too much movement of the holster and harness. Either way, concealability, accessibility, speed and comfort will be degraded.

Proper adjustment is achieved through trial and error. First, put the harness and holster on in front of a full length mirror. It is much easier and safer to do this with the holster empty. Check for proper comfort. Next, check that the proper handgun is unloaded and place it into the holster and secure all retention devices (retention devices are important when using shoulder holsters because gravity is working against the wearer). Check for satisfactory concealment, access, and drawstroke. Next, remove the empty pistol, take the system off and secure the locking devices; don't over tighten, more adjustments may be required.

Put the system back on, check again for comfort, put the pistol in the holster and then put on the outer wear that is usually worn, and check for print, protrusions, and bulges. Finally, the wearer may wish to secure any screws with a drop of clear finger nail polish to prevent the screws from backing out. It is a good idea to have a second party evaluate the system as the wearer moves around. The wearer may further evaluate the system, by wearing it at home when performing normal household duties. Whenever a change of outer wear is required, recheck the system and evaluate it for any required adjustments.

Many shoulder holster manufacturers offer accessories such as flashlight and knife cases or spare magazine pouches that may be attached to the side opposite the holster. This often helps in balancing the load. But be aware that a multitude of accessories can compromise the system or cause the wearer to bulk out and have

the gait of a gorilla. Remember, speed loader pouches often require a lower position than magazine pouches, due to their bulk. Magazines lay flat, speed loaders do not. Evaluate the necessity of each accessory before deciding to add it to the system.

ANKLE HOLSTERS

“It will prove embarrassing to walk down the street and kick the handgun into a crowd when it slips off the wearer’s boot.”

Ankle holsters are often chosen for the high degree of concealability they provide. They are also a good choice for people who live in hot climates because light clothing may not be sufficient to cover other types of holsters. However, ankle holsters are slow to access due to the unnatural carry location and the comparatively high number of independent moves required during the drawstroke.

The handgun may be drawn by the following methods: raising the carry leg to the upper torso; raising the foot up and then onto an object; kneel and draw; bend over and draw or go to the ground on one’s back and draw. All of these draw techniques are unnatural and foreign to

most other drawstrokes. A great deal of practice is necessary to become proficient.

There is also a tactical problem associated with most techniques for drawing from an ankle holster. In a contorted position, it’s difficult to continue to observe the threat while concentrating on finding the holster, getting a grip on the pistol, drawing, and then trying to get the sights on the target. Also, once a person is attacked, it is extremely hard to draw from an

ankle holster. Any movement away from the threat is negated because the wearer's legs must be stationary in order to draw. This now presents the attacker with an unarmed, stationary target. Ankle holsters are perhaps easiest to access when the wearer is seated, although it is also possible to draw a pistol while lying on one's back, as may be the case if an attacker has already launched his attack and is stepping in to finish the job. Hopefully, the wearer will identify danger ahead of time and be able to pre-stage the handgun.

Ankle holsters force the wearer to choose compact weapons. It just isn't feasible for most people to carry a large pistol in an ankle holster. Ankle holsters are worn either inside or outside the leg between the foot and calf. Positioning the holster on the inside of the leg provides the handgun some protection from scrapes and bumps, and reduces the possibility of alerting others to the weapon when it bangs against a hard object like chair leg. The outside leg carry position makes it more likely that the piece will knock against some other object. Right handed wearers will normally wear the holster on the inside of the left leg, while left handers will wear it on the inside of the right leg. If the outside of the leg is chosen, the holster will be positioned on the right side for right handers, and left side for left handers. Ankle holsters should be as lightweight as possible, and made from a material that is both durable and perspiration resistant. A superior retention system is vital in order to keep the handgun secure during leg movements. For maximum support and comfort, a support band or garter may be chosen. This support device will keep the holster from moving or wobbling around on the leg and help distribute the weight of the handgun. A variation of the ankle carry is to use an inside the waistband(IWB) holster and clip it on the inside of high top boots such as a cowboy boot. Inside the boot is preferred because the outside may not be stable enough for the handgun and holster. It will prove embarrassing to walk down the street and kick



Over the past ten years or so, kydex and other similar plastic materials have allowed holster manufacturers to offer lighter holsters that are less bulky than their leather counterparts.

the handgun into a crowd when it slips off the wearer's boot. The entertainment value of this situation is a definite thumbs down.

There are clothing concerns unique to this system. Pants which are not sufficiently long will expose the holster when the wearer sits down, especially if the legs are crossed. Tapered pant legs will often make this system unusable. High boots will afford concealment, but also make the handgun almost impossible to reach. Socks can be pulled over the bottom of the holster to hide it, but this will eventually ruin the socks, causing them to sag and resemble a shaved poodle's leg. Of course, athletic type tube socks shouldn't be used to cover the whole ankle holster, including the handgun. Concealment would be enhanced, but the wearer would have a great deal of difficulty accessing the handgun.

INSIDE-THE-WAISTBAND HOLSTER

These holsters offer excellent concealment and retention capabilities. Accessibility is fast, and an additional layer of concealment is provided by the pants. Generally, pants should be purchased two sizes larger than normal to comfortably accommodate the holster and weapon. Before buying pants it's a good idea to measure your waist with your pistol and holster

in place. Inside the waistband holsters are usually affixed to the trouser belt or garment top by a metal or polymer spring tension clip, or leather straps. Some poorly constructed spring tension clip models will slip off the belt during the drawstroke and remain on the handgun. Spring clip models offer the wearer a variety of options such as clipping the holster inside high top boots, inside a coat, or clipped to a vehicle's interior. The biggest complaint, about inside the waistband holsters, is their bulk and often uncomfortable fit. However, over the past ten years or so, kydex and other similar plastic materials have allowed holster manufacturers to offer lighter holsters that are less bulky than their leather counterparts. Generally speaking, the smaller the holster, the greater the degree of comfort. But this is not to say that everybody is limited to a small pistol. Many people are able to carry full size pistols in an IWB with a high degree of comfort. Like shoes, different holsters suit different body sizes and shapes.

PADDLE HOLSTERS

The author prefers paddle or belt slide holsters instead of inside the waistband holsters. Paddle holsters, a variation of belt slide holsters, are designed to be worn on the waist without a belt. A body contoured attachment called the paddle keeps the system in place. It is found on the reverse of the holster. Paddle holsters may be positioned around the waistline to suit the wearer's requirements: strong side, cross-draw, or behind-the-hip. They are often very comfortable and are very concealable because they tuck the handgun close into the body. The self-supporting paddle makes this type of holster quick and easy to put on and take off. However, herein lies one problem: during seated bathroom activities this system must be totally removed and secured by positioning it where the owner can reach it, but an opportunistic thief cannot.

BELT SLIDE HOLSTERS

Belt slide holsters are designed as high rides, mid rides or low rides, and may be positioned anywhere around the waistline of the wearer; strong side, cross draw, behind-the-hip, or small of the back. For concealment purposes, only high-rides and mid-rides are applicable. Low-rides are duty or uniform type holsters, and are worn openly rather than concealed under a jacket. High rides position most of the firearm high above the belt on the torso. High rides are generally more concealable, because short outer garments will cover the handgun and holster when the wearer bends over or reaches overhead. Often, larger handguns are better suited to this style. Mid-rides position the pistol grip just above, or at the beltline. These holsters are a good choice for people with short torsos who find high rides uncomfortable. It's worth noting at this point that all women are shorter in the torso than men, regardless of how tall they are. In other words, the distance between a woman's belt line and her armpit is shorter than that of a man. This means that a woman who opts for a high-ride, or possibly a mid-ride holster may not have enough distance between the pistol and her armpit to draw very easily. To demonstrate this you can compare a man and women of the same overall height. You will see that the woman's belt is higher than the man's belt.

Belt slide holsters can be found in a forward rake, rear rake or neutral rake design. Rake or cant can be defined as the angle between an imaginary vertical line and the barrel as the pistol is worn on the waist. The forward rake (often called the FBI cant) positions the grip of the handgun to the front and the muzzle to the rear. This is good for concealment. The neutral rake positions the weapon straight up and down, which combines concealment and quick-draw capabilities. The rear rake positions the butt to the rear, and the muzzle to the front. This is fastest for draw, but not so good for concealment. Not all rakes are compatible with all carry positions. For example, a rear rake

will not work well in a cross draw position. Because of their shorter torso, women often find that with a forward rake they cannot get the correct firing grip on the pistol and draw it easily from the holster.

Hip carry approximates the traditional open carry making this position more natural and easier to learn than most other carry positions.

Pancake holsters--a style of belt slide holster--are efficient at tucking the handgun into the body and distributing the weight over a larger area along the belt line. They are comfortable and easy to access, even while seated. These holsters can be positioned on the strong side (right side for right handers, and left side for left handers) or in a crossdraw position on the weak side (right side for left handers, and left side for right handers). Pullovers, sweat shirts or short wadded coats may be worn with this system, although the drawstroke may need to be modified to include the non-shooting hand pulling the garment up and out of the way. If long coats are worn, it is best to leave the coat undone so the hand can brush it aside when drawing the weapon.

S.O.B. - SMALL OF BACK HOLSTER

This system is usually a belt slide type holster which is canted at a radical angle. These holsters are designed to ride on the belt, in the small of the back, parallel to the waistline. People with larger buttocks or love handles may find this system more comfortable than

smaller people. However, if the covering garment rides up and exposes the weapon, the wearer often will not notice in time to correct it. The most effective designs will cant the handgun's grip at an angle toward the wearer's strong hand. This position facilitates a fast, smooth drawstroke, although practice is required to avoid sweeping the muzzle across the torso. As with all drawstroke techniques,

the finger must rest alongside the frame of the pistol, outside of the trigger guard until the pistol has cleared the holster and the body. Only when the pistol is pointed at the target should the finger enter the trigger guard and rest lightly on the trigger. The S.O.B. system is often extremely comfortable and secure. However, this holster may interfere with access to the rear pants pockets. Outer wear is necessary for concealment; any un-tucked shirt will do.

The biggest disadvantage of this system is the difficulty in drawing the weapon while seated. Car seats are a special concern when the wearer is secured by a seatbelt. When seated, the handgun is trapped between the wearer's back and the seat. Chair arms may hinder the drawstroke,

even if the wearer rocks forward.

There are two concerns that should be addressed when considering this system: First, the wearer must consider their personal range of flexibility. A large waistline, or limited mobility in the upper body may make drawing the handgun slow and very awkward. Second, if the wearer falls backward and lands on a hard

“The biggest disadvantage of this system is the difficulty in drawing the weapon while seated.”

surface the handgun may impact the spine and cause serious injury.

POCKET HOLSTER

Pocket holsters are designed for both front or rear pockets and offer good concealment, but they are pretty much limited to small handguns. Pocket holsters reduce the risk of printing, a problem often encountered when carrying just the handgun in a pocket. They also prevent foreign objects (lint, coins, gum, etc.) from lodging in the handgun's moving parts. A good pocket holster has a rough coating on the outside that "sticks" to the inside of the pocket, thus enabling the pistol to be drawn from the pocket, leaving the holster in place. The cheaper, poorly designed holsters require the independent move of pulling the holster off the weapon, in order to fire. This wastes time which could be better spent aiming and firing the pistol, but also there is a great risk that the wearer will shoot himself in the hand as he pulls the holster off the pistol. For these reasons, only holsters that will stick in the pocket, and not be drawn out when the gun is drawn, should be used.

These holsters may be carried in front or rear pants pockets, shirt pockets, purses, jackets, etc. They are particularly well suited to garments that have vertical pockets which offer excellent speed and access. Pocket holster access may be enhanced when the wearer can rest their hand on the weapon inside the pocket. This maneuver is seen as natural by most people and will not cause alarm.

HOLSTER PURSES

Holster purses are available in a wide variety of sizes, styles, colors and materials. They offer good concealment, since they house the handgun in a specially designed inner pouch that prevents printing. Most people don't immediately recognize a holster purse for what

it really is. Holster purses also allow women the freedom to carry larger handguns and more reloads than other carry methods. Another good feature holster purses possess is their dual purpose. They are both a concealed carry system and a purse.

The main problem with any "off body" carry method is the possibility of losing access to the weapon in the event of a purse snatching, self



Holster purses also allow women the freedom to carry larger handguns and more reloads than other carry methods.

defense, dropping the package or accidentally leaving it behind. While it is true that a handgun that cannot be easily accessed is virtually useless, unauthorized access to the handgun by children or curious adults is unacceptable. So, any time the holster purse is taken off the shoulder and placed somewhere, it is vitally important that it is either secured under lock and key, or kept under constant surveillance. If the decision to carry a handgun in a purse is made, the weapon still should be secured in a holster that is specifically designed to be carried attached to the inside the purse. It is not acceptable to simply place a pistol in a purse. Invariably it ends up at the bottom of the purse with a lot of other items on top of it. In this condition it is not easily accessible, and worse yet, an item such as a pen or lipstick may work its way into the trigger guard and actually cause the piece to fire. The lack of a holster increases the possibility that foreign objects

such as lint, coins, gum, antacid tablets, etc. may lodge in the action and prevent the weapon from firing when needed.

DAY ORGANIZER SYSTEMS

Day organizer systems are really a poorly designed man's holster purse. Consisting of a modified daily organizer case, the interior includes a compartment designed to hold pistol. This is done in a feeble attempt to be dual purpose like holster purses. The handgun compartment often comprises a custom fitted foam rubber insert designed to house the weapon and spare magazines or speed loaders. The problem with custom fitting is the limitation to only one specific weapon. A system like this should be flexible enough to accommodate various pistols and revolvers.

This "off body" system offers good concealment, with no printing. It is discreet, and the weapon is well stabilized and protected. However, due to zipper design, many of these systems inhibit fast access to the handgun. Even dual zipper models make it difficult to access the handgun quickly and smoothly and get a good firing grip. Many day organizer systems require a support hand in order to open them—an inconvenient, awkward, independent move, under the best of circumstances.

This system will be difficult, if not impossible, to access if the person using it is already under attack. It may be snatched like a purse, and constant observation is required whenever the system is set down. Day timer systems are generally a poor choice offering few advantages.

FANNY PACKS

Fanny packs come in a variety of colors, sizes, and materials. They are secured to the torso by a support strap that is linked around the waist, and they offer great concealment because the handgun is completely hidden from view.

Fanny packs offer quick access to the weapon and prevent it from printing. They also offer a means to carry spare ammunition. A good fanny pack is designed with an internal holster. When they first became available, fanny packs were very fashionable amongst practitioners of concealed carry because they did not alert others to the fact that a handgun was housed inside. But today, a decade or more since they became popular, most criminals and police officers assume that a person wearing a fanny pack is carrying a gun. If no other mode of carry is viable, the fanny pack does get the job done, but don't assume that everybody is oblivious of what is inside. Be aware, these devices may be lost if the waist band is cut or the quick release buckle is disengaged. Having said that, I believe fanny packs are more secure than a holster purse, day timer, or other carried systems, since they are worn instead of carried. Finally, fanny packs offer concealment in difficult environments such as the beach, while wearing athletic clothing, or during hiking or jogging activities.

BELLY BANDS

Belly bands are designed to be worn around the stomach against the skin or over underwear, and under outer garments such as shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters, etc. The belly band should be worn level with the belt, and the handgun should be positioned in a front crossdraw position. One shirt button should be left undone, normally the second one above the trouser belt. This facilitates access to the weapon through the shirt. A necktie will usually conceal the undone button. Well-endowed women may wear the belly band midriff high, positioning the handgun's grips between the breasts. Concealment is good, due to the coverage of outer garments and the lack of belts, harnesses, and exposed belt attachment clips. When a pullover-type garment is worn access is fairly fast. With this system, tight fitting and buttoned shirts will compromise or slow access.

The belly band should be made from a comfortable, non-abrasive, light colored mesh or elastic material. If irritation or abrasion occurs, try wearing the system over a tee shirt. A light colored material is required in order to prevent silhouetting the handgun. Mesh material is much cooler, and reduces perspiration, especially in hot climates. Often a padded area is attached to the support band behind the holster compartment to absorb perspiration and increase comfort. Most belly bands are designed to be ambidextrous, allowing either a strong hand draw or a cross draw. Most belly bands contain pockets for extra magazines, wallet, knife, etc. A variety of small handguns can be carried in this manner.

WAIST BAND HOLSTER

Waist band holsters are variations of belly bands. However, they are designed to be worn either under or over clothing or as a belt for women. Some waist band holsters may even come with an attractive buckle. Waist bands require the use of a light jacket or similar overgarment. This system enables the wearer to choose the personal carry position that is the quickest to access and most comfortable. They are designed to be ambidextrous. Strong side draw, cross draw and small of the back carry may be realized by rotating the belt. Access and concealability level depends on the individual and the carry position that they choose.

THIGH HOLSTERS

Thigh holsters are designed for women who require concealed carry while wearing a skirt or dress. Of course, a short or split skirt will enhance accessibility to the handgun. The negative side of a short skirt is that it attracts attention, particularly to the area where the weapon is likely to be carried. Like ankle holsters, the thigh holster has limitations. Unless there is no better way to carry a gun, it's probably best left to the movies.

“Tight pants will compromise access and concealment. This holster may be hot and uncomfortable, especially when sitting.”

UNDERWEAR HOLSTERS

There are two types of concealed carry platforms which I classify as underwear. The first is a system designed by Thunderwear, this system is intended to be worn directly under the navel and over the pubic region. This system is a variation of the belly band, designed to be worn between the pants and underwear. This location requires the use of small weapons in the strong side, or cross draw carry position, reloads (not speedloader) or other small objects may be carried in the weak side pouch. The main focus of this system is on concealability, so access is somewhat slow. This holster may be a good choice if a pat down search is a concern

because this area is often avoided, especially by same sex searchers. Tight pants will compromise access and concealment. This holster may be hot and uncomfortable, especially when sitting.

The second underwear system is carried in a tee shirt. This system consists of an ambidextrous surgical elastic holster, complete with a Velcro safety strap, built into a mesh tee shirt. The tee

shirt is a low cut unisex three quarter length design available in chest sizes 34 through 46 inches. The weapon is suspended in a vertical position. The advantages this system has over a shoulder holster is that it doesn't use a support harness or straps, and it allows lightweight outer clothing to be worn. This system may be a good choice for people who wear vertical shoulder holsters in the winter and wish to go to a lighter version in the summer.

LANYARD CARRY

This system is unique to the North American Arms revolver. This small handgun is attached to a key ring type device which is then attached to a lanyard. It may be worn around the neck or under an outer garment. When used with athletic apparel, the lanyard may appear to be carrying a whistle. The weapon may be accessed by simply pulling the lanyard out of the shirt. For extra control, the weapon may be taped to the chest using medical tape.

BELT BUCKLE CARRY

This system is unique to the North American Arms revolver. This small handgun is attached to an ornamental belt buckle or a skeleton type belt buckle. The weapon is held in place by metal clamps. The system may be covered by a pullover type outer garment or left exposed in hopes that a casual observer will mistake the weapon for an ornament.

SELF CONTAINED WEAPON/HOLSTER COMBINATION CARRY

This system is unique to the North American Arms revolver. This small handgun is attached to a plastic device which serves as a carrying case and fold-out handgun grip. It may be clipped to a pocket or carried as a pocket holster. It is effective in avoiding printing, and the device provides a larger grip than the standard grips supplied with this small revolver.



All concealed carry systems can be rendered ineffective by improper choice of clothing.

CLOTHING ISSUES

All concealed carry systems can be rendered ineffective by improper choice of clothing. Consider the method of closure on the outer layer of clothing: snaps, buttons, zippers, Velcro, hooks, ties, etc. Snaps or Velcro may be faster to operate than zippers, which may be faster than buttons. The optimum solution is to fit clothing to the person and the weapon. Improper clothing choices may enable others to see the weapon's outline, lumps, muzzle, grips or parts of the holster.

A change in clothing styles often requires changing the method of concealing holster systems. A concealment system that works well with bulky cold weather clothing may not work well with light summer clothing. The wearer may have to readjust the system for proper fit and function, or choose another system.

Clothing that is too tight will print the outline of the pistol, or simply display a suspicious lump. A change of clothing can make a comfortable system uncomfortable. A shoulder holster worn under a light jacket may become too tight or even inaccessible when a change is made to heavy winter clothing. Form fitting clothes may make concealment efforts difficult.

Some concealed carry systems are best suited for use with baggy clothes. It may even be a good idea to purchase clothes at least one size bigger than normal in order to effectively conceal a weapon. Remember, clothing that conceals often slows accessibility.

Be prepared for some accelerated clothing wear if a weapon is frequently carried concealed. Clothing should be evaluated for excessive wear because frayed areas may snag the handgun and slow or prevent a drawstroke.

A final note on clothing concerns the belt. Don't try using a dress belt to secure the holster. They are not rigid enough to prevent the holster from moving, particularly during the drawstroke, or during the normal range of body movements. A belt must be designed to be rigid enough to provide a strong, stable platform in order to keep the holster in place while drawing or moving. I like to use a combination of belt and holster from the same manufacturer. They are often designed to be used together. Pistol belts come in various widths: one and a quarter, one and a half, and one and three quarter inches. So make certain the holster is slotted or looped for the width of the belt to be used. Always order the gun belt at least two sizes larger than normal, especially for inside the waistband holsters. For example, if a 34 is normally worn, order a 36. This added length will accommodate tucked in clothing, added bulk of the holster, and any small fluctuations in weight and waistline that the wearer may experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to avoid the possibility of concealed weapon discovery, a citizen must choose both a concealment system that is effective and the appropriate attire. In order to avoid printing of a weapon (the outline of the gun under clothing) or protrusion of the firearm or holster, many factors must be considered: concealability, speed of access, accessibility,

safety, and fit of pistol to holster. Finally, always read the manufacturer's instruction sheet, and follow all warnings.