

Holsters, sorting the good from not-so-good

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July 2010

What defines a 'Good' holster? For the purpose of this discussion, we will consider this from the perspective of a private citizen who wishes to carry a handgun concealed (i.e. not LEO or military). As such, retention devices (flaps, snaps and straps) are not needed or recommended. While these devices are certainly appropriate for those who open-carry their handgun in an environment where physical contact with unsavory types are likely, they don't apply to the private citizen who carries concealed and avoids trouble whenever possible.

First and foremost, the holster must retain and allow access to the handgun while adhering to the 4-rules: specifically Rules II and III.

I: ALL GUNS ARE ALWAYS LOADED

II: NEVER LET THE MUZZLE COVER ANYTHING YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DESTROY

III: KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOUR SIGHTS ARE ON THE TARGET

IV: BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET

Below are the attributes that one should consider as they select a holster for their handgun:

1. The holster must be a match (made for) the particular model of handgun, including barrel length. Holsters that claim to fit multiple models seldom do so well. Some holsters are made with an open bottom that allows the barrel to protrude, so it can 'accommodate' handguns with different barrel lengths (longer barrels simple stick out the bottom). This may cause problems while presenting the handgun, as it's likely the front sight will snag as the pistol is drawn. Also, more and more handguns are offered with 'rails' for mounting lights and this will impact holster fit. Be sure the holster of interest will accommodate your specific model of handgun.
2. The holster must allow the shooter to acquire the full firing grip on the handgun while holstered. Holsters that have excess material force the shooter to adjust their grip once the handgun clears it. These should be avoided, as we can not afford to loose any time when the handgun is needed. Adjusting one's firing grip during the presentation takes time, is mechanically unsound and leads to poor marksmanship.

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3. The holster must completely cover the trigger when the handgun is inserted, which helps the shooter comply with Rule III. Remember, a holstered handgun is a safe handgun so long as the trigger is covered. This gives the shooter a safe method for transporting the handgun, even if the holster is not worn (moving the handgun from the safe to the cleaning room as an example).

4. The holster must retain its shape when the handgun is removed and allow for one-handed re-holstering. This is extremely important for inside-the-waistband (IWB) holsters, as the holster has to keep its shape against the pressure from the belt. Holsters that collapse when the handgun is removed force the shooter to either use their support hand to open it or use the muzzle to wedge the holster open, both of which are dangerous practices and stand in clear violation of Rule II. Well designed holsters are either rigid enough due to material and/or have a spring steel band built in to reinforce the opening and maintain its shape.

5. The holster should allow the handgun to be removed smoothly and prevent parts of the handgun (front sight) from snagging. Better designed holsters have a channel formed (or sight rails sewn) in them that prevents the front sight from snagging while the handgun goes in or out. Look for this feature while evaluating potential candidates.

6. The holster must securely retain the handgun during 'normal' activities. Typically, this means that the handgun is held in place when the holster is inverted and better designed holsters have means to adjust this tension. The definition of 'normal' activities can vary from person to person and it's up to the shooter to ensure their holster applies the proper friction to the handgun for the tasks at hand.

7. A good holster is of limited value if not supported by a quality belt. The belt must be designed to securely carry the weight and bulk of the handgun of choice. Typically these belts are made from multiple layers of heavier gage leather or nylon. The better ones have a plastic insert between the layers, which allows the belt to retain its integrity throughout its life. Also, the better leather belts are cut on a curve so they are crescent shaped when laid flat. This allows them to better fit the shooter. Make sure to match the belt width to the holster belt loop size for best performance (narrow belt and large belt loops allow the holster to move).

8. Magazine carriers are an important part of the concealed carry system and have similar characteristics as holsters, in that the carrier must contain the magazine securely while allowing easy access. Be careful of carriers that cover too much of the magazine, thus making removal difficult. A well designed carrier will securely retain the magazine while covering approximately half of it. As with holsters, magazine carriers with retention devices are not recommended. The preferred orientation of the magazines is with the bullets facing forward. This orientation permits the quickest reloads.

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Other topics to consider; concealing a handgun on one's person requires a lifestyle change. "Carrying a handgun is supposed to be comforting, not comfortable" (Clint Smith). The shooter must be willing modify their wardrobe to accommodate the handgun and not expect the handgun to adjust. The simple fact is that any handgun of proper caliber and controllable size will add weight and bulk. Accept this and make the necessary adjustments (starting with a good holster and quality belt) and you will likely discover that it's easier to live with your handgun than originally thought.

Also, becoming proficient with the handgun/holster system requires practice. This requires the shooter to practice presenting the handgun from the holster enough times to commit that motion to muscle memory. This action will cause the finish of any handgun to wear. No way around it. Get use to it and accept that a working handgun will show its age (we call it character) and there is nothing wrong with that. It is much better that the handgun shows evidence of its use by a proficient owner that maintain a pristine appearance. This is what separates the shooters from the gun owners. There are plenty of gun owners out there... we need more shooters.

Below is a list of manufactures that produce holsters and belts which meet the above criteria. They range in price from \$30-\$200 so, there is no excuse not to have a proper holster for your handgun. When in doubt, go to some shooting events and ask the participants what works well for them. Just remember, be sure to ask a shooter and not a gun owner... ☺. Good Luck.

Holsters

Leather

Milt Sparks

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

Don Hume

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

Galco

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

Synthetic

Blade Tech

<http://www.blade-tech.com/home.php>

Fobus

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

Sidearmor

<http://www.sidearmor.net/>

Comp-Tac

<http://www.comp-tac.com/>

Raven

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

Blackhawk

<http://www.blackhawk.com/catalog/Holsters,16.htm>

Belts

Galco

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

Wilderness

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