

THE 411 ON HANDGUN HOLSTERS



ARMED ALABAMA

4558 Old Shell Rd. PMB 184
Mobile, Al 36608

<http://armedalabama.com/>

“Wearing your handgun in a holster should be comforting, not comfortable.”

Col. Jeff Cooper

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FOREWORD:

At Armed Alabama, we try to aim for the middle or center mass and comfortable and comforting. A CCW holder (the real term in Alabama is Pistol Permit Holder but since about every other state uses CCW for Concealed Carry Weapon, we will adopt that term in this article). Decide how you intend to carry your handgun. We recommend outside the waistband, strong side, hip carry with at least a retention level 1 and a strong genuine leather or leather with Kevlar belt. This is the safest and fastest way to draw and fire.

Let's start out with some safety issues. A holster should, at a minimum:

- Completely cover the trigger guard of the handgun
- Offer adequate retention of the handgun
- Keep the barrel of the firearm clear of any obstruction
- Allow to safely carry with a round in the chamber

If any of these guidelines are not followed, you could be setting yourself up for an unsafe way of carrying your firearm.

HOLSTER RETENTION

Most holsters have some kind of retention device to prevent losing the handgun during physical activity. The simplest form of retention is friction, either around the whole handgun in the case of leather, or around the trigger guard in many molded holsters. Snaps are the most common form of retention, with some requiring force in a specific direction to release. Snaps may be opened either towards or away from the body. Many law enforcement security holsters require the handgun to first be pushed or pulled or canted in a certain way before the handgun can be removed, often in conjunction with a snap and either friction or a hood covering the top of the handgun, particularly with molded holsters. A holster with three different methods of retention is called a "level three" security holster. Level three security holsters prevent law enforcement personnel or "open carriers" from having their handgun taken from them during an altercation.

Here are the broad categories of holsters:

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OUTSIDE THE WAISTBAND (OWB) HOLSTERS

OWBs are probably the most popular style of holster. These should be worn near your strong side hip but if there is a concealment issue or comfort problem they can be moved back towards your back or forward some. Cross draw holsters (which are positioned on your weak side) are not ones we recommend as they present a safety problem (you are sweeping a large area with your muzzle and take longer to draw). Most OWB holsters worn on the strong side will come with the “FBI cant,” meaning that the handgun is tilted slightly forward. This is to aid in concealment. The grip remains the toughest part of the pistol to conceal. Canting the holster forward slightly makes the telltale bulge under a shirt or jacket much less obvious. The “cant” is adjustable on many brands, especially Kydex holsters.

MATERIALS: Kydex, Quality Leather, other thermoplastics. Nylon or cloth like material not recommended.

THERE ARE SEVERAL VARIATIONS OUTSIDE THE WAISTBAND OR BELT HOLSTERS:

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TYPES OF OWB HOLSTERS

SMALL-OF-THE-BACK

Small-of-the-back (S.O.B.) holsters and press on your vertebrae all day often causing pain. You risk severe injury if you fall backwards and the learning curve is steep. Do yourself a favor and forget this style.

PADDLE HOLSTER

The paddle holster is a concealed carry option popular with law enforcement and civilian users alike. Instead of attaching to the belt with a hook or loop, paddle holsters use a flat, concave polymer or leather surface that creates friction against the hip to keep it in place. Paddle holsters have an extra attached flat tongue that is sandwiched between your body and pants, and include a portion that grips your belt or waistband to prevent the whole holster coming out while drawing your handgun. Paddles are mostly used for convenient installation and removal without threading a belt through, and in fact often don't require the use of a belt at all, depending partially on the type of pants. Most paddles work extremely well and are very secure.

PANCAKE HOLSTERS

Pancake holsters are ideal for those looking for a conceal carry holster that sits close to the body. Typically sitting high on the hip, these pancake holsters allow you to conceal your firearm more easily making it possible to wear lighter clothing. Available in leather. Pancake holsters are designed for discreet concealed carry with increased comfort, quicker accessibility and easier re-holstering compared to inside-the-waistband styles.

CROSS DRAW HOLSTER

This holster is worn on your weak side, but forward as if the holster were on backward. As with the shoulder holster, it can be unsafe because you may be sweeping a large area with your muzzle when drawing. They are also usually short on retention features. Usually made of leather.

INSIDE THE WAISTBAND (IWB) HOLSTERS

IWB holsters offer the maximum in concealability, but many people find them uncomfortable. Drawing your handgun is also more difficult. As a rule, you will need to buy pants 2 inches bigger in the waist to wear an IWB. There are a lot of great companies making IWB holsters in both leather and Kydex. Some IWBs can also be worn outside the pants but inside the belt. Some even allow a shirt to be tucked into the pants over the holster. Handgun grips tend to be lot tougher than skin so wearing an undershirt is a must, unless you buy a holster that has some type of backing that prevents the handgun from rubbing against you.

MATERIALS: Kydex, Quality Leather, other thermoplastics.

SHOULDER HOLSTERS

While they have the same advantages and disadvantages as cross draw holsters, shoulder holsters are extremely comfortable and are often excellent at concealment. Women who do not want a baggy shirt or jacket concealing their waist will often find that a shoulder holster easily conceals a small-frame pistol when they put a short jacket or open blouse over the top of it. The best and safest option in shoulder holsters are those that carry the pistol vertically. Why? Because every time you stand in a line with the more common horizontal shoulder holster you are pointing your handgun at the person behind you. Vertical shoulder holsters are slightly harder to draw from and often require a greater reveal of your intent.

MATERIALS: Kydex, Quality Leather, other thermoplastics.

ANKLE HOLSTERS

Ankle holsters range from super comfortable to excruciatingly painful depending on the amount of padding, whether the handgun rests on your ankle bone and how tightly it is strapped. They can become exposed when seated as pant legs ride up, but they make most smaller-framed weapons almost disappear. However, they are very slow to draw from, require practice hiking the pant leg before drawing and are generally impossible to get to while physically fighting with someone. Since they are not readily accessible they should only be uses for a back-up handgun or deep concealment.

MATERIALS: Nylon or cloth like material

TYPES OF HYBRID HOLSTERS

FANNY PACK HOLSTERS

If these have the quick release feature and a holster inside they may be an option worth considering.

MATERIALS: Nylon or cloth like material

CARRY PURSES

Specialty purses and briefcases which allow you to either draw and fire or even fire from the purse or briefcase are not recommended. This is off the body carry and it is dangerous as thieves' target what you are carrying. Thus, in a purse snatching, you will lose your handgun

POCKET CARRY FOR MOUSE GUNS

Small Frame .380s and small revolvers can be carried in a pocket IF they are place inside a quality pocket carry holster like DeSantis Nemesis, Blackhawk Inside-the-Pocket Holster, and Galco Front Pocket Holster. Make sure the holster is for your handgun and it completely covers the trigger-guard.

A NOTE ON LEATHER HOLSTERS

A higher price generally means better construction and longevity, particularly with leather. Bianchi, DeSantis, and Galco are mass produced leather holsters and found in most stores. Small and medium shops produce holsters to order but are generally more expensive but better quality. I purchased a custom leather holster for a Taurus Judge from <http://dmbullardleather.com/> and it was excellent quality. However, mine was for wearing in the woods for rattle snake protection. If I used the holster for concealed carry, I would have a shoe repair s hop add a leather retention strap and probably would not carry it openly.

HERE ARE FOUR HOLSTERS THAT WE WOULD NOT USE:

The Handgun Sling

- No trigger protection whatsoever
- No proper retention of firearm
- Having to place an obstruction inside the barrel

VERSACARRY

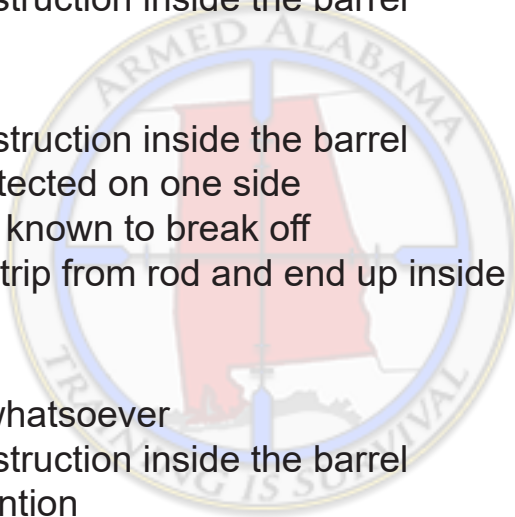
- Having to place an obstruction inside the barrel
- Trigger guard only protected on one side
- Plastic base has been known to break off
- Pieces of plastic can strip from rod and end up inside barrel

ZERO CARRY

- No trigger protection whatsoever
- Having to place an obstruction inside the barrel
- No proper firearm retention

SNEAKY PETE HOLSTERS

- Basically, a box you wear on your belt to mimic a cell phone carrier.
- No trigger protection whatsoever
- No proper firearm retention



FINAL POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. **SAFETY OVER STYLE.** The holster you buy should completely cover trigger guard, retain your handgun when running, jumping or rolling around on the ground. It should also attach to your body through a belt or other device that will not pull off in the event you are involved in a struggle. If it doesn't, do not buy it. If you plan on "open carry" wear at least a level 2 retention holster and a genuine leather belt, belt with Kevlar, or a trainer's belt. You are telling the world that you have taken actions to prevent snatch and grab handgun thefts. Our recommendation for open carry or concealed carry is a strong side hip holster made of Kydex, such as a Blackhawk Serpa CQC Concealment Holster. The "concealed" comes in by wearing a cover garment over it. Some people will balk at the \$35-\$45 these "plastic" holsters cost. First, they are not plastic, they are Kydex and second, they are sized specifically for your handgun.
2. After safety, the most important consideration is accessibility, to enable you to draw and fire fast, ideally in 2 seconds or less. Can you really do that with an ankle holster? A person can run, with their machete, 21 feet in just 1.5 seconds. That is the minimum amount of time you need to perceive the threat, draw and fire. Deep concealment is great, but if you can't safely draw your handgun and fire in 2 seconds or less (I am giving everyone half of a second) then you are dead.
3. A higher price generally means better construction and longevity, particularly with leather.
4. For concealed carry, practice draws and re-holstering while wearing the clothes you normally wear, not just clothes you wear to the range.
5. Don't forget a "magazine holster". Carry an extra magazine, not necessarily because you may need more ammunition (you might) but because most failures to feed, jams and other problems are caused by a defective magazine. An extra magazine is like a life preserver and should be carried on the opposite side as your handgun. Avoid combination holsters and magazine holsters as it is more efficient and safer to grab your magazine with your weak hand, while your handgun is in your strong hand than to try to do both with the same hand. Magazine holsters that hold two magazines are great but probably too much for most people. Magazine holsters come sized for the caliber of the ammunition your magazine carries and whether your magazine is single or double stacked.

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4558 Old Shell Rd. PMB 184
Mobile, Al 36608

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