



GunDigest

# HANDGUNS

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

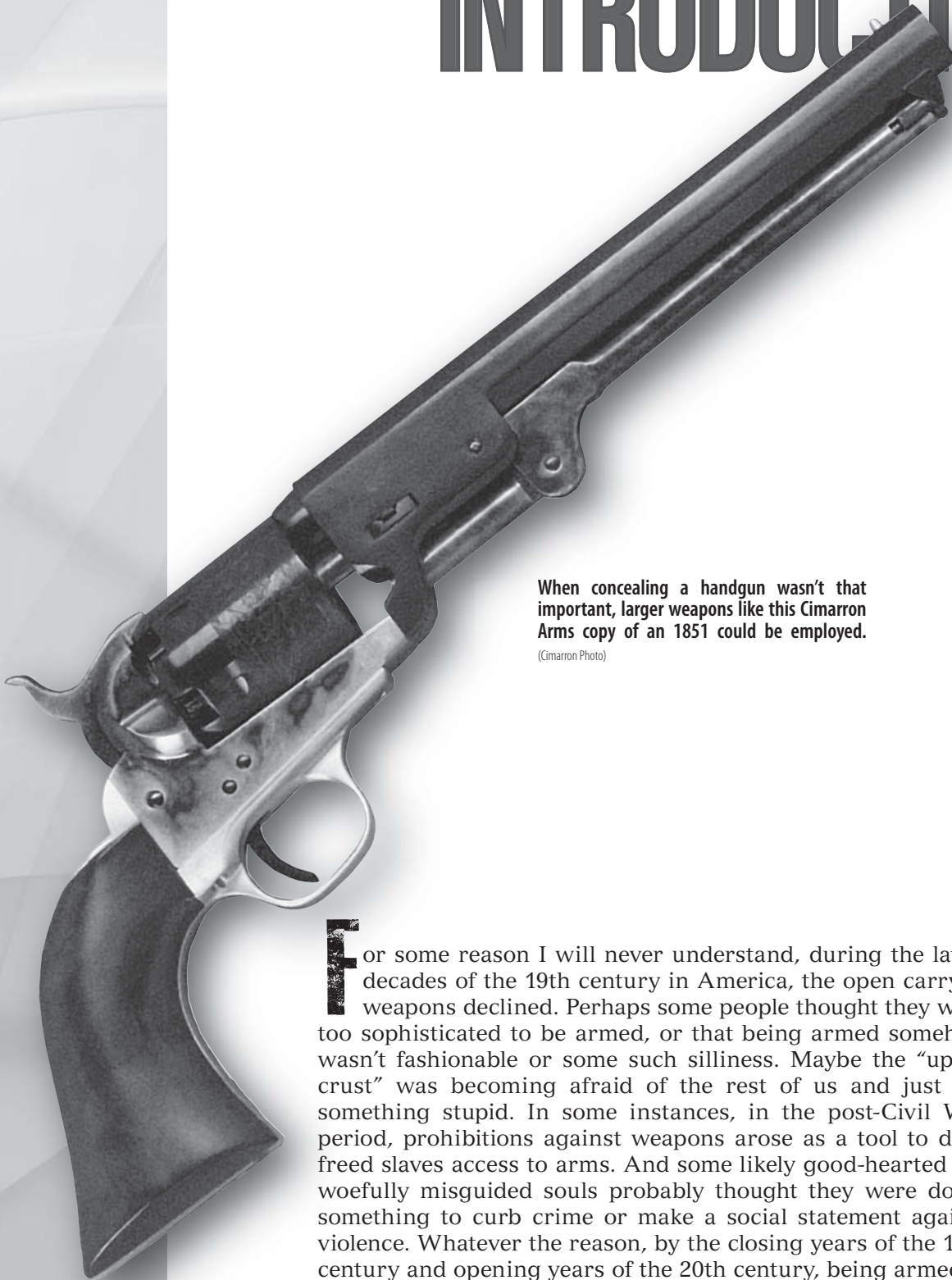


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**Choose the Best  
Self-Defense  
Handgun**

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# INTRODUCTION



When concealing a handgun wasn't that important, larger weapons like this Cimarron Arms copy of an 1851 could be employed.

(Cimarron Photo)

**F**or some reason I will never understand, during the latter decades of the 19th century in America, the open carry of weapons declined. Perhaps some people thought they were too sophisticated to be armed, or that being armed somehow wasn't fashionable or some such silliness. Maybe the "upper crust" was becoming afraid of the rest of us and just did something stupid. In some instances, in the post-Civil War period, prohibitions against weapons arose as a tool to deny freed slaves access to arms. And some likely good-hearted but woefully misguided souls probably thought they were doing something to curb crime or make a social statement against violence. Whatever the reason, by the closing years of the 19th century and opening years of the 20th century, being armed at all on the street – even if not openly – was illegal in many locales,

New York's "Sullivan Law" of 1911 being the most egregious example of such restrictions.

Those of us who are sensible, and do not labor under a religious or moral obligation against self-defense, go armed. If we are fortunate enough to live in one of the ever-growing number of "shall issue" states, and have a clean background with the law, etc., we can apply for and receive a concealed carry permit, after the appropriate background checking has been done and, in some areas, a course of instruction taken. Those good people who do not live in "free states," but

must be armed, either find the means by which to circumvent draconian anti-firearms laws by getting some sort of legal pass – a badge as a volunteer or reserve deputy, etc. – or just carry discreetly anyway and hope not to get caught. Remember the old aphorism? "It's better to be judged by twelve than carried by six."

We carry weapons in order to protect ourselves, our loved ones and other innocents from violence. It's as simple as that. That is why people have taken up the practice of going armed since the first caveman picked up a rock or the jawbone of an ass. That is



For greater concealability, the Baby Dragoon, sans rammer, was a fine choice. (Cimarron Photo)



Once the most advanced military handgun on the planet, the Walther P-38, this a police turn-in gun imported by Century International Arms, has a five inch barrel. That can be cut for supposed added concealability.



Bond Arms Derringers can be converted from one centerfire caliber to another merely by swapping barrel sets. The trigger guard is also easily removed for a more traditional appearance.

why peasants, serfs and the disenfranchised in general in subsequent eras were denied the use of arms. Those who couldn't defend themselves or their loved ones or just stand up

for what was right were far easier to control, subjugate and exploit.

Since weapons are usually no longer carried openly, although there is a growing movement



A derringer is a palm sized handgun, typically, designed to be carried hidden in a pocket, up a sleeve or in a woman's purse. Unlike what we see in the movies, any handgun is going to weigh too much to be held up by a garter on a pretty woman's leg.

Cobra offers derringers of different sizes, depending on choice of caliber.

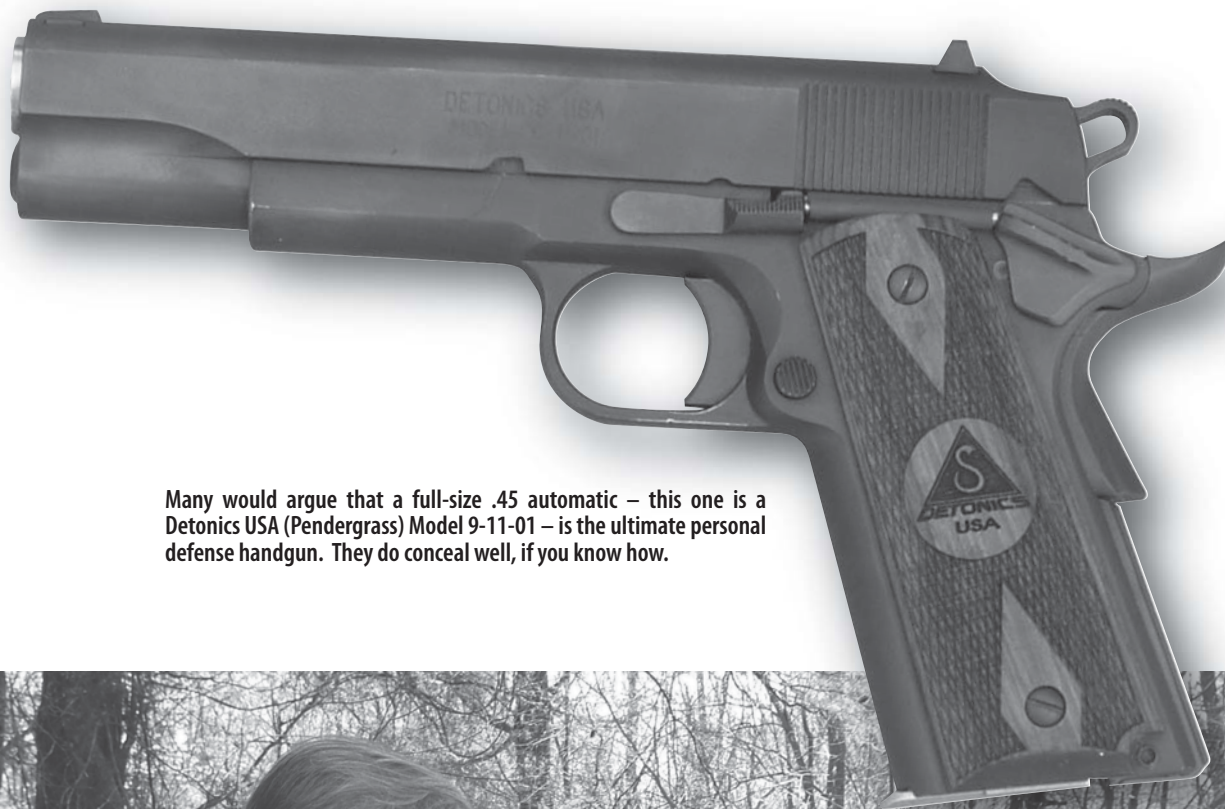


A derringer sits well enough in the hand, but accurate shooting is a challenge at anything past contact distance for a great many shooters.

in that regard, we have learned to conceal our weapons, and more and more effectively. In the old west, in towns where being openly armed was no longer *de rigueur*, unless one possessed a firearm specifically made for concealed carry – like a derringer – one might employ a “town carry,” wherein a full-sized Colt Single Action Army was stuffed holsterless into the wearer’s trouser waistband, the loading gate left open to

guard against the revolver’s slipping and sliding down into the trouser leg.

Small, concealable handguns had been available for quite some time. The single shot pistol from Henry Deringer with which actor John Wilkes Booth murdered President Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the most well-known example. Deringer’s pistols were already widely circulated and the word “derringer,”



Many would argue that a full-size .45 automatic – this one is a Detonics USA (Pendergrass) Model 9-11-01 – is the ultimate personal defense handgun. They do conceal well, if you know how.



A full-size .45 is a pleasant handgun to shoot and a well-made model can be extraordinarily accurate.

spelled with an extra “r” in the middle, became as generic in use as “fridge,” the shortened form of the trade name “Frigidaire,” became synonymous with any refrigerator, regardless of the brand. The most famous derringer ever was the Remington over/under, produced from 1866 until 1935. Using self-contained cartridges, small and concealable, it chambered a comparatively anemic .41 caliber rimfire round and could discharge if dropped. Some of these guns are likely still carried in men’s hip pockets and women’s handbags.

When men commonly wore vests or waistcoats, a Remington derringer might well be hidden in the vest pocket. As automatic pistols smaller than Borchardts and Mausers started to appear – notably some of the fine designs of John Moses Browning and weapons inspired by his work – it became possible to carry more than two shots in one’s vest pocket.

The “vest pocket pistol” is a class by itself, but it’s often lumped together with “pocket pistols”



Regardless of what anyone says to the contrary, small handguns for close range personal defense may have to be shot from waist level. The Seecamp, of course, has no sights at all.

generally. Let’s take two well-known examples: the Browning Baby Model .25 ACP, generally considered one of the smallest .25 autos – if not the smallest – ever made, is a vest pocket-sized pistol. The Walther PP or PPK is a pocket pistol.

To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, “A pocket is a pocket is a pocket.” But the distinction is worth noting. Today, the most commonly encountered ultra-small pistols aren’t pistols at all, but revolvers from North American Arms. The original .22 Short and .22 LR and .22 Magnum Mini-revolvers – especially those with the one and one-eighth-inch barrel – are true vest pocket size. The more recent .22 Magnum NAA Pug, although possessed of a slightly more bulbous grip, is actually an ideal vest pocket pistol.

In a free market economy, manufacturers develop or attempt to develop product based on



The North American Arms .22 Magnum Pug makes a fine ultimately tiny backup or backup to a backup. The Long Rifle Mini-Revolvers like this would sometimes be hidden inside a package of cigarettes.



The NAA LR Mini-Revolver, in the palm of a hand, has been set up to be worn in a belt buckle, on a chain around the neck or is fitted with a folding grip that holsters the gun at the waist.

what is perceived as present or future consumer demand. Smith & Wesson's first self-contained cartridge revolver, the Model 1, was a seven-shot .22 Short rimfire introduced in 1857 and continued into the 1880s. It was the first revolver to utilize a self-contained cartridge and was the ultimate in modern defensive weaponry. A tip-up revolver, it looked a little like a North American Arms Mini-revolver with a hinge on the top of the frame forward of the cylinder. And, of course, it was bigger than the North American Arms guns.

By the post Civil War period, despite a serious economic downturn, there was still a demand for firearms, this fueled by westward expansion. As cities grew, and as being openly armed was less and less practiced, it was only logical to combine the technological improvements in

cartridges – “central fire” over rimfire – and mechanical advances such as stronger break-open constructions, solid frames and double action mechanisms into weapons of a size to be handily carried in an outerwear or suit coat pocket or a woman's purse. Just as in the days of bronze and iron edged weapons, when steel was sought-after as a technological marvel, in the age of firearms it has always been firepower, interpreted either as cartridge effectiveness, or sheer number of rounds between reloadings, or both. When firepower was coupled with reduced size and weight, there was true practical and commercial potential. A five- or six-shot .32 was easily at least as good as a seven-shot .22 Short. And, if the slightly larger size were not a problem, five or six .32s easily beat out two .41 rimfire rounds in a Remington Derringer. The



To conceal a full-size single action, long barrel and all, many would use a “town carry,” wherein the loading gate is left open, serving to keep the gun from slipping down.



An original Browning Model 1910/22, with original grips and magazines, the 1910/22 variant intentionally made larger than the more familiar Model 1910 from which it is derived. This was an extraordinarily popular .32 ACP.



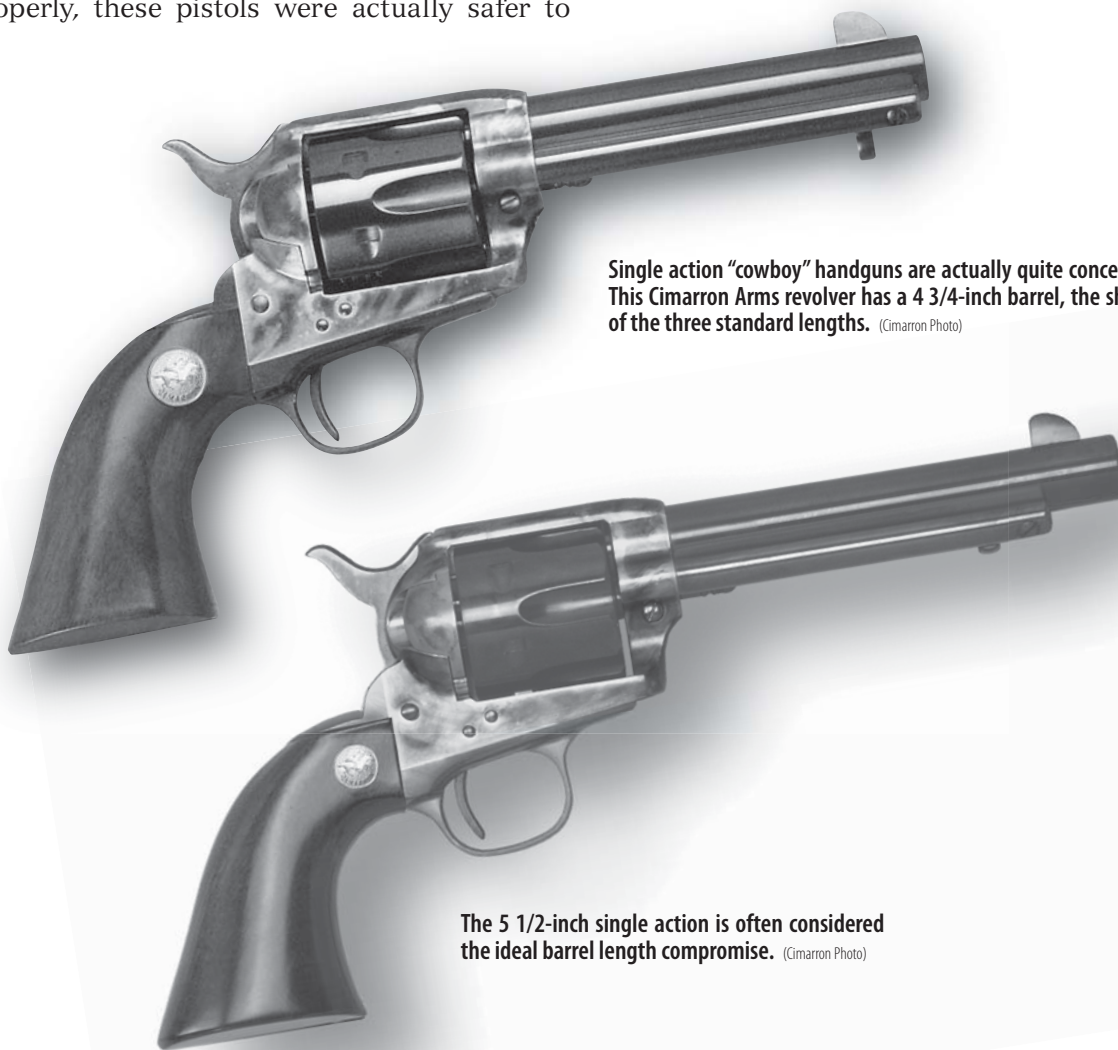
Precision Small Arms exports the US-made Browning Baby Model 1910/22 for Fabrique National of Belgium. Marked differently, the guns are sold in the USA as well. There are various options, including finish, engraving, grips and even metallurgy. It is one of the most popular .25 automatics ever made. (Precision Small Arms Photo)

Derringer hung on, of course; John Dillinger was arrested in Tucson, Arizona, in 1934 with one of the Remington Derringers in his sock. In 2009, that Derringer went at auction for \$95,000. If memory serves, that's a bigger haul than Dillinger ever made from one of his famous bank robberies. And I wouldn't be at all surprised if an officer involved in that 1934 arrest had a Remington Derringer as a backup weapon stuffed in his hip pocket.

The .25 automatics that Browning designed for Colt and for Fabrique National of Belgium revolutionized personal defense. Not only were these guns small, they were capable of firing a half- dozen shots without reloading and as rapidly as one could pull the trigger; and when reloading was needed, assuming the presence of a spare magazine, firing could be quickly and easily continued. The very flatness of these pistols was essentially a match for the Remington Derringer, as was overall length and, to a lesser degree, height. If operated properly, these pistols were actually safer to

carry and, assuming someone bothered to make a ballistic comparison, the .25 ACP under most circumstances more than held its own against the .41 rimfire in every practical regard.

In comparatively little time, Browning had developed pistols in the more powerful and still well-regarded .32 ACP. Within a period of two years – 1903 to 1905 – this led to the same pistol being offered in the even more powerful .380 ACP. The modern age of concealed carry handguns was upon us. Handguns surviving in close to original mechanical and structural condition from this epoch are as serviceable today as they were throughout the 20th century, when the 1903 and 1905 Colts were carried by Prohibition Era plainclothesmen, issued as General Officers Pistols to men like George Patton, worn covertly by the agents who served in World War II's Office of Strategic Services and kept in a pocket, purse or nightstand to safeguard private citizens.

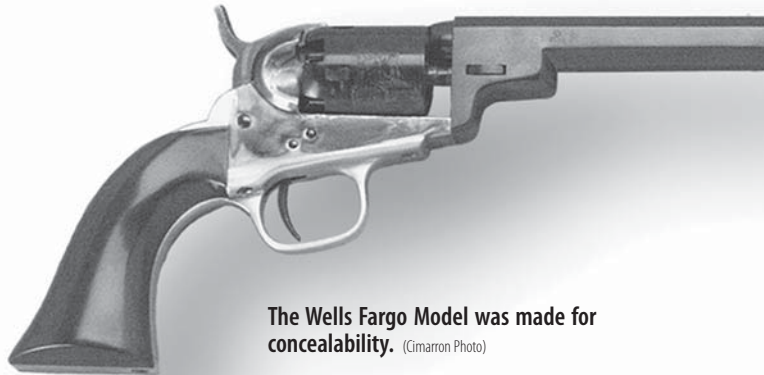


Single action "cowboy" handguns are actually quite concealable. This Cimarron Arms revolver has a 4 3/4-inch barrel, the shortest of the three standard lengths. (Cimarron Photo)

The 5 1/2-inch single action is often considered the ideal barrel length compromise. (Cimarron Photo)



# SIZE REALLY DOES MATTER



The Wells Fargo Model was made for concealability. (Cimarron Photo)

Over thirty years ago, we were out testing some guns with our old friend Hal. Hal was a big guy. I'm not exaggerating when I say that Hal carried a four-inch N-Frame S&W in an ankle holster in perfect comfort. That's how big Hal was. One of the guns we were field testing was a .22 Short Mini-revolver. Sharon was afraid that Hal was going to shoot himself in the tip of the finger, his hands so large, the gun so small and the barrel so short. In those days, sometimes I'd carry a Mini-revolver just dropped into a jacket pocket. I had this corduroy sportcoat – wide lapels and everything, as was the fashion in the 1970s – and I lost the little revolver in one of my pockets and actually had to pat myself down in order to find it.

Guns can be too small for concealed carry use, and guns can also be too large to hide.

Generally speaking, you should be able to get at least one to one and one-half fingers on the butt of the gun for a secure hold. If you cannot grasp the gun easily as it is drawn, you are increasing your chances of a fumble when the gun is needed. With almost any handgun you might conceivably carry concealed, two fingers is enough for a terrific hold, the little finger curled under. If you specifically have a gun for concealed carry, you must understand some basic parameters.

With a little modification, such as larger or extended grips, your concealed carry handgun may be capable of pinpoint target accuracy. So



From top left clockwise, Seecamp .32, Beretta 950BS .25, NAA Guardian .380 and NAA Guardian .32, all excellent concealment pistols, the perfect size.

what? That's nice and all, but you don't need to be able to shoot a one-hole group at twenty-five yards. If you can, fine; but, if that means making the weapon less concealable, you may be hitting the bullseye but you're missing the point. That's why we don't put handgun scopes on hideout weapons.

Walther – very sensibly, I might add – would supply their PP series pistols with two magazines, one of which had the finger rest extension, the other without. Sensible people who carried concealed used the finger rest extension magazine as a spare or when plinking or target shooting, using the magazine without the finger rest extension when the gun was hidden on body. Consider the logic. Let's say

that the use of a finger rest extension lengthens the gripping surface by more or less a half an inch. If you buy a handgun with a grip that is a half-inch or so longer, you might very well have one round greater capacity in the magazine. So, if you're going to lengthen the grip and possibly reduce concealability, you may as well get that extra round for your trouble. The idea with a concealable handgun is that it should be concealable.

Some years back, when I was running the Detonics USA operation in Pendergrass, Georgia, we occasionally made up a small number of pistols with the short CombatMaster grip frame and a full-length slide and five-inch barrel. They were called "StreetMasters." The

guns were never very popular, but they were extremely practical. The weapon had a quite concealable grip with a barrel length that allowed full ballistic efficiency. It just looked odd. Years earlier, Colt offered a pistol that was set up just the opposite way. The pistol came with an Officer's Model slide and barrel and a full-length grip frame. No offense to the folks at Colt, but, barring someone with a valid need which I cannot begin to imagine, no person with even a basic understanding of concealment issues would ever have bought such a gun for concealed carry. All that gun afforded the concealed carry consumer was greater capacity at the cost of concealability. With a full-size 1911 grip, a full-size 1911 slide and barrel is just as concealable on body.

Within reason, length of a handgun matters little to nothing as far as concealment is concerned, depending on application and carry method. When I do live demonstrations of concealment positions at waist level, I use a six-inch N-Frame, if one's available. The revolver is

easy for folks in the back row to see and, if you do it right, a six-inch N-Frame can be concealed perfectly well, although a gun of that length is far from ideal for the task. Grip length, on the other hand, is extremely important. Too long a grip and the handgun will be harder to hide, poking out under the covering garment. Too long a grip as relates to too little length and the gun butt will "fall away" from the body when worn at waist level. This further complicates hiding the gun.

There is physical size and then there's caliber size. If the only handgun you have available or the only handgun circumstances will allow you to hide is a North American Arms .22 LR Mini-revolver, then that's the gun to carry and, hopefully, you'll hit what you are aiming at, should you need to. North American Arms Mini-revolvers are outstandingly well-made. It's just that .22 Long Rifle isn't the ideal defensive round. It's not even remotely close to ideal. That said, Israeli sky marshals and executive protection teams used to carry Walther and Beretta .22



From top left, Detonics USA (Pendergrass) Model 9-11-01 .45 ACP with Crimson Trace LaserGrips, Detonics USA (Pendergrass) CombatMaster .45 in Detonics Black finish, Grandfather Oak Kydex inside waistband holster and SureFire L4 Digital LumaMax.



Clockwise from left, NAA Guardian .380 with Crimson Trace Laser grips, Seecamp .32 on a pocket holster, NAA Guardian .32, NAA Pug .22 Magnum and, smallest of the bunch, a standard Long Rifle Mini-Revolver.

LRs and I doubt any of us would have cared to tell them that using a .22 was stupid.

Assuming a man or woman has the requisite shooting skills and the resolve to risk taking a life if called upon, the better suited the caliber to defensive use, the better the potential results. An old friend I haven't seen in several years carried a Beretta Minx – the tip-up barrel .22 Short semi-auto – in his hip pocket. He was/is a quite gun-knowledgeable guy and I could never quite see why he did that. I mean, as the choices in tiniest semi-automatics went in the late 1970s and earlier, one of the tip-up barrel Berettas was just about as good as you could get. But, that same gun was available in .25 ACP. .25, as anyone will tell you, is not some powerhouse round. My old friend Lynn “Trapper” Alexiou – gunsmith, spring manufacturer, refinisher, writer and video producer – told the story about once seeing a mouse cross the floor of

his spring factory. The only thing available was a .25 automatic. He shot the mouse with a square hit, but it escaped. The story is probably apocryphal, but even though the .25 ACP isn't a very good choice for self-defense, as a centerfire round, it's a vastly better choice than any .22 round, if that .22 is going to be fired from a semi-automatic.

For starters, .22 Short and Long and Long Rifle are all rimfires, meaning that the primer compound is painted on the rim. What if a spot – the spot where your pistol's firing pin is going to strike – doesn't have the primer compound? You can't look at a rimfire cartridge and tell for sure. Oops! Quite unlikely, certainly, but extremely likely is the possibility that the more fragile rimfire cartridges can be damaged when you load them into the magazine or will be damaged when they feed. The bullet can separate from the case. What shooter hasn't had that happen at least once when handling a .22 rimfire cartridge? And, lead bullets with no jacket can more easily catch on anything than jacketed bullets can.

There are .25 ACP hollowpoints and special purpose rounds, but since cartridge size – bullet size and weight and powder charge – really does matter, certain rounds just really are better suited to defensive use than others.

These days, unless budgetary or sentimental concerns over-ride one's better judgment, semi-automatic defensive handguns in .22 rimfire or .25 ACP can be bypassed completely for the same size handgun in a much better caliber choice.



Left profile of the excellent little Glock 27 .40.



Shooting the Glock 27 was a pleasant experience.

That said, I have no idea how many hundreds of thousands or more .25 ACP semi-automatics are in service throughout the world and will be for decades to come. The ammunition is as robust as any centerfire and the .25 ACP generates so little pressure, if the gun is well-made to begin with, it'll essentially never wear out. Anyway, such guns are rarely shot.

Three of the best .25s – only one is still manufactured, to the best of my knowledge, and that in limited quantities – are the Baby Browning, the Beretta 950BS “Jetfire” and the super-inexpensive Phoenix Arms Raven. Yes, the Raven. The guns worked and the people who made them knew the guns inside and out and, when I was a salesman three decades back for a firearms distributor, regular dealer price was \$29.95. Yes, under thirty bucks! Every once in a while, we'd have them on special!

The old 950BS Beretta, mistakenly attributed as the .25 Beretta “007” carried in the James

Bond novels prior to *Dr. No* (Bond's gun was a much earlier model, generally considered to be the Model 418 based on the descriptions in Ian Fleming's books), had an eight-round magazine when most .25s had a six-round magazine. Additionally, the weapon featured a tip-up barrel for easy loading and unloading. Field stripping was ridiculously simple, unless you foolishly removed the grips. The magazine release was push button style, hence faster and more familiar to most shooters. The tip-up barrel feature was a special plus for women with poor finger strength. Later models of the basic Jetfire incorporated a thumb safety. The gun could be carried cocked and locked, if one chose. The Berettas I had and, years and years ago, sometimes carried, were always kept at half-cock. I got into the habit with my first Jetfire, one that had no manual safety. That's the only pistol I would ever carry at half-cock, the half-cock notches on single action Beretta pistols supposedly quite strong. A one-armed American Indian who worked in a shoe repair shop made me an inside waistband holster for the little gun and, quite literally, it was one of the best holsters I ever had and was marvelously concealable. That man was as fine a holstermaker as I've ever encountered.

The Baby Browning has the cachet of being wonderful because it is a Browning, and that's true in most regards. The basic gun – whether current limited production under the name PSA/Precision Small Arms (for US sale, guns for sale outside the USA were marked “FN”) or the long-gone stainless steel Bauer or the originals that were made in Belgium – consists of few parts. A six-round magazine, base of the



Smith & Wesson's M&P 9C Compact is sized for concealability.



At left, a Beretta “Minx” in .22 Short, at right a well-used Beretta “Jetfire” in .25 ACP, a much better choice for an autoloader.

butt magazine release, with a sliding thumb safety, the pistol is striker fired. It is certainly among the smallest handguns to be had, both in length, height and thickness. Various cosmetic grades have been offered over the decades the pistol has been around and, for a number of years, there was a version offered with an alloy frame. I used to carry a Bauer .25 quite a lot, until I talked myself into selling it. The problem I had with this basic Browning design was the ease with which that sliding thumb safety would slide. And, I saw no sense in carrying a super-tiny .25 auto chamber empty.

In addition to PSA, Beretta, Phoenix Arms and Taurus still offer .25s, the PSA and Phoenix guns single actions. Double action, the Beretta Model 21 Bobcat and Taurus PT 25 are clearly the spiritual inheritors to the Beretta 950 BS's crown (which I award posthumously) as the most practical .25 automatic. I like double action handguns, especially when talking about safe carry of pocket pistols. That said, I would still stick by my top three choices – the 950 BS, the Baby Browning and the Raven. I was born in 1946, so, at my age, I've got a right to be set in my ways with some things. Would I carry a .25 these days? Only if I had to and, for some reason, couldn't use my Seecamp .32, my Guardian .380 or my North American Arms Pug .22 Magnum.

As much as I discourage the use of semi-automatic pistols in .22 LR or .22 Short for defense, because of inherent problems one can

have with .22s in semi-autos, I have nothing but praise for the North American Arms .22 Magnums and, if I really can't hide anything larger, the basic one and one-eighth-inch barrel .22 LR. Calling it like it is, a .22 Long Rifle out of one of NAA's reliable and well-made Mini-revolvers, if you rotate ammunition regularly (shoot it off), is way, way better than nothing and should be used, if it must, at or near contact distance against a soft target. It may seem crude, but there's no such thing as not "hitting below the belt" when you are fighting for your life. I view a small, limited sight radius .22 LR as an "eye, ear, nose and throat" gun. I've heard of a practice some police officers use. They carry a .22 Short Mini-revolver that is loaded with .22 Long Rifle cartridges with a portion of the LR cartridges' bullets sawn off, this to have the smallest handgun possible for stashing in a pack of cigarettes or some other hidden on-body location, yet have more "power" than the .22 Short. That seems to me like a great deal of trouble for nothing. The Long Rifle Mini-revolver from NAA is four inches long, while the .22 Short version is three and five-eighths inches long!

When you get to .22 Magnum, though, you're into something more substantial. Many years ago, Freedom Arms, which also made Mini-revolvers, had a Boot Pistol model with a three-inch barrel. Smith & Wesson, at that time, was making a three-inch barrel version of their



The 21A Beretta Bobcat features the convenient and familiar tip up barrel.



The 21A feels almost as familiar to Ahern's hand as the old 950 BS, now discontinued.

justifiably well-respected Kit Gun in .22 Magnum. I was testing both for different articles. Sharon and I had some duct seal – very fashionable in those days for testing bullet performance – and we fired both guns into the duct seal, which is like clay. Regardless of the gun, with ordinary hollow point .22 Magnum rounds, the bullets expanded to roughly .38 caliber and penetrated over two inches. Should we ever be attacked by a claymation figure like Gumby, I'll grab a .22 Magnum unhesitatingly! But, against more commonly encountered enemies, even with one or one and one-eighth or one and five-eighth barrels, the .22 Magnum is better than the .22 LR and is what I would consider the absolute minimum personal defense cartridge.

The NAA Pug is probably the best choice in

this caliber, for combining handling qualities and performance. If you pass on handling qualities, the one and five-eighths standard .22 Magnum Mini-revolver will give you a little more barrel through which muzzle velocity can develop. Both are extraordinarily well-made little handguns.

Currently I do not own a .25, because I have no reason to and I am not a gun collector. I may pick one up again, someday, but it would largely just sit at home. I own a Long Rifle Mini and a .22 Magnum Pug. They're available should I need them and I know they are reliable, while the classic small frame semi-autos which began appearing around the beginning of the 20th century are victims of the less-than-stellar cartridges they employ.



# MEDIUM FRAME SEMI-AUTOS ON THE RISE



This nickel plated Bersa Thunder .380 is a perfect example of a medium frame semi-automatic in a classic medium frame caliber.

**T**he semi-automatic pistol, which emerged as a type in the very late 19th century, was, of course, the harbinger of the future. No longer do the uniformed police who patrol our streets and by-ways or the troopers in our Armed Forces who stand against America's enemies carry a revolver. It's semi-auto, the wave of the present and the wave of the future, at least until death ray guns come along – which, on a personal note, I really hope don't come along for a long, long time. Even Brinks messengers are carrying semi-autos these days. When I was a young guy in Chicago and Brinks guards carried their guns in one hand

and money bags in the other, I got to see some amazing old revolvers. When I was a kid, I remember seeing a black Chicago motorcycle cop who wore a pearl handled revolver on each hip, the holsters suspended from over-long drop shanks, the gun butts at the level of his hands. I remember a white foot patrolman who carried his stag-gripped revolver in a reverse draw, just like the real Wild Bill Hickok and Guy Madison's portrayal on TV. Those colorful days started fading when the early autoloading pistols proved themselves quite a bit more than a collector's oddity.

The early semi-autos were large handguns,



The medium frame is ideal in the hand, large enough to grasp properly and easily, yet not so large as to be harder to conceal. This is a Bersa Thunder .380 in nickel.

of course; our 1911 and 1911A1 and the German Pistole '08 Luger were almost trim little guns by comparison to pistols the size of the C-96 Mauser Broomhandle (which is still a quite formidable weapon, if you can find one with a bore left). What really got people into carrying semi-automatics rather than the familiar revolver were the still smaller autos. We've just touched on the .25s, of course, but they were the super hideout guns. For ordinary citizens who kept a handgun around just in case they needed to carry it, and for cops and military officers and, admittedly, even for some of the gangsters, what was to become known as the medium frame automatic was just the thing.

Medium frame autos really caught on. Even the legendary frontiersman and showman Buffalo Bill Cody endorsed a medium frame auto! Flatter and more concealable than a revolver with a six-shot cylinder, the medium frame was/is a natural to drop into a pocket



This blue Bersa Thunder .380 might be considered by some to be the poor man's Walther PPK/S, but there is nothing poor in quality or performance. All the Bersa pistols examined and fired in association with this project worked like champs.

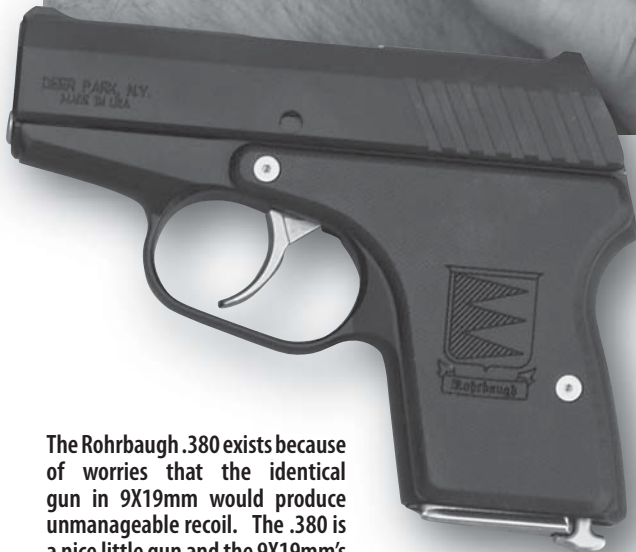


The Bersa Thunder Plus .380 is a larger capacity pistol with double column magazine.

or use with a holster. In 1929, a medium frame auto was to become the first commercially successful double action semi-automatic pistol in the world. That gun, of course, was the Walther PP, initially produced in .32 ACP (7.65mm Browning), then in .380 ACP (9mm



The Rohrbaugh .380 is small as guns in that caliber generally go.



The Rohrbaugh .380 exists because of worries that the identical gun in 9X19mm would produce unmanageable recoil. The .380 is a nice little gun and the 9X19mm's recoil is not horrible.



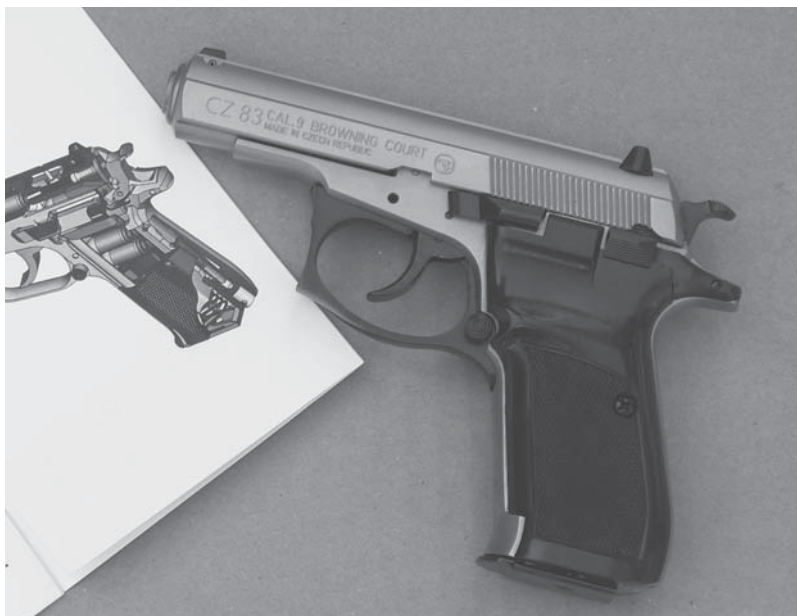
The SIG-Sauer P238 is a single action .380, small in size, slender and quite pleasant to work with.

Kurz). For a number of years, PPs were offered in .22 LR. Shortly after the success of the PP, a slightly smaller version, the PPK, was produced, aimed at undercover police use. There have been many variations within the PP series, such as some PPK production with aluminum alloy frames, some in .25 ACP (6.35mm Browning). Walther PP series pistols have been and still are wildly popular. PPs and PPKs have served not only as civilian and law enforcement concealed weapons, but as openly worn service pistols for police agencies and, during World War II, the German military. The original PP in .32 was the most popular of the guns.

Today, Walther PPs are not manufactured under license in the USA by Smith & Wesson, as are PPK and PPK/S models; as this is written, Walther Germany's website shows German manufactured .32 ACP PP Models still available in blue, but I have been unable to ascertain if anyone is importing them into the USA. The PP in .32 was the most popular model in Europe in the entire PP series, the slightly shorter PPK the most well known variant because of the association with James Bond.



Old and modern, this Walther PP in .32 ACP wears Crimson Trace LaserGrips.



Left profile of the CZ83 with a page from its owner's manual.

The PPK/S came about after the Gun Control Act of 1968 went into effect and banned importation of numerous handguns based on size and other arbitrary factors, the PPK one of these. The PPK/S was a way around the ban, a

hybrid with a PP frame and a PPK barrel and slide, the combination making the PPK/S a pistol that could be imported.

As proof that the PP series guns are still considered modern pistols, I'll call attention to the fact that Crimson Trace LaserGrips are manufactured for the Walther PPK/S. I have a set on my Century International Arms imported police turn-in Walther PP .32. Remember, the grip frame of the PP is the same as the grip frame of the PPK/S.

Other famous names in the firearms business, of course, produced at one time or still produce medium frame autos. Remington had one (the Model 51), as did Savage (the most well-known being the Model 1907). Fabrique National of Belgium and Colt both offered John M. Browning-designed medium frames in .32 and .380, the FN pistols being sold under the Browning marque in the United States. The FN Model 1910, otherwise known as the Browning .380, was banned from importation by GCA 68; a target stocked, target sighted, slightly longer version was imported for a short while



At left, a Beretta 705 .380, at right the 1934 Model, a .32. The Model 1935 was a .380 and the 705 is a much modernized version, long since discontinued.

The 1934 Beretta is generally considered a classic of its type. It was the World War II Italian service pistol. It's also the Beretta used on screen when "James Bond" has to swap to the Walther PPK per the orders of "M." An actual Beretta .25, regardless of model, would have looked rather ridiculously small. The 1934 is a .32, just like the PPK Bond is given.

after that. The original was a truly fine looking and practical personal defense weapon. The post-GCA 68 model was not. The Colt 1903 (otherwise known as the Model M) was the issue General Officers pistol during World War II and was among the weapons of America's Office

of Strategic Services, the famed OSS, which was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency. At a gun show, recently, Sharon and I spotted an after-market nickel plated version of the little Colt and Sharon was amazed at its slimness.

Colt manufactured other medium frame autos, most recently the Colt Mustang and the Colt Pony, the former a single action, the latter a double action. In size and general appearance, the SIG 238, a single action .380, bears a startling resemblance to the Mustang. The Mustang and Pony were among the casualties when Colt's leadership backed away from most civilian handgun model production during the period of uncertainty before The Protection Of Lawful Commerce In Arms Act was passed in the Senate by better than a two to one margin in 2005, during the Administration of President George W. Bush. Some gun makers, like Colt's, cut back production in order to minimize the potential for punitive litigation brought on by anti-firearms administrations in certain of the cities. Others, like Smith & Wesson, when it was

owned by British lawnmower makers before its current pro-gun ownership, had signed a pact with the Clinton Administration, incurring the wrath of firearms rights proponents everywhere. The vote in the House was almost two to one. Six days after the vote in the House, President Bush signed the Bill into law. Other good and promising handguns fell by the wayside, the Autauga .32 among them.

Beretta offers the tip-up barrel Tomcat in .32 ACP and the Model 80 Cheetah series in .380 ACP. Over the years, Beretta has offered numerous medium frames, like the large capacity Model 84 which, for a time, was sold as the Browning BDA .380. One of the most famous and well respected medium frame autos of the 1930s was the 1934 Beretta, this .32 ACP single action being followed in 1935 by a .380 chambering. The pistols have a distinctive look and are quite attractive. Following World War II, Beretta offered a cosmetically altered, more modern looking version of the same basic pistol, sold as the Model 70S, if memory serves. As far as I know, the 70S was offered in .380 and .22 LR, primarily sold in .380 in the United States.

When Smith & Wesson introduced the first stainless steel handgun in 1965 – the Model

60, a two-inch .38 Special J-Frame revolver – the semi-automatic pistol field was slow to catch up. Most people will say that the original Detonics company was the first firm to offer a stainless steel semi-automatic which didn't gall (gouge itself) unless or even if exotic lubrication regimens were followed. However much I'm a fan of Detonics .45s, I believe the Bauer .25, a stainless steel copy of the FN Baby Browning, actually holds that title, although comparing durability concerns between a .45 and a .25 is rather silly.

During the Viet Nam War, considering the jungle environment, a great many persons were interested in rust-resistant personal ordnance. Exotic chrome plating finishes, some truly excellent like the still available work of Mahovsky's Metalife ([www.mahovskymetalife.com](http://www.mahovskymetalife.com)), began to flourish and stainless steel revolvers were nearly as dear as diamond encrusted gold ingots.

But it was not just how the gun held up, but what the gun could do that would literally cause a revolution: a man named Lee Jurras started a business called "Super-Vel Cartridge Company" in Shelbyville, Indiana. Talk about a shot heard 'round the world!



The double action Beretta Cheetah .380 is the latest in Beretta's long and distinguished line of true medium frame autos.

Solo shot of the Beretta 70S. This gun originally had bad grips and only one magazine of dubious quality. Searching the Internet found a domestic source for older Beretta parts and the gun, which belongs to a friend, was restored to original usefulness.

# DOWNSIZING MEDIUM FRAME CALIBER AUTOS



Left profile shot of the Kel-Tec .32, a very popular pistol.

**T**he problem, of course, with smaller handguns had always been that they threw a less effective bullet at the target. Lee Jurras sought to rectify that with the creation of the first high speed jacketed hollow point handgun ammunition. Although Super-Vel Cartridge Company of Shelbyville, Indiana, made a lot of ammunition between 1963 and 1974, their rounds for smaller personal defense handguns achieved the greatest notoriety. I still have part of a box of original Super-Vel .380 hollowpoints, then the ultimate in medium frame semi-automatic ammunition. Lee Jurras sent it to me when I was Associate Editor of *GUNS Magazine*, between 1973 and

1975. It came out of the glove compartment of his Pantera. The Super-Vel cartridges worked so well that he was taking substantial business away from the larger cartridge manufacturers. They learned from him and the abundance of superb cartridges from Remington, Winchester, Federal, Black Hills, Corbon and others might not be available today were it not for his efforts. Lee Jurras is a name that every handgunner should revere.

Because of Lee Jurras, guns like the J-Frame Smith & Wessons and the Walther PPK models were elevated to much more serious ordnance than ever before. As I write this, one of my two usual pocket automatics is in my pocket. Today,



The Kel-Tec .32 and guns like it are palm sized and can be hidden almost anywhere.

it's the Crimson Trace LaserGripped North American Arms Guardian .380, loaded with Remington 88-grain JHPs. At other times, it's my faithful Seecamp .32, loaded with Winchester Silvertip hollow points. Neither cartridge might exist, and, had they not, neither gun would likely exist, either, were it not for Lee Jurras.

Bersa offers the various Thunder Models in .380 ACP, these traditionally-sized medium frame autos. The Walther pistols made in this country by Smith & Wesson, the current Berettas and the two models from SIG-Sauer are also popular traditionally sized medium frame autos. SIG's Model 238, as mentioned earlier, is a pocket-sized single action. The 238 is five and one half inches long, just under four inches high and weighs a tad over fifteen ounces, without magazine. The barrel length is almost two and three quarter inches. Alloy framed, the slide is stainless steel. It is a single action, with this particular gun meaning it will be carried cocked and locked or chamber



The LCP is Ruger's entry into the small, light medium frame pistol market.

empty. Let's assume cocked and locked. And, with that being the case, those persons doing so would have to carry the gun in a holster if they wished to be prudent.





Ahern's trusty Seecamp .32, in his pocket as this caption is written.

SIG's double action medium frame is the 232. It is just over six and a half inches long, just under five inches high and features a barrel that is a little over three and one-half inches. If you get the pistol with an alloy frame, empty weight without magazine is eighteen and one-half ounces. If you go to the all stainless steel model (with stainless steel frame), you are adding another five and one tenth ounces to the empty weight. Magazine capacity is six rounds. The 232, and the earlier 230, as double actions, offer greater versatility in how they can be carried, in my opinion, but are heavier and larger than the relatively diminutive single action Model 238. There are no easy choices when it comes to selecting a concealable handgun, whether for backup or primary personal defense.

While discussing smaller SIG-Sauer pistols, it's interesting to note that the SIG 239, with a capacity of eight plus one in 9mm and seven plus one in .40 S&W or .357 SIG, is 6.6 inches long, just like the 232. The 239 is 5.1 inches high,

making it four-tenths of an inch taller than the SIG 232. The barrel of the SIG 239 is 3.6 inches, identical in length to the 232. The weight factor is substantial. The 239 comes in at 29.5 ounces with alloy frame and the 232 is 18.5 ounces with alloy frame. So, for eleven extra ounces – and I know extra handgun weight bothers a lot of people – you get a pistol available in three of what are usually considered the top four semi-automatic pistol cartridges in the world today. And you get added capacity. If you go with the .40, you can swap barrels, enabling .357 SIG versatility. Data like this makes the intelligent selection of a handgun even more complicated. It is comforting, at least, to know that any handgun you would pick from the SIG-Sauer lineup would be an excellent choice. The most gun knowledgeable man I know, someone who has his choice of a wide range of superb handguns, is quite happy carrying his SIG 239 in .357 SIG.

So, since the SIG 239 is the same size



**The Autauga .32 was a promising little handgun, discontinued during the period when certain city administrations were trying to drag the gun companies into court. No action was brought against the company, but the ownership decided to close it anyway.**

essentially as a medium frame, but in a caliber normally associated with compact or full-size large frame automatics, what is it?

These days, the old size classifications have become very blurred because of a guy named Larry Seecamp and his late father, and a small manufacturing company on the other side of the country which specialized in explosives. Larry and his Dad did the impossible. They took a .25 automatic sized handgun – which was actually identical in size to the .25 auto Colt had been selling – and packed .32 ACP into it. Some years later, with these guns successfully performing in the field, Larry chambered the exact same size handgun for .380 ACP. The .380s work and work well.

Meanwhile, those explosives guys, led by explosives expert, engineer and security consultant Sid Woodcock, took the dream of a man who only wanted a small .45 automatic for himself and did the impossible as well. The original Detonics in Washington state offered

the first factory produced (albeit there was a great deal of hand-fitting) 1911 .45 automatic that was about the same size as a traditional medium frame automatic like the Walther PP. Custom gunsmiths had been making seriously cut down 1911s for some years, the result often referred to as “chopped and channeled.” There was a waiting list months or years long to send one’s full-size or Commander-size 1911 in to some of the top gunsmiths for this treatment, then months more until the gun was returned. Cost was high and didn’t even include the original cost of the gun.

After Seecamp began to enjoy great success with his downsized .32 and the larger gun companies saw that the Detonics guns usually worked quite well, other manufacturers of semi-automatic firearms, who, for years, had been seeing their full-sized automatics being cut down by professional gun whittlers, took notice. Smith & Wesson started offering smaller sized versions of the firm’s popular 9X19mm



Lee Jurras gave Ahern this box of Super-Vel .380 hollowpoints, taken from the glove compartment of his Pantera. That was in the mid-1970s.

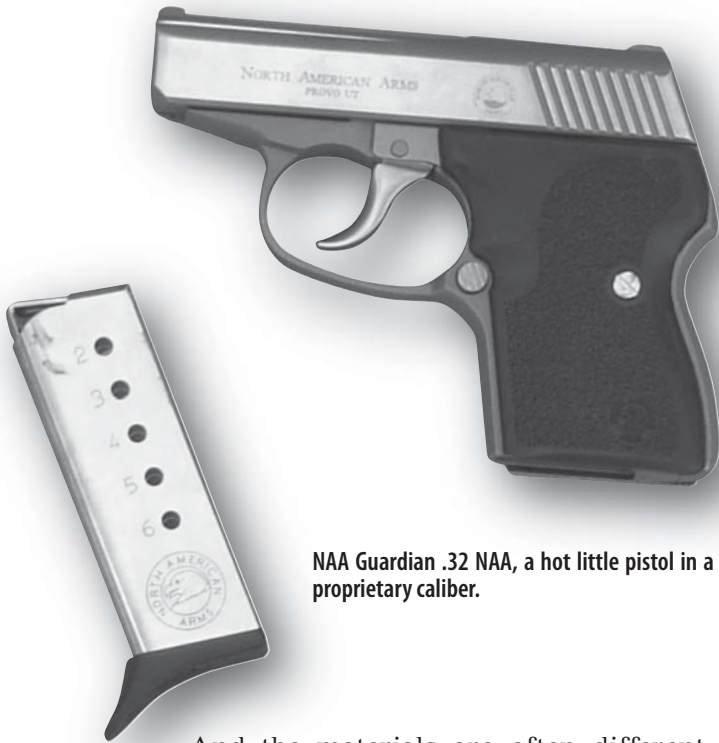


The Rohrbaugh .380, identical in every aspect except caliber to the R9 9X19mm.

semi-autos, inspired it would seem by the ASP and Devel pistols. Colt eventually came out with the Officer's Model .45.

So, now, we have the cartridges that traditionally went into full-size autos being

chambered in handguns the size of traditional medium frames. The cartridges that were once chambered in traditional medium frames are now being chambered in guns the size of a small frame.



**NAA Guardian .32 NAA, a hot little pistol in a proprietary caliber.**

And the materials are often different. Years ago, firearms had steel frames, except for those comparative few with frames made from aluminum alloy. Spurred on by the success of Glock's pioneering work with polymer frames, companies like Kel-Tec CNC and, more recently Sturm-Ruger, have introduced polymer framed .25 auto-sized pocket pistols. Kel-Tec's first effort with such a pistol was a .32 ACP. The Kel-Tec people were well-versed in working with polymer frames, of course, based on an earlier and larger model. The little Kel-Tec .32 has been extremely well-received. The next project was a .380, this enjoying good success as well. Ruger closed out the first decade of the 21st century with its very first small semi-automatic, the polymer framed .380 caliber LCP, which weighs in at 9.4 ounces empty. The Beretta 950 BS Jetfire .25 weighs 10 ounces empty. See what I mean about the distinctions being blurred?

And then we have the Rohrbauh, which is also the size of a small frame semi-auto at just 5.2 inches long, 3.7 inches high and weighing only 13.5 ounces empty. There is a .380 ACP version that handles very nicely. But the model getting all the interest is the R9. It's a 9X19mm. That's 9mm Parabellum, the same cartridge chambered in the full-size handguns on the hips of the majority of cops in the United States, the official handgun caliber of the United States military. My Walther PP .32 is 6.5 inches long, 4.25 inches high and has an empty weight of 23 ounces, Crimson Trace LaserGrips included.



**The Guardian in .32 NAA and the Guardian .380 below it, the .380 wearing Crimson Trace LaserGrips.**

While some were, with varying degrees of success, working with already existing cartridges, the people of North American Arms, the Mini-revolver makers, were coming up with new cartridges. Based on work by stopping power expert Ed Sanow, Cor-Bon's Peter Pi and the design staff of North American Arms, the first of the two cartridges is the .32 NAA, a bottleneck .380 case with a .32 caliber bullet. The second round is the .25 NAA. The .25 NAA was inspired by the .25/.32 cartridge, developed by my old friend and world class firearms expert J.B. Wood. It is a fast round, the nominal .25 caliber projectile sitting rocket-like atop a .32 ACP bottlenecked case.



The Tomcat .32 Beretta features the firm's popular tip-up barrel design, far easier than racking a slide to load or unload – and, safer, too.

Bottlenecked cases are noted for ease and reliability of feeding. .357 SIG is a recent and very prominent example of this successful mating of down-sized bullet to bottlenecked case, in that case a .357 bullet on a bottlenecked .40 S&W case. The NAA cartridges incorporate these same concepts. I've recently been shooting a North American Arms Guardian – the .380 ACP frame size – in .32 NAA and have found the results to be quite interesting.

What used to be referred to as “medium frame autos” these days come in a variety of sizes, of course, and can be found in a relatively wide range of prices. The lowest priced .380 auto to be had, as best as research indicates, is from Hi-Point. Pricing starts a little over a hundred dollars and, depending on model, can be about double that. Such low pricing should not be off-putting. Hi-Point has developed a reputation over the years for good, solid value. Cobra Enterprises has bargain priced .32s and .380s along with a wide range of other guns. The FS .32 and .380 models go for well less than two hundred dollars, the CA .32 and .380 models

being even less expensive. The Accu-Tek AT-380II is still quite a bargain, although around a hundred dollars more in price. At about the same pricing level, you'll find the Firestorm .32 and .380.

Smith & Wesson, as this is written, catalogs no .380, but was scheduled to release the new, state-of-the-art, integral laser Bodyguard .380 in May of 2010. It looks very typical of S&W semi-auto profiles, is to be DAO and will have a 6+1 capacity. No word on price. Taurus, well-known for combining excellence of manufacture and performance with attractive pricing, comes in very near to four hundred dollars with the choice of .32 or .380 in the Millennium Pro. The CZ 83 .32 and CZ 83 .380 are several notches higher on the pricing ladder, the CZ reputation for quality respected worldwide.

The Glock Model 25 .380 is the physically smallest of the Glocks, but no miniature. Glock's reputation for quality and durability is unquestioned. The firm makes truly superior handguns. The Kahr P series .380 is another



The magazine release for Beretta's more modern tiny automatics, like this Tomcat .32, is convenient and easy to operate.

of the more expensive .380 pistols; but unless you've taken a Kahr for a "road test," you might not appreciate what superb shooting machines the typical Kahr products are. Precious little larger than the .380 is the Kahr MK 9 or MK .40. These are superb guns, especially the models which have been slicked up at the factory. The Ruger LCP .380 is a fine compromise between pricing and size, a palm-sized handgun at a suggested retail price of just a tad over three hundred dollars.

We return to what many consider the benchmarks for the traditional medium frame auto calibers, the Walther and the Seecamp. Walther PPK and PPK/S Models, produced in the USA under the aegis of Smith & Wesson, although a little altered – the tangs have been slightly lengthened – are still Walthers, the premier traditionally-sized medium frames

for decades and decades. Larry Seecamp's .32 and .380 Models are, of course, what started the size revolution. Talking to Larry recently, I'm not breaking any confidence by telling you – obviously – he's working on some new ideas that may, one day, become reality. In the meantime, both the higher priced (just under eight hundred dollars) Seecamp .380 and the quite reasonably priced .32, lower priced than either Walther model, are considered the "Rolex" of unobtrusive, personal protection handguns. One idea I must dispel, however, and one I must confirm: in tests I conducted, bracketing two Seecamp .32s around one Seecamp .380, I could barely tell any difference in perceived recoil. As to differences between the Walther PPK and PPK/S, the solid steel backstrap of the PPK/S delivers less perceived recoil to the hand than the wrap-around plastic grips of the PPK.

# HANDGUNS FOR WOMEN AND CLOSE RANGE SHOOTING FOR ALL



**More so than a man, a woman will wisely go out of her way to avoid physical confrontation. And, possibly more so than a man, if trouble starts for a woman, it may well be at extremely close range.**

**W**omen often get to corner the market on raw deals and short ends of the stick. Women also frequently get to benefit from the judgment—or lack thereof—of husbands, boyfriends and fathers when it comes to what handgun they may wind up with in their purses or glove compartments or nightstands. If said interested male is gun-knowledgeable, a woman

who might not be into guns can, indeed, truly profit from such recommendations. However, if the guy doesn't know a great deal about the subject or appreciate women's special concerns for safety, the woman in question may be better off doing what a girl friend of my wife's used to do in Chicago some forty years ago. The woman's father was in the construction business. He gave



The control on this variation of Crimson Trace LaserGrips is on the side, not the front strap.

her a brick to carry in her purse, which she did faithfully, ready, if needed, to swing the purse at an attacker's head or a more obvious target, quite a bit further south. A gun would have been better, of course, but that was in Chicago, where only the cops and the crooks get to be armed on the street. In those more genteel days, when women often wore gloves, carrying change in the palm of the glove was an instant blackjack or sap.

When our daughter, Samantha, turned 21, we gave her an ideal birthday present for someone about whom we care a great deal. I'd gone to my great friend Steve Fishman, proprietor of Sydney's Department Store and Uniform of Augusta, Georgia, a terrific gunshop, and purchased a very gently used Smith & Wesson Model 640 .38 Special. Sam had been shooting since age seven and once cleaned a table of bowling pins with two shots from a full-sized .45 automatic when she was 12. Eventually, Sam wound up with a nice pair of Crimson Trace LaserGrips on that 640.

So let's talk frankly about women and handguns. If a woman is a uniformed cop,

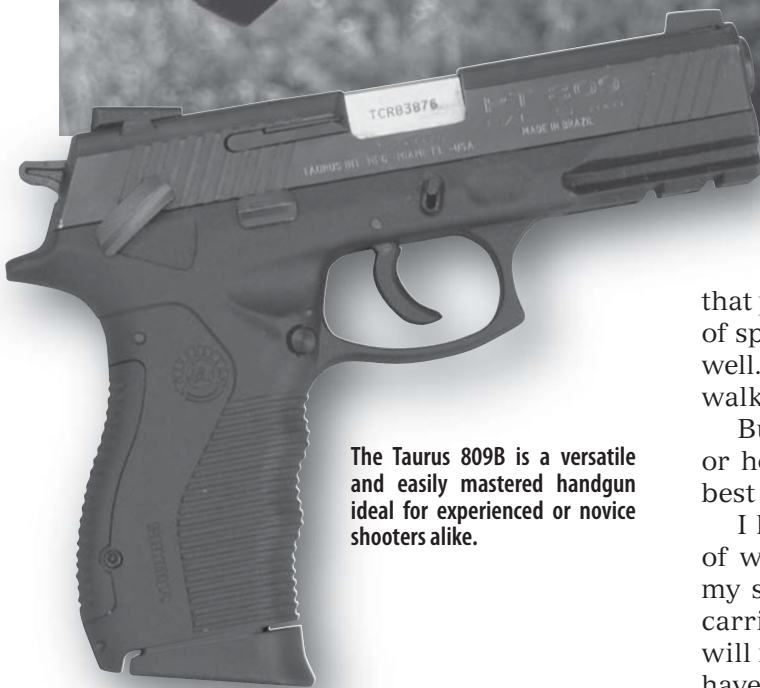
or a cop in an environment where she is in plain clothes but openly displays her badge, concealment is not a problem – until she's off duty. If a woman is a plainclothes cop, she must conceal her weapon just as a man would, but differently, because – big shock here, guys – women are constructed differently!

Sharon and I knew a fine female law enforcement professional who worked with the U.S. Marshal Service. She wore a blazer to cover her strongside carried weapon. She was a lovely and stylish woman, and it worked great for her. But most women will not alter their clothing style in order to carry a concealed weapon, despite specialized clothing that is available for women, designed to hide gun and holster combinations. I'm sure a lot of this specialized clothing is sold, but most women, like it or not, will carry in a purse. Sure, a purse can get snatched, the gun is slow to access and all that. But if you want a woman you care about – whatever the relationship – to have a handgun there if she needs it, you have to be realistic and realize what she'll do and what she won't do.





The Taurus 809B in 9X19mm features an ambidextrous thumb safety and exposed hammer, two features many people like.



The Taurus 809B is a versatile and easily mastered handgun ideal for experienced or novice shooters alike.

Get her to carry that .45 she's so great with on the range and it'll be at home in a drawer if she ever needs it because the gun is too heavy for her to carry comfortably in her purse. Men should do this experiment. Ask the lady in your life if you can borrow a shoulder bag. Assure her that you're not planning a lifestyle change. Take all the stuff you normally carry in your pockets, along with other items she might need – women do that for guys – and stick it all in

that purse. Then, take that 1911-A1 and a couple of spare magazines and put them in the bag as well. Now, hang this from your shoulder and walk around with it all day. You'll get the idea.

But, the subject here is the guns and not how or how not to carry them. So, what guns are best for women to carry concealed?

I have been asked this question in a variety of ways for decades and I'll tell you some of my stock answers and what my wife, Sharon, carries. How do I know what a woman will or will not carry? As this is written, Sharon and I have been married for over 41 years. That kind of gives me a clue. I have a beautiful daughter and a beautiful daughter-in-law and I've done a great deal of research for this book, other books and decades' worth of columns, articles and lectures on concealed carry gear and techniques.

What I normally recommend as my generic answer concerning what a woman should carry in a purse is a .38 Smith & Wesson revolver (or, a similar revolver that is set up the same way). Specifically, I'm talking



Tracy is armed with a Glock 22 fitted with Crimson Trace LaserGrips unit and a Surefire 300 WeaponLight.

about the Smith & Wesson Model 640 .38 Special with two-inch barrel (only manufactured for five years and no longer offered new). The original 640 .38 was and is the best handgun of its type ever devised. Almost identical is the Taurus 850 SS2. If blued works for you or your loved one, the Taurus 850 B2 is a good choice. In the lighter weight revolvers, the original S&W Airweight Model 642 with two-inch barrel, the nearly identical Cobra Shadow .38 Special or the Ruger LCR, or the as yet to be released new S&W Bodyguard .38 would work, but not with +P ammunition. They are lighter weight, hence easier to carry in a purse, yet producing more perceived recoil when fired. This is an important concern. I'm prejudiced about this weight issue, I know, but I recommend all-steel construction whenever possible for women (and men, too). The fully enclosed or shielded hammers of these guns make them perfect for quickest access from inside a cluttered handbag or an outerwear pocket. If you can't find any

of these enclosed hammer models – if you're a woman reading this or a man assisting a woman in personal defense handgun selection – take an exposed hammer version of the Smith & Wesson or Taurus revolvers or go to one of the Charter Arms or Rossi revolvers. If you acquire an original S&W Bodyguard or a similar revolver with shielded but not enclosed hammer, there is always the possibility of a coin or some other object getting lodged between the two sides of the shield and preventing proper hammer function. If you really must, get a Smith & Wesson or Taurus in .357 Magnum, still avoiding the exotic metals as much as possible, and never fire anything more than .38 Special +Ps in the revolver. If you can only find one of the exotic metals revolvers –scandium, titanium, etc. – I'd stick with standard velocity .38 Special hollowpoints and nothing hotter than that. Generally, the lighter the weapon, the heavier the perceived recoil and the lighter recoil-producing ammo required.

If a woman has adequate hand/finger strength and can reliably and easily work the slide of a semi-automatic pistol, try a medium frame caliber auto, as discussed in the previous chapters. But try an auto of any description – medium frame caliber or whatever – only if hand/finger strength is not an issue. For a great many women, it is. If an automatic is the best choice, and hand and finger strength is marginal, what comes instantly to mind is a gun such as the Beretta 3032 Tomcat, with its tip-up barrel. The Tomcat can chamber a round inserted directly into its chamber – its slide doesn't have to be cycled to chamber that all-important first round. For years, before there were small frame automatics in medium frame calibers, Sharon carried a Beretta 950 BS Jetfire .25 in her purse. It was a good little gun, despite the caliber, and served her well. The tip-up barrel feature and the minimal finger strength required to work the slide, if she had to, made a great combination. Sharon is as strong as the average woman, certainly, but her grasping finger strength has never been that great.

When Sharon wasn't carrying that Beretta Jetfire, she carried an original Smith & Wesson Model 60 .38 Special two-incher. We put Goncalo Alves combat stocks on the revolver, giving her more gripping surface. The grips did nothing negative as far as concealment, because the revolver was either in her purse or a coat pocket. These days, Sharon's J-Frame is a Smith & Wesson Model 640 .38 Special with Crimson Trace LaserGrips, the revolver loaded with 158-grain lead semi-wadcutter hollowpoint +Ps, just like Samantha's. When this handgun is too large for the occasion, Sharon carries a North American Arms Guardian .32, loaded with Winchester Silvertips, just like I carry in my Seecamp .32.

More so than a man, a woman will wisely go out of her way to avoid physical confrontation. And, possibly more so than a man, if trouble starts for a woman, it may well be at extremely close range.

Although this is not a book about shooting, and I certainly don't consider myself a shooting instructor, it is appropriate to digress with this chapter. The handguns normally selected for concealed carry often have smaller sights, shorter sight radii and grips which may be harder to hold as securely as one might wish. Because of these factors, and especially for newer shooters or totally inexperienced tyros, it is important when shooting concealed weapons that these shooters are enabled to experience

some degree of success at the outset. This is quite practical, too. Most shooting altercations take place at 21 feet or less, a mere seven yards. When one considers how such a statistic is derived, one realizes that a great many shooting situations must occur at well under 21 feet. My point is that for accurate confrontational shooting training and in order to rapidly instill confidence in beginning shooters – as a great many women and a great many men are – targets should be engaged initially at contact range or close to that, when safety considerations allow.

Obviously, when shooting at extreme close range, one must be significantly more conscientious about the potential for ricochets. And one must understand the gun in question well enough to realize its close range limitations when shooting something solid like an attacker rather than something as flimsy as the typical target. Some handguns, for example, can be pushed out of battery and, consequently, will not fire when the muzzle is pressed against a hard surface – like a human sternum or ribcage. 1911 style pistols are famous for this. During World War II, some Allied personnel were taught that certain handguns which might be used by enemy forces could be disabled for an



**Demonstrating close-range technique:** Ahern prepares to shove an attacker back from his personal space as he readies his gun, an old-style Smith & Wesson Model 640 with Crimson Trace LaserGrips.



At virtual contact range, careful to keep his other hand out of the way, Ahern's laser is in the center ring of the target.



As Ahern takes a pace back, the muzzle rises. His support hand comes onto the gun.



Another step back, the gun coming up but still not at eye level.



The weapon is nearly to eye level, Ahern still another step away from his target.



**Both hands on the gun and looking across the sights, Ahern isn't yet in a good position for this type of aimed fire.**



**At last, Ahern is in a Weaver Stance, the gun on target. At any stage, Ahern could have delivered a center of mass shot. The laser helps, of course, but so does the confidence one can build from starting out so close.**

instant by actually pressing against the muzzle of the weapon, when one was faced with a pistol shoved into one's back. In theory, this works. I've seen it done with a 1911, for example, but I really have no interest in finding out if it works in the field and wouldn't recommend anyone else try it.

For the closest range shooting, you need to make enough room between yourself and an adversary that you can access your handgun. Push, shove, punch, gouge, scratch, knee or whatever to get yourself that fraction of a second to step back and put that foot or so or yard or so of distance between you and an adversary in order to draw your gun. Stab the gun toward your attacker's center of mass as you fire, unless you are very close. Then, keep the gun near your hip or pelvis and fire. These techniques can be practiced on a variety of target media, from simple silhouettes to things like Usama Bin Laden targets (Great fun to shoot at and patriotically uplifting, too!) to the full torso mannequin style, so long as the target itself and how the target is mounted or held up is safe for such close range firing and all other factors regarding basic shooting safety are adhered to.

This type of shooting gives instant gratification to a novice. Just always be doubly careful that the shooter's other hand and all body parts are well clear of the target area. In other words, she shoves with her open palm or knees the target, draws and fires. Make certain that hand or that knee is out of the way. Also, in this reactive style of shooting, make certain the novice has enough trigger control experience so she will not prematurely discharge the weapon. Practice these techniques with an empty weapon before a loaded weapon is used.

In order to accomplish this, you must first set up targets at a more conventional distance, but not a great distance. Again mindful for ricochets and other safety considerations, set up a target about six feet distant. After teaching the fundamental safety and handling techniques every shooter must know and engaging in some dry firing techniques, get the new shooter to comfortably do some target shooting on a silhouette, just aiming for center of mass.

Before doing anything that involves aiming, dry firing or shooting, make certain that the gun is being grasped properly. With an empty gun and correct muzzle discipline, pick up the handgun and position it so that the lateral center of the grip is in contact with the center of the web of the shooting hand, the web being the

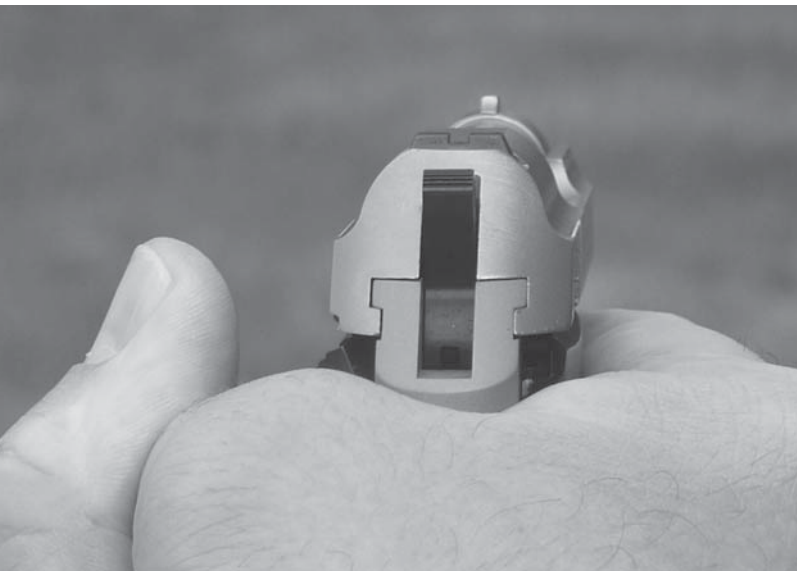


**A good concealed carry gun for a man or woman, especially a beginner, this Beretta 3032 in .32 ACP is easy to shoot and operate.**

area between the thumb and the trigger finger. The hand should be as high up on the pistol as the top of the grip section. With a Colt, a Cimarron or similar single action cowboy style revolver, you obviously don't position your hand so the web is immediately behind the hammer. I'm talking about modern revolvers and semi-automatics.

Once the learner has assumed this grip, again abiding by all safety considerations, whoever is instructing should determine whether or not the hand is going to get in trouble if the handgun is a semi-automatic and the web of the hand is fleshy. This is not a great concern with revolvers, because they do not have slides moving out of and back into battery, shot after shot. If the fleshy part of the web is rolling over the grip tang, the retracting slide will cut the skin. You will have to encourage the shooter to either alter the hand's position or, if practical, get a different handgun. Otherwise, your learner will develop a fear of that slide coming back and biting. Thankfully, women's hands will rarely be large enough or fleshy enough to experience such problems.

Once the grip with the master hand has been considered, you must teach what to do with the support hand. I remember watching that great old television series *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and seeing Robert Vaughn's support hand go under the magazine base plate of the heavily modified P-38s used in the series. In real life – some guns more than others – cupping the palm under the butt of the gun can exert



**The little Beretta .32's sights aren't large, but they're adequate for the type of shooting required from a small personal protection handgun.**

upward pressure on the magazine that can be sufficient to cause a pistol to jam. Not a good thing. When the support hand comes into play, it should be wrapped around the master hand and the pistol grip, roughly so that the middle knuckle of the off-hand first finger is just under the trigger guard and at the lateral mid-point relevant to the grip. This gives a good, solid, secure and comfortable hold that can easily be assumed and reliably helps to control the weapon in recoil.

Once your student is over the idea of the loudness of the report, even with hearing protection, and what perceived recoil there will be, work to tighten groups a little, but remember that you are not teaching bullseye shooting.

Again with an empty gun, have the student practice drawing the gun from wherever it will most commonly be carried. If a purse is where that gun will be in the real world, then don't waste the learner's time teaching her how to get the gun into action from a belt holster. You must emphasize trigger control again and again.

There is great controversy between advocates of aimed fire across the sights and body indexed point shooting. It's a silly thing to argue over. If someone is about to do you harm and you have determined in that micro-second of realization that you must act with potentially deadly force and your adversary is only a few feet away, only someone who had trained in no other technique would take the time to bring the gun up to eye level in a two-hand hold before firing. If your potential murderer might be three feet

or six feet away from you, you must master the technique for body indexed shooting, so that, if this scenario is suddenly your reality, you can shoot as soon as you've cleared your carry system and can stab the muzzle at the target.

To facilitate body index shooting and speed up the process and increase the confidence level, add a laser that can be handily mounted within the gun or, my preference, in the form of Crimson Trace LaserGrips. I talk about Crimson Trace products because I use them on virtually every handgun I have for which LaserGrips are made. The prudent thing is to have the learner work with the laser both on and off, so that a battery suddenly going out – unlikely if the shooter monitors battery service life as he or she should – doesn't prevent the learner from taking appropriate action with the weapon.

The greater the distance to your target, the higher the pistol or revolver can rise after the draw. At contact or near contact distance, get your weapon out and, unless the threat no longer exists, shoot. If someone is twenty or thirty feet away, you'll probably have time to use the sights and, hopefully, move to cover at the same time. Start with the close range and extreme close range shooting and a novice will be getting maximum benefit in the minimum time and can go on from there to further develop needed skills.

As a general rule, when a sudden life-threatening situation arises, promptness of response is at least as important as mode of response. That said, it is only common sense that, if an adversary is extremely close, it would be madness to waste precious time by bringing the firearm up to eye level, acquiring some sort of sight picture and pressing the trigger. Likewise, if an adversary is some distance away – arbitrarily, let's say 20 feet – it would be silly not to use one's sights if time permits. Indeed, at virtual point blank range, extending one's arms in an isosceles or Weaver stance may well be an invitation to have one's weapon knocked aside or worse.

The logical remedy to this predicament is body index shooting, as mentioned. Here's how it is done. Body index shooting from the "hip" or abdomen level at extreme close range is the very specialized and potentially quite useful technique for firing with one hand and bent arm with the weapon as an extension of the shooting hand, while at the same time held extremely close to the body.

Think of the old black and white movies for a moment. The good guy – whether cop, detective,





**The Beretta Storm 9mm is ultra modern and very compact, a good choice for the beginner or experienced persons.**

amateur sleuth, frontier marshal or cowboy – would get the drop on the bad guy. He wouldn't extend his arm from his body, but rather hold the gun close in at approximate waist level. Of course, in many of those old films, unlike real life, at the precise moment the good guy gets the drop on the bad guy, the good guy also decides to practice his oratorical skills while expounding upon some important plot point or another. But, the positioning of the gun in relation to the gun-holder's body is, essentially, quite valid at close range. Most of us have seen some of the old Warner Brothers films starring Humphrey Bogart or Jimmy Cagney. When they had the "drop" on an adversary, it was actually good, close range technique they were demonstrating.

With this hip shooting technique, the good guy can hold a firearm quite inconspicuously and fire quite effectively at close range. My old pal Sid Woodcock taught me the appropriate

technique. After that, it was a matter of practice. On the days when I'm carrying a pistol with Crimson Trace LaserGrips – like my North American Arms Guardian .380 – I practice the technique against a safe backstop, closing my eyes, drawing the gun and actuating the laser, then opening my eyes to see where the laser is pointing. The results are reassuring.

When drawing the weapon, whether from a pocket or some type of holster, try to keep your shoulders level. This may sound simple and obvious. It is neither. When one reaches for a gun, covering garments must be lifted or brushed aside, the body will be moving in such a fashion that the gun arm is either pistoning upward or sweeping from the opposite side of the body, depending on carry technique. The body must recover its equilibrium from such motions in order that the shoulders will become level. A common technique used at close range by handgun armed assassins is to point the gun



**The Beretta Storm features an ambidextrous safety.**

and simultaneously step forward and stomp the foot, this to settle the skeletal support in the moment the trigger is pulled.

It is paramount that the drawn weapon's barrel or slide/barrel assembly is kept parallel to the ground. Remember that the body is the sighting system and, if the weapon is not parallel to the ground, shots will either print high or low. At near contact distance, it matters little, but at even a few feet away, resultant error from failure to keep the firearm parallel to the ground will be magnified and the consequence will be a missed shot or shots or even injury or death to an innocent.

Never forget that, with this type of shooting, the target is the opponent's center of mass. Don't go for anything fancy. You want to hit that center of mass and keep multiple shots grouped no more than three or four inches apart. During practice sessions, of course, one is naturally "aiming" for center of mass hits on a silhouette target, one which would be positioned for an average height person so that the silhouette's

"shoulders" would be at more or less the same height as one's own. If you are a shorter statured man or woman, someone below average height, once you get the hang of the technique, it might be incumbent upon you to raise the height at which the firearm is held, perhaps from the approximate level of the pelvis or waist to a slightly higher position, this merely by extending the arm an inch or two further forward. This is important to remember because the weapon must be held at a height equivalent to the mid-body point of the target, if one wishes to go for center of mass hits. If instead of hitting, say, at the level of an attacker's sternum, you hit in the abdomen, you might have different results. You are not trying to kill someone, remember; instead, you are defending your life or the life of an innocent by reacting to a threat and the whole idea is to put the attacker down so the attack will cease.

The reasoning behind keeping your shoulders level as you draw and prepare to fire is so that you may enhance hand-eye co-ordination for accuracy. To repeatedly assume the correct hold and stance for an instant response in situation after situation, whether in training or real world use, the body itself becomes the reference to the target, the aiming device, as it were. I have been practicing this since Sid Woodcock first taught me the principles behind the technique and it has proved to be remarkably simple.

As the gun is pointed at the target in practice, you should try to develop the habit of viewing your handgun from above while at the same time watching the target dead on. The slide top strap of an automatic, for example, will be in the lowest boundary of your vision. When using a semi-auto pistol rather than a revolver, you must be especially careful to guard against hot brass hitting your eyes. Safety glasses are very important during practice because of the position at which the gun is held. Make certain that these glasses fit rather closely. I've had the experience of a piece of hot pistol brass dropping between my shooting glasses and my face and burning my cheek. I wouldn't have wanted that brass coming in at a slightly different angle and striking my eye.

In order to speed up the learning process and enhance hit capabilities by instantly correcting one's hold, a laser sighting device can be extremely useful, as noted. Let me emphasize that I am not recommending that the laser takes the place of practice. The laser will merely speed up proficiency by showing you every time where the hits would be if you are dry firing or

showing you before triggering a shot that you need to adjust the point of impact.

Albeit that a number of high quality laser systems are available on the market, I favor the Crimson Trace LaserGrips or a laser which is incorporated within a guide rod, in both cases because of the ease of carry and use, but also because they do not alter the natural balance point of a weapon with which the operator may already have developed some considerable familiarity.

Balance of the weapon must be considered as extremely important. Weight and size of a weapon can seriously affect how you hold it. When we're talking body index shooting at extreme close range and you are using different handguns, you may well find that the muzzle will be high or low, depending on the balance point of the weapon and the weapon's weight. For me, at least, a lighter weight handgun will have a tendency for the muzzle to rise, while a heavier handgun's muzzle may have been dead on. The lesson to learn from this is that, perhaps, for consistency with this type of shooting, one should either stick to similarly balanced and weighted weapons or practice so much with each weapon you might use in this context that your body develops the ability to naturally compensate.

Safety must be paramount. Remember that an empty gun practiced with in front of a mirror will hang differently in the hand than a loaded gun will at the pistol range. The weight is unavoidably different. If you are using a semi-auto, as most shooters do these days, it might be a good idea to buy an old, "beat up" magazine, pull the follower and magazine spring and insert some lead fishing weights of an equivalent weight to the number of cartridges the full magazine would hold, plus the one in the chamber. Use epoxy poured into the magazine to keep the weights from shifting around or rattling. If using a revolver, get some empty brass and persuade your friendly neighborhood bullet caster or black powder shooter who makes his own projectiles to add an appropriate amount of weight to those empties.

It's a good idea not to forget that some handguns naturally point high or low for some of us. The method by which you can determine what your own weapon or weapons will do is actually pretty simple. Start out with the eyes closed and just point the weapon straight ahead (obviously observing all prudent safety precautions). Open your eyes and observe where your weapon is pointed. This simple



**Balance point, weight and grip angle, when they are just right for your hand, can make a big difference in the quality of your shooting, whether body index shooting or aimed fire across the sights.**

exercise will assist you in determining whether the handgun's muzzle naturally points up or down. If you have a handgun that points way off when you do this, you might want to think about whether or not this particular model is a wise choice for you defensively. If you have the opportunity when you are shopping for a handgun to safely perform this little test (without creeping people out), it could save you a lot of money. Balance point, weight and grip angle, when they are just right for your hand, can make a big difference in the quality of your shooting, whether body index shooting or aimed fire across the sights.

Start with the target at nearly point blank range, perhaps only a yard or so away. Be careful lest the weapon is held so close to the body that your clothing will interfere with your pistol's slide operation. As the weapon is walked on target at the range, acquisition of the target with the first shot or shots will become easier and easier.



Getting used to a derringer like this one from Bond Arms, presents a whole set of technique related issues. Danny Akers is at The Firing Lane in Bogart, Georgia.

Mastering close range and distance shooting alone will not be enough. Other elements of close range shooting, to include movement and the like, should be studied and practiced. Remember that in a perceived dangerous situation, your adrenalin will be pumping, your vision will be somewhat distorted and your body may actually tremble because of the adrenalin rush and other aspects of typical human fight or flight response.

The worst mistake a person can make in helping an inexperienced man or woman to acquire a firearm is not teaching that man or woman how to use that firearm, or seeing to it that someone teaches how the weapon is properly and safely used. When your child turns 16, you don't just give the kid the keys to the family car without instruction. One must have confidence both in one's weapon and one's ability to use it as intended in order for the weapon to be worth its weight. A firearm, the mechanics of which an inexperienced man or woman barely understands, will be useless in an emergency, except, perhaps, as something that is thrown at an attacker or used to club him.

Women can be tenacious, deadly fighters when their children or families are threatened,

but women are generally raised to be gentle and compliant, nurturing and non-aggressive. A lot of that is changing, of course, with women so frequently engaging in contact sports like basketball and even ice hockey and more and more women getting into physical fitness regimens which may include kick boxing or some other martial art.

Part of helping a woman or a man to be sufficiently competent with a handgun that it will be carried concealed, won't be left at home and will be drawn and brought into action if necessary is assisting the new concealed weapons carrier in the understanding of why deadly force needs to be one of many options and exactly what the use of deadly force implies. If you are a man or woman who is confident you would never use deadly force, you are probably not someone who would be reading this book. So it's simply a matter of priorities, isn't it? Whose life is more important to you? Is the life of a robber or rapist or sadistic thrill-killer of greater importance to you than your own? No one wants anyone's loved ones to have to grieve; but, given the either/or choice, would you rather your attacker's loved ones grieve his passing or your loved ones grieve yours?

# SNUB-NOSED REVOLVERS



A Cimarron Arms copy of a short barreled concealment revolver from the mid-19th Century, a Colt Pocket Model. (Cimarron Photo)

**A**lthough any knowledgeable firearms person will tell you that a semi-automatic pistol is typically a far simpler mechanism than a double action revolver, that same well-informed person will likely freely admit that the double action revolver is easier to operate, whether we're talking about actually shooting or merely loading and unloading of the weapon.

The complications associated with a revolver's mechanism are coincident with the multiple mechanical functions needed for the gun to work, and the fact that, by the very nature of how these mechanical functions are accomplished, there are all sorts of entryways

into a revolver for dirt and debris, far more so than for the typical semi-automatic.

Back in my days with *GUNS Magazine*, one of our regular contributors was Colonel Charles Askins. Askins was not just a knowledgeable gun person, but a terrific writer, too. And, he was a truly fine shot. Before World War II, as Askins related in one of his articles, he saw no problems with relying on a double action revolver in the field. But, slogging through Europe in all sorts of rotten weather conditions brought home to him just how comparatively delicate a revolver really was.

But simplicity of operation – firing, loading

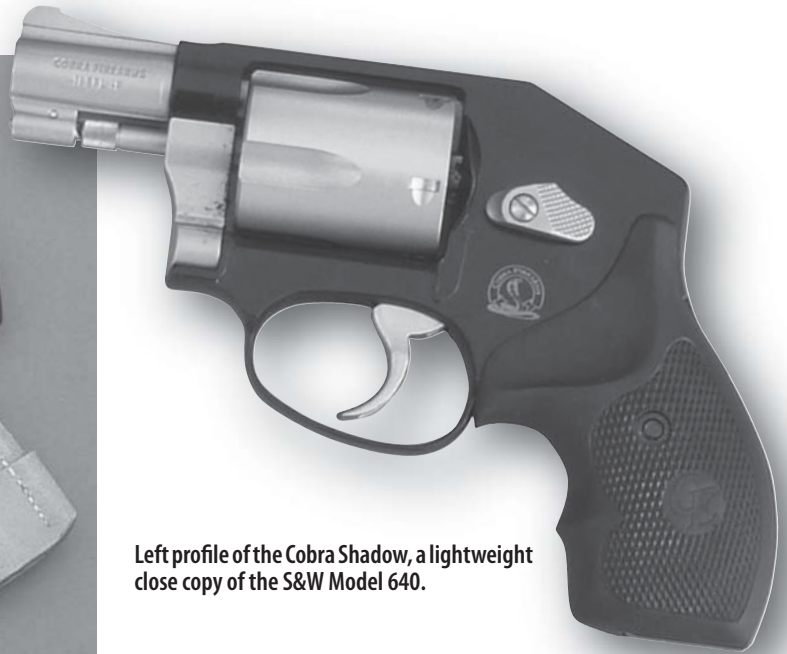


At top, Sharon Ahern's old-style Model 640 .38 Special, below that Jerry Ahern's old-style 640, both with different styles of Crimson Trace LaserGrips. The holster is for pocket carry.



Ahern holds the Cobra Shadow in his right hand, a Model 60 Smith & Wesson in his left. Note subtle differences, like the front of the crane.

and unloading – keeps the small revolvers popular. And, unless the gun is subjected to the harshest of field conditions, as Colonel Askins had to endure with his revolver, the good quality revolver will do just fine. Like semi-automatic pistols, revolvers can be ammunition sensitive, but not to the same degree. The principal ammunition related issue for the double action



Left profile of the Cobra Shadow, a lightweight close copy of the S&W Model 640.

revolver is primer seating depth. If the primers on the cartridges you place in the cylinder of your revolver are raised, the cylinder might very well not turn. So, yes, you can get a jam with a revolver, but it's unlikely in the extreme with factory loaded ammunition.

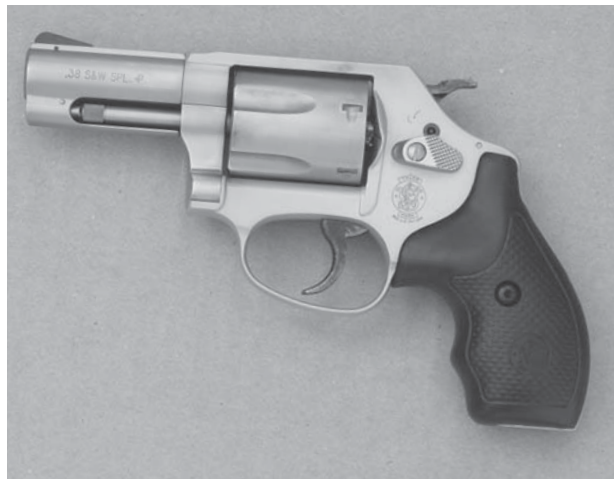
Historically, in the United States, the snub-nosed market belonged to Colt and Smith & Wesson. In the mid-20th century, along came Ruger and Charter Arms and the Rossi revolvers from Brazil. Ruger never had a true snub nosed, small frame revolver until the LCR debuted well along in the first decade of the 21st century. In the 1970s, the Taurus revolvers, also from Brazil, began to be noticed in the USA. Smith & Wesson-like and lower-priced, they caught on and grew.

The category of snub-nosed revolvers is usually defined by a nominal two-inch barrel, but many of these same revolvers can be had, at times, at least, with nominal three-inch barrels.

Charter Arms had its ups and downs, but seems, in modern times, to have hit its stride. Built on innovation from the very beginning, Charter has continued this tradition with such things as its mirror image left-hand revolver. Rossi revolvers are now manufactured by Taurus, but as a distinctly different line. Under its own name, Taurus offers a wonderfully full line of snubby revolvers. Smith & Wesson, of course, continues its tradition of world-class revolvers. With Cobra and Ruger offering snubbies, the choices for the consumer run the gamut of pricing and features.



The innovative Ruger LCR is a modularly built .38 Special revolver.



The Smith & Wesson Model 637, like so many concealment handguns, is extremely light weight.



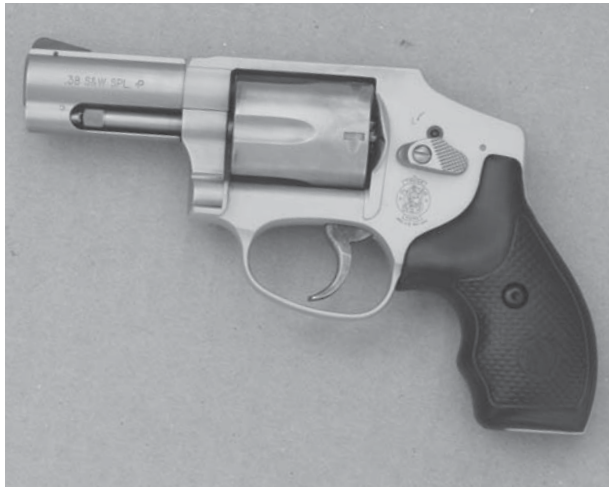
When firing guns like the S&W Model 637 with hotter ammunition, expect serious recoil; you'll get it.

During the Clinton administration years, before legal protection for gun manufacturers was passed by Congress and signed into law by George W. Bush, as noted elsewhere, a number of anti-Second Amendment city administrations went after gun makers with law suits and threats of law suits. The philosophy seemed to be that the cigarette makers had proven to be fair game in the court system, so, why not gun makers? The idea, of course, was to gouge as much money as possible, then force the gun makers out of the civilian arms business. Colt, at that same time, abandoned most of its handgun line, snub-nosed revolvers among the casualties.

A list of the two largest makers of snub-nosed handguns would still include Smith & Wesson, of course, but the principal competitor to Smith & Wesson's offerings is Taurus USA, and that is a situation that is likely to remain.

The Colt Detective Special, as well as the Agent and Cobra, will still be found from time to time as used guns. Of robust design, one of these revolvers in good condition would likely provide a lifetime of service with the proper ammunition choices. And that can be said for all of the snub-nosed revolvers I have ever tried. Treat them properly and they will serve you well.

The Colt revolvers were derived from the Colt Police Positive, the smaller-framed .38 Special six-shot service revolver in the Colt line in the early years of the 20th century. Original swing-out cylinder revolvers on this frame size were introduced as early as 1889. The Detective Special was a Police Positive with a two-inch barrel. The Smith & Wesson J-Frame of 1950, on the other hand, was an enlarged I-Frame gun, beefed up to take .38 Special.



Left profile of the Smith & Wesson Model 642 .38 Special.



Ahern bought his first all steel J-Frame S&W in 1967. This old-style Model 60 is more recent than that, of course.



Ahern using body index shooting with a revolver, a skill useful in close range confrontations.

Smith & Wesson produced, of course, snubby K-Frame (smaller medium frame) revolvers, but they weren't small enough. The earliest I-Frame was the .32 Hand Ejector of 1896. The J-Frame five-shooter that so captured the market was the original Chiefs Special Model 36, a true classic that provided the inspiration for all of the five-shot .38 Specials in today's market, regardless of the maker. Other makers' handguns have their own distinctive features and design differences, of course, but that these guns all have marked similarities – frame size, overall length, cylinder capacity and caliber to name the most obvious points – is undeniable.

Because the range of snub-nosed .38 Special revolvers is so broad, the wise shopper will examine as many of these different models

as possible, being careful to consider all features.

Weights range from 22-1/2 ounces to jarring featherweights at 13-1/2 ounces. Construction materials can be ordnance steel, stainless steel, magnesium, titanium, aluminum and scandium. Blue and nickel plated finishes are available. You can have gold highlights. You can have multiple colors on the same gun, because of differing metals used. Calibers include .357 Magnum, .38 Special (+P rated), .32 H&R Magnum and .22 Magnum. You can have recoil absorbing grips, fiber optic front sights and lasers.

If you choose a snubby wisely, it can be a tool that will serve you faithfully for life. My first handgun was a snubby revolver and I wouldn't be without one to this day.



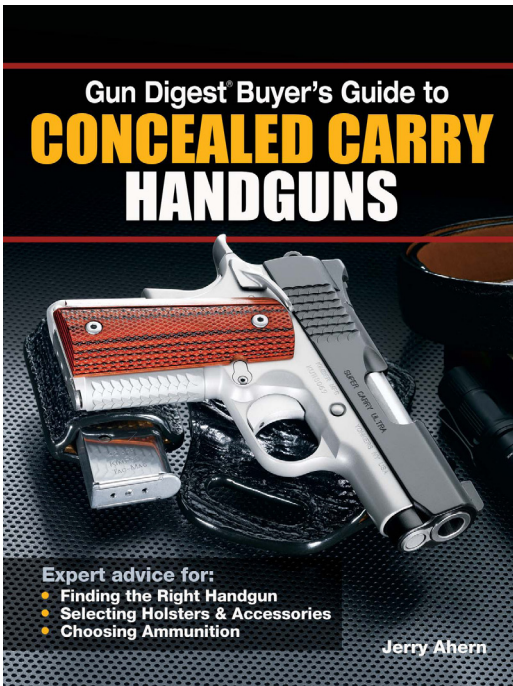
# NEED HANDGUN HELP?

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