▲ *A proper seating position is high enough so half the shooter's torso is above the bench, yet low enough to allow both feet to be flat on the ground.*

CHAPTER 12:

# THE BENCHREST POSITION

The most fundamental position that any new pistol shooter should learn is the benchrest position. The position derives its name from the fact that the shooter fires from a seated position, using a rest on a shooting bench for pistol support.

**Preparing To Use The Benchrest Position**

Before assuming the benchrest position, a number of items must be assembled. First and foremost is a shooting bench approximately 30 to 36 inches high, with sufficient space for the shooter's elbows, sandbag rests, ammunition and spotting scope, if used. Sturdiness and stability are a must; card tables, planks across sawhorses, etc. do not afford the steady rest necessary for accurate shooting. Best are benches designed expressly for shooters; some may have a cutout for the shooter's upper body.

The next requirement is a chair or stool for use with the shooting bench. This should be high enough so that about half of the shooter's torso is above the bench. Proper height in relation to the shooter's legs is also important. The seat should allow the shooter's feet to be flat on the ground, with an angle at the knee joint of approximately 80-90 degrees. The exact angle will vary somewhat, depending upon the leg length of the shooter.

Also needed is a rest for supporting the pistol. There are many types of these, from simple sandbags to elaborate devices providing support for both the pistol and the shooting hand, and offering various types of adjustments. Even homemade rests, such as old telephone books or a rolled-up jacket, can be used with some success, although such expedients often do not offer the consistent performance of products made specifically for supporting firearms.

Hard-kicking pistols tend to lift the shooting hand and, as a consequence, drive the elbow of the shooting arm downward. Thus, for extended benchrest sessions with heavy-recoiling centerfire pistols, an elbow pad is often recommended.

Another accessory that can make the benchrest range session more productive is a spotting scope, an optical device that allows the shooter to see bullet holes at 25 to 50 yards and more. The shooter should also have a supply of targets, a stapler for attaching the targets to a target board or backer, target pasters, and of course, eye and hearing protection. More information on useful shooting accessories is found in Selecting Pistols, Ammunition and Accessories.

*A sandbag or other device can be used to support the wrists and palms, but not the pistol itself.*

*A quality spotting scope with tripod allows the shooter to see bullet holes at a distance without wasting time walking downrange to inspect the target.*

### Assuming The Benchrest Position

Once a comfortable and stable seated position is achieved, use the unloaded pistol to try different rest positions to find the one offering the greatest stability, balance, and comfort. Rest height is of considerable importance. The proper height allows your arms and elbows to contact the rest and benchtop comfortably and naturally, and allows your head to be in a natural upright position.

a standard or predictable amount of change in bullet impact at a known distance (e.g., 0.5 inches at 50 yards), making precise and repeatable sight adjustments easier.

Red-dot and telescopic sights have similar windage and elevation adjustments, usually by means of knobs or dials that are often located roughly in the middle of the sight. The direction of adjustment, and the value of each click, are normally found on the scope's adjustment knobs or dials. Many click values are given in minutes of angle (1 MOA=1.04 inches at 100 yards). Common click values for pistol scopes are 0.5 inch and 0.25 inch at 100 yards, or 0.5 and 0.25 MOA. Adjustment instructions and other information are found in each pistol scope's owner's manuals.

Once the gun is zeroed at the desired range with the ammunition to be used, different zeros can be established at different distances, or using different ammunition.

Zeroing pistols with fixed iron sights can be challenging, as there is no easy or precise means to bring the point of aim into alignment with the point of bullet impact. Some changes in elevation can be produced by using different loads. In general, at relatively short distances (25 yards and under), heavier, slower-moving bullets will print higher on a target than lighter, faster-moving bullets. This is because gun recoil begins while the bullet is still in the barrel, and slower-moving bullets are in the barrel longer, and thus exit the bore when the muzzle is elevated at a higher angle due to recoil. Experimentation with different loads will often bring bullet impact acceptably close to the sights' point of aim at a reasonable target distance. When it does not, the only recourse may be for a gunsmith to install a higher front sight (if bullet impact is too high) or remove material from the front sight (if bullet impact is too low).

When the rear fixed sight is mounted on the gun's slide or frame by way of a transverse dovetail, windage adjustments can sometimes be effected simply by drifting the sight laterally in the dovetail. This task is usually best left to a competent pistolsmith.

▶ *With a given cartridge, it may be necessary to try both high- and low-velocity loads to bring bullet impact into alignment with the point of aim at a specific distance.*

**Using The Benchrest Position To Improve Pistol Shooting**

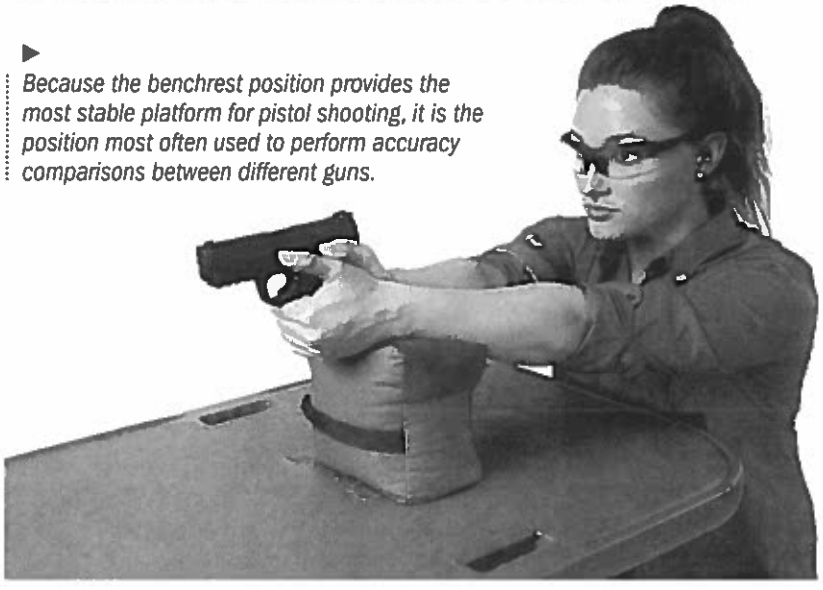
Many novice pistol owners, when shooting offhand or from various other pistol positions, spend most of their concentration and energy in trying to hold the pistol steady on target, and, as a result, often fail to observe all the shooting fundamentals. The benchrest position, because it makes it easier to hold the pistol steady, allows the shooter to focus on the fundamentals, and is thus a good tool for refining shooting technique.

Shooting from the benchrest position is not just for beginners, however. Most top competitive shooters regularly spend time shooting groups from the benchrest position. This activity allows them to consciously focus on, and review, individual aspects of technique.

In addition to technique, many other things may influence shooting accuracy. Accuracy refers to the ability to deliver shots to the point of aim consistently, repeatably and with a high level of precision. Different ammunition loads, gun components such as barrels and triggers, and even accessories such as shooting glasses can all affect the level of accuracy that is achieved. The benchrest position, because it affords the most stable and precise technique for pistol shooting, is ideal for evaluating the effects of different loads, gun modifications and other factors on accuracy.

Meaningful accuracy comparisons can only be obtained by the proper testing procedure, performed in a consistent way. For more information on such a procedure, see Chapter 17: Selecting Pistols, Ammunition and Accessories.

**Notes:**



*Because the benchrest position provides the most stable platform for pistol shooting, it is the position most often used to perform accuracy comparisons between different guns.*

The bend in your support arm elbow will cause your firing hand to push forward, into the support hand, which simultaneously pulls rearward. For some shooters, the push/pull tension that's created provides more stability holding the pistol, and steadiness while aiming, than the isosceles position does with its equal tension, two-handed grip. The bend in your elbow also acts as a spring to help you absorb recoil and recover more quickly between shots.

Keep in mind that depending on your body type and flexibility, you may need to adjust the position of your shooting arm and the angle of your support elbow to find what works best.

To help with recoil and shot recovery, some shooters like to combine somewhat of a boxer's stance into the Weaver position, with the leg on the firing side rearward and both knees bent slightly.

The focus of the Weaver position is the relationship between the positioning of your support arm and your firing-hand arm. The position's isometric push/pull helps you handle the recoil of the gun and returns it to the original line of sight after each shot.

◀ **Assuming The Isosceles Position** *Both arms are extended fully forward, approximating an isosceles triangle when seen from above. The isosceles position is more naturally and easily assumed by many novices.*

### The Low Ready Position

In some shooting situations, you may not immediately go into a firing position, but may have to hold your firearm in a ready position for a period of time, in anticipation of use. Alternatively, after firing a number of shots, you may want to lower the gun temporarily, to rest the arm muscles, before continuing shooting. In both circumstances, a ready position is used. One ready position is presented in this course: the low ready position.

One way of visualizing the low ready position is to adopt the shooting position and then simply lower the extended arms approximately 45 degrees downward.

The simplicity of the low ready position, and the unobstructed view it gives of the target, are two of its primary advantages. The position also permits easy assumption of the shooting position. With the arms already extended, the wrists already locked and the feet and shoulders already aligned, the gun is simply raised to eye level to acquire the sights and fire.

**Assuming The Low Ready Position**

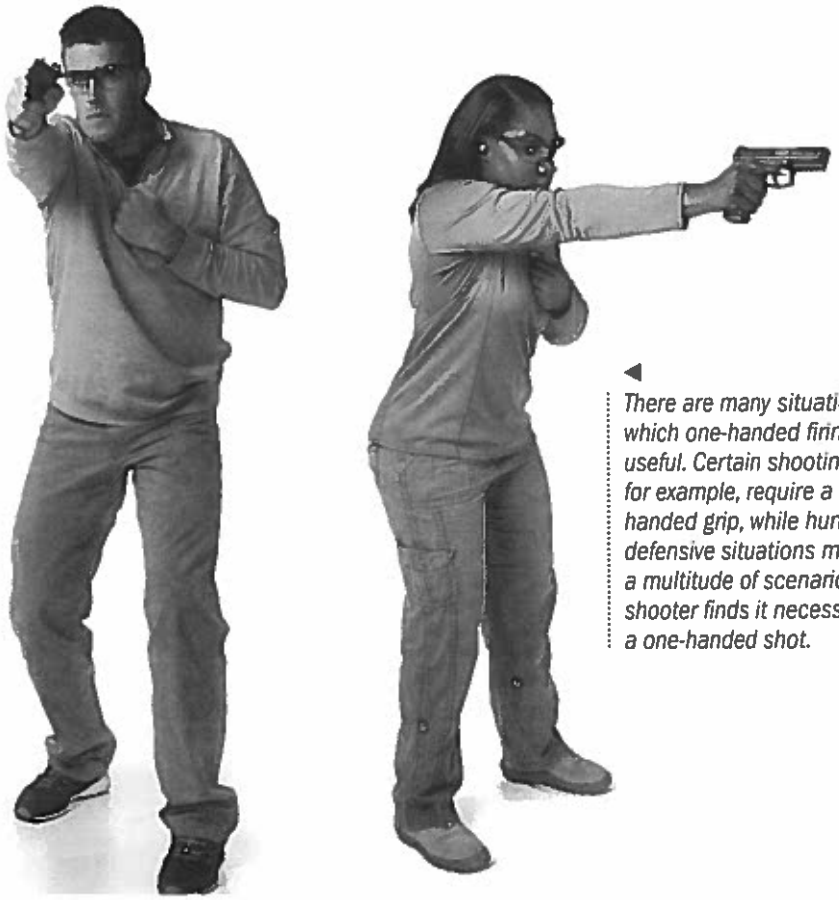
*Take the proper grip on the pistol and extend the arms outward and downward at approximately a 45 degree angle. The firearm will be oriented toward a point on the ground several feet in front of you. Your knees should be slightly bent and the weight slightly forward, in anticipation of either movement or the acquisition of a full firing position. Your foot and shoulder position should reflect the firing position that you plan to assume (e.g., isosceles, Weaver, etc.).*

**Notes:**

CHAPTER 14:

# THE ONE-HANDED SHOOTING POSITION

The well-rounded pistol shooter must be as comfortable with one-handed firing as with the more familiar two-handed methods.



*There are many situations in which one-handed firing may be useful. Certain shooting sports, for example, require a one-handed grip, while hunting or defensive situations may present a multitude of scenarios where a shooter finds it necessary to take a one-handed shot.*

Perhaps the single most critical factor in one-handed pistol shooting is having good trigger control. It can be challenging to smoothly manipulate the trigger while also applying a firm grip on the pistol. New shooters should practice, in dry-fire, isolating the trigger finger from the rest of the grip. This can be practiced by taking an unloaded pistol and lining the sights up on a target. With a firm grip on the pistol, the shooter practices pressing the trigger straight to the rear without disturbing the sights. If the gun is moving too much while the trigger is being pressed, the shooter should adjust grip pressure until the trigger finger can move freely enough to effectively fire the gun.

When the one-handed position is used during bullseye pistol competition, the non-firing arm is in a relaxed position with the hand resting on the waist, in a pants pocket, or on the belt buckle. For modern defensive and practical pistol shooting the support arm is tucked against the chest with either a flat palm or a fist resting on the sternum. It is important that the support hand be in contact with the chest for two reasons. First, it minimizes the chance of sweeping the support hand with the muzzle of the firearm. Second, doing so keeps the support arm from acting as a pendulum, swaying with the recoil of the firearm. This motion of the support arm transmits to the firing hand, creating movement of the pistol and making it much more difficult to hold the sights on target. There may be times in a defensive scenario when the support hand is called upon to operate a cell phone or flashlight, or open a door. Once the support hand is free it should return to the chest unless prevented by injury.

If the one-handed shooting position is used for slow fire bullseye target competition, there is little need for the shooter to lean toward the target (as in the isosceles and Weaver positions), since this activity does not usually require rapid shooting and recoil control. However, under circumstances in which a heavy-recoiling pistol is used, or during the rapid-fire stage of competition, the shooter's upper body may lean slightly forward, with most of the body weight on the forward (shooting-side) leg. The support-side leg acts as a brace to support the aggressive, forward-leaning stance. This positioning allows for more efficient use of the shooter's body mass to mitigate recoil.

The one-handed position can easily be assumed from the low ready position, simply by stepping toward the target with the shooting-side foot and raising the gun with the shooting hand. With practice, the shooter will come to automatically assume the proper foot and body position.

*Because the one-handed pistol shooting position is inherently less stable than any two-handed position, good shooting performance is even more reliant upon proper technique.*

CHAPTER 15:

# COMMON PISTOL SHOOTING ERRORS

In principle, shooting a pistol is simple: Keep the sights aligned on the target as the trigger releases. In practice, however, shooting is a highly refined skill that takes coordination, discipline, and a great deal of practice. Moreover, there are many errors or habits that may contribute to poor shooting, without the shooter being aware of them.

In general, pistol shooting errors may be traced to either a lack of consistency or a lack of proper form. Consistency refers to the ability to perform an action in exactly the same way, time after time. Proper form refers to the manner in which an act, such as aiming, holding the pistol or pulling the trigger, is performed. While some shooters who use poor form, but use it consistently, may still be able to shoot well under some circumstances, proper form is still preferable because it allows the shooter to more easily achieve or maintain consistency, accuracy, recoil control and so forth.

Note that in the following discussion, the changes in group position produced by various errors are described as they would occur for a right-handed shooter. A left-handed shooter would experience changes in the opposite direction. Note also that some shooting errors will be more evident from a one-handed shooting position.

▲ *This wide, random pattern is typical of a novice pistol shooter who lacks consistency in virtually every aspect of technique. A more experienced shooter usually succeeds in achieving tighter grouping. Even for an inexperienced shooter, group placement may reveal a specific type of pistol shooting error.*

**Effects Of Aiming Errors On Bullet Placement**

*Note that a sight alignment error results in greater group deviation from the desired point of impact.*


**Aiming Errors**

Aiming errors can make it impossible to reliably hit a target. There are two basic types of sighting errors. Errors in **sight alignment** result when the proper relationship of the front and rear sights is not maintained while the shot is fired. Such errors can occur only with iron sights. Errors in **sight picture** result when the aligned iron sights, the dot of a red-dot scope, or the crosshairs of a telescopic sight, are not properly aligned with the target when the shot is fired. This most commonly happens simply because it is difficult to hold a pistol perfectly still in relation to a target.

Sight alignment errors are a greater accuracy problem than errors in sight picture. Small errors in sight picture generally cause a small shift in bullet impact. Small errors in sight alignment are magnified with greater distance, and thus produce a larger shift in bullet impact.

### Trigger Errors

For maximum consistency and accuracy, the trigger of a firearm must be pressed or pulled straight to the rear. The pull must be properly controlled to allow the sights to remain perfectly aligned with the target until the hammer, sear or firing pin is released and the shot is fired.

Poor trigger control can simply result from inconsistent application of trigger technique, or it may reflect the development of bad habits.

Trigger problems can often be diagnosed through the use of a laser pointer attached to the firearm. Observing the movement of the laser dot when the trigger is pulled often reveals faulty trigger technique.

### ▼ Grouping Errors Reveal Trigger Finger Problems

**Jerking The Trigger** *may result when the shooter attempts to fire the shot at the exact instant the moving sights cross the target. Jerking the trigger invariably results in poor accuracy, as it cannot be performed with any consistency and pulls the sights out of alignment. Jerking the trigger often results in either a too-large group, or a tendency to group shots low and to the left. The solution to jerking the trigger is to concentrate on a trigger squeeze that produces a surprise break in firing the shot.*

**Fingering** *is when the trigger finger is not placed properly on the trigger, makes contact with the pistol frame, or is pulled sideways and not straight to the rear. Any of these conditions can result in lateral pressure of the trigger finger, or fingering. This can cause shots to deviate directly to the left of the aiming point (for a right-handed shooter).*

**Riding The Recoil** *A third type of trigger problem is produced when the shooter fails to employ a proper follow-through and instead jerks the trigger finger forward just as the shot breaks, producing a group in the 9:30 to 12 o'clock position. This same pattern can also be produced when the shooter, anticipating recoil, jerks the whole pistol in a recoil-like movement as the shot is fired. This is called riding the recoil.*

### Hold Errors

For the novice, hold errors result from a lack of hold control, and reflect an inability to keep the firearm still while the sights are aligned and the trigger is pulled. With any pistol held at arm's length, there will inevitably be a certain amount of movement, which will be seen in the changing relationship of the sights and the target. A beginning pistol shooter will experience a great deal of this **arc of movement**, as his or her arm muscles and nervous system are not accustomed to the challenge of holding a pistol in an extended position. One sign of a lack of hold control is an increase in group size as the shooting session progresses. Simple muscle fatigue can be made even worse when the shooter fails to rest between shots, or strings of shots. With practice, the muscles that are used in holding a pistol acquire better tone, and gun movement while aiming decreases.

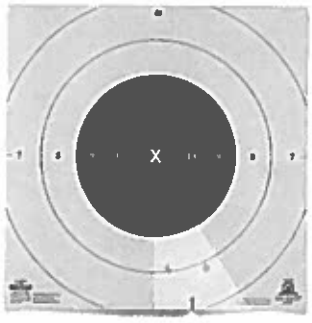
### Grip Errors

Grip errors are errors in the way that the pistol is held. A **too-loose grip** allows excessive gun movement upon firing. With some semi-automatic pistols, a loose grip can lead to cycling malfunctions. A **too-tight grip** is also often a problem, as it is not possible to maintain a consistently hard grip for long before muscle fatigue and tremors set in.

Grip inconsistency can produce variations in the pistol's movement under recoil. This affects accuracy because the pistol begins recoiling while the bullet is still in the bore. Good grouping depends upon the bullet exiting the muzzle at the same point in the pistol's recoil pattern. A consistent grip allows this.

Ideally, the grip should allow some degree of recoil control,

**▼ Common Grip Errors**



**Breaking The Wrist** *is the most common grip error. It occurs when the shooter drops the gun slightly downward at the moment the trigger is pulled in order to counteract the upward movement of the recoiling pistol. Although this dropping movement is often produced by simply breaking the wrist, it can also occur when the entire arm moves downward. Groups in the 5:30 to 6 o'clock area below the point of aim are often produced by breaking the wrist.*

**Heeling The Gun** *occurs when the shooter anticipates the shot and gives the gun butt a slight push with the heel of the hand. Groups above and to the right of the point of aim are produced by this condition.*

**▼ More Comon Grip Errors**

**Thumbing** *Applying pressure with the strong-hand thumb to the side of the gun as the shot is fired will tend to throw groups to the side away from the thumb (the 3 o'clock direction for a right-handed shooter).*

**Tightening**, *which can cause low right grouping, is produced by tightening the grip as the trigger is squeezed and the shot is fired.*

channeling the recoil movement in a rearward direction. Improper hand placement, and misalignment of the gun, hand, wrist and arm can cause the gun to twist or angle sideways when fired, making good grouping more difficult.

Certain grip errors produce specific group patterns. Virtually all such errors are the result of the shooter anticipating the recoil or muzzle blast of the shot.

**Breath Control Errors**

When a person takes a breath, the abdomen, chest, shoulder girdle and arms move. Precision shooting, such as in bullseye competition, or when testing pistols from a bench, demands that gun movement be reduced to a minimum. Normally, this is done by taking a few deep breaths, letting the last breath about halfway out, and then firing the shot during a window of time about three to eight seconds after breathing stopped. This period represents the interval in which gun movement is at a minimum.

Breath control problems may occur when a shooter may simply forget to hold his or her breath during shooting, resulting in excessive gun movement during aiming, usually in rhythm with the breaths taken. Sometimes a shooter will stop breathing at the proper time, but may forget to resume breathing, or fail to take in enough air between shots to replenish the body's supply of oxygen. Lack of oxygen can result in muscle fatigue and even lightheadedness.

**Other Errors**

Sometimes a shooter will aim a pistol using the non-dominant eye. This often happens when a shooter is cross-dominant (i.e., has the dominant eye and dominant hand on different sides) and learned to shoot by using the eye and hand of the same side. In general, cross-dominant individuals should aim with the dominant eye, and hold and shoot the pistol with the non-dominant hand. For more information on determining the dominant eye, see Chapter 11: Fundamentals of Pistol Shooting Positions.

Failure to use the Natural Aiming Area (NAA) can also lead to poor shooting. In relatively static pistol sports, such as bullseye shooting, a proper NAA is important to place the body in a stable, relaxed and supportive position. In more dynamic pistol activities, such as practical pistol competition and even self-defense, shooting is often done very rapidly, almost reflexively. Using the NAA will properly index the body in relation to the target, and will make it possible to fire rapidly in a natural and efficient manner. For more information on determining a shooter's Natural Aiming Area, see Chapter 10: Fundamentals of Pistol Shooting.

Lack of proper follow-through can also lead a shooter to "give up on the shot." In this error, the shooter fails to observe the shooting fundamentals all the way through the firing of the shot, and for a few moments afterwards. In the absence of a deliberate follow-through effort, the shooter will inevitably fail, on occasion, to maintain one or more of the shooting fundamentals before the bullet leaves the muzzle.

Some errors may not relate solely to shooting technique. High-recoiling ammunition can produce any number of shooting errors, particularly in a novice shooter. Also, a broken scope sight or adjustable sight, or an inaccurate gun or ammunition can produce the appearance of shooting errors.

**Diagnosing Pistol Shooting Errors**

Shooting errors can be diagnosed in several ways. Using a video camera to record a shooter during a range session can allow his or her form to be reviewed later, in slow-motion if necessary. When using a video camera in this way, care must be taken not to put either the camera or the camera operator in front of the firing line or the gun's muzzle. Also, as mentioned earlier, a laser mounted on the gun may also reveal these errors.

CHAPTER 16:

# CLEARING COMMON PISTOL STOPPAGES

Though modern repeating pistols offer far greater reliability than their predecessors, they are still machines and thus can malfunction. An occasional jam is a minor annoyance for a casual plinker, but may cost a target shooter a win, or have even more dire consequences for a person who owns a pistol for protection. Thus, the ability to quickly recognize and resolve a stoppage is a skill every pistol shooter should possess.

**Normal Primer Indentation** **Light Strike**


### Causes Of Stoppages

Most pistol stoppages are related to ammunition problems, including improperly made reloaded ammunition or, with semi-automatic pistols, factory ammunition too weak to cycle the action. Some semi-automatics also are finicky regarding the feeding of different bullet shapes and cartridge lengths, so various loads may have to be tested to find one that fires and functions reliably in a particular gun. Persistent reliability problems may indicate a gun problem that must be addressed by a gunsmith.

Stoppages can also be caused when the gun is dirty, rusty, poorly-maintained, or simply worn or damaged through frequent use (see Cleaning and Maintaining Your Pistol). Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations regarding the replacement of parts that can wear out or fatigue, such as recoil springs.

### Failure To Fire

A failure to fire occurs whenever the hammer or firing pin falls on a loaded chamber (or what is thought to be a loaded chamber) and the gun does not fire. This type of stoppage can occur with any kind of pistol.

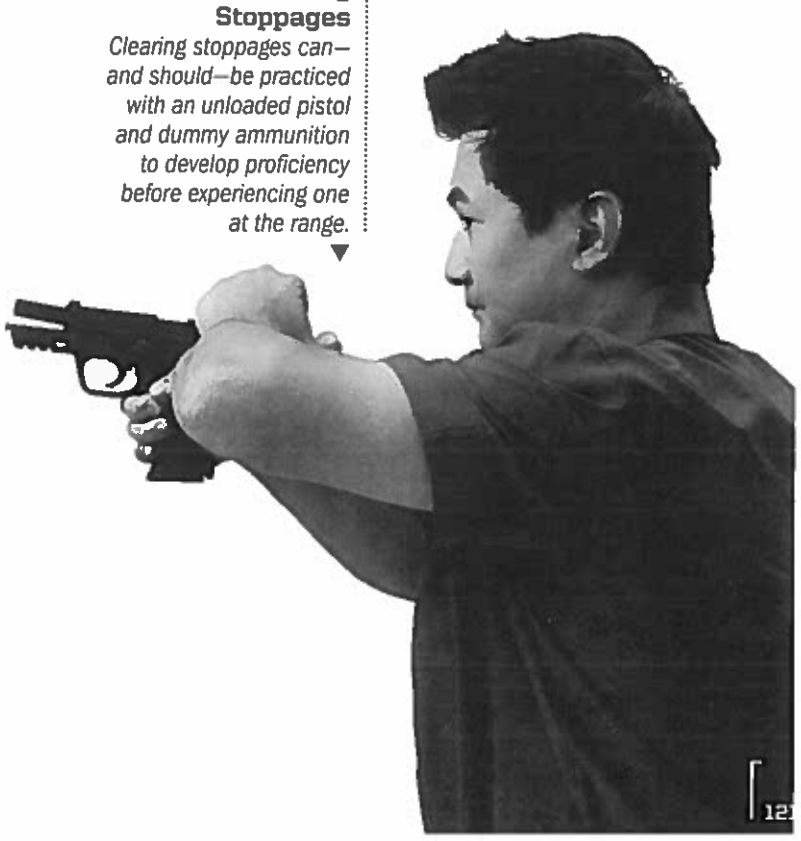
◀ **Light Strikes** *A faint firing pin indentation can result in a failure to fire, and may indicate a problem with the pistol.*

With a revolver, a failure to fire can occur when all the cartridges in the cylinder have been fired, or when the hammer has fallen on an empty chamber. Similarly, when a semi-automatic pistol fails to load the top cartridge in the magazine into the chamber, a failure to fire can take place when the hammer or firing pin falls on an empty chamber.

If the hammer or firing pin of a pistol falls on a live cartridge and fails to fire it, the most common problem is the ammunition used–a "dud" cartridge, a hangfire or misfire (see Chapter 8: Ammunition Fundamentals). The recommended procedure is to wait 30 to 60 seconds with the muzzle pointed downrange, in the event that the condition you are experiencing is a hangfire. In situations in which this is not practical, as in a defensive encounter, the shooter should simply pull the trigger again, if that is possible with the particular pistol. With a revolver, this will bring a fresh (and hopefully functioning) cartridge in line with the firing pin. With a double-action semi-automatic, a second firing pin hit on the primer may discharge the cartridge.

A persistent failure-to-fire problem, especially when good-quality factory ammunition is used, may indicate a problem with the pistol, such as a broken firing pin. Examination of the primers of both the functioning and non-functioning cartridges for proper firing-pin indentation could reveal if this is the case. Generally, a failure-to-fire condition that is not ammunition-related requires the attention of a gunsmith.

**Practice Clearing Stoppages**
*Clearing stoppages can—and should—be practiced with an unloaded pistol and dummy ammunition to develop proficiency before experiencing one at the range.*



## SPECIFIC SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOL STOPPAGES

▲

**Failure To Go Into Battery**

*This stoppage occurs when the slide does not return all the way forward and the cartridge is not fully seated in the chamber. Usually the slide is left about 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch short of going into battery.*

*Most commonly this type of stoppage is caused by a round that gets jammed on the feed ramp leading into the chamber, or by an oversize or over-length cartridge. On occasion, failure to go into battery can also be produced by an excessively dirty chamber.*

▲

**Failure To Eject**

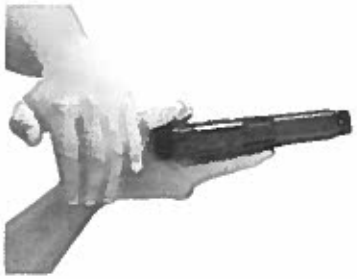
*In this condition, the fired case is extracted at least partially from the chamber, but is not completely ejected from the pistol. The fired case may remain inside the slide, possibly becoming jammed into the chamber, or it may be partially protruding from the ejection port, a condition known as a stovepipe stoppage.*

## TAP, RACK AND ASSESS DRILL

Just about all semi-automatic pistols can be cleared of all three of the above stoppages–failure to go into battery, failure to fire, and failure to eject–using a single immediate action drill consisting of three steps, referred to as tap, rack and assess.

1 *When a stoppage occurs, your trigger finger should be removed from the trigger. Next, tap the base of the magazine with the palm of the support hand to ensure it is fully seated.*

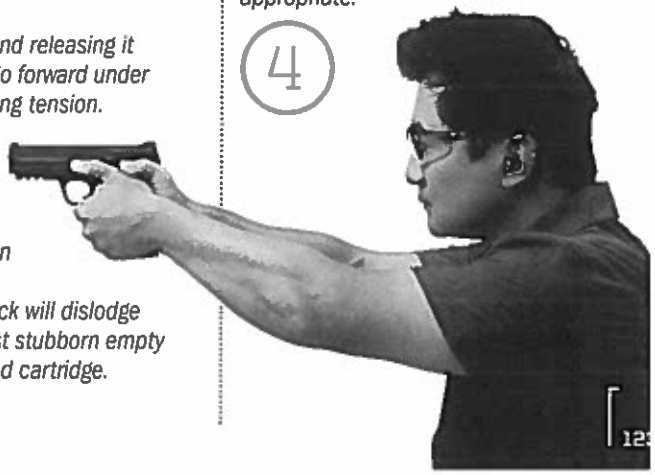
2 *Then, invert the pistol by rotating the ejection port towards the ground, and rack the slide vigorously by pulling it all the way to the rear ...*

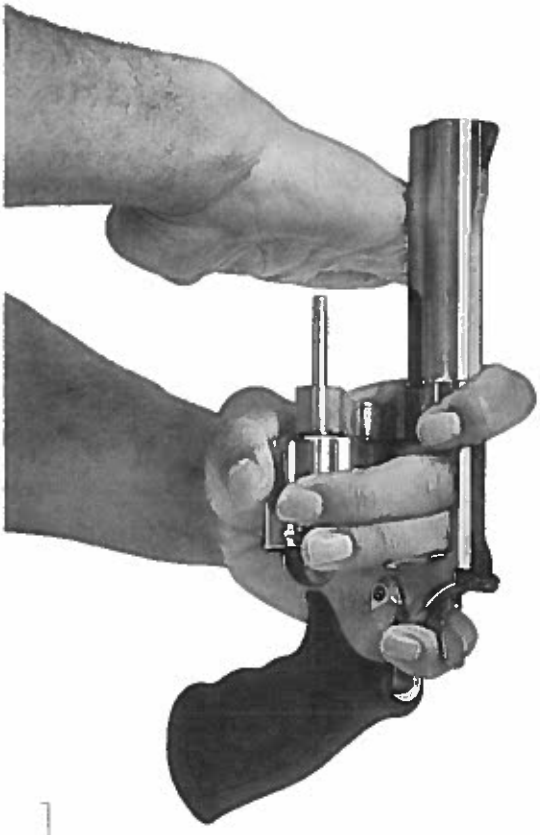


3 *... and releasing it to go forward under spring tension. Inverting the pistol before racking the slide and shaking the gun while the slide is held fully back will dislodge all but the most stubborn empty case or jammed cartridge.*

*Finally, reassume the shooting position, assess the target area downrange, and resume firing, if appropriate.*

4





## SPECIFIC REVOLVER STOPPAGES

◀

**Failure To Eject Cases From The Cylinder**

*Difficulty in ejecting fired cases from a revolver cylinder may result from oversized or high-pressure cartridges, dirt in the chambers or roughly machined chambers. When rapid reloading is necessary, the action to be taken to overcome this is to hit the ejector rod again with greater force. Be careful to strike in a straight line with the rod to prevent bending it with an off-axis strike. If this problem is encountered during practice sessions, a gunsmith's assistance should be sought to eliminate it.*

**Notes:**


# MAINTE

NRA GUIDE | Basics of Pistol Shooting

SECTION 04



# Pistol MAINTENANCE Selection and Use

CHAPTER 17:

# SELECTING PISTOLS, AMMUNITION AND ACCESSORIES

Today's pistol buyer has an unprecedented range of choices of pistol manufacturers, models, action types and calibers, not to mention ammunition and accessories. This can be confusing, especially for the first-time gun buyer. For such an individual, a logical selection process is needed.

## SELECTING A PISTOL

*Modern pistols may be made completely of steel, or have frames of aluminum, titanium or polymers; come in varying calibers, sizes, weights, actions and capacities; and can be designed for multiple uses or very specific applications. Deciding how you want to use your pistol is the first step in selection; it's highly unlikely that one pistol will be appropriate for every usage.*

**Stage 1: Research**

Before the research process is even started, the following question should be answered by anyone thinking of buying a pistol: *Am I a sufficiently responsible person to own a firearm?* While gun ownership is a constitutionally guaranteed right, there are still those who lack the maturity, emotional stability, or willingness to accept the responsibility of gun ownership. Anyone who recognizes this in him- or herself, and chooses not to own a firearm, should be commended for their responsible decision.

For those who elect to own a pistol, the single most important selection criterion revolves around the **purpose** of the firearm. In some cases, there will be a single clear-cut reason for pistol ownership–formal target shooting, hunting, or self-defense, for example. The identification of this reason greatly simplifies pistol selection.

Many shooters, however, intend to use a pistol for a number of activities, such as target shooting, plinking and self-defense. Generally, any claim that one pistol will do everything should be met with skepticism. Most multipurpose pistols embody a series of compromises that may make them mediocre, at best, for any single function. The shooter wishing to engage in several different shooting activities will usually end up with a separate gun for each activity, or a single gun that is best suited for the highest-priority purpose.

The **action type** of the desired pistol should also be selected in this stage. Sometimes the action type will be determined by the purpose. Cowboy Action shooters, for example, will usually select a single-action revolver. For most other activities, the choice will be between a semi-automatic pistol or a double-action revolver. The semi-automatic has the edge in concealability, cartridge capacity (as many as 18 to 20 rounds) and speed of reloading, while the revolver offers simpler operation and greater reliability. A revolver is also preferable for shooters lacking mechanical aptitude.

The prospective gun buyer, in the research stage, should also look into the reputation of the manufacturer and model of any pistol under consideration. Usually, the best choice is a standard model of proven design, made by an established, reputable gunmaker. Newly introduced


▲

## Do Your Homework

*A variety of information resources can be consulted in the research phase, including books, magazines, gun dealers, gun clubs and the internet. NRA publications and their websites are an excellent source of information covering a vast number of firearms both new and old.*

or innovative designs from new gun companies should probably be avoided.

The pistol's materials may also influence pistol selection. At one time all guns were made of steel and wood; now, titanium and aluminum alloys, as well as polymer materials, are commonplace. As a general rule, steel is still the strongest material, but most pistol owners will not shoot enough to see a difference in longevity between steel and any other material. Steel is also heavy and can corrode, while aluminum alloys and polymers do not corrode to any appreciable extent. Because of their light weight, titanium, aluminum and polymer materials are often used in carry pistols. There is a downside to such materials, however. Lightweight guns are easy to carry, but give more recoil than heavier, all-steel firearms of the same size.

A final, crucial factor to be researched is **safety**. While modern firearms from reputable manufacturers are generally over-engineered, with multiple safety features built in, some designs may confer an additional margin of safety in certain situations, such as in households in which there are children or others not authorized to use or handle the firearm. Both revolvers and semi-automatic pistols can have a variety of safety features, such as manual safety levers, magazine disconnectors, grip safeties and even key-operated action locks. Some safety features may compromise rapid pistol deployment in an emergency situation. The prospective gun buyer should weigh the merits of such features in light of his or her own particular living situation.

As a general rule, the novice pistol owner is best with a new firearm having a full warranty, rather than a used model whose previous history of use or abuse may be unknown. An exception might be made for a used pistol sold and warranted by a reputable gun dealer.

### Stage II: Examination

Once the research stage has narrowed the range of choices down, the prospective gun buyer should examine these choices in a gun shop.

Here, the shooter may learn much about each model–how it feels in the hand, how large and heavy it is, the ease with which the controls may be manipulated and so forth. With the help of a knowledgeable store clerk, the gun buyer can go through the operations required to load, unload, and fire the firearm, using an empty gun.

**Gun fit** is an important factor in pistol selection, and is largely subjective. Small differences in grip shape, thickness and angle, and even barrel length and slide weight may radically alter the feel of the gun in the hand. Ideally, the **trigger reach**–the distance from the backstrap of the frame to the trigger face–should allow the trigger finger to engage the trigger somewhere from the middle of the pad of the fingertip to the first joint. Small-handed persons often have difficulty with pistol grips that are too thick or a trigger that is too far forward, or may have problems in reaching all the pistol's controls. Most such persons are better off with small- to medium-frame semi-automatics and revolvers. Less commonly, a large-handed person will encounter a small pocket or defensive pistol having a too-small grip or trigger guard, or controls too small for easy manipulation.

Also important is the physical strength required to operate the pistol. Many people have difficulty retracting the slide of a semi-automatic pistol with a stiff recoil spring. Some persons may also lack the finger strength to pull the trigger of a double-action revolver. Pistols vary in recoil spring stiffness and trigger pull weight, so a prospective gun buyer should try many different models.

Cost and quality are also factors. While low-price models may be appealing, they can represent false economy if they fail to provide the desired reliability, durability or accuracy. The price and availability of ammunition, parts, accessories and so forth should also be considered. Also, certain models are supplied with a greater number of aftermarket parts and accessories, or may be easier for a gunsmith to work on.

Through the process outlined above in Stage II, the prospective gun buyer should be able to further narrow the number of potential choices.

▲ **Trigger Reach** *is the distance from the backstrap of the frame to the trigger face, and should allow the trigger finger to touch the trigger between the middle of the pad of the fingertip and the first joint.*

**Stage III: Test Firing**

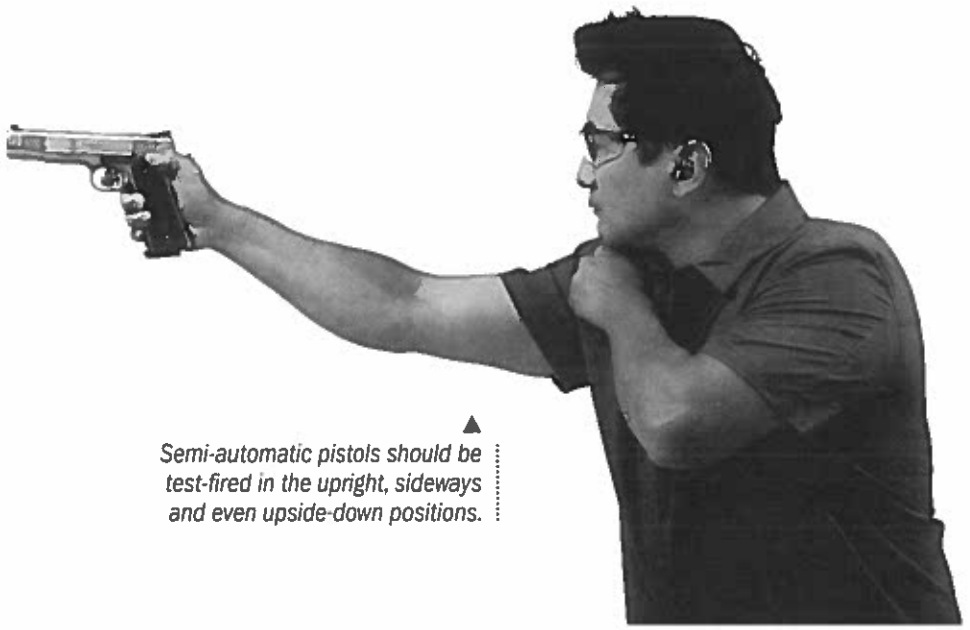
The final stage in the pistol selection process involves test firing representative samples of the remaining viable choices. This often may be accomplished at ranges having a variety of pistols for rent. In this activity, the individual can judge the recoil, accuracy, comfort and feel of each. Any stoppages or other problems can be noted.

Semi-automatic pistols should be fired with one- or two-hand holds, with both a tight and a loose grip, and with the gun held in various positions--upright, sideways and upside down. The shooter should note the trajectory of the fired brass; ejected shells should land around five to six feet away. Loads of different levels of power and with different bullet shapes should also be used.

Revolvers should be fired with loads of different power levels, in both the single-action and (if applicable) double-action modes. With all loads, fired cases should easily eject from all cylinders.

With all pistol types, firing pin indentations should be deep and round, whether the firearm is fired in the single-action or double-action mode (if applicable). Recoil and accuracy should be evaluated with various loads. Adjustable sights should be evaluated to ensure that sight adjustments are crisp and accurate. Fixed-sight guns should be tested to note the degree of deviation of the bullet impacts from the point of aim.

Finally, the test firing session will help the gun buyer determine the appropriate caliber to buy. Many gun designs are produced in similar models in several chamberings, such as 9 mm Para, .40 S&W and .45 ACP. Thus, in many cases, a new gun buyer may decide upon a specific pistol design, and have the further choice of a variety of chamberings, with different levels of recoil.



▲ *Semi-automatic pistols should be test-fired in the upright, sideways and even upside-down positions.*

## SELECTING PISTOL AMMUNITION AND ACCESSORIES

Accuracy, reliability and other aspects of pistol performance depend at least as much upon the ammunition chosen as on the particular gun design. Also, even after the proper gun and ammunition are chosen, a variety of pistol accessories can further enhance a shooter's enjoyment and performance in any shooting activity.

### SELECTING PISTOL AMMUNITION

The selection of the proper ammunition type and load involves consideration of several factors, among the most important of which are: **safety**, **purpose**, **reliability**, **accuracy**, and **recoil**.

Ammunition **safety** primarily involves using the proper ammunition for the firearm. As described in Chapter 8: Ammunition Fundamentals, this is accomplished by matching the caliber designation on the barrel and/or slide with that on the ammunition package and cartridge headstamp. Additionally, higher-pressure "+P" and "+P+" loads should be used only in those firearms certified for them.

As a general rule, the novice pistol owner should avoid reloaded ammunition, as well as military surplus ammunition, and purchase only new ammunition from a reputable manufacturer.

The intended **purpose** of the pistol/ammunition combination is the main factor in determining the choice of caliber, cartridge power, and bullet weight, design and construction. For example, target shooting, hunting and self-defense all require different types of ammunition.

Information on the general ammunition types required for different pistol shooting activities can be found in many gun books, magazines and videos, as are listed in Appendix B: Information and Training Resources.

**Reliability** is the ability of a load to consistently feed, fire, eject and cycle the action. Factors that may influence ammunition reliability include load power, bullet shape, cartridge overall length, crimp and much more. In general, any load used in a critical application should be absolutely reliable during a test of 200 to as many as 500 rounds.

Persistent reliability problems with various loads may indicate a situation that must require resolution by a gunsmith.

**Accuracy** is a function of several factors: the gun, the load used, and the skill of the shooter. The level of accuracy required in different activities can vary greatly. Information on the accuracy needed in various pistol shooting activities can be found in various books, magazines and videos.

Accuracy testing should ideally involve a number of five-shot groups fired from a benchrest position at a target placed at an appropriate distance (see Chapter 12: The Benchrest Position).

**Recoil**, or "kick" felt by the shooter upon firing a gun, will vary with gun weight, cartridge power, bullet weight, grip size and shape, and more. Additionally, shooters differ in their sensitivity to recoil. Excessive recoil can inhibit the ability to quickly fire multiple accurate shots, and can produce a flinch reflex that impairs accuracy.

Determining the recoil a shooter can tolerate is usually made by test-firing different guns in different calibers. Novice shooters should avoid hard-kicking pistols, as early exposure to

high levels of recoil can cause flinching, shot anticipation, jerking the trigger and other unwanted habits. Note that many cartridges come in several loads that may vary greatly in recoil.

## SELECTING PISTOL ACCESSORIES

Various types of pistol accessories can add greatly to one's enjoyment of any pistol shooting activity, as well as contributing to better shooting performance.

**Eye and hearing protection** are perhaps the most important accessories a shooter must have (see Chapter 1: Basic Firearm Safety).

A **range bag** of leather, canvas or nylon allows convenient carry and storage of the pistol, ammunition, eye and hearing protection, targets and more. Although the pistol may be carried loosely in the range bag, a **pistol rug** or **pistol box** is usually preferable. The latter has the advantage of being lockable with a padlock, and thus provides some security when transporting or storing the firearm.

Also for inclusion in the range bag is a small **tool kit** containing, at a minimum, the items used for disassembling the pistol. A basic **cleaning kit** may be included (see Chapter 18: Cleaning and Maintaining Your Pistol).

Other items for the range bag are a **first aid kit**, a **stapler** for mounting targets on the target frame and a recoil-absorbing **shooting glove**.

For semi-automatic pistols, additional **magazines** are mandatory, as they can be easily damaged, even in normal use. Factory or high-quality aftermarket magazines should be favored over inexpensive "no-name" units, which may not function properly. Note that some pistols function better with one brand of magazine than another. Loading semi-automatic pistol magazines to full capacity is made easier with another accessory, the **magazine loader**. For revolvers, speedloaders make reloading faster and easier.

A **holster** is essential for concealed carry or hunting purposes, and may also be convenient when shooting at a range or in an outdoor environment. Holsters come in many different styles and materials, with carry holsters being different in design from hunting and general-purpose models. Also useful, for some purposes, are **holster belts** and **magazine or speedloader pouches**. Information on selecting a carry holster can be found in the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course and its companion textbook, the *NRA Guide to the Basics of Personal Protection Outside the Home*.

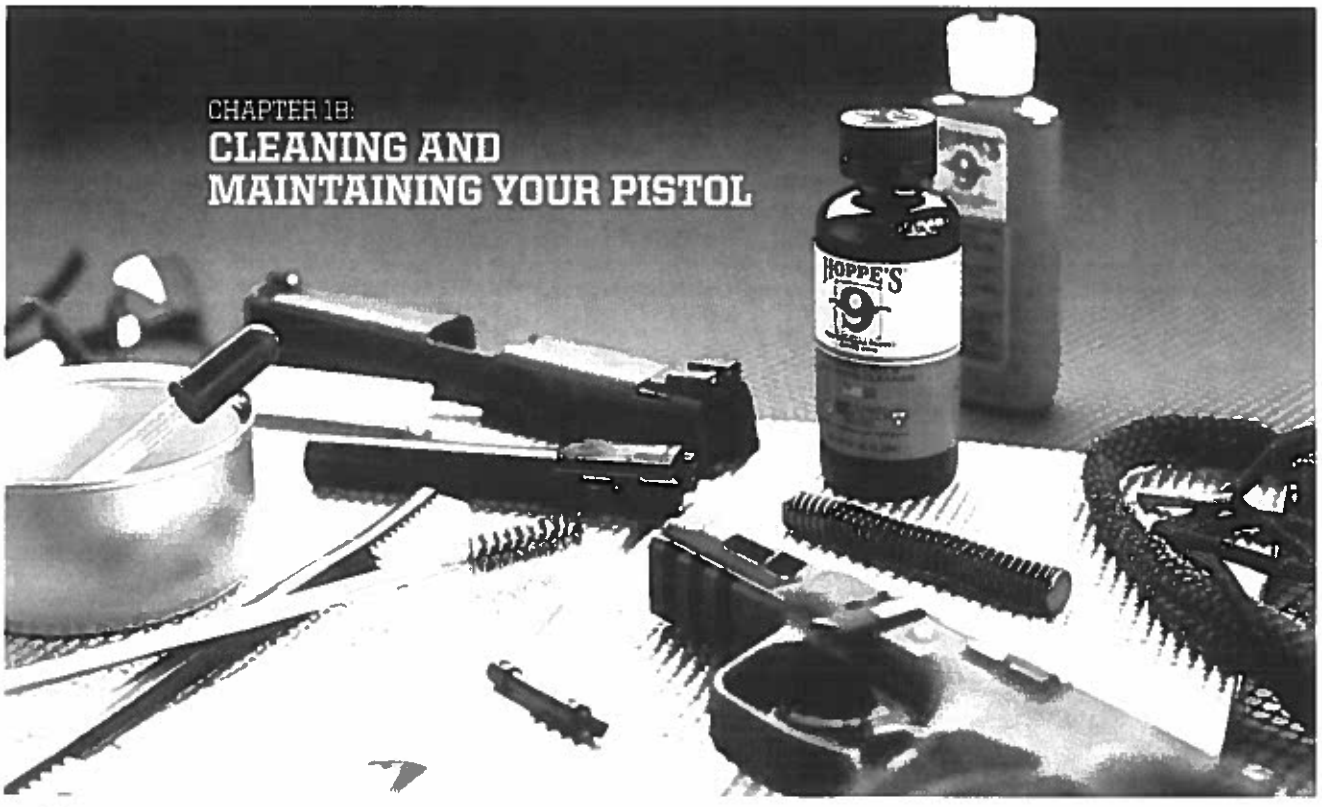
Many pistol accessories take the form of aftermarket parts, which can improve a pistol's ergonomics and accuracy, decrease recoil, or enhance controllability. Examples of such parts include sights, triggers, match-grade barrels, springs and different grips or stocks. A gunsmith should be consulted regarding the selection and installation of any such parts.

**Pistol targets** come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. While pistol competitors will use the targets of their particular discipline, recreational shooters have a variety of targets for practice, testing and plinking. **Target pasters** cover bullet holes in the target, extending target life.

Depending upon the shooting activity, other accessories may also be useful. A spotting scope allows bullet holes to be seen in a distant target; a chronograph

measures bullet muzzle velocity, which is crucial to the calculation of bullet energy and trajectory; and a shooting timer is used for shooting practice or competitions conducted under time limits.

*A dedicated range bag will hold—and organize—multiple pistols, magazines, ammunition, loaders, holsters, targets, pasters, stapler, first aid kit, cleaning kit and tool kit, and still have room for more.*




◀
**Gun Cleaning Kit**
*Available at any gun shop as well as sporting goods, hardware and large discount stores, a gun cleaning kit will include, at a minimum:*
- *Cloth patches*
- *Cleaning rod and cleaning rod attachments (including a bore brush and tips to hold patches*
- *Small brush for cleaning gun crevices*
- *Gun solvent (bore cleaner)*
- *Gun oil*
- *Soft cloth*

A gun that is regularly fired accumulates dirt, powder residue and other foreign matter, all of which can make it more prone to stoppage, wear and corrosion. Even a firearm that is left untouched on a shelf or in a drawer can accumulate sufficient dust and dirt to affect functioning. Responsible gun owners understand that removing such material is critical to ensure gun reliability and readiness. A gun that is properly maintained at regular intervals–including regular cleaning, inspection and lubrication, as well as a periodic gunsmith checkup–will function more reliably, shoot more accurately and last longer than one whose care is neglected.

Every gun owner should have a gun cleaning kit. Make sure that any such kit, or any individual cleaning rod, jag (a tip designed specifically to hold a cleaning patch) or bore brush is the proper size for your pistol's caliber. Also, select patches of the proper size.

Additionally, you need safety glasses to protect your eyes from cleaning solvents and spring-loaded parts that may be inadvertently released from your gun. Also recommended are thin rubber gloves to protect your skin from exposure to solvents, lubricants, firing residues and lead particles. Be sure that your gun-cleaning area has good ventilation, and do not eat, drink or smoke while performing firearm cleaning or maintenance.

In most cases, the owner's manual will present only basic disassembly instructions for general cleaning and maintenance; further gun disassembly by the owner is usually discouraged. However, dirt and powder residue collects in interior action areas that can be accessed only by complete disassembly. A partial cleaning of these inaccessible areas may be achieved by flushing the action with gun cleaner or a solvent that leaves no residue, such as brake cleaner. The solvent is sprayed into the action in such a way as to allow the excess to drain freely (such as with the stocks removed), dissolving and flushing away loosened dirt and residue.

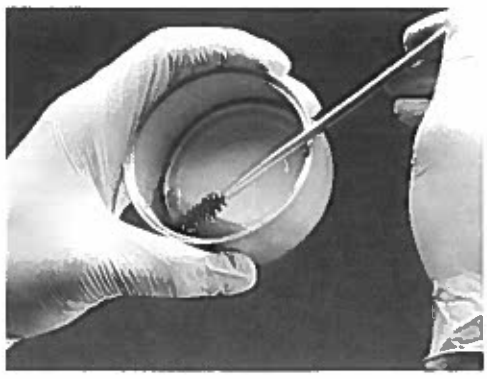
**NO AMMUNITION IN THE GUN CLEANING AREA**

*Remove all ammunition from the room before beginning to clean any firearm.*

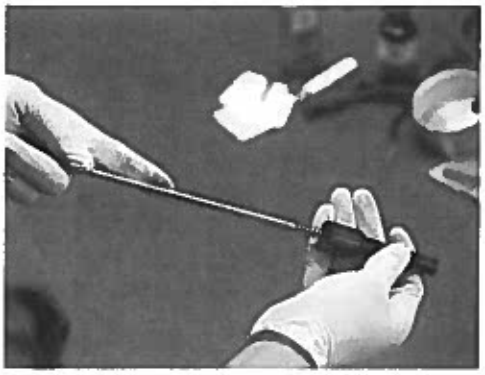
## Cleaning Semi-Auto Pistols

*The first step in cleaning your firearm is to ensure that it is unloaded. No ammunition should be in the cleaning area.*

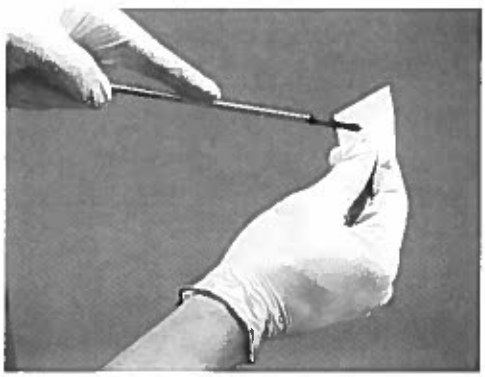
*Next, disassemble your firearm according to the instructions in the owner's manual for the gun. If you do not have an owner's manual, you can usually obtain one from your gun's manufacturer. Also, a professional gunsmith may be able to show you how to disassemble your gun.*



*Attach the bore brush to the cleaning rod and moisten it with gun cleaning solvent. If possible, use a dropper or spray to put solvent onto the brush; avoid dipping the brush in the solvent, as this contaminates the clean solvent with dirt and grit that may be on the brush.*



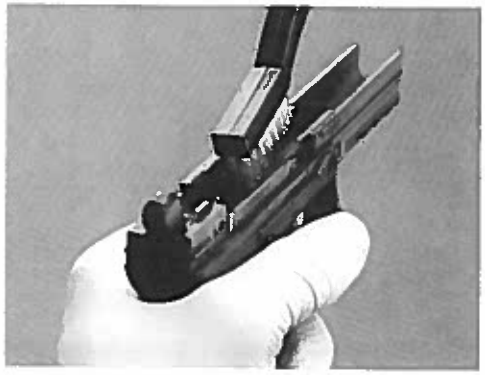
*Push the brush all the way through the bore, then pull it back through. Do not try to reverse direction with the brush still in the bore. Run the brush through the bore about 10-15 times, adding solvent to it as necessary.*



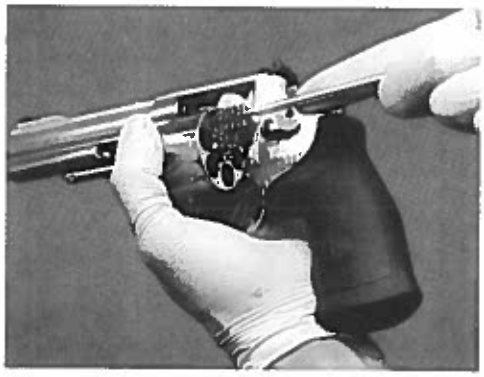
*Attach the jag to the cleaning rod and push a patch moistened with solvent through the bore. This patch will come out quite dirty with the material that was loosened by the solvent and the bore brush.*

*Run several dry patches through the bore. These should come out progressively cleaner, until virtually no fouling is visible. If the patches keep coming out somewhat dirty, repeat the cleaning process as outlined previously. Visually check the bore for any remaining fouling, lead or powder residue.*

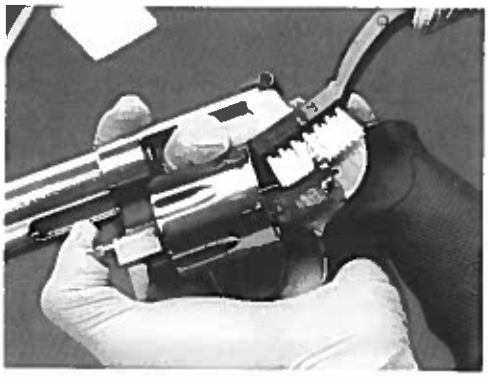
## Cleaning Your Pistol



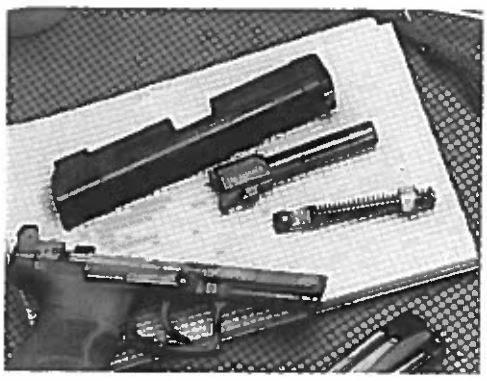
*To clean a pistol frame, dip a nylon brush in gun cleaner and use it to remove carbon and other debris. Use special care to not dislodge any springs that might be exposed.*



*In cleaning a revolver, the cylinders are cleaned with the bore brush and patches using much the same technique as is employed in cleaning the bore.*

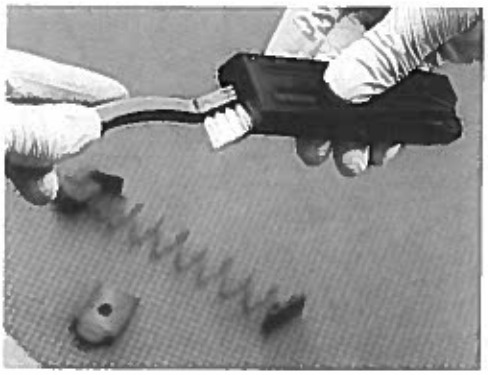


*Once the bore is clean, residue must be removed from other gun surfaces. Use a solvent-soaked patch, cotton swab or toothbrush, as appropriate, to loosen and remove powder residue and other matter from working surfaces.*



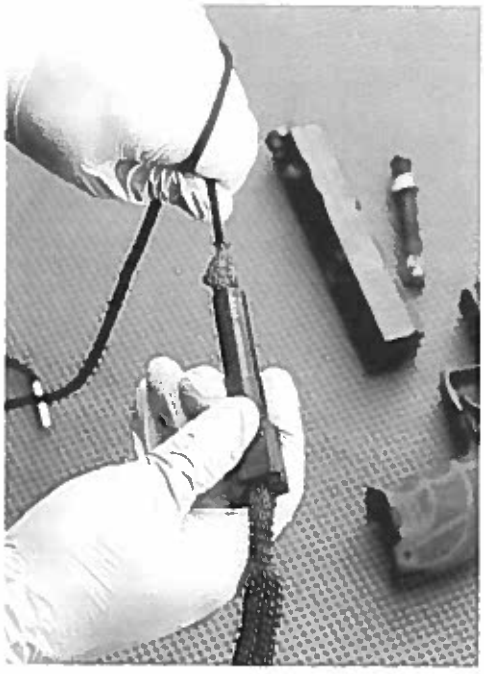
*On a semi-automatic pistol, such surfaces include the interior of the slide, the slide and frame rails, and the exterior barrel surface. On a revolver, such surfaces include the crane, frame, and any action parts that are accessed by the removal of the stocks.*

*Finally, reassemble the pistol and wipe it with a soft, lightly oiled cloth.*



*Maintenance of semi-automatic pistol magazines is critical for proper pistol functioning. Most magazines are designed to be disassembled; instructions should be in your owner's manual. Once the magazine is disassembled, remove dirt and powder residue from the inside of the magazine body using a brush and patches.*

## Cleaning Your Pistol



**Proper Use Of A Boresnake** *Another way to clean the bore of a pistol is through the use of a boresnake. A boresnake has a weight and draw string at one end and a caliber specific bronze brush embedded in the cleaning material at the other end. To use, pass the weight through the barrel, grab the draw string and pull the boresnake through the barrel. Repeat as necessary.*

▲ *Once cleaned, defects such as cracks, burrs, broken parts and loose pins and screws are easier to spot. Develop the habit of inspecting your clean pistol while disassembled to correct issues before problems arise.*

**Inspecting Your Firearm**

The ideal time for giving your firearm a thorough visual inspection is when it is disassembled after cleaning. Defects are easiest to spot on parts that are free of dirt, residue and oil. Look for cracks, burred, pitted or indented areas, broken components and so forth. Also be aware of screws or pins that have worked loose, sights that have drifted from recoil forces, or parts that seem to have shifted from their normal positions.

Additionally, every time you pick up your firearm, whether to practice at the range, dry-fire in your basement, or clean it in your workroom, you should give it a cursory inspection (after, of course, making sure it is unloaded). Look for the buildup of firing residues; grip screws or other parts that have become loose; excessive oil leaking out of the joints between parts; and any other condition that may affect the functioning of the gun. Getting in the habit of making this kind of inspection will help you determine when cleaning or lubrication is necessary, or if there are any conditions that may make your gun unsafe or unreliable.

**Lubricating Your Firearm**

Cleaning powder residues and other foreign material from the gun usually removes necessary lubrication from working surfaces. Thus, it is essential to re-lubricate the firearm after it has been cleaned.

The owner's manual for your gun will likely contain detailed instructions on the proper method of lubrication. In general, lubricate revolvers in the areas of the crane, ejector rod, and cylinder latch, and around the sides of the hammer and trigger. With the stocks removed, you may also squirt oil into action areas to smooth the trigger pull.

Semi-automatic pistols should be lubricated on the slide and frame rails, at the muzzle (where the barrel engages the slide), and in the barrel locking area. Also apply a small amount of oil to the sides of the trigger and hammer where they enter the frame, and drip a little lubricant into action areas. If you desire, you may put a very light film of oil on the exterior surface of the magazines to prevent rust.

It is critical not to allow oil to be transferred to the cartridges carried within the magazine. Oil on cartridge cases can penetrate to the primer, making its ignition unreliable, and may have other harmful effects on gun functioning as well.

Use only those lubricants designed expressly for use in firearms. Over time, improper lubricants may become gummy, impairing proper gun functioning, or may be too thin or runny to provide lasting protection. Also, firearms that are used in climates that are extremely hot, cold, wet or dusty often have very special lubrication needs, as do firearms that will be stored for extended periods. Consult with a gun shop or gunsmith to determine the proper lubricants to be used with your firearm.

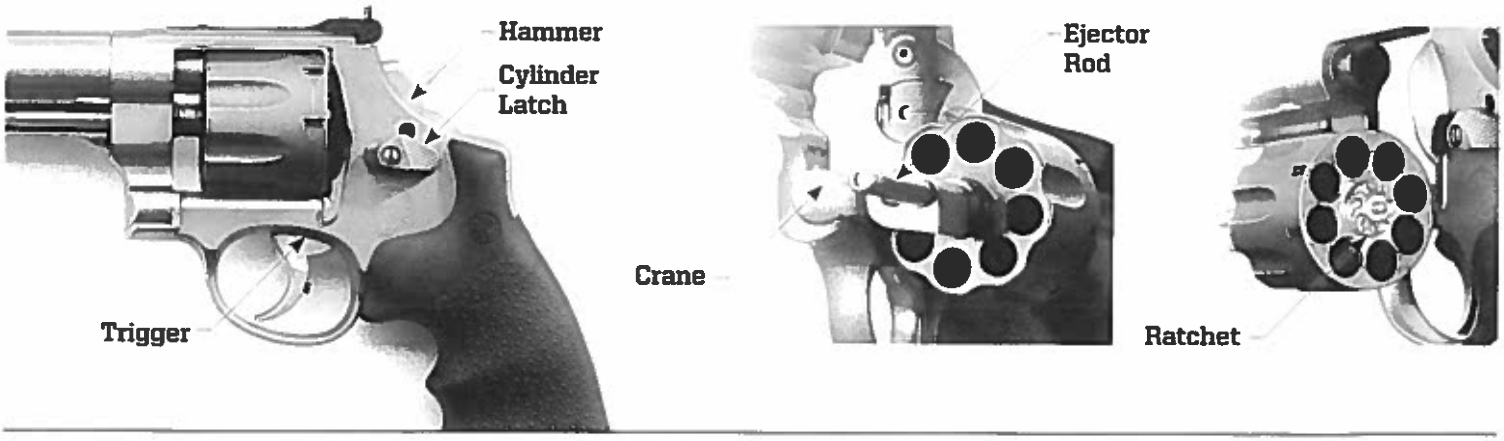
It is also important to avoid over-lubricating your pistol, or leaving oil in certain areas. For example, while a thin film of oil should coat the bore of a firearm that is to be stored, all oil should be removed from the bore before the gun is fired. Excess lubricant can also penetrate wood stocks and cause them to deteriorate. Too much oil left on the exterior of a pistol that is carried in a leather holster can soak into the leather, softening it. This can be of particular concern with leather holsters that are molded to snugly fit a particular pistol model. As explained above, oil left inside the magazine of a semi-automatic pistol or the chambers of a revolver cylinder can contaminate cartridge primers and lead to misfires.

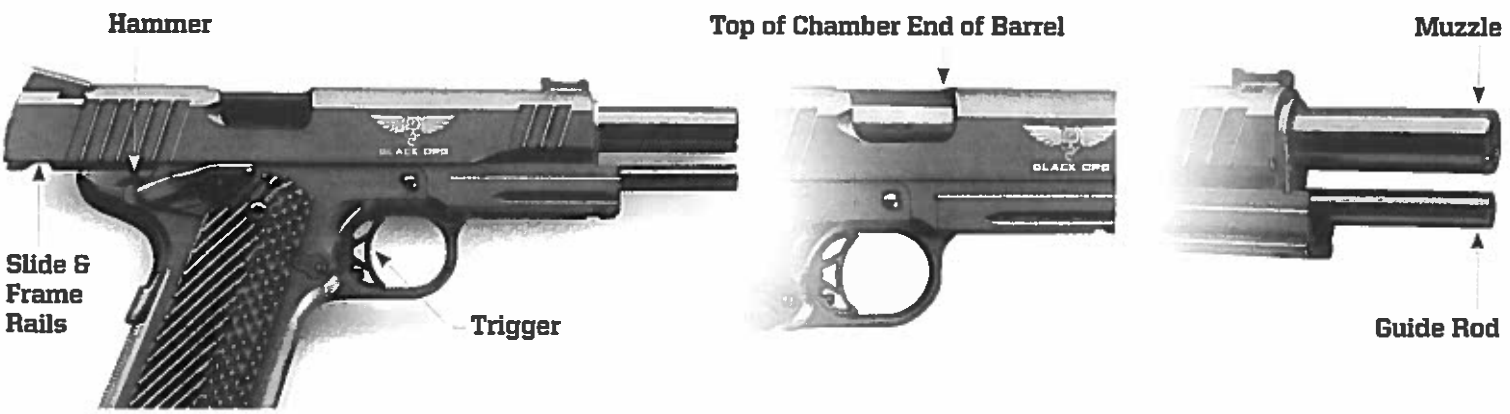
## Lubricating Revolvers

*Lubrication points for a revolver include the cylinder latch, the junction of the trigger and the frame, the crane, the ejector rod, and alongside the hammer where it meets the frame. With the hammer back, a few drops of oil may also be dripped into the action to lubricate internal action parts. Internal parts may also be accessed for lubrication by removing the stocks.*

## Lubricating Semi-Autos

*Lubrication points for a semi-automatic pistol include the slide and frame rails, the hammer and trigger where they enter the frame, the muzzle end of the barrel and guide rod, and the top of the chamber end of the barrel.*


Hammer
Cylinder Latch
Trigger
Crane
Ejector Rod
Ratchet


Hammer
Slide & Frame Rails
Trigger
Top of Chamber End of Barrel
Muzzle
Guide Rod

### Function Checking Your Firearm

After cleaning, inspecting and lubricating the firearm, the final stage is reassembly and function checking. The inspection process referred to previously should continue during reassembly. Be aware of parts that do not go together as they should, a sudden increase in the play or looseness of pins and other components, and so forth.

When the firearm is reassembled, make sure that it is unloaded and then dry-fire it a few times to see if there are any changes in the feel of the trigger or the functioning of the controls. With a revolver, swing the cylinder out and test the action of the extractor rod. Rack the slide of a semi-automatic and ensure that its various safety controls are functioning. Don't just look with your eyes; listen with your ears. Sometimes the sound of the gun as it is cycled or dry-fired can reveal a functional problem.

Similarly, when firing live ammunition at the range, be aware of any changes in the gun's function or feel. Gradual changes in gun function such as sluggish cycling, frequent stoppages or larger groups can result from a buildup of dirt, powder residue, congealed lubricant and so forth. Thorough cleaning and lubrication often restores proper functioning in such cases. However, a sudden tendency of the gun to misfire, jam, or change the size or location of its groups may be a sign of a broken part or other serious mechanical problem that usually requires gunsmith attention.

### Other Maintenance

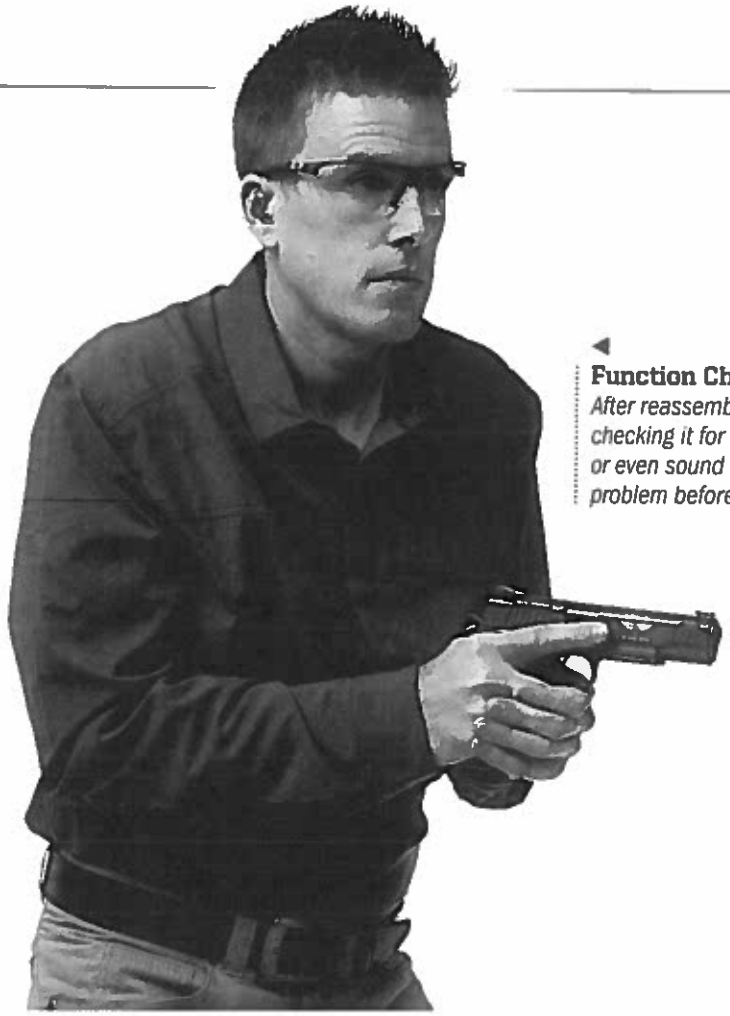
Firearm maintenance involves more than just cleaning, inspection, lubrication and function testing. Both semi-automatic pistols and revolvers are powered by springs, which can, over time, fatigue. The springs that power revolver hammers generally last for many years, however, revolvers having a tendency to produce light hits on the primer may be suffering from weak springs.

Recoil springs on semi-automatic pistols should be regularly replaced, usually every several thousand rounds. Your owner's manual should have specific recommendations regarding recoil spring replacement, as well as directions for installing new springs. Magazine springs, too, sometimes require replacement, as some will lose stiffness over time and produce feeding problems. A competent gunsmith can diagnose and remedy problems stemming from fatigued springs.

### Gunsmith Checkup

In addition to the normal maintenance you can perform, it is important to periodically have a gunsmith completely disassemble, clean, inspect and lubricate your firearm. This is also an opportunity for an experienced eye to look for wear, breakage or other conditions that may affect your gun's ability to function properly.

The frequency of this kind of gunsmith examination depends upon your shooting habits. In general, if you practice regularly with your firearm, an annual checkup is recommended.



**Function Check Your Firearm**
*After reassembly, dry-fire your unloaded pistol, checking it for any changes in function, feel or even sound that could reveal a functional problem before firing live ammunition.*

**Notes:**

CHAPTER 19:

# PISTOL SHOOTING ACTIVITIES AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In general, there are four main uses to which a firearm may be put: recreational shooting, hunting, target competition, and self-defense. Despite claims to the contrary by those seeking to restrict their ownership, pistols are commonly employed for all of these activities.

◀ **Know Your Target And What Is Beyond**

*When shooting on public or private land, be aware that a bullet from even a .22 rimfire may travel a mile or more from a pistol fired when pointing skyward. Shooters must also be good stewards of the land, not trespassing on private property, removing all their spent cases and trash, and avoiding improper targets, such as glass bottles, old batteries, etc.*

## RECREATIONAL SHOOTING

Although many thousands of shooters own pistols for hunting, for formal target shooting, or for self-defense, by far the greatest number of shots fired from pistols each year involve casual recreational shooting, often called plinking. Plinking is quite simply the name given to any form of informal target shooting, done with any type of pistol at any type of safe target. The only limitations placed on this activity are those imposed by safety, legal restrictions, and the shooter's imagination.

Plinking can be done at a dedicated indoor or outdoor range facility, or on private or public land (subject to applicable local, state and federal laws). Indoor pistol ranges are fairly common, and are often found near large metropolitan areas in states and local jurisdictions that permit citizens to own pistols. Shooting ranges can usually be found online, or by asking a local gun shop.

Each range will have rules dealing with safety, permissible shooting positions, drawing from holsters, caliber restrictions and so forth. Some ranges may have a Range Safety Officer on duty. Every shooter is responsible for learning and observing all range rules.

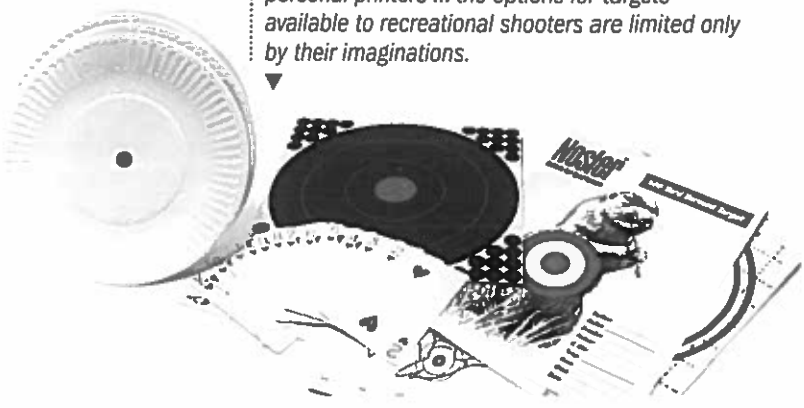
Some shooters may prefer to shoot on public or private land rather than a range. In such situations, however, safety is even more of a concern. The shooter must be responsible for always pointing the pistol in a safe direction, establishing a proper backstop, ensuring that unauthorized persons do not wander into the line of fire and so forth.

Pistol owners may use recreational shooting to sharpen their skills for hunting, target shooting or self-defense. Most often, however, the emphasis is simply on fun. While standard bullseye targets are extremely popular, other types of challenges may be improvised. For example, a piece of 8.5 by 11 inch piece of paper may be put out at 10 yards or so, and a single bullet hole put somewhere on the sheet. Each successive shooter must attempt to place their shot as close as possible to the original bullet hole.

In addition to a gun and ammunition, recreational shooting usually requires additional gear, such as a shooting bag, cleaning kit, tool kit and, of course, eye and ear protection.

Finally, recreational shooting is the best way to introduce a new shooter to pistol shooting, and to ingrain the rules of safety and the principles of good marksmanship in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

*Paper plates, playing cards, self-adhesive dots, personal printers ... the options for targets available to recreational shooters are limited only by their imaginations.*



## PISTOL HUNTING

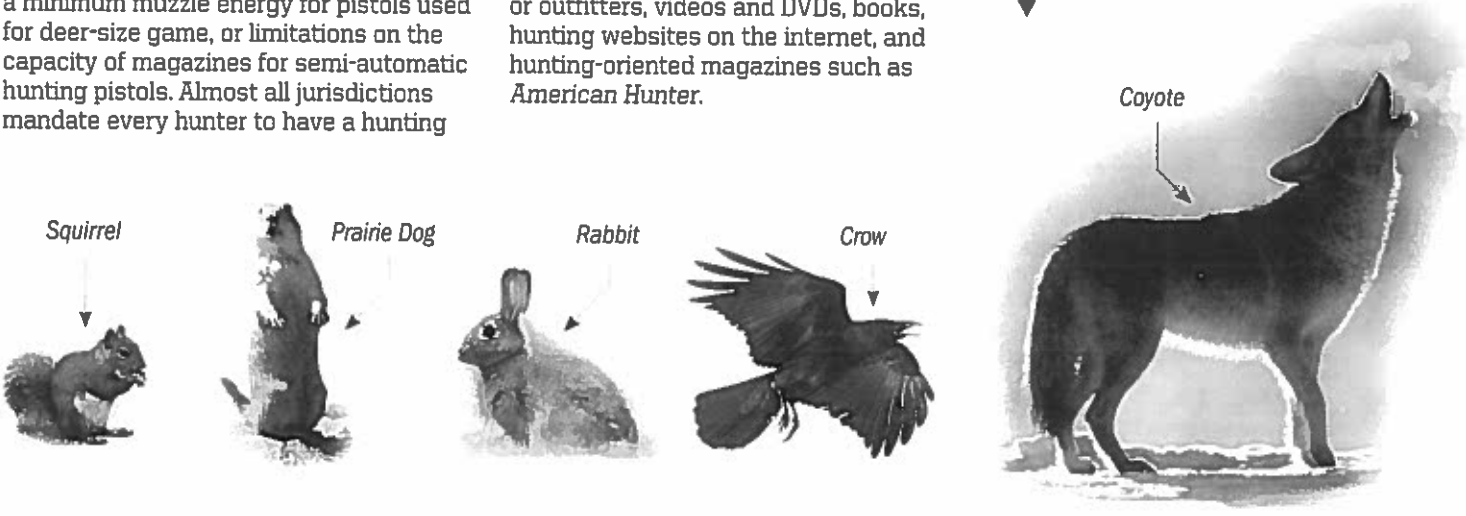
The claim that pistols have no sporting use is easily disproven by the several million hunters who use pistols to harvest everything from birds and squirrels to big game such as deer, elk, moose and bear. Using specialized single-shot pistols or highly powerful revolvers, some intrepid hunters have even humanely taken dangerous African game.

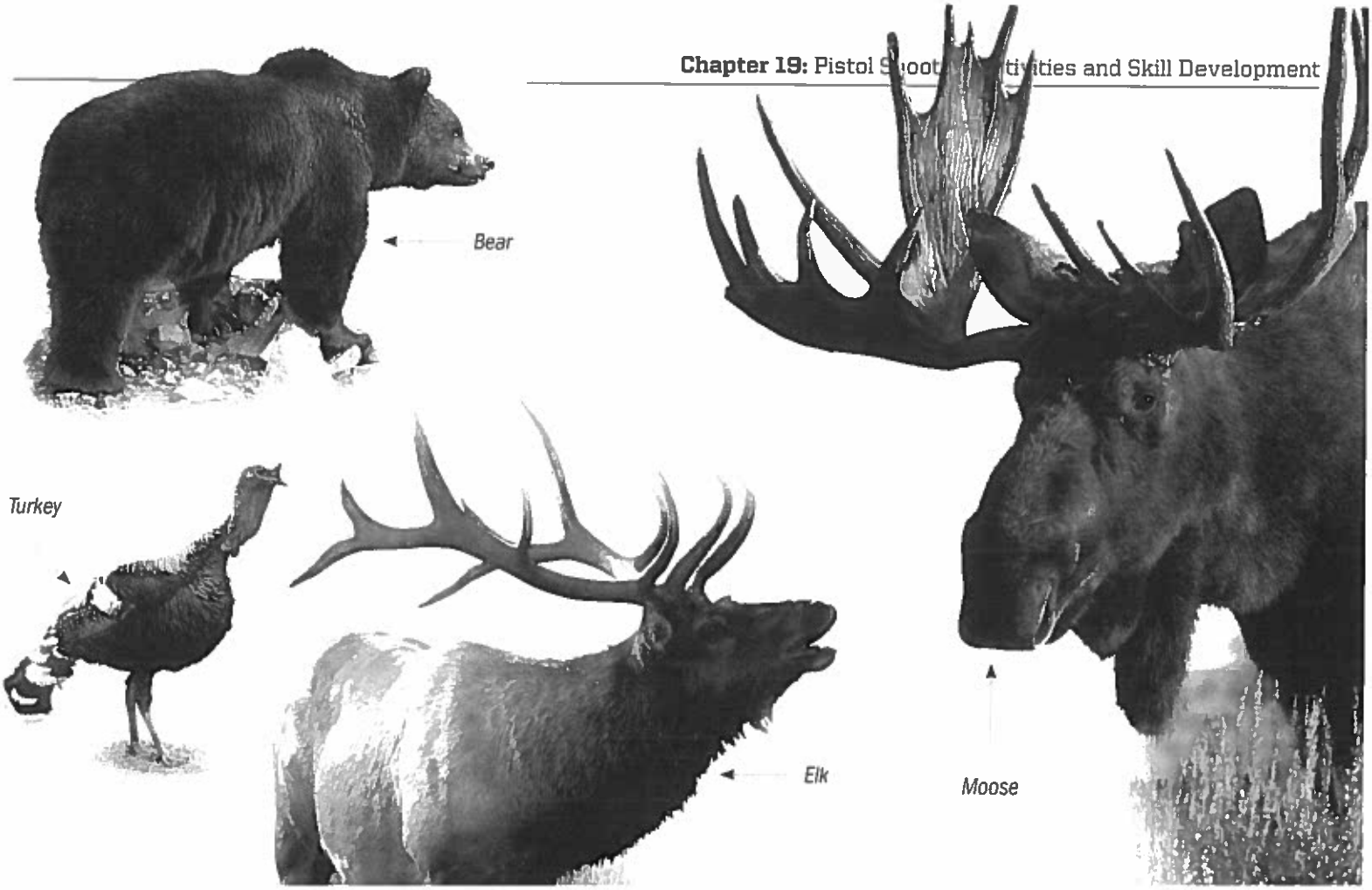
Some jurisdictions have certain requirements for hunting pistols, such as a minimum muzzle energy for pistols used for deer-size game, or limitations on the capacity of magazines for semi-automatic hunting pistols. Almost all jurisdictions mandate every hunter to have a hunting license, usually issued upon successful completion of a hunter education course. Regulations regarding hunting on public or private lands are usually readily available from the state fish and game service or other similar office.

Advice on the selection of pistols, ammunition and accessories for a particular type of hunting can be obtained from a variety of sources, including local gun shops, gun clubs, hunting guides or outfitters, videos and DVDs, books, hunting websites on the internet, and hunting-oriented magazines such as *American Hunter*.

### What Can I Hunt?

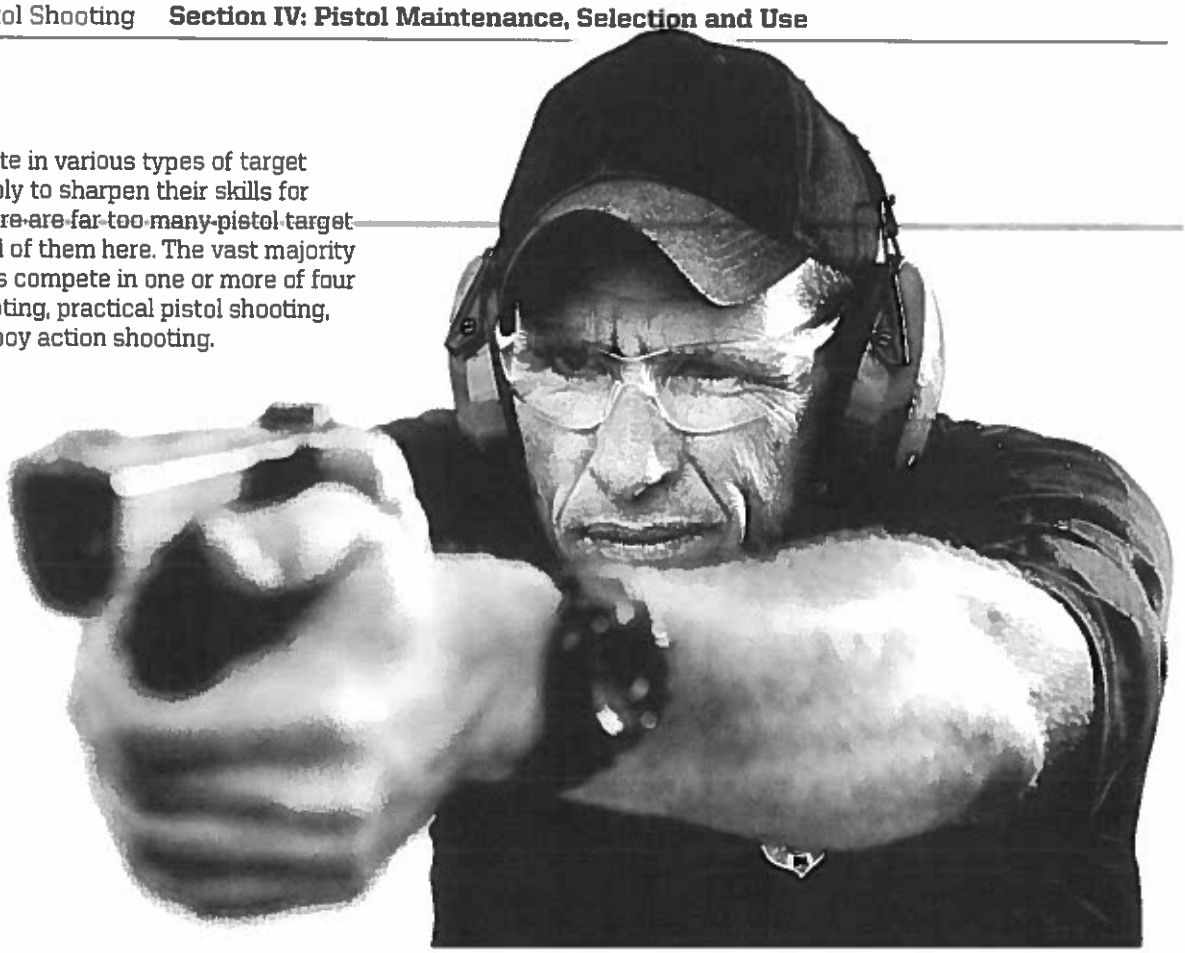
*There are basically three types of pistol hunting activities: small game hunting and pest control (involving game such as squirrels, rabbits and crows), varmint hunting (involving game such as prairie dogs, groundhogs and coyotes), and big-game hunting (involving deer-sized and larger animals). Each type of hunting involves different types of firearms, ammunition and accessories, as well as different shooting skills. Be sure to check local regulations.*




Bear
Turkey
Elk
Moose

## COMPETITION

Many pistol owners participate in various types of target competition, sometimes simply to sharpen their skills for other shooting activities. There are far too many pistol target shooting sports to discuss all of them here. The vast majority of competitive pistol shooters compete in one or more of four main activities: bullseye shooting, practical pistol shooting, silhouette shooting and cowboy action shooting.



▶ **Practical Pistol Competition**

*A great way to challenge your skills, practical pistol competition gauges your accuracy and speed and compares your scores to other competitors.*

### Practical Pistol Competition

The various pistol shooting sports known collectively as practical pistol competition were originally derived from the training regimen of the Mexican Federales, which utilized life-size silhouette targets, a two-handed shooting grip, and rapid multiple-target engagement at relatively close range. Practical pistol shooting is generally done "from the leather," by drawing a gun from a holster. Targets are fairly large–cardboard silhouettes with perforated scoring rings, or steel plates of various sizes and shapes–and close, most set at 25 yards or less. Some sports utilize Comstock scoring, in which both the point value of the hits, as well as the total elapsed time to shoot the stage, are used to compute the score.

**International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC)**–or **United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA)**, as it is better known in the U.S.–and **International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA)** competition are similar in many respects. Both employ humanoid cardboard targets and employ ever-changing target arrays, rather than standard courses of fire, to challenge competitors' problem-solving skills. While "race guns" with compensators and red-dot sights are allowed in IPSC/USPSA's Open division, such accessories are limited in IDPA competition, which stresses defensive guns, tactics and shooting scenarios. IDPA offers classes for most types of stock and custom defensive semi-automatics and revolvers.

**NRA Action Pistol** competition, like IPSC, USPSA and IDPA shooting, starts from the holster. However, this sport utilizes a number of standardized stages, and each string is usually fired under time limits rather than Comstock scoring.

Popular practical pistol calibers include 9 mm Para, .38 Super, .40 S&W and .45 ACP. Practical pistol sports commonly require loads that meet a minimum **power factor**, calculated by multiplying bullet weight in grains by muzzle velocity in feet per second, and dividing by 1,000. Minimum power factors for various practical pistol sports range from 120 to 165.

Bull-barreled revolvers are preferred in a fourth type of practical pistol shooting, **Police Practical Competition (PPC)**, although the sport also has classes for standard revolvers and duty-type semi-automatic pistols. Intended to test shooting skills relevant to the law-enforcement environment, PPC shooting is done at full-size B-27 silhouettes, at ranges from seven to 50 yards. A number of standard courses of fire are used, shot under time limits, and usually requiring shooters to fire from behind barricades in various positions. Target loads in .38 Special or 9 mm Para are favored.

In all practical shooting disciplines, most shooters employ specialized holsters, a matching gun belt, and one or more magazine or speedloader pouches to facilitate reloading.

**Bullseye Competition**

Bullseye pistol shooting is conducted using a one-hand hold. Firing is generally at round targets, called bullseyes, with a series of concentric scoring rings.

**NRA precision pistol (bullseye) competition** consists of slow-, timed-and rapid-fire strings fired at bullseye targets which can be set from 50 feet to 50 yards. Four general types of pistols are used in NRA precision pistol competition: the .45 Caliber Pistol, Service Pistol, Center-Fire Pistol, and .22 Caliber Pistol. Additionally, the Distinguished Revolver category specifies the use of a factory .38 Special Revolver. In some bullseye matches, the competitor will fire three different types of guns--the .45 caliber pistol, center-fire pistol, and .22 caliber pistol. Red-dot sights are allowed, and light target loads are usually favored, although standard-power .45 ACP ammunition is required in certain matches for the .45 caliber pistol.

*Most bullseye shooting is normally conducted in a relatively slow, deliberate manner, with a high premium placed on accuracy.*

**International Pistol** competition is practiced worldwide, and is featured in the Olympics. Five types of pistols are utilized in this type of competition. Free pistols are specialized .22 Long Rifle single-shot arms with very light triggers and iron sights. Free pistol competition is very exacting, with the 10-ring of the 50-meter free pistol target being only 50 mm (slightly more than 2 inches) in diameter. The rapid-fire pistol is a semi-automatic or revolver in .22 Long Rifle, designed for a course of fire featuring five turning targets exposed for only a few seconds, during which time one shot is placed on each target. The international center-fire pistol can be an iron-sighted semi-automatic or revolver in any caliber from .30 caliber to .38 caliber. The standard pistol and women's sport pistol are similar to the center-fire pistol, but are chambered for .22 Long Rifle ammunition. Finally, international air pistol competition is limited to .177 inch air pistols with iron sights. All air pistol competition is conducted at 10 meters.

Typical accessories for all forms of bullseye shooting include a spotting scope and stand, ammunition blocks, and a pistol box that can hold several pistols as well as the spotting scope and ammunition. To contact the sanctioning bodies for these forms of bullseye competition, visit competitions.nra.org.

**Silhouette Competition**

In silhouette shooting, the targets are life-size or reduced-size steel silhouettes of four game animals–ram, turkey, pig and chicken–that must be knocked over to score a hit. Banks of targets for each animal are set at different distances from the firing line. In some classes of competition, the farthest (ram) targets may be placed as far as 200 meters from the shooter.

Shooting is done from the standing position or the freestyle position, in which the shooter is positioned on the ground.

Competition is held in a variety of classes, for both .22 rimfire and centerfire pistols, with both iron and optical sights, and using standing and freestyle positions. Some shooting classes favor long-barreled .22 target pistols, while others are dominated by typical big-bore hunting revolvers and specialized single-shot pistols in rifle calibers. There is even a class for air pistol shooters.

To contact the sanctioning body for NRA silhouette competition, visit competitions.nra.org.

**Cowboy Action Competition**

Cowboy Action Shooting is a relatively new sport, and reflects a resurgence in interest in the historical American West.

Courses of fire are similar to those used in practical pistol competition, in that they reflect the originality and creativity of the course designer. Thus, the stages at each match are likely to be very different. Extensive use is made of period props, such as barrels, hay bales, and even small buildings to give the shooter new and interesting challenges. Some pistol events even involve shooting balloons with special shot cartridges while riding a horse. Successful Cowboy Action pistol shooters must be able to fire from a variety of positions, at ranges up to 25 yards, with two hands as well as with just the strong and weak hands.

Targets include metal plates, cardboard silhouettes and the aforementioned balloons. Scoring is calculated on the basis of both the hits achieved and the time taken to complete the stage.

Pistols for Cowboy Action Shooting are limited to those guns (or modern copies) whose designs originated prior to approximately 1900. This generally means a revolver, such as a Colt Peacemaker, Smith & Wesson Schofield or Russian, 1875 Remington and other similar models.

Cowboy Action shooters have an extensive range of accessories from which to choose, from period clothes, boots and hats to various types of holsters, gun belts, cartridge belts and more.

To contact the sanctioning body for Cowboy Action Shooting visit sassnet.com.

*Cowboy Action competitors are required to dress in period clothing and assume nicknames reflecting the flavor of the Old West. Most matches have events for pistols, rifles and shotguns.*

*The NRA offers three comprehensive and highly-rated defensive pistol courses: the **NRA CCW Course**, for those interested in obtaining their CCW permit, the **Basic Personal Protection In The Home Course**, for pistol owners interested in home defense, and the **Personal Protection Outside The Home Course**, for those wishing to gain additional knowledge and skills necessary for personal defense. For more information about these courses, contact the NRA Education & Training Division at **training@nrahq.org**.*

## PERSONAL PROTECTION

Although nearly all of the millions of rounds fired by civilian pistol shooters each year are expended at targets or game, most pistol owners cite "self-defense" among the reasons for owning a gun. The right of self-defense is enshrined in American law, and the majority of states acknowledge the right of law-abiding citizens to carry a firearm for self-protection.

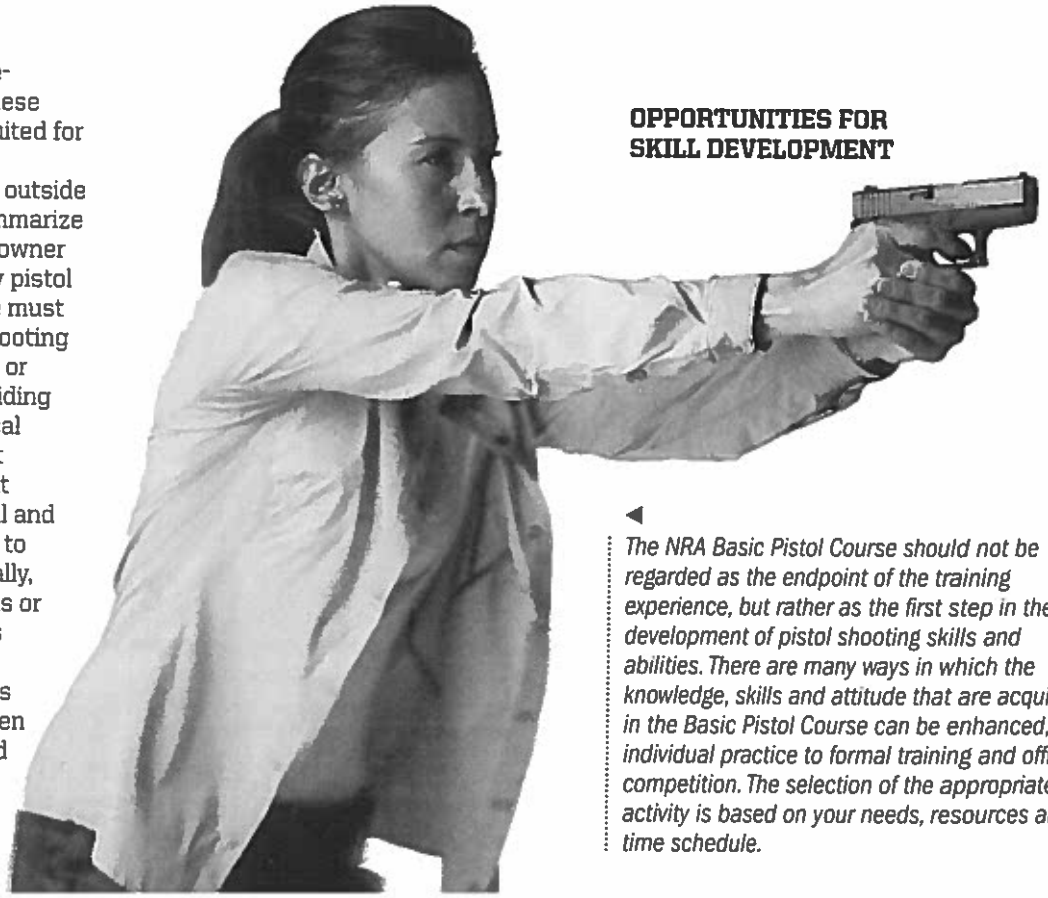
There are generally two situations in which a firearm is used for personal protection: **home defense**, in which the firearm is stored in the home, and **concealed carry**, in which the firearm is carried on the person in public. The requirements of these two types of self-defense are different, and thus usually involve different pistol types and cartridge choices.

In general, any pistol used for self-defense purposes must be able to fire several shots without reloading, and should be reliable, easy to use and easy to reload. Also, it should be chambered for a reasonably powerful cartridge.

Semi-automatic pistols and double-action revolvers most closely fit these requirements, and are thus best suited for self-defense use.

The subject of self-defense in or outside the home is far too complex to summarize here. The defensive-minded pistol owner not only must choose among many pistol types, sizes and calibers; he or she must also be proficient in a variety of shooting techniques. Just as importantly, he or she must know techniques for avoiding or evading attacks, the physiological and psychological phenomena that often accompany or follow a violent confrontation, and the mental, legal and social aftermath of using a firearm to protect oneself or one's family. Finally, the pistol owner must also know his or her legal rights and responsibilities regarding self-defense.

Owning a pistol for self-defense is a great responsibility, not to be taken lightly. The proper training will build the knowledge, skills and attitude to use a firearm safely and responsibly for self defense.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

◀ *The NRA Basic Pistol Course should not be regarded as the endpoint of the training experience, but rather as the first step in the development of pistol shooting skills and abilities. There are many ways in which the knowledge, skills and attitude that are acquired in the Basic Pistol Course can be enhanced, from individual practice to formal training and official competition. The selection of the appropriate activity is based on your needs, resources and time schedule.*

**Dry-Fire Practice**

Dry-fire practice is an inexpensive, safe and time-efficient way to enhance shooting fundamentals and practice the various shooting positions. Dry-firing involves practicing every phase of the firing process using an unloaded firearm.

All dry-fire practice must be performed under the following safety rules:

- The firearm must be completely unloaded.
- All dry-firing is done in a dedicated dry-fire area having a safe backstop at which the gun is pointed.
- No live ammunition is allowed in the dedicated dry-fire area.
- Reloading drills are performed only with dummy ammunition.

Of course, even though the firearm is unloaded, it is important to still observe the first Rule for Safe Gun Handling–**ALWAYS keep the gun pointed in a safe direction**.

Dry-firing can be used to practice a variety of skills, including reloading a revolver or semi-automatic pistol (using dummy ammunition); clearing stoppages (using dummy ammunition); practicing various shooting positions (kneeling, squatting, prone, etc.); and, of course, mastering the shooting fundamentals as well as grip, position and NAA (Natural Aiming Area). The ways that dry-firing can be used to enhance shooting skills are limited only by the imagination.

Laser technology affords a variation on traditional dry-fire techniques, in the form of target systems allowing an unmodified firearm to "fire" a beam of laser light at a target sensor. Such systems use a cartridge-shaped laser light inserted into the gun's chamber and activated by the firing pin strike.

Some pistols, most notably rimfire pistols, can be damaged by dry-firing them. With any pistol, the owner's manual should be consulted to determine if dry-firing is safe to do.

**Live-Fire Practice**

Although dry-fire practice, as well as the review of books, videos and other materials, can add considerably to your knowledge and ability, there is no substitute for live-fire practice in improving pistol-shooting skills. Initially, the novice shooter should concentrate upon drills that promote mastery of the shooting fundamentals. Later, as skill improves, more challenging drills may be practiced.

A shooting partner during live-fire exercises not only provides an additional incentive to practice; such a partner can help you better assess your progress. During a live-fire practice session, a partner can observe and give feedback on stance, grip and shooting fundamentals. On occasion a video record of the practice session may be useful in perfecting form or diagnosing shooting problems, particularly when played back in slow motion. The video camera must always be placed at or behind the firing line, never in front of the muzzle.

### Additional Training

The NRA Basic Pistol Course provides a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of safe and effective pistol shooting. Practice and application of these techniques will greatly enhance pistol shooting skill and enjoyment.

In recognition of the fact that self-defense is a concern of many pistol owners, the NRA's Education and Training Division offers the *NRA CCW* Course, the *NRA Personal Protection In The Home* and *NRA Personal Protection Outside The Home* courses. These courses cover the essential shooting skills required for effective home defense and concealed carry, and, in terms of the number of shots fired and the diversity of skills taught, are comparable to courses offered at elite shooting schools. In addition to varied shooting and gun handling techniques, these courses also present ways that an armed citizen can avoid, deter, escape or evade a violent confrontation.

Some shooters may wish to avail themselves of non-NRA training available at numerous facilities throughout the country. The instruction provided at such facilities may vary in terms of length, quality, type and cost. Shooters contemplating enrolling at such a facility should consider:

- Reputation of facility
- Geographic location
- Cost of course
- Credentials of instructors
- Student-teacher ratio
- Safety record of institution
- Types of courses offered
- Availability of nearby lodging (for multi-day courses)

Pistol enthusiasts who are primarily interested in improving their skills in a competitive discipline may avail themselves of NRA's Coach Program. This program provides advanced individualized coaching to pistol owners at all levels who are competing in NRA Bullseye, NRA Action Pistol and NRA Air Pistol matches.

### NRA Pistol Marksmanship Qualification Program

Any pistol shooter can develop skills and gain recognition for his or her level of proficiency in the NRA Pistol Marksmanship Qualification Program, a self-paced recreational shooting activity that provides shooters of all skill levels with both fun and a sense of accomplishment. The Program consists of seven different skill ratings which are earned by attaining the required scores on a series of increasingly challenging courses-of-fire. For more information on the NRA Pistol Marksmanship Qualification Program, see mqp.nra.org.

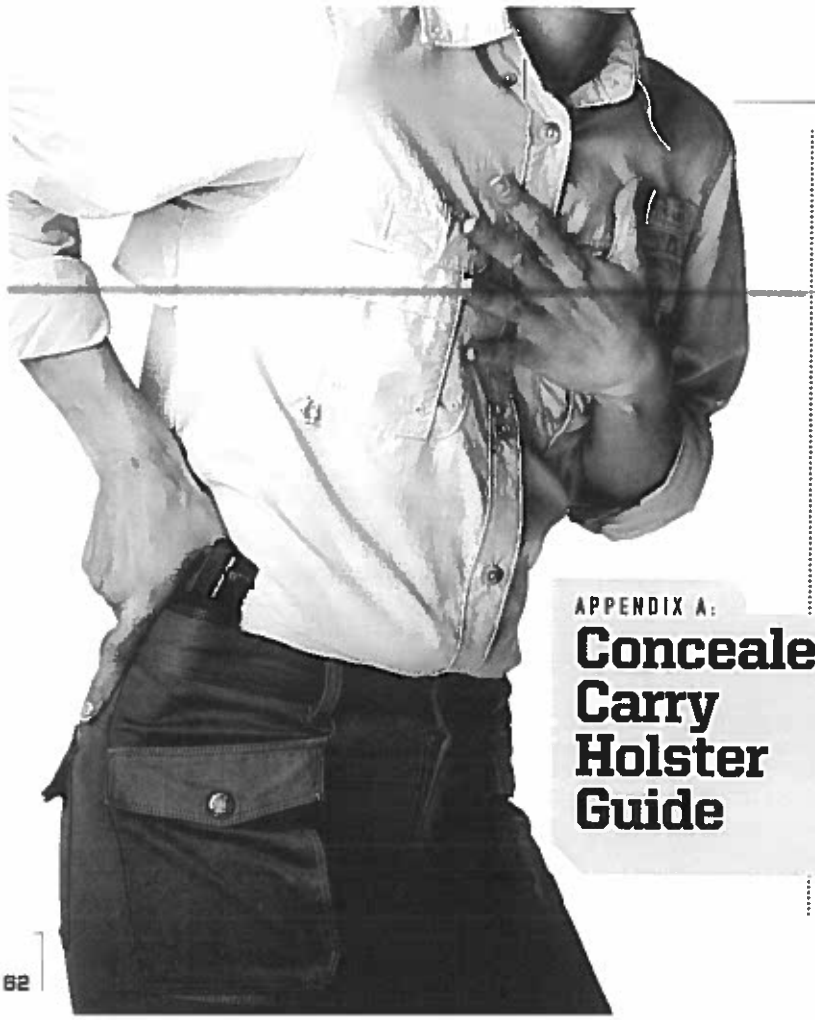
### NRA Instructors

*NRA is the world's leader in firearms safety training. More than 120,000 NRA instructors train civilian, military and law enforcement personnel nationwide, making NRA the first choice for advanced firearm training.*

C A R

SECTION 05

# Guide to Concealed Carry Holsters



APPENDIX A:

# Concealed Carry Holster Guide

**The NRA Concealed Carry Holster Guide** has been created by civilians that actually carry a concealed firearm, day in and day out; by individuals that have had to think ahead and choose the right holster for the right attire and/or occasion. In most cases, the first holster was never the "right" holster. As you will see with this guide, we have thought about all the attributes and principles associated with carrying a concealed firearm. We will introduce various methods of concealed carry and explain the advantages and disadvantages of each type. Hopefully, this guide will help you make the proper selection the first time in your quest for the "right" holster.

However, you must also keep in mind that there is no specific "perfect" holster or carry mode for all occasions. Ultimately, if you decide to carry a pistol on a daily basis, you will end up owning and incorporating different types of holsters for the same gun. Holster selection will become seasonal and your selection will be driven by what you are wearing. This may require a lifestyle change. You will need to consider your wardrobe, versus your carry mode, and choose the appropriate attire that will keep your firearm concealed and still provide you with a level of comfort and security as you go about your daily routine. A gun left at home will do you no good when you need it. As a wise man once said, "carrying a personal protection firearm is meant to be comforting, not comfortable." As we may not necessarily agree with this, hopefully our guide will help enhance your holster shopping experience and help you find the correct holsters to meet all your daily carry requirements.

## Principles of Concealed Carry

Selecting a suitable carry holster is only part of your overall pistol concealment strategy. Your carry holster must be integrated with the proper clothing and you must constantly be aware of the body positions, actions and activities that promote or hinder gun concealment. There are a number of basic principles, techniques and tips to help you better conceal your gun.

### Concealed Carry Gun

Chances are, you may have already selected and purchased your concealed carry firearm. In many cases, an individual selects the largest, most powerful gun that they can shoot well to incorporate into their daily lives. Unfortunately, this first selection may not always be the best one or the gun that you actually will carry on a daily basis. From experience, these large, heavy guns may end up locked up in a drawer or in your safe and not actually be on your person when you need it. If you already have the big heavy gun, all is not lost and there is no need to worry. You may also choose to purchase another firearm specific to your needs on any given day. Many people who have introduced a firearm into their daily personal protection strategies own several guns.

▲

**One Size Does Not Fit All**

*If you wear a business suit all day, you can carry a large-framed heavy pistol, as long as you have the appropriate holster and belt to complement it. However, this attire is not always appropriate or desired. If you live in a beach community or go on vacation where you will be wearing shorts and a T-shirt or other casual attire, you may wish to carry a different gun and utilize a different carry mode.*

Though this guide will focus on the carry system and concealed carry, it is important to introduce some factors that should be considered when selecting the pistol that you will carry. First, the gun must be easy to conceal, but just as important, it should be easy to draw from under clothing. For maximum concealment, the smallest gun you can shoot well, in the caliber you have selected, would be the best.

Some considerations when choosing your pistol should outweigh others, such as gun width. The narrower the gun, the less it will protrude. Semi-automatic pistols are generally more "concealable" than revolvers. If you choose a revolver, consider a five-shot revolver over a larger capacity, as the cylinder diameter will be slimmer. The cylinder of a revolver is most likely the widest part of the gun. Smaller, light-framed hammerless five-shot revolvers make fine pocket pistols, which we will cover in more detail later in this guide.

The dimension of the grip or gun butt is also an important consideration and could determine the manner in which you choose to carry. The gun is usually positioned by the holster in a manner that will place the grip so that it will stick out slightly from the body for access. This can produce a bulge in your clothing. A long, bulky grip will produce a larger bulge and will require a lot of thought in your chosen carry mode and attire. Smaller gun butts/grips would be best. In addition, the grip should be made of relatively hard, smooth materials, such as wood or hard plastic. Although soft rubber grips may help absorb felt recoil, they will cause your clothing to stick, bunch or ride up the grip. This will also happen with very heavy checkering or "skateboard" taped grips. If you have wood grips with heavy checkering, you can "dull" the sharp edges with fine sandpaper.

Gun length is not as important as the width or gun-butt size, yet it is still an important aspect to consider. A pistol with a six- or eight-inch barrel will not only be heavier to carry, it will be tougher to conceal, unless you wear a heavy coat and carry it in a muzzle-down shoulder holster, which we will introduce later in this guide. In most cases, you can own the same gun, in the same caliber with a much shorter barrel. This will provide the security of your chosen caliber, yet give you more options when considering your concealed carry mode. Let's face it, even if you start out with that six-inch, large framed revolver in a shoulder holster, you will most likely determine later that a smaller, lighter gun would be preferred.

Your concealed carry firearm should be as "snag-free" as possible. With some guns, dehorning may be desirable. Dehorning is the process of making the gun as smooth as possible, without sharp edges that can abrade clothing or snag clothing during the draw. Certain guns can be dehorned even further, by removing the spur from the external hammer. This is usually performed by a gunsmith. Some short-barreled revolvers incorporate a hammer shroud, which not only provides a snag-free draw, but also allows the gun to be fired repeatedly from a pocket, if necessary, without the danger of the fabric being caught between the gun's hammer and frame.

## Concealed Carry Gun Considerations

*Your carry firearm must be easy to conceal and easy to draw; a narrow width and other smaller dimensions will make it easier to conceal. It should be free of sharp protrusions that will snag clothing, and it should be small and light for the chosen caliber.*

**Concealment Clothing**

As indicated in the introduction, incorporating a concealed gun into your daily lives may require quite a lifestyle change. Not only do you need to consider the pistol you will choose to carry, you also should consider the clothing you will wear that will afford comfort and concealment as well as facilitate a smooth presentation of your firearm, should the need exist. There are basic principles to follow when selecting concealment clothing.

First and foremost, you should wear clothing that is appropriate for the occasion. It should blend in with the style and type of clothing that is appropriate to the weather and the circumstances. A lightweight sport coat worn to conceal a gun in a hip holster would fit in an office or city street, but would be totally inappropriate on a beach or a jogging trail. Any jacket at all may be out of place on a sweltering summer day. If you have a coat on and everyone else is wearing nothing but T-shirts, you'll certainly stand out and attract the attention of any reasonably observant person.

Loose clothing will hide the signs or bulges that may alert the casual observer that you are carrying a gun. It will also make it easier for you to access and draw your gun if needed. Yet, you must also keep in mind that clothing that is excessively loose can draw unwanted attention and gather in folds that may actually impede the draw.

If you carry your gun under a jacket, make sure you can comfortably button or zip it up to keep it from blowing open on a windy day.

Heavy clothing or clothing made of heavy fabric would be preferred over clothing that is made of a light fabric. However, you must consider what is appropriate and possible for the climate and occasion. A light fabric can easily conform to a protruding stock or holster and easily reveal the straps of a shoulder holster. Heavy fabric will usually hang in a way that conceals any irregular shape that lies beneath it. Of utmost importance, the heavy fabric tends to be easier to sweep aside to access your firearm.

Avoid very light-colored clothing. Bulges in clothing caused by a concealed handgun create hollows and shadows. These can be more evident when the clothing is light-colored.

Clothing with regular patterns, such as stripes, geometric patterns, plaids and so forth create a visual reference that easily reveals any irregularities in the way the clothing hangs on the body. Solid-colored fabric or fabric with a random pattern should be your choice when carrying a concealed firearm.

## Concealment Clothing Principles

*Effective concealment clothing should blend in by being appropriate for the occasion, including weather. To hide bulges, it should be loose-fitting and of a heavier weight. Darker colors conceal more effectively than lighter colors, as do solids and irregular patterns.*

**Holster Selection Fundamentals**

As with any purchase, you should consider the ultimate goal of the product and apply certain fundamentals in your decision prior to purchase. For instance, when selecting your automobile, you need to consider in what conditions you want to remain mobile. If you live in a snowy environment, you may want to purchase an all-wheel or four-wheel drive vehicle. Having a top quality holster and belt is essential for proper carry. The basic fundamentals you should consider prior to purchase are: concealment, access, retention and comfort.

The single most important aspect of concealed carry is to actually have your gun on your person when you need it. The best pistol and holster in the world will do you no good if you left them at home when you are confronted with violence.

For safety, all pistol carry devices should cover the trigger while the pistol is in the holster. This would prevent the inadvertent pulling of the trigger during presentation and prevent any other object, such as fabric of a shirt or blouse snagging and pulling the trigger.

**Concealment:** The primary function of your holster or other device used to carry your pistol is to conceal it on your person. Concealment means that a reasonably observant person would have little or no suspicion that you are carrying a pistol.

In many situations, it is just as bad for a person to suspect you are carrying a gun as it is for that person to know you are carrying.

**Access:** You must be able to get to your gun immediately when you need it. There are two aspects to access: physically grasping the firearm, and being able to remove it from the holster or other carry device.

Whatever carry mode you choose, you must be able to access and present your firearm as quickly as possible.

There is often a tradeoff between concealment and accessibility. Holsters and other concealed carry devices offering the greatest concealment often do not afford optimum access, and vice versa.

An example of a holster that provides high concealment, yet does not afford the ability to draw very quickly, would be an ankle holster. On the other hand, a holster that can provide immediate access, yet is not very concealable, would be a crossdraw holster.

Keep in mind that the selection of any particular carry device is usually a compromise between concealment and access. The relative importance of each will be a primary consideration for the gun owner.

## Holster Selection Criteria

*Every holster is a balance between concealment, access, retention and comfort. The choice of carry holster is also dependent upon a myriad of other considerations, such as weather, wardrobe and occasion. It is rare that "one size fits all."*

**Retention:** Your holster or other carry device should be able to retain its grip on your pistol. Consider activities such as running, jumping or any other strenuous activities. It should also retain if you sit, bend over, fall to the ground or end up grappling with an assailant. You should also consider retention in the event an attacker attempts to take your gun from you.

The best form of retention is accomplished with snug-fitting holsters that are molded to a specific gun (friction fit) or held in place by spring tension.

Although retention straps or devices that must be manually manipulated to remove your firearm from the device may afford a higher level of retention, they must be unfastened prior to the draw. This represents another step that must be performed under stress, which may slow your presentation.

Ultimately, a properly made holster that is snugly fitted to the pistol usually allows a draw in one direction only, making removal by an assailant more difficult. Hip holsters with a forward tilt ("FBI cant") make it harder for an assailant to remove the gun from behind.

Fitted holsters often provide the individual a good level of retention with the ability to perform a fast presentation, unimpeded by straps that must be unfastened.

Keep in mind that some carry devices, such as holster purses and fanny packs, almost always employ some sort of hook and loop retaining straps to secure and position the gun inside the device.

**Comfort:** Finally, the often most overlooked factor in choosing a carry device is comfort. If your carry device is not comfortable, you are more likely to leave your gun at home. In addition, you may reveal the fact that you are carrying a gun if you are frequently readjusting its position and scratching where it irritates you.

An uncomfortable holster or other carry device often indicates that something is not quite right. The gun may be too heavy, the belt is too thin or tight or the holster may not position the gun in a manner that affords the most comfort.

Choosing appropriate equipment will contribute to comfortable carry for extended periods. Consider the belt you choose for a hip holster. It should be a "gun belt" or a heavy, wide belt that fits the holster belt openings tightly. If you choose a shoulder holster, consider wide, smooth cross straps. Be sure to choose a holster that has rounded edges where it contacts the body.

Many holster manufacturers offer a "body shield" on their holsters. This is a process in which the holster material that lies against the body rises to the height of the gun, so safeties, sights and other steel or plastic edges are not rubbing your body while you are carrying.

Unfortunately, experimentation with different types and brands of carry devices may be the only way to find the one that is right for you. Also be mindful that some combinations, such as a heavy, large-framed pistol worn in a belt holster by a small person, may never afford complete comfort.

## Holster Materials

Holsters and other carry devices are usually constructed of leather, nylon fabric or plastic/polymer.

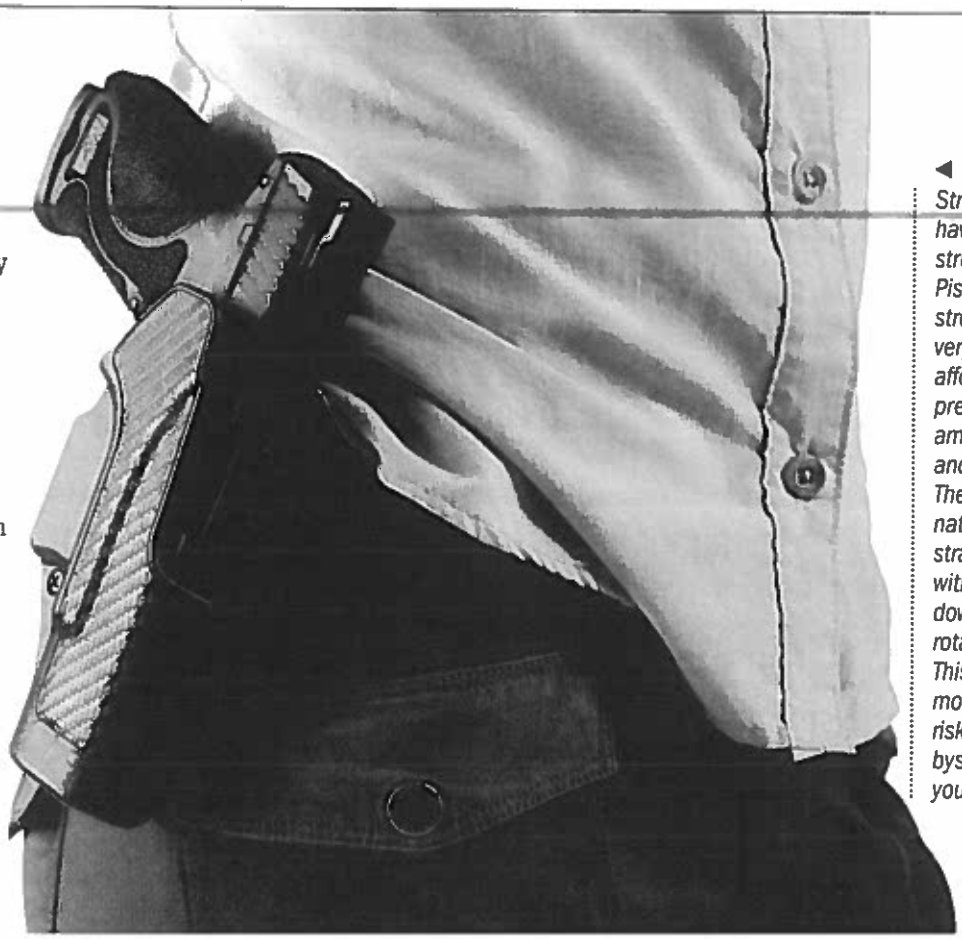
▲ **Leather holsters** *can be made to snugly fit a pistol, making a safety strap unnecessary on some designs. Fitted leather holsters can expand with use, making some sort of tension adjustment desirable. Holster purses are usually made of leather to make them resemble traditional purses. Leather is reasonably tough and durable, but can deteriorate when exposed to moisture, oils, solvents and extreme temperature conditions.*

▲ **Nylon fabric** *is used for many types of pistol carry devices, including holsters, holster purses and fanny packs. This material is soft and flexible and is often used in several layers with a layer of padding sandwiched between. Holsters made of nylon fabric cannot be made to fit a pistol as snugly as fitted leather holsters do and usually require a safety or retaining strap.*

▲ *Holsters made of* **plastic or polymer** *are usually hard, stiff holsters that offer retention equal to fitted leather holsters. Plastic or polymer designs have an ability to retain their shape over time and are more resistant than leather to moisture, solvents and oil. Pistols may move slightly inside hard polymer holsters, producing noise and wear on the gun's finish.*

## The Holster

A gun holster is a carry device that positions the gun on the body, leaving both hands free. Holsters are the most common carry devices for pistols and are the best for most people under most conditions. A properly designed holster positions the gun in a consistent manner and helps conceal the gun under appropriate clothing. The most common holsters are strong-side hip, shoulder, crossdraw, small-of-the-back, ankle and pocket holsters.



*Strong-side hip holsters have a number of strengths to consider. Pistol retention with strong-side hip holsters is very good. They probably afford the fastest presentation speed among the holster types and provide a safe draw. The gun is presented in a natural motion that goes straight toward the target with the muzzle pointing downward until it is rotated toward the target. This natural presentation motion minimizes the risk of sweeping innocent bystanders or parts of your body.*

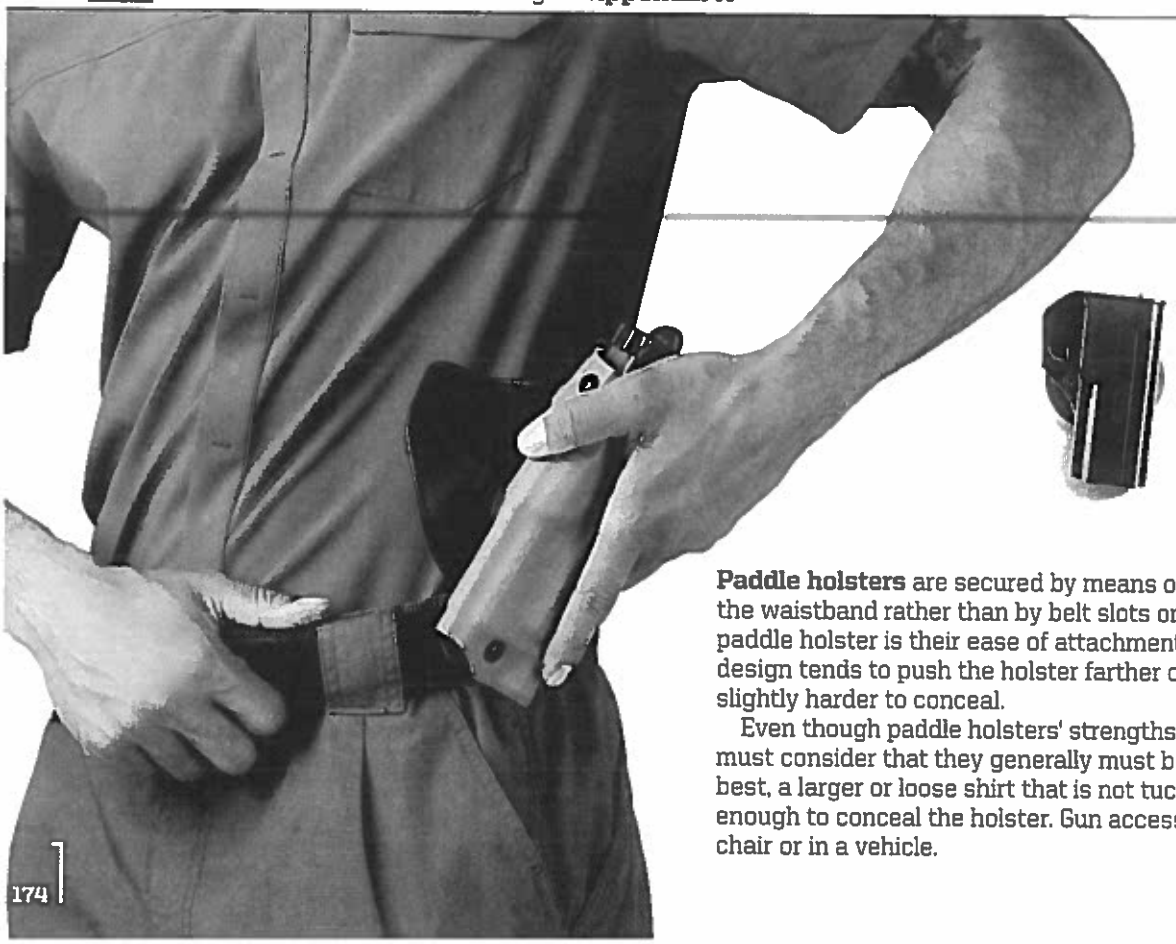
The **strong-side hip holster** is the most familiar type of holster. These holsters are positioned on the shooting hand side, usually between the kidney and the point of the hip. These holsters offer the best combination of concealment, access and retention.

It should hold the gun tight against the body for maximum concealment and be silent when the gun is carried. Squeaking leather or clicking hard plastic can give away the presence of a pistol. There are several different types of strong-side hip holsters.

Belt slide, pancake or other kinds of holsters that attach to the belt by way of belt slots or loops provide extreme stability and consistent positioning on the body. The different types of such holsters vary primarily in the pattern of the belt slots or loops. Pancake holsters, which are flat and wide with widely-spaced belt slots, position the gun close to the body, promoting concealment.

**Inside-the-waistband holsters** place the holster inside the waistband of the pants instead of outside, as in other hip holster designs. Belt loops encircle the belt and retain the holster in place. Such holsters provide excellent concealment.

◀ *Note that you may need to wear larger pants and belt to provide adequate room to use an inside-the-waistband holster comfortably.*



*Paddle holsters can be very convenient. It is important to note that most paddle holsters still require the use of a belt. Ensure that the holster does not ride up during presentation of the firearm. The majority of paddle holsters are carried on the strong-side hip, giving them the benefits of that type of holster while being easier to take on and off.*

**Paddle holsters** are secured by means of a large flat paddle that fits inside the waistband rather than by belt slots or loops. The main advantage of a paddle holster is their ease of attachment and detachment. Often, the paddle design tends to push the holster farther out from the body, causing it to be slightly harder to conceal.

Even though paddle holsters' strengths may outweigh their limitations, you must consider that they generally must be worn with a jacket or coat or, at best, a larger or loose shirt that is not tucked in. The clothing must be long enough to conceal the holster. Gun access may be limited when seated in a chair or in a vehicle.

*The best shoulder holsters offer good concealment, retention, access and comfort Some vertical shoulder holsters use spring steel inserts, while vertical and upside-down shoulder holsters may use a simple thumb-break retention strap to retain the gun. These devices enable a simple draw.*

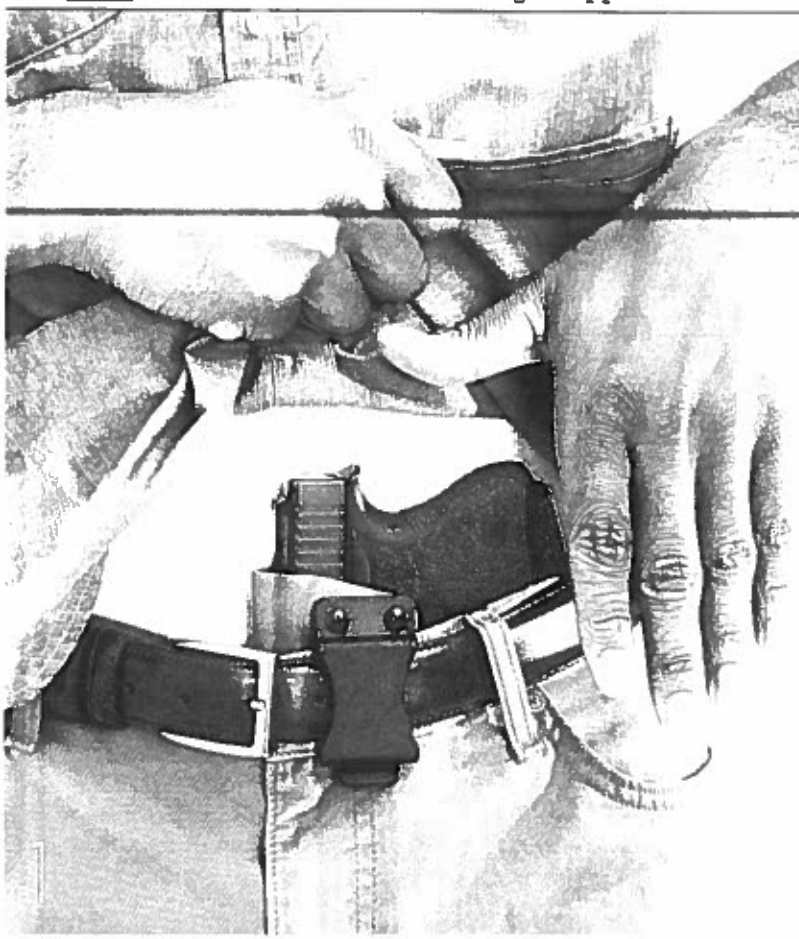
**Shoulder holsters** suspend the firearm under the support side arm from a harness made of leather or fabric straps that wrap around the back and shoulders. Like belt holsters, they are available in versions that suspend the pistol in various ways.

Upside-down shoulder holsters put the pistol in the armpit, suspended butt-down. They offer good concealment for small-frame revolvers and semi-automatics.

A vertical shoulder holster suspends the pistol muzzle-down, with the butt under the armpit. Such holsters are often preferred for large-frame or long-barreled pistols.

Horizontal shoulder holsters place the gun with the muzzle pointing directly to the rear and the butt forward. These holsters put the gun in perhaps the most natural drawing position. These holsters work best with fairly short pistols.

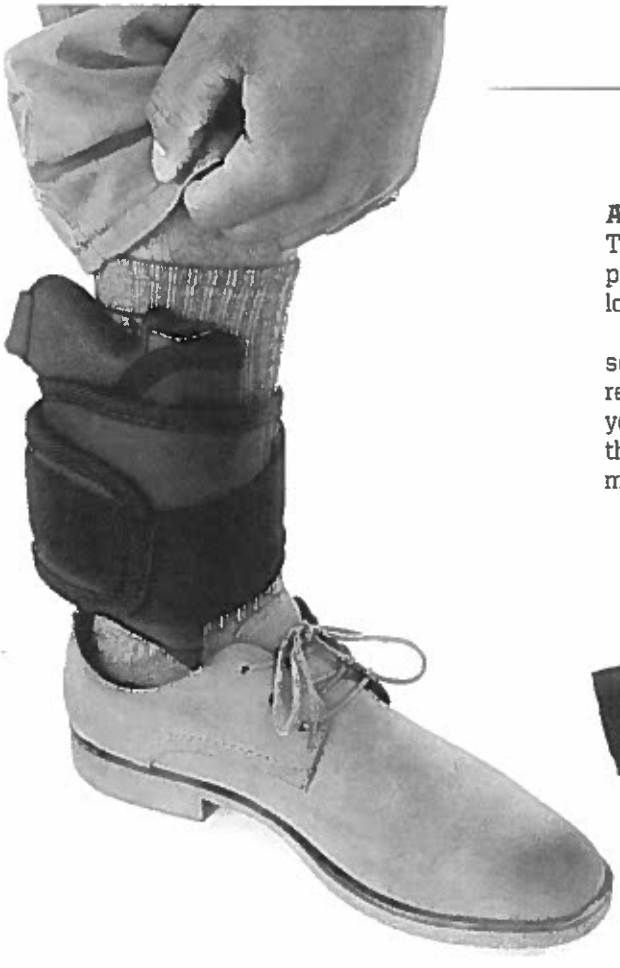
Consider their weaknesses as well. During presentation from a shoulder holster, the firearm often sweeps a wide arc or otherwise points in an unsafe direction. Shoulder holsters that carry the pistol pointing to the rear potentially endanger persons behind the wearer. Upside-down shoulder holsters carry the firearm with the muzzle pointing upward into the armpit, a potentially unsafe direction. Both the horizontal and vertical shoulder holsters position the pistol so that it could easily be grabbed by an assailant.



*The appendix carry position provides a high level of concealment as well as excellent firearm access, particularly while seated. Comfort is a decidedly individual matter. Appendix holsters should be purpose built and designed specifically for the gun being used.*

The **appendix holster** positions the pistol on the belt somewhere between eleven and two o'clock on the body. In use, the shooting hand reaches straight down, providing a very fast draw under most conditions. This method of carry also offers a very high level of concealment.

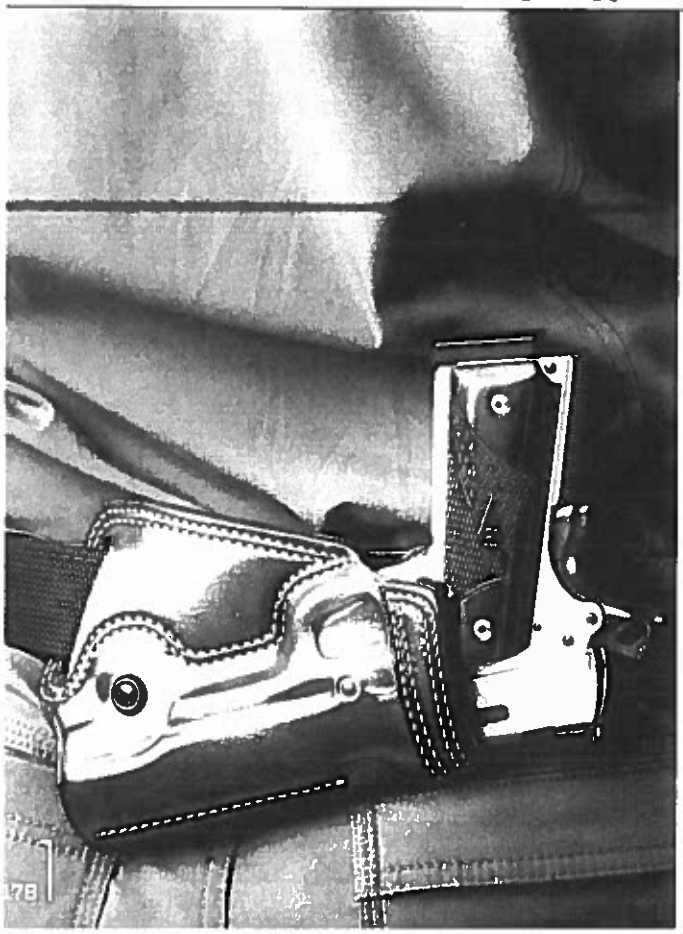
One must consider body type when deciding to adopt the appendix carry position. A large or protruding abdomen could result in difficulty for some. Another consideration is holster selection. Although there are many holsters that might work in this location, it is important to have an appendix-specific holster that is made for your firearm. This will increase safety and comfort while using and carrying your firearm.



**Ankle holsters** position the gun on the lower leg, on or just above the ankle. Typically, a cuff or series of straps wrap around the lower leg, with the gun positioned muzzle-down on the inside of the leg. The gun is most often located on the inside of the support side leg.

Accessing the gun in an ankle holster requires a relatively complex sequence of events: Bending down or lifting the leg, lifting the pants leg and releasing the safety strap before the gun can be drawn. During the draw, if you are trying to maintain balance on one leg, you may inadvertently point the gun in an unsafe direction. For some people, the extra weight on one leg makes the ankle holster feel awkward or uncomfortable.

◀ *The primary benefit of an ankle holster is concealment. The ankle holster is an example of compromising accessibility with a good level of concealment, provided you wear pants in which the pant legs are sufficiently loose.*



*Comfort may be a big factor with this type of holster, especially when sitting. Additionally, when taking a seat in a chair or hard backed bench, the gun butt can knock against the back with a telltale sound.*

The **small-of-the-back** holster provides excellent concealment of the gun when you are viewed from the front. However, when you are viewed from the side or rear, a bulge may be readily visible if a medium- or large-frame gun is carried. A small gun will often be well concealed in such a holster. Concealment is enhanced with an inside-the-waistband small-of-the-back holster, as the lower part of the holster and the gun are hidden inside the waistband of the pants.

There are drawbacks with a small-of-the-back holster as well. Retention can be problematic if an assailant observes the holster and grabs for the gun, considering how difficult it is to struggle with an assailant who is behind you. Access is only fair, since you need to reach behind the back and under your clothing. In regard to safety, it is very easy to inadvertently point the gun's muzzle at your thigh or side or to sweep others in a wide arc.

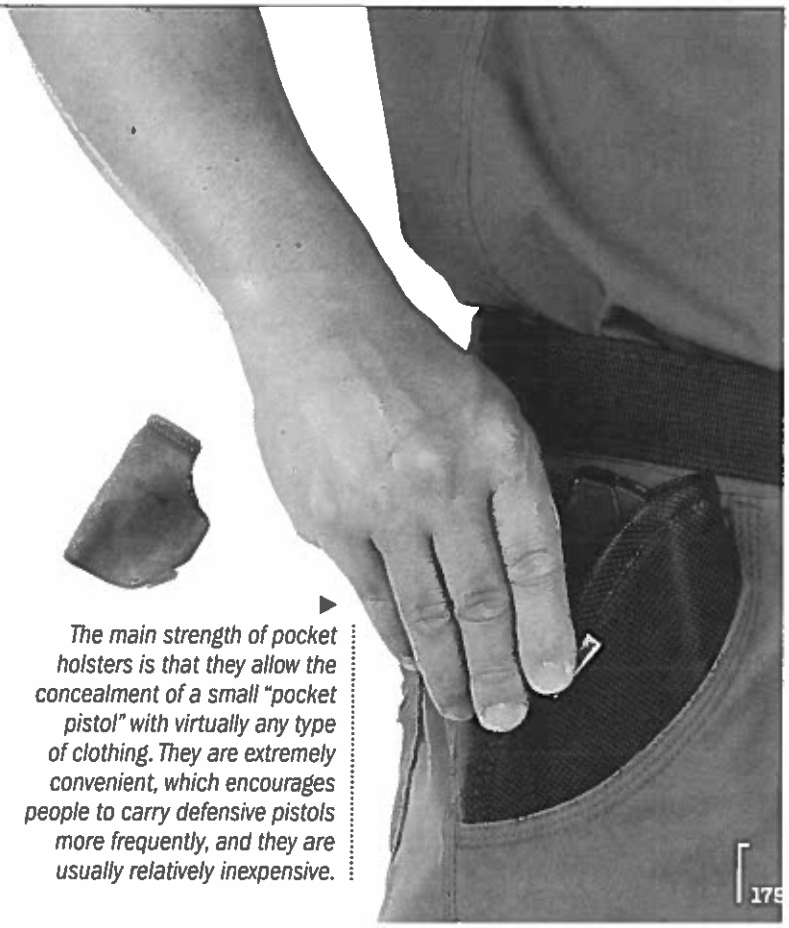
A **pocket holster** is a staple in many people's concealed carry arsenal. Many people start out with large pistols and determine after time that a small pocket-sized pistol may be perfect in many situations in which a larger gun may be inconvenient or uncomfortable. Pocket pistols can easily be tossed into a pant or coat pocket if you are making a quick trip to the all-night convenience store.

First and foremost, to be considered a "pocket pistol" the gun must generally be small in size, light weight and made with rounded edges and have very few controls to prevent snagging during presentation. They are comfortable to carry and easy to conceal.

A gun carried in a pocket without a holster may rotate so that its butt is downward when you go to access it. Obviously, this would make presentation more difficult. Even the smallest pistols will tend to "print" through clothing and may alarm a reasonably observant person.

Pocket holsters that fit inside the pocket and hold a small pistol serve to both orient the gun's butt in a consistent position and break up the gun's outline through the clothing.

You may wish to consider the drawbacks. First of all, only a small pistol can be carried concealed in a pocket. In addition, no other objects, such as loose change, matches, keys or any other commonly carried items should be mixed in the same pocket that you carry your pistol in, and it can be difficult to draw from a seated position. The good news is pocket pistols have become so popular that most manufacturers offer them in powerful calibers and have developed them to a point as to be considered very reliable.

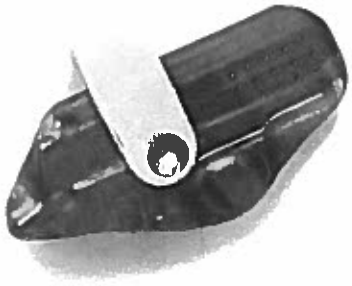


*The main strength of pocket holsters is that they allow the concealment of a small "pocket pistol" with virtually any type of clothing. They are extremely convenient, which encourages people to carry defensive pistols more frequently, and they are usually relatively inexpensive.*

## Other Carry Modes

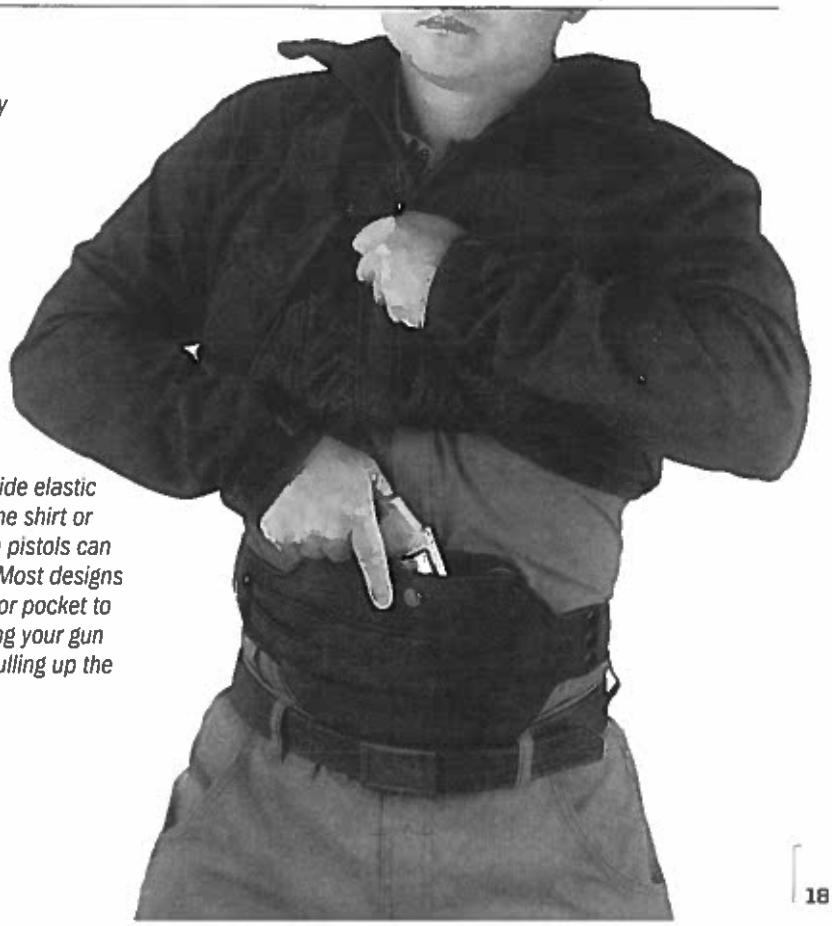
There are many other holster-type pistol carry devices. All such devices provide primarily "deep cover" carry in which concealment is the primary concern and access is often limited.

◀ **Holster vests/holster jackets** *have pockets or compartments that contain integral holsters capable of concealing pistols of almost any size. Care must be taken not to carelessly put the jacket aside or hang it up. They sag visibly to one side, unless you add equal weight to the opposite side. Similar safety concerns as presenting the pistol from a shoulder holster apply.*



◀ **Bra holsters** *have become available and are gaining popularity in some circles. They are usually made with thin fabric and are snapped directly to a brassiere, placing a very small pocket pistol between the breasts.*

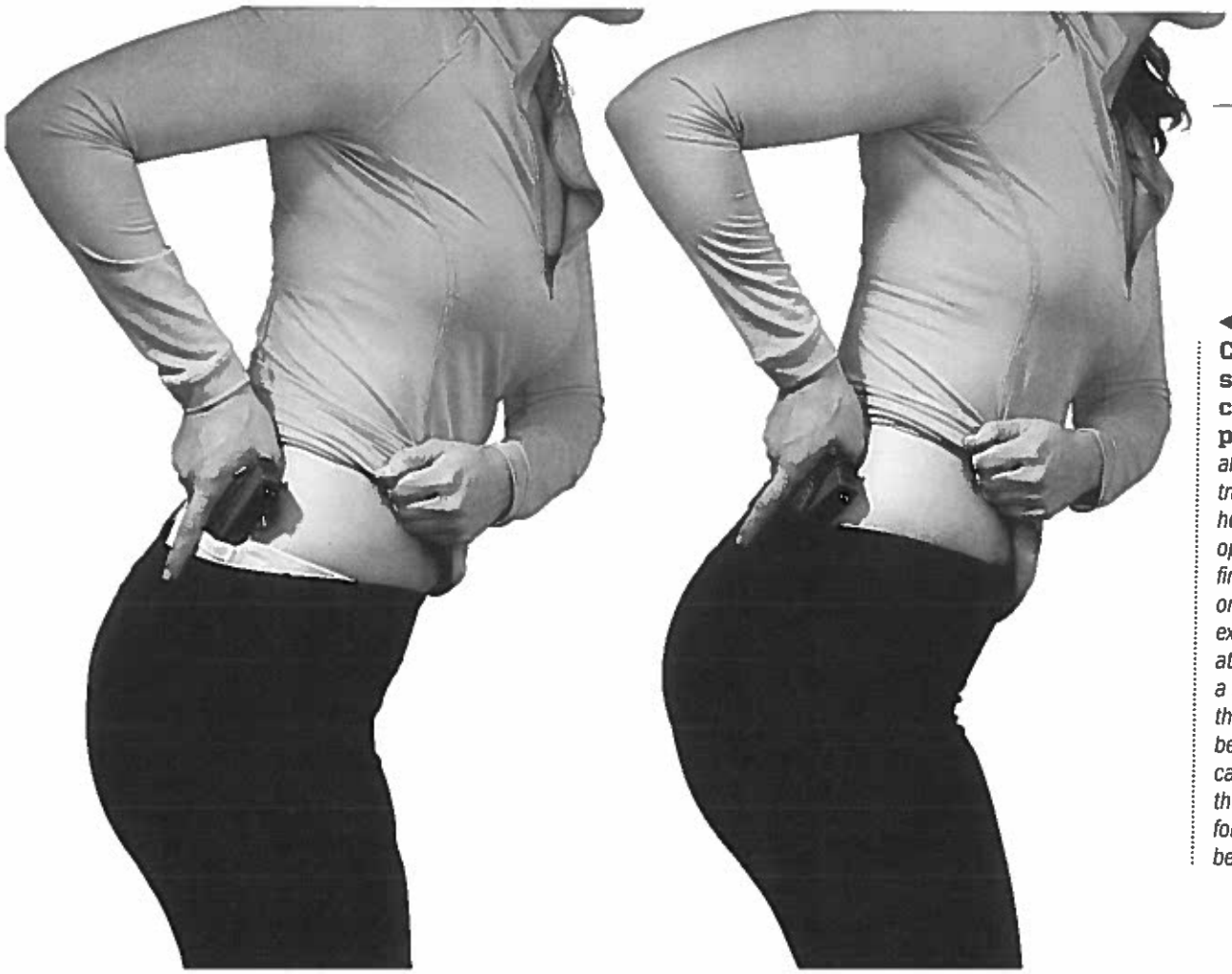
▲ *The* **underwear holster** *lies completely inside the pants with the pistol positioned in front of the crotch. Accessing the gun involves reaching down inside the pants. Concealment and retention of a small pistol can be excellent, but access obviously takes some effort.*



▶ **Belly bands** *are wide elastic bands that fit under the shirt or blouse and into which pistols can be inserted for carry. Most designs incorporate a holster or pocket to locate the gun. Drawing your gun requires opening or pulling up the covering clothing.*

**Thigh holsters** *are usually made with wide elastic bands and incorporate a holster or pocket to locate the gun. They are very similar in design to the ankle holster, yet they are made to be worn with shorts, skirts and dresses, on the support side thigh. Drawing the gun requires pulling up the short leg, dress or skirt.*

**Tank top holsters** *may be a good option when carrying on the belt line is not possible. Most tank top holsters are ambidextrous and allow the user to carry multiple items. A good option for some dresses and active wear, this holster can be adapted to many body types.*



**Compression shorts** *and* **compression pants** *are a great alternative when a traditional belt and holster are not an option. Many users find it difficult to carry on their person while exercising or wearing athletic clothing. With a sewn in holster, these items are a better alternative to carrying the gun off the body, allowing for faster access and better retention.*

## Holster Accessories

Holster accessories can increase the effectiveness of the chosen holster.

**Gun belts** are extra-thick leather having the requisite rigidity to support the weight of a pistol and holster without bending or curling over. Proper gun belts help position the gun consistently on the body. The width of the belt should match the width of the holster's belt loops or slots. It is easy to find gun belts that are made to resemble standard dress belts, aiding gun concealment. The length of the belt may need to be longer than a customary dress belt.

**Magazine** or **speedloader pouches** can be mounted on the belt if a covering garment is worn or may be carried in a pocket; carried in either location, these devices allow an individual to carry extra ammunition in an accessible location. It is equally important to ensure these accessories are also concealed. If worn exposed, they may give away the fact that one is carrying a firearm as well.

**Holster purses** are designed to look and function like normal women's purses. The best holster purses are designed expressly for carrying a concealed pistol and incorporate a dedicated gun compartment and utilize steel-reinforced straps that resist cutting. They hold the gun in a position for a proper grip with easy-access closures.

An assortment of purses ensures a pistol can be carried no matter what style or type of clothing is worn. Holster purses that can be hung off the support side shoulder are more easily carried and retained than those which can be carried only by handles.

Holster purse strengths include fast pistol access provided by some models that have separate gun compartments featuring quick-opening closures. They are often the only method of concealed pistol carry for women wearing clothing that does not allow the use of a holster. They are identical in appearance to standard purses and thus provide strong pistol concealment.

You should consider that some designs place the firearm in a position so that it points directly to the rear when carried. Many holster purses are suspended from a shoulder strap on the support side; others have handles. With either type, one hand–usually the support hand–is always engaged in retaining or carrying the purse.

Drawing from a holster purse usually requires both hands, one to retain, stabilize or open the purse and the other to grasp the gun inside. Special vigilance is required to keep from carelessly leaving the purse unattended or accessible to children, or from making it a tempting target for a purse snatcher. When drawing from a purse, special techniques must be used to avoid sweeping a wide arc and possibly innocent bystanders.

▲ *Holster purses provide excellent concealability and good access and comfort. The level of retention they offer depends upon the purse design as well as the way in which the purse is carried and handled.*

**Briefcases** and **day planners** are available that feature a compartment or internal holster for a pistol. The advantages and disadvantages are very similar to those of a holster purse.

**Fanny packs** are small pouches of fabric or, less frequently, leather that fit around the waist with an attached belt. Despite their name, most fanny packs today are worn at the front of the body. They are commonly worn during physical activity such as running or riding a bike or when the clothing does not employ a belt, such as gym shorts.

Like holster purses, the best fanny packs are those designed expressly for carrying a pistol. Avoid fanny packs bearing logos of gun related companies; criminals know these companies and will recognize your fanny pack as containing a gun.

Many criminals are aware that fanny packs are often used to carry pistols. Fanny packs designed for concealed carry utilize separate quick-opening gun compartments.

Even though a specifically designed fanny pack is desirable, many people simply drop a small pistol in a regular fanny pack.

Fanny packs do a good job of concealing a small to medium sized pistol and offer many of the same benefits of holster purses, though they have an additional advantage of freeing up both hands when worn. They may offer the only way of carrying a concealed pistol when light jogging or workout clothing is worn in warm weather. Fanny packs specifically designed for guns offer good concealment, access, retention and comfort.

As with any other device, these have their limitations as well. If a regular fanny pack is used, the compartment in which the gun is carried should be absolutely free of other objects.

**Testing the Concealed Pistol Carry Device**

You have your pistol and have decided on a carry device to incorporate it into your daily life. Testing the carry device for concealment, retention, access and comfort is your final step.

Use a full-length mirror or two mirrors, if necessary, to determine if your pistol is concealed from different angles.

Turn, bend, stoop, squat and reach while wearing your gun to determine if it is revealed by movement. Have a second person observe you as you move. Raising your arms above your head causes your concealing garment to ride up several inches, potentially revealing the bottom of a belt holster. Bending forward can make the butt of a gun worn in a hip holster stick out toward the rear.

Test the device for concealment in the wind. A gun concealed under a jacket can easily be revealed should a gust of wind blow the jacket open.

Test retention while jumping, jogging or engaging in other strenuous activities. Have a friend attempt to snatch a dummy training gun from the carry device. Any retention problems may require adjustment or replacement of the device.

Be sure to test the device for rapid access to the firearm by practicing presentation while wearing your concealing garment. You can have a friend time your presentation with a stopwatch. An elapsed time of much more than two seconds is too slow.

Finally, test the device for comfort by wearing it around your home for extended periods of time.

*All tests of a carry device must be performed with an unloaded pistol or dummy training gun.*

We hope that this guide has provided you with the necessary information to assist you in your search or the perfect concealed carry solution. Remember, with this right comes responsibilities. It is the gun owner's responsibility to learn and obey all applicable laws that pertain to the purchase, possession, carry and use of a firearm in their locale.

**Notes:**

# NRA HISTORY

Dismayed by the lack of marksmanship skill among Civil War troops, Union veterans Col. William C. Church and Gen. George Wingate formed the National Rifle Association of America in 1871 to "promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis."

After New York state granted it a charter on Nov. 17, 1871, NRA chose Gen. Ambrose Burnside, a former governor of Rhode Island and U.S. senator, as its first president. In 1872, with financial help from New York state, the NRA purchased the Creed Farm on Long Island and built a rifle range, named Creedmoor, where NRA held its first annual matches. Political opposition to the promotion of marksmanship in New York forced NRA to find a new home for its range. In 1892, Creedmoor was deeded back to the state, and NRA's matches moved to Sea Girt, N.J.

*General Ambrose Burnside*

NRA's interest in promoting the shooting sports among America's youth began in 1903, when NRA Secretary Albert S. Jones urged the establishment of rifle clubs at all major colleges, universities and military academies. By 1906, more than 200 boys were competing in NRA matches. Today, more than 1.3 million young Americans participate in NRA shooting sports programs, partnering with groups such as 4-H, the Boy Scouts of America, the American Legion and the U.S. Jaycees.

By 1907, a new range was needed. Gen. Ammon B. Critchfield, Adjutant General of Ohio, began constructing a new shooting facility on the shores of Lake Erie, 45 miles east of Toledo. Camp Perry became the home of the annual National Matches, which became the benchmark for competitive marksmanship excellence. With thousands of competitors annually in pistol, smallbore, high-power rifle and black powder events, the National Matches are one of the biggest sporting events held in America today.

Responding to repeated attacks on Second Amendment rights, NRA formed its Legislative Affairs Division in 1934. While NRA did not yet lobby directly, it mailed out legislative facts and analyses so members could take action. Recognizing the critical need for political defense of the Second Amendment, NRA formed the Institute for Legislative Action in 1975.

NRA continued its commitment to training, education and marksmanship. During World War II, NRA offered its ranges to the government, encouraged members to serve as plant and home guard members, and developed training materials for industrial security. NRA members even reloaded ammunition for those guarding war plants. In 1940, NRA members contributed more than 7,000 firearms to Britons to defend themselves from an expected Nazi invasion.

After the war, NRA concentrated its efforts on another much-needed arena for education and training: the hunting community.

In 1949, NRA established the first hunter education program with the state of New York. Hunter education courses are now taught by state fish and game departments across the U.S. and in Canada, and have helped make hunting one of the safest recreational activities in existence. NRA continues its leadership role in hunting today with the Youth Hunter Education Challenge, a program that allows youngsters to build on skills they learn in basic hunter education courses, reaching over 1.2 million young hunters since 1985.

With the introduction of its NRA Police Firearms Instructor certification program in 1960, NRA became the only national trainer of law enforcement officers. Over the past 50 years, we have trained more than 55,000 instructors who train thousands of law enforcement and security personnel each year. Top law enforcement shooters from around the world compete annually at the NRA National Shooting Championships.

NRA is the world's largest civilian firearms trainer. Courses are available in basic rifle, pistol, shotgun, home firearms safety, personal protection and range safety, among others. Additionally, over 8,000 NRA-certified coaches work with young competitive shooters.

In 1999, NRA launched Women On Target® in response to persistent calls from women for increased opportunities in hunting and shooting sports. Women On Target is a nationwide series of hunts and instructional shooting clinics that provide a friendly and supportive atmosphere for women at all levels.

Through the lifesaving Eddie Eagle GunSafe® Program, established in 1988, more than 29 million pre-kindergarten to third-grade children have learned that if they see a firearm in an unsupervised situation, they should "STOP! Don't touch. Run away. Tell a grown-up." Over the years, NRA's Refuse To Be A Victim® seminars have helped more than 125,000 men and women develop their own personal safety plan using common-sense strategies.

In 1990, NRA established The NRA Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, to raise tax-deductible contributions in support of gun safety and educational efforts benefiting young people, women, hunters, gun collectors, law enforcement officers and the physically disabled. To date, The NRA Foundation has awarded over $300 million through more than 28,000 grants to eligible organizations in support of the shooting sports.

In addition, *Friends of NRA*, a nationwide system of community fundraising events, has raised more than $600 million for firearms education, with 80 percent going to youth programs.

With 15 galleries and more than 3,000 firearms on exhibit, the National Firearms Museum at NRA headquarters in Fairfax, Va., traces the development of firearms from the earliest hand cannons to modern-day sporting and military arms. The museum tells the story of how Americans and their guns gained freedom in the Revolutionary War, earned a place in the American wilderness and won two world wars.

Now, NRA is widely recognized as America's most powerful defender of Second Amendment rights. Through it all, NRA has been the world's premier firearms education organization–due to the tireless efforts and countless hours of service of millions of NRA members.

# MEMBER INFORMATION & BENEFITS

**MEMBERSHIP ACCOUNT INFORMATION: (877) 672-2000**

**NRA Headquarters: (703) 267-1000 • INTERNET ADDRESS: nra.org**

**MEMBER SERVICE** ..... (800) 672-3888

**NRASTORE.COM** ..... (888) 607-6007

**5-STAR MEMBER BENEFITS**
For Member discounts and special offers visit ..... Benefits.NRA.org

**INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION**
Grassroots/Legislative Hotline ..... (800) 392-8683

**OFFICE OF ADVANCEMENT/ GIFT PLANNING** ..... (877) NRA-GIVE

**THE NRA FOUNDATION** ..... (800) 423-6894

**NRA INSTRUCTOR/ COACH FIREARM TRAINING** ..... (703) 267-1500

**EDDIE EAGLE GUNSAFE PROGRAM** ..... (800) 231-0752

**REFUSE TO BE A VICTIM** ..... (800) 861-1166

**RECREATIONAL SHOOTING** ..... (800) 672-7435

**NRA AFFILIATED CLUBS** ..... (800) 672-2582

**RANGE SERVICES** ..... (877) 672-7264

**COMPETITIVE SHOOTING** ..... (877) 672-6282

**LAW ENFORCEMENT** ..... (703) 267-1640

**FRIENDS OF NRA** ..... (703) 267-1342

**NRA MUSEUMS/ GUN COLLECTOR PROGRAMS** ..... (703) 267-1600

**SHOWS & EXHIBITS** ..... (866) 343-1805

**MEDIA RELATIONS** ..... (703) 267-1595

**HUNTER SERVICES** ..... (844) 672-6883

# STATE ASSOCIATIONS

**Alabama Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
jmoses1936@gmail.com

**Arkansas Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
arkansasrifle.com

**Colorado State Shooting Ass'n.**
cssa.org

**Connecticut State Rifle & Revolver Ass'n.**
thecsrra.org

**Delaware State Sportsmen's Ass'n.**
dssa.us

**Florida Sport Shooting Ass'n.**
flssa.org

**Georgia Sport Shooting Ass'n.**
gssainc.org

**Illinois State Rifle Ass'n. Inc.**
isra.org

**Indiana State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n. Inc.**
isrpa.org

**Iowa Firearms Coalition**
iowafc.org

**Kansas State Rifle Ass'n.**
ksraweb.org

**League of Kentucky Sportsmen Inc.**
kentuckysportsmen.com

**Louisiana Shooting Ass'n.**
louisianashooting.com

**Maine Rifle & Pistol Ass'n. Inc.**
mainerpa.org

**Maryland State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
msrpa.org

**Goal (Massachusetts)**
goal.org

**Michigan Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
michrpa.org

**Mississippi Gun Owners Ass'n.**
msgo.com

**Missouri Sport Shooting Ass'n.**
missourisportshooting.org

**Nebraska Marksmanship Ass'n.**
nemarksmanship.com

**Gun Owners Of New Hampshire Inc.**
gonh.org

**Ass'n. Of New Jersey Rifle & Pistol Clubs Inc.**
anjrpc.org

**New Mexico Shooting Sports Ass'n. Inc.**
nmssa.org

**New York State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n. Inc.**
nysrpa.org

**North Carolina Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
ncrpa.org

**Ohio Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
orpa.net

**Oklahoma Rifle Ass'n. Inc.**
oklarifle.com

**Pennsylvania Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
pennarifleandpistol.org

**Rhode Island 2nd Amendment Coalition**
ri2nd.org

**Gun Owners of South Carolina**
gosc.org

**Tennessee Shooting Sports Ass'n. Inc.**
Tennesseeshootingsports association.org

**Texas State Rifle Ass'n.**
tsra.com

**Vermont Federation Of Sportsmen's Clubs Inc.**
vtfsc.com

**Virginia Shooting Sports Ass'n.**
myvssa.org

**West Virginia State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n.**
wvasrpa.org

**Wisconsin Firearm Owners, Ranges, Clubs & Educators**
wisconsinforce.org

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## Credits

Executive Director, NRA General Operations
**Joseph P. DeBergalis, Jr.**

Senior Managing Director,
NRA General Operations/Administration
**Jim Kohlmeyer**

Director, NRA Education and Training
**Eric Frohardt**

Deputy Director, NRA Education and Training
**John Howard**

Manager, Training Dept. NRA Education & Training
**Brett Simon**

Creative Director/Designer
**Clay Turner**

Photographers
**Michael Ives**
**Don Jones**

Digital Illustrator
**Edon Guraziu**

Photo Assistants
**Shea Hussey**
**Dan Russell**

Firearms/Gear Coordinators
**Hoser Freeman**
**Gary Kimball**
**Smith & Wesson**
**Frank Winn**

Production Coordinator
**Caile Turner**

# NRA BASICS OF PISTOL SHOOTING COURSE STUDENT EXAMINATION

Name ..... Date ..... Grade .....

**DIRECTIONS**: Please select the best answer for each of the following multiple-choice and true-false questions. The questions in this examination are based on *The NRA Guide: Basics of Pistol Shooting*.

1. The three major components of a pistol are:
   a. barrel, action and grip
   b. frame, barrel and action
   c. barrel, frame and hammer
   d. cylinder, frame and barrel

2. Your finger may contact the trigger:
   a. when drawing from the holster.
   b. when you are ready to shoot.
   c. when gripping the pistol.
   d. when it is unloaded.

3. The trigger mechanism:
   a. releases a spring-powered hammer or striker to fire the cartridge.
   b. the part of a firearm in which a cartridge is contained at the instant of firing.
   c. the end of the barrel where is the chamber is located.
   d. another term for the slide on a semi-automatic pistol.

4. Aiming consists of:
   a. grip and position.
   b. sight alignment and sight picture.
   c. breath control and aiming.
   d. trigger control and follow-through.

5. When aiming a pistol, the eye can only focus on one object at a time; therefore, you should focus on the _____ so that it appears clear and sharp.
   a. rear sight
   b. target
   c. front sight
   d. bullseye

6. To ensure you use the correct ammunition for your gun:
   a. check the information stamped on the barrel and/or slide.
   b. check your owner's manual.
   c. check the cartridge box and cartridge headstamp.
   d. all of the above.

7. When a cartridge fails to fire immediately, you should:
   a. put the safety on and put the pistol down.
   b. keep the pistol pointed in a safe direction and, after waiting at least 30 seconds (as a precaution in case of a hangfire), open the action and remove the cartridge.
   c. open the action immediately and inspect the cartridge to determine the malfunction.
   d. none of the above.

8. When gripping the pistol, you should:
   a. use the same grip each time that you hold the pistol.
   b. change your grip when going from short-range to long-range targets.
   c. slowly increase your grip pressure when you begin pulling the trigger.
   d. hold the pistol as loosely as possible to prevent muscle tremors.

9. Follow-through is important because:
   a. it integrates, maintains and continues all shooting fundamentals before, during and immediately after firing the shot.
   b. it helps maintain your grip.
   c. it keeps the gun from recoiling excessively.
   d. none of the above.

10. The frame of a pistol is:
    a. made of wood or metal.
    b. is pulled to release the hammer.
    c. is the central component of most pistols.
    d. none of the above.

11. The four components of a pistol cartridge are:
    a. primer, wad, case and bullet.
    b. hull, shot, slug and primer.
    c. bullet, hull, powder and wad.
    d. case, primer, powder charge and bullet.

12. Some of the benefits of the Isosceles Position are:
    a. gives considerable support to the firearm.
    b. it is natural and easy to assume.
    c. enhances recoil absorption.
    d. gives excellent mobility.

13. Double-action refers to the type of action:
    a. in which pulling the trigger performs two tasks: cocking and releasing the hammer.
    b. found only on revolvers.
    c. found only on semi-automatic pistols.
    d. none of the above.

14. Before cleaning a pistol, be sure that:
    a. the pistol is unloaded.
    b. The pistol is disassembled according to instructions in owner's manual.
    c. no ammunition is present in the area.
    d. all of the above.

15. A _____ occurs when a cartridge fails to fire after the primer has been struck by the firing pin.
    a. hangfire
    b. dry-fire
    c. squib load
    d. misfire

16. The safety on a pistol is:
    a. a mechanical device, and can fail.
    b. never fails.
    c. is found only on revolvers.
    d. none of the above

17. When shooting, you should hold your breath because:
    a. it minimizes body movement.
    b. it enhances concentration.
    c. it eliminates muscle tremors.
    d. all of the above.

18. Dry-firing:
    a. occurs when the cartridge fails to fire after the firing pin strikes the primer.
    b. is a long delay in the ignition of a cartridge after the firing pin strikes the primer.
    c. involves practicing every phase of the firing process using an unloaded firearm.
    d. is the firing of live ammunition at tin cans and other similar targets.

19. The basic rule for sight adjustment is:
    a. move the rear sight in the opposite direction that you want hits on the target to move.
    b. move the front sight in the same direction that you want hits on the target to move.
    c. move the rear sight in the same direction that you want hits on the target to move.
    d. none of the above.

20. Trigger control when shooting refers to:
    a. pulling the trigger when the arc of movement has been eliminated.
    b. the technique of pulling the trigger without causing any movement of the aligned sights.
    c. both a and b.
    d. none of the above.

**TRUE OR FALSE QUESTIONS**

21. T F As the gun powder burns, it creates high-pressure gas that begins to push the bullet down the bore.

22. T F Consistency, balance, support, natural aiming area, and comfort are elements of a good shooting position.

23. T F Proper sight alignment is having the front sight even with the top of the rear sight, and the front sight centered in the notch of the rear sight so that there is an equal amount of space on each side of the front sight.

24. T F A squib load develops less than normal pressure or velocity after ignition of the cartridge powder charge.

25. T F A gun that is properly maintained will function more reliably, shoot more accurately and last longer.

26. T F ALWAYS keep your gun pointed in a safe direction.

27. T F The safety on a pistol is a mechanical device that can fail.

28. T F Pistols should be stored so that they are not accessible to unauthorized persons.

29. T F A misfire is a perceptible delay in the ignition of a cartridge after the primer has been struck by the firing pin.

30. T F Most pistol cartridges can be fired from any handgun.

31. T F Both ear and eye protection are highly recommended whenever you are firing live ammunition..

32. T F Cartridges loaded to lower pressures than standard ammunition are known as "+P" cartridges.

33. T F You should always bury unserviceable ammunition.

34. T F You should always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.

35. T F Grip consistency is essential for accurate shooting.

36. T F Ammunition should not be present when cleaning a pistol.

37. T F The single most important selection criterion revolves around the purpose of the firearm.

38. T F Your breath should be let out slowly and steadily until the shot is fired.

39. T F Your non-dominant eye should be used for aiming the pistol.

40. T F You should always keep your gun unloaded until you are ready to use it.

41. T F Pistols that are fired regularly do not need to be cleaned.

42. T F Aiming consists of two stages: sight alignment and sight picture.

43. T F Trigger control is one of the most important shooting fundamentals.

44. T F The major components of breech-loading pistol include the frame, the barrel, and the action.

45. T F The Natural Aiming Area refers to the natural alignment of the shooter and the gun in any position.

46. T F The first Rule for Safe Gun Handling can be ignored while dry- firing.

47. T F Pistol cartridges should not be exposed to water or solvents.

48. T F The muzzle is the front end of the barrel where the bullet exits.

49. T F When shooting a pistol, you should always know your target and what is beyond.

50. T F Before handling a gun, learn how it operates. Read the owner's manual for your gun.

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