



Concealed Carry Methods

By Chuck Hawks

Most experts suggest using a conventional belt holster for concealed carry. Breaking that down, we find inside-the-pants (strong or weak side), and strong side external holsters the most frequent recommendations. Weak side (cross draw) external holsters, shoulder holsters, and sometimes even small of the back holsters, are also regarded favorably.

Now, these are all excellent options in some circumstances, but I do wonder where these guys work, socialize, and relax. Don't they ever sit down, attend a function, have coffee with their friends, or drive a car? Isn't it ever summer time where they live? Don't they ever come in out of the rain? Don't they ever do any kind of physical activity (labor or recreational)?

Because if they did any of these things, the first thing they would normally do is take off their coat or jacket. And in the process expose their here-to-fore concealed weapon to public view. Which is not desirable, and in most jurisdictions, illegal (called "brandishing").

A lot of people now live in states permitting legal concealed carry, and are taking advantage of it (and a lot of other people live in places where their Constitutional right to "maintain and bear arms"—that means carry a gun, folks—has been infringed by state or local government, but who have decided to ignore such laws and arm themselves for self-defence anyway). And who can blame them? Honestly, if you and your loved ones were threatened with robbery, battery, rape, torture, and murder by a gang of toughs, or even a single psychopath, could you defend yourself without a gun? Sad but true, not many of us could.

I am talking about ordinary, law abiding, working or retired people here. People who live normal lives and want to protect themselves and their loved ones, but do not want to disrupt their lives or dramatically change their behavior to do so. People who do all of the things I mentioned above. For most of these people, the conventional holsters recommended by so many experts are just not going to get the job done.

Lets examine some options. Start with the gun to be concealed (see *Some Thoughts On Concealed Carry Pistols*). The larger it is the harder it is to keep concealed. And the heavier it is, the less comfortable it is to carry. These factors mitigate against service type autos (Colt 1911, full size Glocks, Beretta 92 series and Taurus versions of same, full size S&W's, Ruger P89 size, Browning Hi-Power, Sig P226, and similar pistols), as well as service type revolvers (Colt Python and King Cobra; S&W K and L frame models, Taurus models that are basically copies of the Smith models, Ruger GP 100, and all similar size revolvers from other makers). No matter how brilliantly these guns perform when the whistle blows, the service pistols were never designed for concealed carry. Indeed, they were designed to be carried in large hip holsters suspended from a wide gunbelt. The service pistols are just too big (see *Service and Home Defence Handguns* for details), and are beyond the purview of this article.

A step down in size are the compact service pistols. These are the shortened and lightened versions of the semi-auto service pistols. Virtually all chamber the 9mm (9X19), .40 S&W, or .45 ACP cartridges. I think the first pistol of this type was the Colt Commander. Today, a Commander, at 27.5 ounces and 7.75" in length, seems chunky compared to the new Colt Officers Model (24 oz. and 7.25") or, my favorite, the Glock 19 (21 oz. and 6.85"). Most manufacturers now have "chopped" (shorter barrel and grip) versions of their service pistols. This class of gun is the largest I would consider for concealed carry.

If you are absolutely sure you will not need to remove your jacket, the conventional strong side belt holster can work well. Under the same circumstances, and depending on your build, a shoulder holster may also be satisfactory. These conventional holsters are the best options for a fast draw. I find an inside-the-pants holster to be too uncomfortable for guns of this size, although many experts recommend it. Small of the back holsters are just too uncomfortable any time you have to sit down, and I will not mention them again. That about covers the conventional holster carry options. So what about the unconventional options?

My favorite way to carry guns of this size is a large fanny pack (that is, a fanny pack designed to carry a concealed gun). Most manufacturers offer two (or more) sizes, and the compact service pistols usually require the "large" size. The fanny pack has several good points as a method of carrying a gun. For one, it has its own wide belt that spreads the load of the pistol and makes it much more comfortable to carry all day. For another, it does not interfere with most normal activities, and is completely independent of the clothing you wear (no jacket required). It is suitable year round, and in any climate. Access is pretty good (you just jerk the corner out and down with your weak hand to reveal your pistol, held ready for a strong hand draw). It is attached to your body, and you will not forget it, or be separated from it at the wrong time. You will not inadvertently reveal your gun (flash) as you bend over, or twist to look behind you (common problems with conventional holsters). There are no odd straps running under your clothes (like with a shoulder holster) to give you away. Your gun will not "print through" your clothing, since your clothing is not concealing the gun. Both men and women can, and do, innocently carry fanny packs all the time, so yours will not be remarkable.

The main drawback to a fanny pack is that it is not appropriate for wear with a suit and tie (for men), or evening dress (for women). But pretty much anytime you do not have to "dress up", a fanny pack is appropriate. The other drawback cited for fanny pack carry is that knowledgeable cops and civilians (usually others with concealed carry permits), may spot yours for what it is. So what? As long as you are carrying legally, the cops and other legitimate gun owners are no threat to you. The point is that the general public will not know, will not be upset, does not think in terms of concealed firearms, and will not give you or your fanny pack a second glance.

Another way to carry a large gun is in a day pack. You see people with these light knapsacks everywhere. Women carry them shopping, kids carry them to school, you could carry a gun in one with no one the wiser. Rapid access might be a problem here, though.

In the same general category are womens purses, or mens shoulder bags. There are special models for both women and men, designed to hold all the stuff purses usually hold. Plus, the models made for concealed carry have a special area for your gun, usually held closed until you need it by Velcro. You rip the Velcro open, and slip your hand into the opening to grasp your pistol. Such purses seem a very good deal for the person who works in an office or other place where a fanny pack is inappropriate.

Another carry method for office workers or other persons for whom a fanny pack may be too casual is the briefcase. I am not speaking of the typical hard side briefcase that is hinged along the bottom to open, but of the special leather or Cordura type designed for carrying a gun in a special area. Like the holster purse, most of these use Velcro for closure, and you can access your gun by ripping the Velcro panel open. One briefcase not intended for carrying a concealed weapon, but which works pretty well anyway, is the Lowe Pro. Made of Cordura, it has a double (two way) zipper across the top, and pouches inside intended for notebooks, pencils, and so forth, some of which fit guns up to a snub-nose .38 revolver quite well. The top zipper can give you rather unobtrusive access to the gun, even when carrying the briefcase by its double handles, if something does not look "right."

A very special briefcase that deserves mention is the ingenious model from HK, designed to carry their compact SP89 or MP 5k sub-machine gun. ~~This thing looks just like a regular hard side (Samsonite?) briefcase, but it holds the sub-gun firmly inside, barrel lined up with an~~ unobtrusive hole in one end of the briefcase. There is a trigger built into the handle, and special provision inside to channel spent brass from the ejection port to the bottom of the case. You can fire the whole magazine without ever opening the case or removing the gun! Of course, the entire inside of the briefcase is taken up by the gun and the mechanism, so it will not function as a regular briefcase. Note: BATF considers this to be a Class 3 destructive device. I have been told that the Secret Service uses these on their VIP protection details. Now you know why some of those Secret Service guys following the President around are carrying briefcases.

A special "day planner," one of those leatherette books with zipper closure, a calendar, address book, notepad, and so forth that you see many people carrying around these days, can also serve as a way to conceal a firearm. I have seen advertisements for special versions of these which include a compartment for a gun. Or a person could modify a standard one for the purpose. I believe the specially made-for-the-purpose models still retain their original function, where as one modified from a typical Cambridge (or other brand) model might need to be pretty well gutted to hold a pistol as large as a G 19.

Almost anything you could reasonably carry could be used to conceal a gun. A camera case, shoe box, hollowed out book, Christmas package-in a pinch, even a paper bag.

A couple significant points should be made about all of the carry methods that do not firmly attach the gun to your person. You could be separated from your gun at the very moment that you need it most. Purses are particularly vulnerable here, as they are regarded as valuable targets for theft by criminals (i. e.: purse snatching). The other consideration is that it is perfectly possible to leave your briefcase, day planner, or whatever, somewhere and forget it. This could be disastrous if it contains a gun. Only people who NEVER forget a coat, or lose a purse, should consider carrying a gun in this manner.

The next group of concealable pistols include the small frame .38 Special snub-nose revolvers (Colt's Detective Special and S&W's Chiefs Special are the classics), the majority of the .380 ACP semi-autos (Walther's PPK being perhaps the most famous), and the new breed of ultra compact 9X19 semi-autos (like the Glock 26). (See *Concealed Handgun Comparison* for details of these pistols.) The G 26, for example, is 6.3" long, and weighs 19.7 ounces. Its size is representative of all three of the above classes of pistols.

Clearly, all of the concealed carry methods discussed in the section above will also suffice for these smaller pistols. Some additional methods are practical for this class of guns which may not apply to their larger brethren.

First of all, a smaller size fanny pack may be used. The smaller a fanny pack is, the less it resembles a gun pack. And the less hassle it is to carry. Once again, a fanny pack is my preferred method of concealment, and the smaller size of fanny pack is especially desirable. I recommend the smallest one your gun will fit into.

A second convenient method of carry is the "photographers vest". These are available from a number of sources (mine is a Domke). They are generally light in weight, have multiple large pockets, and provide a secure method of carrying a concealed gun. The front zipper pockets of mine will accept a G 26 or Detective Special size gun, but not a G 19. I carry extra ammo in the weak side front pocket to equalize the weight distribution. Access is pretty good. The other pockets can be used for pens, a wallet, change, checkbook, and other stuff that it is handy to have with you (similar in this respect to a fanny pack). About the only negatives to the photographers vest are similar to those for the fanny pack: it does not go with more formal attire, and very knowledgeable shooters may suspect why you are wearing it.

A third carry method that applies to many guns of the size now being discussed is the holster shirt. This is an undershirt with a pocket specifically designed to carry a pistol, in about the same place a shoulder holster does. These shirts provide a very high level of concealment, coupled with rather poor access (you normally have to unbutton your outer shirt to get to your gun).

The fourth additional carry alternative that often applies to these guns is a large pocket. While too big for a normal pants pocket, they will often fit in a coat pocket. Not only the traditional trench coat seen so often in movies, but some leather jackets and parkas have pockets large enough to hide these guns. Another possibility is the thigh or cargo pocket on some types of pants. Carry extra ammo (an ammo wallet is handy for revolver fanciers, as it is flat) in the pocket on the other side to equalize the weight. Be sure not to leave your jacket in a restaurant somewhere, or check your coat--you are morally and legally obligated to maintain control of your gun at all times.

The smallest guns I will discuss fall into the Deep Concealment or Mini-Gun category. These are the true "pocket pistols", in that they will literally fit into most jacket or pants pockets. Use a pocket holster if you carry your mini-gun in a pocket. The pocket holster stabilizes the gun in the pocket, and prevents "print through". These tiny guns include the .22/.22Mag. mini-revolvers, the .22/.25/.32 mini-autos, and various derringers. Typical specimens would include the North American Arms mini-revolvers, and the Beretta tip-up barrel mini-autos (see "Deep Concealment Pistols" for a more detailed list). My favorite, the NAA Black Widow mini-revolver, weighs just under 9 ounces, and is 5.75" long.

Guns this small can be concealed in many ways, which is their great advantage. All of the previously discussed methods apply, including conventional holsters, as well as several other unique carry alternatives.

One of these would be the ankle holster. I have seen ankle holsters for .380 autos and .38 snubby revolvers, but I surely would not like to carry so heavy a gun that way. However, an ankle holster will work for the deep concealment pistols. They are light enough and small enough not to be too obtrusive. Cowboy boots or similar footwear help to conceal an ankle holster. A thigh holster will serve the same purpose for women wearing dresses. These types of rigs can usually be worn with formal clothes (a big plus). Access is awkward.

A small purse will also conceal one of these pistols, and again is acceptable in almost any social venue. The belly band, worn where it sounds like it would be, and under the shirt, is another way to carry very small pistols. It shares the advantages, and disadvantages, of the holster shirt.

One possibility for the smallest mini-revolvers is the special belt buckle. These are designed to hold the smallest .22 short/1" barrel model mini-revolvers. The one I have seen was from Freedom Arms, and looked like a large cowboy belt buckle. A stud on the front releases the gun into your hand. Pretty neat, except for the caliber of the gun it carries. There is a belt buckle from North American Arms, and theirs fits either standard or magnum frame NAA mini-revolvers, but does not conceal the gun within the buckle like the Freedom Arms version does.

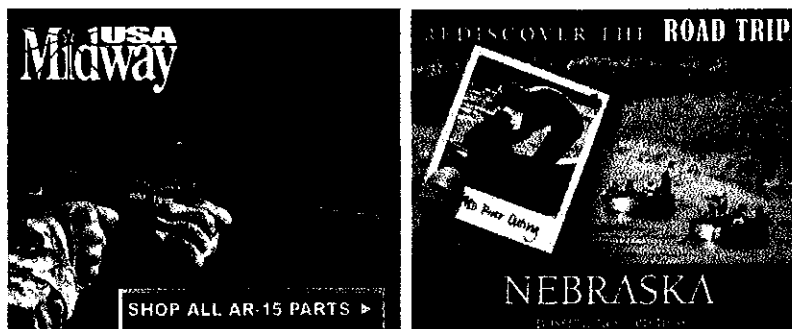
The holster grip, a device which replaces the standard grips on a NAA .22 LR mini-revolver, folds up in a manner similar to a pocket knife. It is designed for pocket carry, and if it "prints" in your pocket, would look like a pocket knife. Deployment would seem a little slow.

The wallet holster literally replaces a wallet with a heavy leather sandwich that snaps around the pistol. Most have cut-outs that allows firing the gun without removing it from the wallet. Carry it exactly as you would carry a wallet.

A lanyard ring can be installed on all NAA mini-revolvers with birds head grips, and the gun then hung around the neck, under the shirt, by the lanyard cord, which incorporates a quick disconnect at the gun end. Neat, and with a little custom work, could also be applied to most mini-autos or derringers. Anything worn under the shirt is probably not going to be too quick to access, however.

My favorite method for carrying a mini-gun is the belt pouch. Mine is from Uncle Mikes. It will hold a small gun in the rear area, and your wallet, change, shopping list or whatever, in the front section. It opens by means of a top zipper. The gun compartment is accessed by a pull away Velcro partition inside the belt pouch. It will work fine with any of the mini-guns, and even the smallest .380 autos (like the Colt Mustang Pocketlite), or .38 alloy-framed snubbys (like an Airweight S&W). The belt pouch just slides onto your regular belt. I recommend a wide, sturdy belt, like a Dickies work belt.

A creative person can devise many alternative methods for concealing a mini-gun. Some that I have heard about include inside a cigarette case, hanging from a cleaning brush pinned under a large collar, or up a sleeve. There they are, some thoughts on how to carry a concealed pistol. I hope some of these ideas are helpful, even if they are usually ignored by many experts.



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