

HOW NOT TO START A HELL-BOX!

P H I L L I P L . S M I T H



Congratulations! You've made the decision to take a proactive role in the personal protection of yourself and your family. The CCW Course is behind you and now you are deciding what firearm to carry and how you are going to conceal the firearm. From now on, all your choices will lead to one of 4 outcomes: (1) A change in your wardrobe, (2) a change in your gun size, (3) a change in your carry method, or (4) new additions to your holster hell-box.

A holster hell-box is like the hell-drawer in the kitchen except it is full of all the holsters you have purchased over the years and do not use any more because you have changed carry methods or holster materials. What the holster hell-box really represents is all the failures to find a carry method which fits your lifestyle and activities. With just a few considerations and realizations right now (at the beginning

of your concealed carry career) it is possible to keep that holster hell-box level low while keeping your concealed carry comfort high.

Concealment holster selection is not a science, it's a discovery of preference. Each individual has clothing and activity preferences which determine which concealment method will best fit within their own lifestyle. People who wear T-shirts and jeans will carry differently from people who wear suits – people who jog for exercise will carry differently from people who like to drive in the country. Let's explore the basic criteria for selection of a concealed carry method and maybe we can discover the method which fits with your lifestyle and activities while making a firm effort to keep that holster hell-box level low.

Every single holster or carry method made can be put into one of three categories: Shallow-concealment, Deep-concealment or Under-concealment. Before we can understand shallow, deep, or under-concealment we must define Base-dress.

Base-dress means the FIRST layer of outer clothing (shirt of any type, long pants of any type) and does not include inner clothing (underwear). Shallow concealment means the firearm can be seen if the CCW is viewed in Base-dress. Deep-concealment means the firearm cannot be seen if the CCW is viewed in Base-dress. Under-concealment is worn under Base-dress. For example, an inside-the-waistband holster can be seen in Base-dress so it is a shallow concealment method – an inside-the-waistband holster which allows the shirt to be tucked over the holster cannot be seen in Base-dress so it is a deep concealment method. A belly-band style holster is worn under Base-dress so it is under-concealment.

Generally speaking, shallow concealment affords a faster draw since the only hand you need to access the firearm is your gun hand. Deep concealment usually requires two hands to access the firearm and that is why deep concealment is slower to access than shallow concealment. Under-concealment requires Base-dress to be opened or removed so is generally the slowest to access the firearm. But, if you change the method of access (such as unzipping a zipper or opening a concealment pouch) then many deep concealment methods are just as fast or even faster drawing the firearm than shallow concealment. Which is best for you? No one can tell you which concealment method is best for you, except You (or maybe an intimate partner who knows how you dress and live). But before you start making up your mind as to what concealment method is best, let's look a little deeper into the mind-boggling process of choosing a concealed carry method.





Most CCW's choose shallow concealment (specifically belt/hip/paddle holsters) for their first method of carry primarily because they were told by their CCW Instructors that hip holsters provide the fastest draw – and this is the absolute truth. They also have noticed that most police officers and detectives carry with a belt/hip holster. So they buy a belt holster and wear it religiously until discovering that they always have to wear an outer garment, they always have to worry about printing (gun outline showing through garment) and they always have to worry about flashing (garment coming open to reveal firearm, e.g. wind). Now concealed carry is becoming a chore and it's not comfortable any more. If the CCW complains that belt carry is prone to flashing or is uncomfortable they are told: "carrying a gun is supposed to be comforting, not comfortable". Even worse, the CCW's holster hell-box level is rising or they have given up concealed carry in frustration. The one fact that novice CCWs are not told is "concealed carry is a compromise". You can compromise your desire to carry a firearm with your daily activities and lifestyle.

What exactly does "compromise" mean? It means you do not have to carry concealed the way other people have told you. It means you can choose a carry method which fits each of your daily activities, the time of year, the way you dress for work or play. Instead of going by other people's rules, you can change the rule to: It's better to have a gun and not need it than to need a gun and not have it. Compromise also means you don't have to go by other people's rules about the gun you carry concealed. That great big full size .45 is a formidable firearm indeed! But at 33 ounces, or more, chances are you are going to leave it in your car, which then becomes the most expensive holster you own. How is that firearm in the car going to help you if you face a combat confrontation outside the car? Here's the reality: If a firearm weighs over 23 ounces the chances are you are not going to

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Balancing Overall Speed and Comfort				
Shallow Concealment Methods				
Holster Type	Maximum Size Firearm	Comfort Rating 10 = Best	Ease/Speed of Draw 10 = Best	Overall Speed/Comfort Rating 100% = Perfect
Shoulder	Large	9	8	85%
Hip/Paddle	Large	5	10	75%
IWB	Medium	3	8	55%
Small of Back	Large	2	6	40%
Deep Concealment Methods				
Pocket	Small	10	8	90%
IWB Tucked	Small	3	4	40%
Ankle	Small	8	2	50%
Fanny Pack	Large	10	8	90%
Belt Pack	Small	10	7	85%
Briefcase	Large	10	8	90%
Portfolio	Large	10	8	90%
Daytimer	Medium	10	7	85%
Purse	Small	10	5	75%

carry it on-body, at least not for long. But! While you are saving up to buy that little Baby Glock you can still carry that big 33 ounce .45 by changing your carry method to off-body deep-concealment.

Off-body deep-concealment carry includes purses, handbags, portfolios, daytimers, briefcases, and fanny packs. Most can be hand carried or slung with a shoulder strap. Are they slower to present than shallow concealment? Yes! Are they a stealthy deep concealment method? Yes! Herein lies the compromise. The compromise is always comfort vs. speed of presentation and this compromise is both time-consuming and expensive to learn. Those that carry full-time learn the compromise quicker than those who carry part-time even though the part-timers are much smarter, since they know exactly when they are facing danger and only carry during that time, or so they seem to believe.

The terms SPEED and COMFORT are subjective terms when applied to concealed carry. That is, a fast speed for one person is a slow speed to another. A comfortable holster to a man might be very uncomfortable for a woman, especially considering hip holsters and the physical difference between a man's hips and a woman's. Remember, the purpose of concealed carry is to have a firearm when you need it, so it is imperative that you find a carry method which allows freedom, convenience and comfort so you will carry full time. Below you will find an overall speed vs. comfort rating for each of the holster or carry methods based upon my own

personal use of each of these holsters.

Understand these ratings are my own subjective ratings. Although some might disagree on the rating given any one holster type, most would agree on the ranking of all the rest of the holsters. That is, some might say that a hip holster is comfortable and deserves a higher comfort rating than 5; but they would agree that an IWB or Small of the Back holster is LESS comfortable than a hip holster. This is not a scientific analysis based on objective reasoning, it is based on bias; bias that one type of holster is more or less comfortable to me than another type of holster (*See Balancing Table on Left*).

Now that you have some idea of the comfort/speed rating of different holsters it might be a good idea to discuss the upside and downside of each of the different holsters. All holsters, whether shallow or deep carry, have positives and negatives, pluses and minuses, good and bad. For example, shoulder holster carry is not the best type of carry at a family gathering



where there is going to be a lot of hugging whereas shoulder carry is the best type of carry if you are in a vehicle (along with cross-draw, especially for police). Again, you get to choose for yourself from the 13 holster types which are all set into real-life settings in the "Activities" matrix below. Base your favorites on which holsters cover the most real-life situations or YOUR real-life situations. A holster gets a 10 if the activity typically allows the holster to be worn/carry (appears normal to be wearing/carrying) and still be accessed EASILY, or a 0 if the activity typically does not. The higher the overall rating the more versatile the holster (*See Activities Table Page 24*).

There is a lot more information in the "Activities" matrix than meets the eye. Think of the "Activities" matrix as your compromise matrix and you begin to see how as little as two different concealed carry or holster types can fit almost every real-life situation you can imagine. For example, a construction worker whose daily chores include physical work could choose pocket carry as the base carry method and supplement the weaknesses in pocket carry with an additional shoulder holster, briefcase or portfolio to provide a "100% of the time" ability to carry concealed. A lady who purse carries could get a fanny pack to make-up for the weaknesses in purse carry. Use the "Activities" matrix to help you define the activities you are involved in most of the time and don't be afraid to think-outside-the-box.

Under-concealment such as clothing holsters and intimate holsters are two types of concealed carry I haven't listed in either the shallow or deep concealment methods. Clothing holsters are shirts, jackets or vests with pockets on the inside to hold a firearm. Intimate holsters are body wrap or underwear type holsters designed to be worn next to the skin under the Base-dress. Both are very light and thin and

will take up hardly any room at all in your holster hell-box. If you decide on an intimate holster it would be wise to practice undressing very quickly while running so if you are ever faced with a combat confrontation you are practiced at accessing your firearm.

No discussion of holster selection would be complete without a brief look at holster materials. The holster material and construction methods dictate the holster life, ability to absorb/deflect moisture, ability to provide a reliable and stable drawing platform, and protection of the firearm from weather or external

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Activities Typically Allowed By Holster Type (10=Typically Acceptable)									
	Shopping	Playing with Kids	Movie or Show	Driving	Hot Day	Cold Day	Physical Work	Office Work	Overall Rating
Shallow Concealment Methods									
Shoulder	10	0	10	10	0	10	0	10	63%
Hip/Paddle	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	10	50%
IWB	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	10	50%
Small of Back	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	10	50%
Deep Concealment Methods									
Pocket	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	88%
IWB Tucked	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	75%
Ankle	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	88%
Fanny Pack	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	88%
Belt Pack	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	88%
Briefcase	0	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	63%
Portfolio	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	75%
Day Timer	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	88%
Purse	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	88%

abuse. As in all other aspects of life, quality and usability dictate price and performance. Quality is usually more costly primarily because of attention to detail and attention to the method the firearm is retained in the holster. There are many materials used in holster construction but these 4 have proven themselves in real life: Leather, kydex, carbon fiber, and plastic. In leather holsters, look for full grain leather with double-stitched seams molded to fit the exact firearm you carry. Any holster you select should stay open and not collapse when the firearm is removed. This allows easy re-holstering without having to use two hands. Choose black as your firearm and holster color if you carry shallow since black is much less prone to identification if your coat or jacket is opened further than you intend. Kydex plastic has all but taken over training schools and combat classes. The material is rigid and can be thermo-formed over exact die replicas of a firearm. The beauty of kydex is that it is adjustable which means you can loosen or tighten the adjustment screw to the exact friction you desire. In cold weather, times of high activity or that down-in-the-gravel training course, you can tighten the friction of the holster on the firearm. When the weather is warmer and your firearm expands you can loosen the friction. Carbon fiber (or Carbon Fiber Matrix) has the best features of a kydex holster in a very, although more expensive, lightweight package.

Plastic (injection molded holsters) are very popular primarily because of their low cost and because many plastic holster manufacturers produce holsters for firearms other than the top twenty (in sales and popularity). Injection molded holsters provide retention by molding in friction,

or tightness, when the holster is produced. Like kydex, they are not affected by water or dirt and will take a lot of abuse. Injection molded holsters are a great first step on the way to kydex or leather. Although injection molded holsters are low cost, there is one other holster that costs less: Nylon. Nylon holsters are soft and bulky and this extra bulk is the fastest way that I know of to fill up that holster hell-box. Three of these nylon holsters will equal the volume of 6 of any other type.

This I know from experience. The price-to-bulk ratio is also way off the scale for nylon holsters: \$12 worth of nylon holsters takes up the space of about \$60 worth of most other types of holsters, even if you squish the nylon holsters flat. Nylon holsters can ruin the layout of a perfectly good holster hell-box. On the serious side, nylon holsters are the holsters of choice for fanny packs, belt packs, portfolios, and briefcases because softness is needed where items in other pockets or compartments may push or squeeze on the firearm. It is also very easy to apply Velcro to a nylon holster which allows the holster angle to be adjusted easily by the wearer.

No matter what concealment method you eventually choose, for your safety and that of others you must carry your firearm in a holster. Do not carry your firearm with clips that slide over the belt or drop the firearm in your pants pocket unprotected by a holster. Stay miles away from people who carry their firearm this way because they are an accident waiting to happen. The purpose of a holster is 4-fold: Provide an angle to afford a full combat grip, secure the firearm, retain the firearm, and cover the trigger guard. Put these 4 requirements in a question to yourself while you are shopping

for a holster: Can I get a full combat grip on the firearm with the holster in its carry position? Is the holster secure or does it move around when I grab the gun's grip, when I walk or when I sit and stand? If I jump or roll on the ground will the firearm fall out? Does the holster cover the trigger guard fully or is part of the trigger exposed? If any of these 4 requirements is missing when you are choosing a holster for your carry weapon then walk away as fast as you can. Never compromise on these 4 requirements!

Now, go forth in safety with the knowledge that you don't have to be uncomfortable or worrisome while carrying concealed. There are no hard and fast rules which govern the way you carry concealed except those which you impose upon yourself. I do not personally know of any CCW who carries full-time with a belt or hip holster, but I do know of many CCWs who carry full time off-body, deep concealment. They have come to the realization that since they are not police officers they are not required to belt carry. Remember the whole point of concealed carry: To have a firearm available when it is needed. Do not put yourself in a state of mind where you are limited to only one type of concealed carry because there is no one single method which is perfect for all occasions although pocket carry comes about as close as one can get. Also remember that you may have to adjust the size of the firearm you carry to a smaller size. Changing the firearm to a smaller size will most often clear up problems you are currently having with your carry method.

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