

Bare-hands to Handguns, Part 2: Pocket Carry

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Every day, more and more Americans are making the choice to carry a concealed weapon.

This choice means more than merely obtaining an unconstitutional “permit” or strapping on a gun.

Concealed carry is a lifestyle, mindset and philosophy.

A concealed handgun is the average citizen’s best last line of defense against subjugation and predation. Good training makes the citizen maximally effective in employing this defense. Employed with awareness, skill and determination, a concealed handgun can positively tilt the odds in a hostile confrontation to a greater degree than any other common carryable weapon. Keeping the handgun concealed until needed provides the carrier the often useful tactical advantage of surprise, in contrast to open carry, while avoiding the problems that can arise when other citizens see an openly carried sidearm.

The concealed carrier has come to the mature realization the s/he alone bears final responsibility for his or her own safety and security, and that of his or her children and other dependents. Court decisions confirm, in case there is any confusion, that each of us is on our own. No police force nor other organization can be considered responsible for our own personal safety and security.

Carrying a concealed handgun has an immediate effect on any mentally balanced individual’s mindset. Situational awareness and the desire to avoid unnecessary confrontation are both heightened. Emotions are better kept in check and a generally more relaxed yet aware outlook is achieved.

Carrying a concealed handgun requires practical accommodations, as well as philosophical and mental ones. Considering the philosophy and mindset that go along with it, concealed carry is most effective as an all-day, every-day exercise. Murphy’s Law being what it is, of course it is just the day you fail to carry your weapon that predatory violence will finally find you. If you are wearing clothes, you should be wearing your weapon(s), even when at home. The carrier must achieve a balanced synergy of his or her dress and movement habits, carry method(s) and weapon(s) selection to enable all-day, every-day concealed carry.

The following factors must be considered:

- a) Dress requirements—while “dressing around the gun” is encouraged, there are practical limits to this depending on your profession and other factors
- b) Movement requirements—whether you spend most of your time standing, sitting in a car or doing vigorous activity can greatly affect what carry methods may suit you best

- c) Build—while achieving a healthy body shape is certainly encouraged, there are many factors we have no control over, or which can take a long time to modify, and which can affect what carry methods are possible
- d) Comfort—while any carry method will take some getting used to, one that starts out and remains more comfortable will be far easier to maintain, all day every day
- e) Access—you need to be able to draw your concealed weapon as smoothly, reliably and quickly as possible, in as many different positions and circumstances as possible
- f) Security—you need your weapon to stay safely where it is during all physical activity
- g) Concealment—different people, depending on their profession and everyday environment, may have different levels of concealment need, ranging from “kinda/mostly” concealed to “absolutely” invisible to observers

Some popular concealment methods include:

- a) Strong side hip, inside or outside the waistband
- b) “Appendix position,” inside or outside the waistband
- c) Cross draw, inside or outside the waistband
- d) Small of back, inside or outside the waistband
- e) Shoulder holster, vertical or horizontal
- f) Ankle holster
- g) Belly band
- h) Garter holster
- i) Bra holster
- j) Groin holster
- k) Off-body carry (purse, briefcase, etc.—special considerations and risks go along with this)
- l) Pocket carry

Depending on the combination of factors described above, any of the above concealment methods may be optimal, with a variety of different firearms.

We’re going to focus on the pros, cons and special advantages of pocket carry.

Many professionals, especially those with ties to law enforcement, tend to relegate pocket carry to the carry of less effective back-up or “deep concealment” weapons only, secondary to the larger, more effective service handgun carried in a more conventional location. However, pocket carry can actually be a viable and advantageous carry method for primary as well as secondary weapons.

A few rules should generally be followed with regard to pocket carry:

- 1) Use a holster, whether a purpose-built pocket holster or an adaptation of some other type of holster that can be made to work properly (certain belt holsters and even some security holsters work well in larger pockets). A pocket holster should:
 - a. Cover the trigger guard, reducing the chance of a negligent discharge

- b. Protect the gun against lint and dirt
 - c. Protect the pocket against the gun's sharp edges and oil
 - d. Keep the gun positioned correctly in the pocket
 - e. Help prevent the gun from falling out of the pocket during vigorous activity
 - f. Facilitate a simple and rapid draw, with some provision to keep the holster in the pocket when the gun is drawn
 - g. If you're going to violate this rule (there may be legitimate reasons to do so), ensure that the above six issues are somehow accounted for regardless
- 2) NOTHING should go in the pocket that holds the gun except the gun and the holster.
- 3) The pocket, in concert with the rest of the garment, must be constructed so as to:
- a. adequately support, retain and conceal the weapon all day and during vigorous activity, and
 - b. provide quick, easy access to the hand for a simple and rapid draw.

Pocket carry need not be limited to a small, subcaliber handgun in the side or back pocket of slacks. Various pants, jackets and even some shirts provide many possibilities for effective pocket carry of small, medium and large handguns. Some garments are available that are purpose-built for effective pocket carry. "Normal" pockets may be customized to create optimal gun pockets, as was frequently done by gunfighters of the Old West who needed to conceal their full-size sidearms (as opposed to the tiny derringers and other "pocket pistols" popular at the time).

Pocket carry has several major advantages:

- 1) **Comfort:** Most of us are quite used to carrying things in our pockets. While the weight and bulk of a gun might require some adaptation, it's typically far less foreign and uncomfortable, and easier to get used to, than other carry methods.
- 2) **Convenience:** If you're wearing clothes that have adequate pockets, you can pocket carry. You don't need cover garments, special belts or oddly oversized clothes.
- 3) **Concealment:** A gun concealed in a pocket will remain totally concealed, even in a stiff wind or when reaching or bending. Also, a bulging pocket is less unusual and less likely to alarm most people than strange protuberances from the waistband, underarm, ankle, etc. People expect people to carry "stuff" in pockets, and don't generally assume that "stuff" to be a gun.
- 4) **Retention:** Anyone trying to grab the gun during a scuffle will have to first get into the pocket, which is generally a more involved and difficult process than to merely reach under a jacket or shirt to get hold of the gun. If the pocket/holster/gun combination has been chosen with sufficient care, pocket carry should provide at least as positive retention against gun spillage during rigorous activity than other common carry methods.
- 5) **Safety in holstering:** Concealed carry methods that involve a fixed position holster (e.g. waistband, shoulder holster, groin and ankle holster carry) typically involve inserting a bare, live firearm into the holster while the holster is fixed in place against the user's body. Many negligent discharges occur during holstering, due to e.g. failing to keep the

finger clear of the trigger or failing to ensure that no foreign objects snag the trigger during insertion. While it is possible in most carry methods to maintain a marginally “safe” direction with the muzzle during holstering, the fact is that visual reference during holstering is limited and any negligent discharge will occur only an inch or so from the user’s body. Pocket carry, on the other hand, allows the user to hold the holster in one hand and the gun in the other, pointed in a completely safe direction well away from the body, and visually guide the gun into the holster, easily seeing any obstructions or other unsafe situations. The gun and holster package, with trigger guard fully covered, is then inserted into the pocket.

- 6) Pre-staging the draw: This is one of the biggest advantages of pocket carry compared to other concealed carry methods. If trouble may be brewing, the aware carrier may surreptitiously place his or her hand on the gun in a firing grip (or something close to a firing grip) while keeping the gun fully concealed in the pocket. This need not appear threatening—you’re merely putting your hand in your pocket. At the same time, it could be done in such a way as to warn off potential miscreants without being guilty of brandishing. Starting from this position yields a much faster and more positive draw than any draw begun with the hand off the gun. The most difficult part of any draw from concealment is getting the hand properly onto the gun in the first place. Pre-staging the draw eliminates this time and uncertainty completely. If the bad situation does not materialize or escalate, the carrier can simply release the gun, take his hand out of his pocket, and proceed with his day, having never brandished nor in any way alarmed onlookers. In certain cases, the gun could even be pointed and fired from inside the pocket, but in most cases it is best to draw the gun first to maintain its functionality and pointability. A practiced hand should easily be able to make hits out to seven yards in well under a second, drawing from a pre-staged pocket at the signal of a shooting timer.
- 7) Speed: Due to its simplicity, even a non-pre-staged draw from the pocket can be faster and less failure prone than draws from other concealment methods. For example, using a side pants pocket or cargo pants pocket, the draw could be executed with no preparatory motion. No shirt must be pulled up, and no jacket must be swept aside or raised. In heavy winter clothing with a zipped or buttoned up coat, drawing from an external coat pocket or a pants pocket below the bottom edge of the coat will certainly be faster and simpler than having to unfasten or reach under the coat to get to an underlying holster. You don’t have to contort your body to reach down to your ankle or inside your belt in order to get to the gun. Such speed and simplicity can be critical in certain situations, such as if you end up near the starting point of a spree killing.

The comfort, convenience, concealment, retention and safety inherent in well considered pocket carry yield the biggest single advantage of all: **HAVING YOUR GUN ON YOU** during all clothed, waking hours. You won’t be tempted to leave your gun at home because it’s not comfortable enough, or you can’t conceal it well enough in a given mode of dress, etc. A carry method that you can maintain consistently and is resistant to excuses yields maximum probability that you will be armed when the need arises.

Making a habit of being armed all the time, even while relaxing at home, is especially important when we consider the risk of violent home invasion. As will be discussed in an upcoming article on Home Defense, your odds of being able to protect yourself and your family against home invaders increase dramatically if you have a gun on your person at all times, rather than only having one or more secured somewhere in the house. Pocket carry is a viable way to remain armed at all times without unduly inconveniencing yourself or alarming others.

Like any carry method, pocket carry of course has its disadvantages as well:

- 1) Limited or no ability to draw with the opposite hand: A gun carried in a side pocket is very difficult if not impossible to quickly access with the opposite side hand. Other pockets may offer higher degrees of opposite hand access, but in general, most other concealed carry methods are more conducive to ambidextrous draw capability than pocket carry. This limitation must be acknowledged and worked around in your combative training and planning. Of course, it can be mitigated by the carry of a second gun in your opposite pocket.
- 2) Possibly increased difficulty getting to the gun in a dynamic draw situation: As discussed above concerning pre-staging the draw, the actual withdrawal of the gun from the pocket once a firing grip is established can be executed as quickly or even quicker than with other carry methods, assuming a relatively snag-free gun and sufficient training and practice. Quickly getting to that firing grip, however, can be slower with pocket carry than with some other methods that leave the gun's grip more exposed. In a dynamic draw situation (i.e. in-fight, surprised, etc.), the hand must quickly find the pocket opening, slip past some pocket material, find the gun's grip and then close into a firing hold. Multiple opportunities for fumbles or snags exist, especially as surprise and required speed increase and practiced smoothness gets challenged by fear-induced adrenaline. This can be partly mitigated by careful selection and preparation of the gun/holster/pocket system, and subsequent training and practice. Wet hands can seriously exacerbate this problem, as pocket material is prone to stick to wet hands and foul the draw. The best way to mitigate this problem is through constant awareness, enabling pre-staging of the draw in as many situations as possible, thus bypassing the need to dynamically acquire a firing grip and enabling the fastest possible presentation from concealment.
- 3) Specific wardrobe requirements, and/or limitations on gun size: While pocket carry can be effective without cover garments, it may pose certain demands on the garments that contain the actual pockets. With some dedication and budget, you could potentially turn virtually your entire wardrobe into very effective pocket carry ensembles for surprisingly large handguns and related equipment. Or you could base your entire wardrobe around dedicated off the shelf pocket carry specialty clothing. You can't, however, expect your \$20 jeans from the local discount store to effectively carry serious hardware in their pockets all day every day for very long. Pocket carry demands planning and adaptation of your wardrobe, and/or adaptation of your concealed carry hardware to your existing wardrobe. In practice, the dedicated carrier will usually end up with a combination of

both approaches. This can get more expensive than simply buying a gun and a belt holster and calling it a day.

In light of the above, the choice of handguns for constant pocket carry in all types of clothing can be critical. Ideally, we want to maximize the capability of handguns we carry in the most permissive/capacious pockets, while giving up as little capability as possible when obliged to adapt the handgun size to the limitations of the smaller/less durable pockets. At the same time, we don't want to have to deal with a variety of action types and shooting characteristics among the multiple handguns we have to maintain proficiency with. We want the different size weapons to operate as similarly as possible, such that increased proficiency with one equals increased proficiency with all.

In all size envelopes, as we covered in our previous article, the handgun in question must be:

1. Reliable and durable under extreme circumstances. In a close quarters fight, your weapon likely won't be fired from a static, stable, upright stance. It may be fired at strange angles, while spastically moving, in a suboptimal grip. During the fight it may be struck or otherwise disrupted. Also, guns carried in pockets do tend to get banged and jostled quite a bit. Regardless, the gun has to work.
2. Simple and intuitive to operate. Under extreme fight-or-flight effects, your body is best prepared to use any hand-held object as a striking or throwing weapon. It will already be an accomplishment of nurture over nature to actually SHOOT THE GUN, so it's best to keep things as simple as possible to accomplish that, regardless of time in training.
3. Quick to grip and draw. When split seconds count and your body is instinctively moving at reflex speed (i.e. the speed at which your hand will pull away from a sudden flame), any additional movement, effort and time required to get a secure grip on an ill-fitting gun and clear snags during the draw is a recipe for disaster.
4. Well fit to your hand and naturally pointable. While it is somewhat possible to adapt to an ill-fitting gun through extensive training and practice, things are just easier and faster and less likely to fall apart under lethal threat if the tool and user are well matched from the beginning. This increases the user's confidence as well.
5. Shootable and controllable enough for you to keep multiple rounds on target at cyclic speed (i.e. as fast as you can pull the trigger) at close range, with one hand
6. Powerful enough to consistently penetrate a big guy's vital organs through commonly worn clothing from all angles with expanding bullets. Within the major combat calibers (including 9x19mm through .45 ACP), this is largely a matter of diligent ammunition selection. More attention should probably be paid to consistently deep penetration, resistance to deflection, consistently reliable expansion and destructive expanded bullet shape than to initial and expanded bullet size or cavitation. Of course, the selected ammunition should not disrupt requirement #5 above.

The Kahr Advantage

The Kahr series of pistols fits the above criteria for most people. From the larger T and TP pistols through the mid-size K and P pistols down to the smallest MK and PM pistols, the basic Kahr design is reliable, durable, simple, slick and adaptable to various people's concealment,

hand fit and shootability needs through its various size and caliber (9x19mm, .40 S&W and .45 ACP, as well as .380 ACP for deep concealment/backup) permutations.

All pistols in the Kahr line (besides those that, due to specific state mandates, include an external manual safety lever) operate the same way: smooth double-action-only-like trigger pull, with no external controls beyond the slide stop lever. This basic operating system is conducive not only to effectiveness under life or death stress, but also to transition to other effective weapons such as revolvers and the manual-safety-lever-free striker fired service handguns mandated by many police departments. This makes skill with the Kahr system much more transferable than e.g. skill with particular single-action or traditional double/single-action semi-automatics.

Even the largest, most shootable T series pistols in the Kahr line are slim and compact compared to most handguns, making it easy to adapt dedicated pockets to their carry. They can be had in lightweight TP trim if weight is a greater issue for a particular pocket than size. The lightweight P series strikes an excellent balance of compactness, light weight and shootability, and is adaptable to many pockets. The subcompact MK and PM pistols can bring full service caliber power into all but the smallest pockets. And for those smallest pockets, the .380 ACP Kahr is an attractive option. Finally, the single stack magazines used by all Kahr pistols are quite easy to carry concealed in pockets (different pockets from those used to carry the guns, of course). It is advisable to use some sort of magazine sleeve or cap for such carry, both to protect the feed lips and cartridges against dirt and damage, and to protect the garment against damage and wear.

These characteristics make the Kahr line a top choice for the concealed carrier who appreciates the many advantages of pocket carry. With one or more Kahr pistols and some well thought out clothing and pocket holsters, plus maximum training, practice and awareness, a concealed carrier can be maximally prepared all day, every day for whatever may come to pass.

See <http://www.attackproof.com/> for more information on how to develop combative attributes, both armed and unarmed. Remember: a gun is useless if you can't get it out. You may have to fight bare-handed before you can shoot.