

CHOOSING A DEFENSIVE HANDGUN FOR CONCEALED CARRY

Photography by Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D

As a senior citizen, when you go to purchase your first defensive handgun for concealed carry, you may find yourself feeling nervous, confused, or “out of your element” at the gun shop. If this is what you experience, join the club! We’ve all been there and done that! After all, you’ve experienced a lot of things in your life, but this is a new experience for you. Know that this is where the value of a truly concerned and dedicated professional can shine through. That would be the gun shop sales person from whom you decide to buy your first gun, or second.

His or her role is to explain to you, in terms you can comprehend, with no condescension, the varieties of handguns available and how they operate. It is important that you resist being seduced into believing that “cute”, “sleek”, “shiny” or complicated, make for a better defensive weapon. Three key rules of thumb to keep in mind are: (1) Form should follow function. (2) Function follows from a quality firearm chosen wisely by an educated, well-advised consumer. (3) Function follows when you purchase a quality handgun from a knowledgeable and reputable firearms salesperson who cares about your needs, and takes the time to competently explain the gun and how to use it.

When you go to a gun shop or indoor range, do you see other happy senior citizen’s hanging around, looking at guns, shooting and/or conversing about handguns, shooting and self defense? Are the sales people friendly and helpful? On the other hand, if you go into a gun shop and you see Bubba and his cousin Jethro, chewing tobacco and snickering at you, get out of there fast!

An ethical gun salesperson or firearms instructor wants to see you on a regular basis and to keep you as a customer or



LWS SEECAMP .32 ACP DRAWN IN A RETENTION READY POSITION.

client, as he or she obtains satisfaction from observing you develop your performance skills with your chosen firearm/s. An ethical professional will never push you into buying a particular product. He or she will help you make a truly informed choice, which involves assessing the type of handgun you are most comfortable shooting, carrying and safely storing. He or she stays updated and honest with regard to the quality products on the market.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

I suggest that, when shopping for a defensive handgun, you find a range facility that other senior citizens frequent, that will

let you rent different handguns, and that offers basic pistol, personal protection, and concealed carry classes taught by qualified, certified instructors. In such a senior citizen-friendly environment, you can best determine which type of handgun will best suit your particular needs, because you can try out different weapons and accessories. It is always best to try before you buy.

THE CHOICE PROCESS

First, educate yourself by gathering information about the different types, makes and models of handguns available. Then, compile a list of your objectives based on your own personal attributes and needs, so that you can make an informed and personally appropriate selection of model and manufacturer. Remember that no one handgun is perfect for everyone, every situation or for everyone’s pocket-book. A handgun can be a great equalizer, but because all handguns were not created equal, you must choose intelligently. If you do so, you will acquire a personal protection tool that you’ll be able to enjoy for many years and then hand down as a family heirloom.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR A DEFENSIVE CARRY GUN

As we age, many of us tend to develop joint problems, arthritis, and hip, back and leg pain. Thus, a concealed carry gun riding on your hip or in your pocket, that is too big and heavy, may place too much strain on your back and it may also pull your pants down! Remember, as we age, gravity tends to pull us down enough, such that, sometimes, just carrying ourselves is a chore! So, think light and thin, which equals comfortable to carry concealed. However, also think about how you dress. Will the gun be easy to conceal?

RELIABILITY

While the above criteria are important, we mustn't sacrifice reliability and durability in a carry gun. Remember, if you are going to carry your handgun everyday and practice with it—it must hold up! So, choose a handgun with a reputation for reliability.

GOOD FIT

Now, in choosing your carry handgun, you must be the judge as to whether the gun you're considering provides a good fit for your hands. Does it point naturally? Is your trigger finger comfortably able to reach the trigger without your having to distort your proper grip? Unless the gun is a point and shoot gun, are the sights usable? Can you see the front sight clearly with your corrective lenses on?

MANAGEABLE RECOIL

Is the gun comfortable to shoot? Is the recoil manageable? Seriously, if the gun is not comfortable to shoot, you will not shoot it, and then, you will not get your practice time in with the gun.

CONTROLLABLE TRIGGER

Is the trigger controllable? That means not too heavy of a pull, but not too light either. Bottom line—does it feel right for you? That means, can you operate it without getting finger cramps and conversely can you feel it when you press it? Can you repeatedly dry fire the gun without making figure eights with the front sight? Are you aware kinesthetically when you've pressed the trigger rearward far enough to cock and fire the weapon? Too light of a trigger spells, ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGE.

ACCURACY

In your hands, the gun needs to be reasonably accurate when you shoot it at 10 yards and in. Is the gun forgiving of the arc of movement created by your hand tremor? Are you able to place accurate follow-up shots? Bad guys have a nasty habit of not going down after just one shot. Good second shot recovery is essential. You must be capable of delivering more than one nasty surprise to Mr. Bad Guy!

SIMPLE, EASY AND SAFE TO OPERATE

Your defensive handgun should be simple, easy and safe to operate. If it is an auto-loading pistol, is the slide easy to operate? Do you have the hand strength to be able to pull the slide all the way back to cycle a round into the chamber or to clear the gun? Can you easily operate the slide stop/release lever to lock the slide back?

Can your thumb reach and operate the magazine catch to drop the magazine? If you have a revolver, can your thumb reach and operate the cylinder release latch? Under stress, whatever fine motor skills you do have tend to fly away. So, Simple Is Good (SIG).

EASY TO MAINTAIN

Don't choose a gun that's difficult to field strip for routine cleaning and maintenance. The end result will be that you won't maintain it, and it will eventually rot or it won't work when you need it! As we age, many of us develop arthritis, which makes it difficult to disassemble and reassemble mechanical devices with many, stubborn little parts.

AFFORDABILITY

The gun should also be affordable to purchase and use. If you're on a fixed income, you don't want to have to sell your firstborn grandchild to afford the gun or the ammunition for it! If practice ammunition is too expensive, then you may become reluctant to practice. Choose a handgun in a caliber for which there's plenty of cheap, quality, target ammunition and a good supply of affordable, defensive, jacketed hollow point ammunition.

SO WHAT HANDGUNS FIT THE BILL?

There are many excellent handguns that meet all of these criteria. Of these, several come to mind as worthy of recommendation for senior citizen concealed carry. They are: the .32 ACP, LWS Seecamp .32 and Kel-

Tec P-32; the .380 ACP Sig Sauer P232; the 9mm Glock 26, Kahr Arms PM9 and MK9, and Sig Sauer P239; and the classic, lightweight, .38 Special, snub-nose, Smith and Wesson J-Frame revolvers. Each of these reliable, well-made handguns offers a low profile, concealed carry package that can provide discreet protection for the average senior citizen. No one but you will know you're carrying until they need to know.

SOURCES

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