

Defensive Pistol Selection

When selecting a gun for defensive purposes, use the R.E.A.P. test. This acronym stands for: reliability, ergonomics, accuracy and power. Reliability is most important, because in a gunfight, as well as any secondary use for most of a gun (competitions), reliability is very, very important.

One other note before breaking down R.E.A.P. into more details, I **STRONGLY** recommend picking one model of handgun that will meet all of your priorities and needs, and spend your time and money (for ammunition) on that one gun. If you are a very experienced shooter, then you can make the decision to switch back and forth between different guns, but the new shooter should stick to one thing. This will allow you to focus on developing fundamental skills to an advanced level rather than chasing equipment and the newest gun or gimmick.

Remember the saying: *“Beware of the man with only one gun, for he probably knows how to shoot it.”* Here is what you need to look at when selecting a firearm for combative purposes, listed in order of priority: Reliability, Ergonomics, Accuracy, and Power.

Reliability

The number one thing a firearm must do is work. Nothing else matters if you have a malfunction during a fight. Most good production guns should be very reliable out of the box, and with a good gunsmith custom guns should work every time. If they don't work, get rid of them. You will want to pay particular attention to the ammunition you use, and the magazines you use to feed that ammunition into the gun, because the large majority of malfunctions are indeed caused by faulty ammunition or magazines, **NOT** the gun. If you know without a doubt that the magazines and ammunition are good, and the gun fails, then it is time to do some trading. Actually, if the gun is a carry gun, do someone a favor and get the gun fixed if possible before trading it, or at least let them know what they are getting so they don't stake their life on the gun.

How reliable should a gun be? An example would be teaching guns like the SIG P320, Glock 19 and the S&W M&P 9, 9C. These guns are the ones used to teach defensive/tactical classes, as well as countless hours of training. The full sized SIG gun finally failed to eject (this may have been an ammunition issue) after 15,000 + rounds and four years of hard training with very minimal cleaning (it was lubricated...but not cleaned on purpose). The M&P 9C gets cleaned because it is a carry gun, and with more than 7,000 rounds, has yet to fail. That is the idea of reliability. If you can't go through numerous training sessions without a malfunction, then your gun is **NOT** reliable.



Some great handguns, the M&P made by Smith and Wesson and the Sig P320 and P365.. Best are a line of guns that offers users a full sized gun and a compact gun with the same ergonomics. Sigarms, S&W, FN, and Glock are good examples.

Ergonomics

The second thing to look for in a firearm is its physical design and ability to be shot well. Generally a gun with a low bore to axis ratio will recover better during recoil because this low axis causes the recoil to travel straight back and through the arm, rather than up. The recoil has to go somewhere, and a well-designed gun will recoil considerably less. The slide lock lever, magazine release, and other manipulation devices should be easy to reach and operate.

If you purchase any high quality production firearm made by a reputable company, these items won't be a problem. Ambidextrous operating devices are preferred, and at a minimum the safety, if the gun has one, should be located and operable on both sides of the gun.

If you have a choice, you should select a single action type (or similar such as the triggers you will find on Sigs, Glocks, and S&W M&P's. The same trigger design for the first and following shots, as double action triggers just require more work when trying to hit a small target fast on that first shot. Please don't take this as a knock on any gun type out there, but the simple truth is that a double action type trigger is significantly harder to manage in situations where you have a high accuracy requirement. While this may be less likely in a defensive situation, having a trigger that is easier to manage could be a big key if you are shooting around family members or friends that you do not want to hit.

Another feature you will find on most modern production guns these days is adjustable or interchangeable grip panels or frame modules that allow you to modify (very quickly) the guns grip size to fit your hand. This feature is strongly recommended. Lastly, the single best test of ergonomics is to shoot the gun and try to manipulate it while shooting. You will find noticeable differences in different designs and the gun you can run well is probably the gun you should consider carrying. Don't carry a gun you can't operate well!

Accuracy

Accuracy is third on the list because while it is very important, it is not the most important factor since most handgun fights will occur at very close ranges. A very accurate gun is preferable if the first two requirements (reliability and ergonomics) are met as well as accuracy. Production carry guns should be capable of shooting a group of four to six inches at 25 yards at a minimum.

Power

Stopping power is something that should be considered. Select a caliber that offers the most stopping power and compromise of controllability you can find. We would all carry .50 caliber handguns if we were able, but there is always a compromise between recoil and the size of the gun versus stopping power. Guns with bigger more powerful bullets (ammunition) are often bigger guns and are harder to carry and conceal. They also recoil more, which isn't a bad thing if you have the ability to control that recoil.

In terms of stopping power, the human body requires a certain amount of penetration (10-12 inches) for a bullet to affect damage to vital organs via a crushing mechanism and "stop" the threat. In addition, a bullet that is built to cause the most damage and largest temporary and permanent (the most important) wound channel is likely to be more effective than one that does less damage. This is a 9mm or larger, with a good ballistic design.

Today's 9mm (9x19) cartridge is the best overall defensive cartridge available. It is not only the most common [centerfire] caliber, it has great stopping power, as well as the largest magazine capacity and is the least expensive to shoot. It is the caliber carried by most law enforcement agencies in the US, as well as the military.

In addition to the four performance related factors, also try to select a firearm that meets some (or all) of these secondary considerations:

High Capacity

The more cartridges in the gun, the less need to reload. You should have no interest in having to reload during a fight, as doing so costs time that might allow an enemy to overcome. The downside to a higher capacity gun is that they are usually thicker and may be harder to conceal, especially in an IWB holster (inside the waist band).

Lightweight

Heavy guns are harder to carry. Therefore a small lightweight Sig P365 or a Smith and Wesson M&P C is a good choice, but have the ability to switch to a full size gun. Try to find a gun that is comfortable enough that you will be okay carrying it all the time.

Stock Ready

This means that you select a gun that is ready to carry right out of the box. The most likely replacement from the factory should probably be sights. High quality manufacturers offer "stock ready" guns right out of the box. There are some things to consider when "setting" up your gun though, and some aftermarket changes are a good thing. Others are probably not recommended. The following will provide that information.

Firearm Setup

The set-up of the gun is critical to how it performs. If your gun met the criteria listed earlier, there should be little additional setup needed, and there might actually be a danger in changing certain things in a stock firearm. Strongly recommended is shooting the gun as close to the factory configuration as possible, as high quality companies build their guns to meet certain specifications. Modifying or changing parts to the newest gimmick of the day might compromise how the gun is

supposed to work, and hinder its reliability. Here are the key factors that should be dealt with when setting up a gun:

Trigger

Be very careful when modifying the trigger system on a carry gun. Making a carry gun trigger very light is probably not a good idea, from both a performance perspective as well as a legal one (if you ever have to go to court over a shooting). The performance downside is that an extremely light trigger is higher risk in terms of potentially having a negligent or early discharge of the firearm while under stress. Light competition type trigger jobs are also prone to cause malfunctions due to light strikes caused by using less than factory weight springs. Legally, any modification that may make it seem like you are interested in making your firearm more “lethal” is probably something an attorney will use against you. Stick to the stock trigger weight (whatever comes from the factory), and think that it is probably ok to “clean” the trigger up on a carry gun to make it smoother. On the other side of the coin are the heavy trigger systems similar to the NY style trigger on a Glock. A heavy trigger system to prevent negligent discharges indicates that the shooters are very untrained, and are certainly not recommend for a carry gun if you are committed to training and the basic principle of keeping your finger outside the trigger guard until you have made the decision to shoot.

Sights



HIGHLY recommend Tru-Glo TFX™ Pro Sights (this picture is a Sig P320), and are built to allow for one handed malfunction manipulations by hooking the rear sight to work the slide. Notice the solid construction. You can find them at www.TruGlo.com.

Sight replacement is something recommended unless the gun can be ordered with good carry sights. The criteria to look for on a carry gun are as follows:

- Solid design (metal, not plastic)
- Visible (larger rear sight notch, and fiber optic or tritium contrasting front sight)
 - Snag free (no sharp corners or areas that will snag or tear your clothing during the draw process)
 - One-Handed useful - rear sight (such as the TruGlo Pro) that allows the operator to use it to work the slide during survival shooting situations where one hand is occupied or injured and cannot be used.

Note on night sights

You can see the night sights in this level of darkness, but you could not identify whether or not the person is a threat without a light. This is why night sights are mandatory on a carry gun. You might be surprised to see “night sights” not mentioned in the criteria. While I have some guns with night sights, and do not have anything negative to say about them, I have found through testing that they are much less needed than most people think. Here’s why: In order to see most night sights glow (which is what makes them unique and work) it has to be dark enough that the shooter must use a flashlight to illuminate and “identify” a threat in order to make a decision to use lethal force. So.... if night sights are the ticket, but you have to have a light to clearly identify in most cases. Now, if you do have them on your carry gun, great, but before you run out and spend the money on them try this: get a pair of night sights and wait until it is dark enough to see them really glow. Now have a friend dressed in a dark shirt place something in their hand (something dark like a T.V. remote control) and have them get 10 yards or so away from you and hold this object near their waist area. You will find that the light is probably low enough to prevent you from seeing what it is. Some of you with very good vision will be able to pick the object out, but most will have to use some sort of light to be certain of what the person has in his/her hands. Remember, “mistake of fact” shootings are those that happen commonly in law enforcement circles when an officer makes a mistake about what someone had in their possession. These shootings very often occur during low light situations. Learn from them!



Grip Surfaces

To increase your ability to control the recoil, and manipulate the gun, all allowable grip surfaces should be stippled or coated with skateboard tape, with the exception of the back strap of the gun. The backstrap of the gun should be left relatively smooth to allow the strong hand to index the gun properly and slide up to a high grip position on the tang of the firearm during the draw process. The sharpness of the stippling on carry guns can be adjusted (with a file) on the edges, so if a gun is tearing up side or cover garments, the surface can be made less aggressive. This modification is strongly recommended for carry guns, especially if one might be shooting with sweaty or bloody hands.



You can see the textured grip surfaces on these guns. Both have been stippled to increase the friction between the hand and the grip. Beware of over stippling a carry gun though, as it will tear your cloths and skin up.

Manipulation devices (magazine release, slide lock, de-cocker, etc.) Manipulation devices are those that allow you to release the spent magazine and de-cock the gun (if the gun has a de-cocking device).

- **Magazine release-** Use caution with extended magazine releases to ensure they do not allow the magazine to fall out or get snagged on clothing, but they should be considered for those who cannot reach the button without pivoting the gun in their hand. There are several great guns on the market today that have the feature of allowing the user to switch the magazine release to the other side of the gun, strongly benefiting those who shoot with their left hand, as most guns are right hand friendly.
- **Slide Lock lever-** An extended slide lock (never a release) lever should be considered for those who cannot reach the lock without moving the gun in their hand, but again I caution you to test the device and ensure that reliability is not compromised. Once again, there are a couple of manufacturers that are building guns with ambidextrous slide lock levers. The shooter should ALWAYS simply manipulate the slide with a gross motor movement instead of misusing a slide lock. It is bad for the mechanism to use the slide lock as some type of slide release. It is a lock lever, not a release lever. Inappropriately using the slide lock as a slide release can also put the pistol in an “out-of-battery” condition when you most need the pistol to work! Learn how to properly use your controls, not follow someone who thinks they are cool in a TV show or movie, or YouTube video.

Useful Links

www.SigSauer.com

www.FNAmerica.com

www.Smith-Wesson.com

www.HK-USA.com

www.Glock.com

www.TruGlo.com

