

A Few Proven Holsters

Carry rigs of veteran lawmen—what you need to know!

By Ralph Mroz

It's not difficult to know if someone takes weapons concealment seriously. Here I'd like to point out some of the things I look for in evaluating a person's level of professionalism, and illustrate those points with examples from several top manufacturers.

First, I need to say that the cost of a person's concealment gear isn't so much of a consideration. As in so many things, you can pay a lot for a fashionable "name," or a reasonable amount somewhere else, and get reasonably equal quality and functionality. On the other hand, good quality often does cost more. Cost differentials in leather goods are often a function of production quantity, which means little in terms of function, to aesthetic detailing that does not contribute much to function, and to differences in materials and workmanship that do make a difference. Function/cost relationships are also skewed today by top-quality holsters made of synthetics—Kydex, thermoplastics, and so on, which manufacturing cost is low but whose functional quality is often quite high. Bottom line, I have both some inexpensive holsters and some very expensive ones that I use with confidence.

The first thing I look at is whether the holster fits the gun it carries. Has the bearer chosen a cheap product that does not tightly secure the weapon, or worse, are they using a holster not designed for the specific weapon they're carrying? I also want to see a holster that pulls the gun in close and tight to the body and does not allow it to flop around. I then look to see if the weapon is worn at an angle for that person, which allows for quick access and draw. Finally, I want to see a holster that's not so bulky it compromises the very concealment job for which it was purchased. Both outside and inside-the-pants holsters work fine, by the way; it's a matter of personal preference.

Next I look at the belt. Does it fit the slots and loops of the holster? There are three common widths of gun belts and holster loops and slots: 1-1/4, 1-



Dillon's "LTD" is a flawless example of the classic wrap-around design. All Dillon leather products are more holster than you pay for!



This "Bomber Jacket" pocket holster from Bullman is a superb example of a specialty piece of equipment.

1/2, and 1-3/4 inches. It is imperative that the width of the belt you wear match the width of the receptacles for it on the holster. Otherwise, the holster will shift about, which is both uncomfortable and unsafe. Many of the larger holster manufacturers make their holsters with only 1-3/4-inch slots and

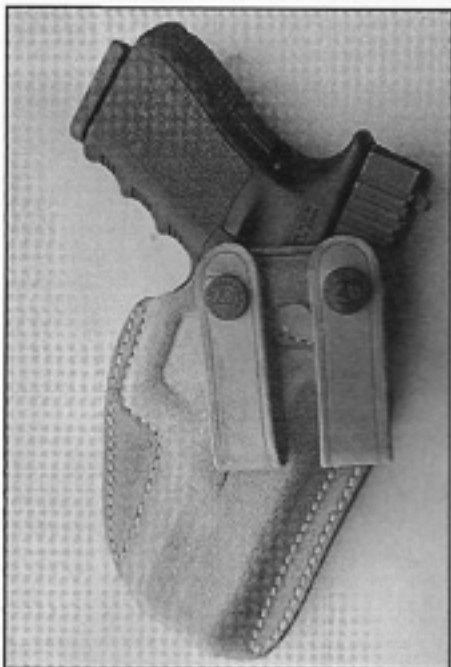
loops in order to keep their production variations under control, which means that you must wear a 1-3/4-inch belt (which are often available in versions that are tapered at the front.) One of the advantages of a smaller shop is that individual preferences in belt width (and subsequently holster slots/loops) can be accommodated for any particular holster or belt. You must also use a belt that's designed to securely carry the weight of a gun. Almost no belt not made specifically for this purpose will do the job, and almost every holster merchant sells good belts. Invest in a few.

Finally, I look to see if the accessory holders—magazine pouches, light holders, cuff cases, etc., are of equally good quality. You wouldn't be carrying these accessories to begin with if you didn't think they were important, so why would you carry them in something that didn't treat them as important?

B&J Concealment Gunleather is a new shop out of West Virginia. B&J chooses and works their leather so that the result is relatively thin and stiff, which reduces bulk and makes for a durable rig; 6/7 or 8/9 ounce cowhide is tightly molded to the gun, given 4-5 coats of hand-rubbed wax finish and



The "New York Style" rig from B&J is meant to carry in front of the body, between the hip and the belt buckle.



The Galco "Royal Guard" is a classic Summer Special done one better, it's made of horsehide!

hand buffed. Because of the coats of wax and sometimes an acrylic finish, B&J holsters are waterproof and long-lasting. Belts also get a bath in saddle oil first. All this handwork results in a snug, well-concealed holster. New holster designs are rare, but their "New York Style" rig is new and practical. Fashioned after a NYPD cop's idea, the NY Style is designed for appendix carry, strong side front (between the hip bone and the belly button). Here the gun's barrel aligns with the thigh/pelvis crease, and the gun is easily accessible from any position, including sitting. Concealment is sur-



Garrity's "Steadfast" boasts two-tone high band and low-cut front, and all-round top-shelf execution.



Garrity's "Steadfast" also features rear belt slots and a split tunnel loop for super security.

prisingly effective. I believe that this carry mode will catch on fast, but you can try it now from B&J.

Mark Garrity could easily be the finest "unknown" holster maker in the business. The reason that he's not better known outside of his region is that he's kept pretty busy as a full-time cop, tactical team member, academy instructor and competitive shooter. That background assures you that his holsters are, first and foremost, practical. His letterhead identifies him as "Owner and Artisan" of Garrity Gunleather, and he is certainly an artisan, too. With its two-tone finish and high mouthband, and with the fact that it sat "just right" on a belt, his "Steadfast" rig caught my attention at an IALEFI conference a couple years ago. The Steadfast was originally made for a drug task force cop who needed a rig that rode high to be con-

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A FEW PROVEN HOLSTERS

cealed under a short jacket. This IDPA approved pancake style holster features 7/8-ounce hide, a high reinforced mouthband (available in various colors and leathers) for security, a low-cut front for speed, and front and rear belt slots and a split tunnel loop for versatility and stability. A full firing grip is easily provided, and the body guard provides comfort. The Steadfast is detail-molded, exquisitely finished, rides extremely comfortably and is reasonably priced, to boot!

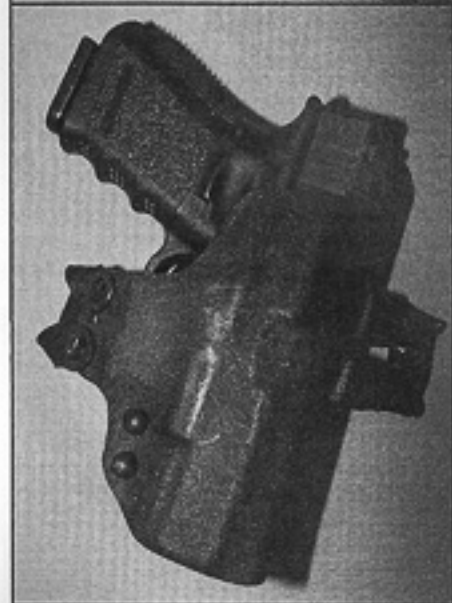
Bulman Gunleather is the shop of Joshua Bulman, and he has joined the ranks of the very high-end makers. All of his holsters are made to order one at a time and are designed to secure the weapon under the most strenuous circumstances, yet release it smoothly after clearing half-inch of resistance. His "Police Pocket Pal" is an example of a specialty item that showcases his abilities. Made for the horizontal-flap/top-loading pocket found on many uniform jackets, the PPP is expressly designed to hold a backup gun. A sewn steel rod is incorporated to act as a secure catch on withdrawal, and most of the shaping is on the body side of the holster to minimize printing. Edges on all Bulman holsters are burnished, not merely painted with acrylic. Bulman's work is tops, and exemplifies the extra touches and quality that you go to a custom maker for.

Dillon Precision has been putting out a line of holsters under their name for a few years now. They are flawless renditions of classic designs at good prices—value leaders, indeed. The "LTD" model is an excellent example of the classic wraparound slot and loop design with a top reinforcing band. It's well made and comfortable with a 1-3/4-inch slot and loop. Dillon belts are likewise solid classical designs, with double thick cowhide, nicely stitched, available in black or brown in 1-1/4 and 1-1/2-inch widths. Solo and dual mag pouches with rear loops incorporate a spring magazine tensioner, a clever touch that works quite well. It's easy to see why Dillon has so many leather fans.

Gunfighters, Ltd., the training company founded by training guru Lou Chiodo, now offers leather holsters made by Flash Point of South Africa. These holsters are offered only for GLOCKs at the present, and with the exchange rate at present levels, they are quite a value. The Gunfighter model shown is a classic pancake style, wet molded to the gun. The



The "Gunfighter" from Gunfighters, Ltd. is a one-side molded workhorse from South Africa, where the exchange rate makes for a real bargain!



The "K1" from FIST is another innovative holster from Jim Murnak.

detail level is appropriate to a snug and secure fit, and is well executed. With double-stitched seams and 1-3/4-inch slots, slight forward cant, and suede lining, this holster provides a full grip and secure hold on the holstered sidearm. The Gunfighter and its thumb-break sister model, the "On Guard," are molded only on the front, with a smooth back side. Lou feels that this arrangement provides better grip acquisition and more comfort along the belt line. At \$34, these holsters are definitely a best buy. And while you check out the Gunfighter holster, take a look at the Gunfighters Ltd. website. It offers other accessories from South Africa and a training schedule.

Galco is a large manufacturer that



B&J's pancake holster is made of thin and stiff cowhide for less bulk, and with a waterproof finish.

uniformly turns out excellent quality concealment gear. Everything they produce is a top-notch example of a proven design. The "Royal Guard" is a flawless rendition of the classic "Summer Special," an IWB rig with rough side out and dual snap belt loops. The Royal Guard goes an extra step and is made of premium horsehide for super long life and shape retention, something to worry about in a rig that rides next to the skin and absorbs sweat. A metal band keeps the mouth open for reholstering. Galco makes both "sport" and "dress" con-

concealment gear, and you can't go wrong here.

FIST is now an established name in holsters, driven by the insight and vision of Jim Murmak. Jim has joined the ranks of Chick Gaylord and John Bianchi in the top ranks of holster designers. In his less than ten years in the business he has introduced a stream of innovations and designs. Among other things, he's solved the women's holster conundrum (with "Lady-Fist" holsters), designed a practical snap-on/off pancake holster (the "Inside/Outside"), and fused the pancake and wraparound styles (the "Superside"). His Kydex line is also innovative. Taking the opposite approach from makers who tout the thickness of the Kydex they use as a virtue, Jim went to a thinner Kydex for his holsters. His "K-1" is my favorite of the lot, and it is the closest thing I've come across yet to someone Velcroing a gun to my side. The thin Kydex hugs the gun and takes up no room. The clever screw-on belt slots pull the whole thing into your body very snugly. The effect is a holster that simply disappears from all sensation, while holding a gun that's always where you want it. Professionals are fast discovering FIST.

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