

WHAT'S HOT

There's always a lot that's new. Here's what's good in ammunition, holsters and more!

Ammo—New & Proven Loads

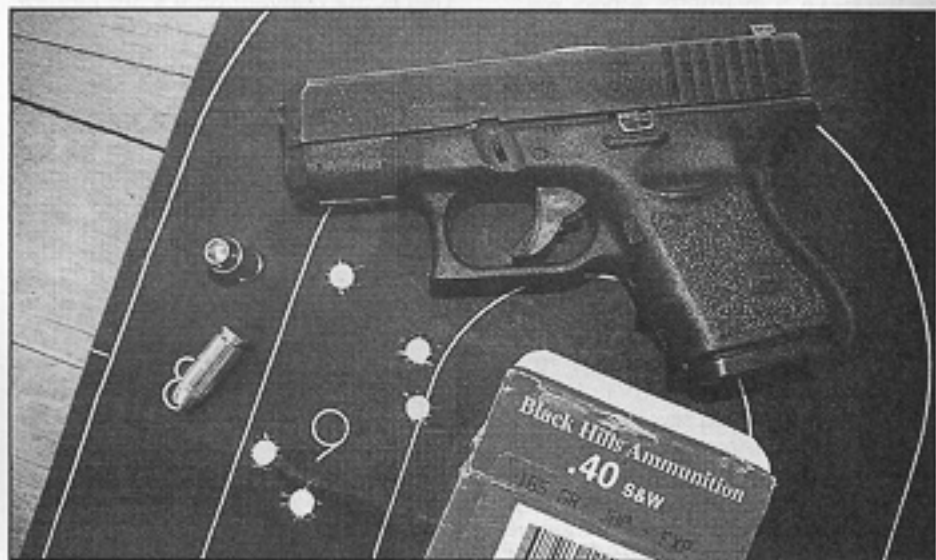
Black Hills introduced a new round in their hot "EXP" series at the 2001 SHOT Show, a 165-grain .40 S&W load stoked up to a muzzle velocity of 1150 feet per second (fps). This approaches the ballistics of a 158-grain .357 Magnum, but with much milder recoil. The bullet is CCI's proven Gold Dot bonded hollowpoint.

The ballistics are good, but there are other companies that can equal them, including CCI Speer's own Gold Dot offering. What Black Hills brings to the table is their famously precise quality control as well as the accuracy for which the brand is justly famous.

I first tested the new round from the 25-yard bench with an out of the box GLOCK 22 that hadn't been sighted in yet. I noticed that the first two shots were touching each other at 11 o'clock in the X-ring. I compensated by moving the sight picture, and over-corrected. The next three shots went to 5 o'clock in the X-ring. All three were touching one another. The gun had, in essence, delivered a five-shot one-hole group. Since .40 S&W is not a chambering famous for accuracy, I was impressed. Backing off to 50 yards, I tried another five-shot group. I jerked one shot low, which I didn't count because it was my error and I even felt it go. But the other four measured at 1-7/8 inches from half a football field away. This was the best accuracy this particular GLOCK gave with any of the several rounds I tested with it. I was more impressed.

The SIG P-229 in .40 never gives quite as good accuracy as it does in calibers 9mm or .357 SIG. With this Black Hills round, though, it plunked five shots into 1.95 inches at 25 yards, the best group I've ever gotten from a P-229 in that caliber.

I got to wondering what it would do at longer ranges. I set up an IDPA target on the rifle range after GLOCK armorer Rick Devoid got the GLOCK 22's Meproflight sights dead on, and fired three shots from a standing two-hand position. The three holes from the Black Hills .40s hit dead-on in a



Baby GLOCK 22 shot the Black Hills EXP ammo well at 25 yards.



DAO Beretta delivered 50 out of 50 points at 25 yards with EXP 165gr. .40.



This SIG P-229 grouped its best ever with new Black Hills loads.

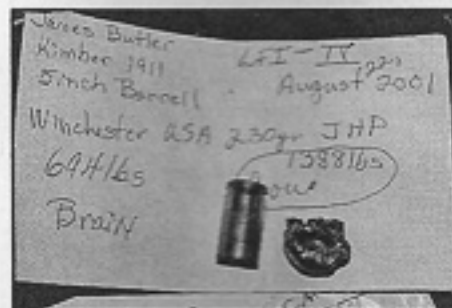
less than a 3.5-inch group. I stepped back to 75 yards and fired six rounds from the same standing isosceles posture, now using the three dots instead of the post-in-notch sight picture. Since the dots sit below the top edges of the sights, closer to the bore, this sight picture results in higher hits, and I wanted to allow for drop. The gun was on. I honked one high into the head and one right, into the four-point zone, but the other four Black Hills loads centered in the 8-



Winchester 185gr. Silvertip had more impressive mushroom than lower priced 230gr. JHP. Bullet was recovered from large animal.



New USA JHP, left, is similar to original 180gr. subsonic .40 S&W load from Winchester's main line, right.



Mushroomed USA 230gr. .45 slug was recovered from the brain of an instantly-killed cow.

inch five-point circle.

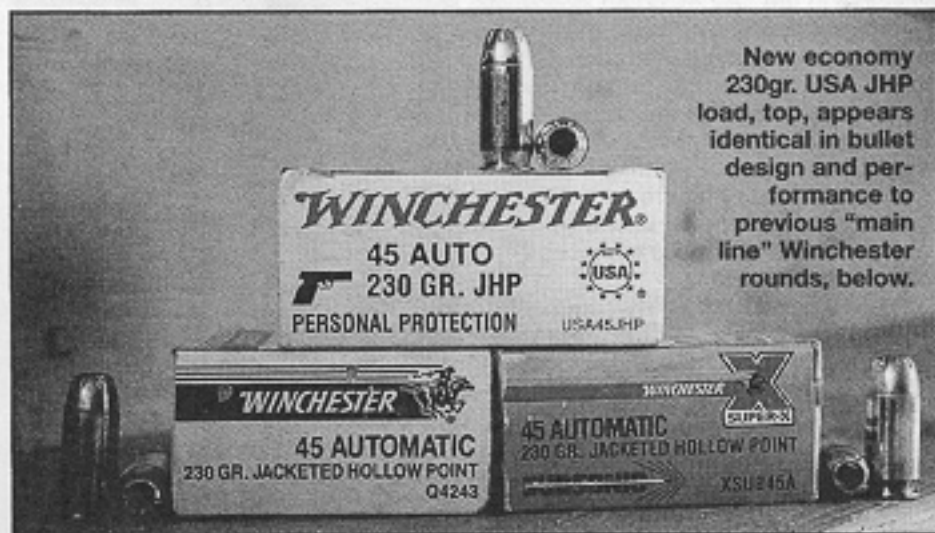
I went back to 100 yards and, wanting to gauge the bullet drop, went back to the post in notch sight picture for a center hold. Now the 165-grain slug was indeed dropping: while aiming at the chest, I got two gut shots and one in the frame just below the target. I went to the bench and returned to the three-dot sight picture on the chest. This brought the post-in-notch sight picture exactly to the neck of the target, the place where PPC shooters aim for a more precise hold. In effect, I had two sight pictures in one. The three shots were all in the chest, two in the A-zone and one just above it, measuring 8.35 inches apart. For a .40 caliber service pistol, I can live with that.

In June of 2001, I used this ammo in the same GLOCK 22 to win the state shoot for cops sponsored by the New Hampshire Police Association. I think the Black Hills' accuracy at the 50-yard stage may have been what put me over the top.

My department was looking for an



All seven .40s tested shot outstanding with 165gr. EXP. Each group is easily within a 3x5 card at 25 yards.



New economy 230gr. USA JHP load, top, appears identical in bullet design and performance to previous "main line" Winchester rounds, below.

issue load for the increasing number of personnel using that caliber for off-duty or backup wear. Accordingly, I tested it in four popular service pistols that are sufficiently light and compact for plainclothes carry, and three sub-compact models ideal for the backup

function. All are carried by one or another of our personnel. Distance was 25 yards, with pistol braced on a Millett rest. Each five-shot group was measured to the nearest .05 of an inch twice, once for all hits, and once again for the best three. The latter

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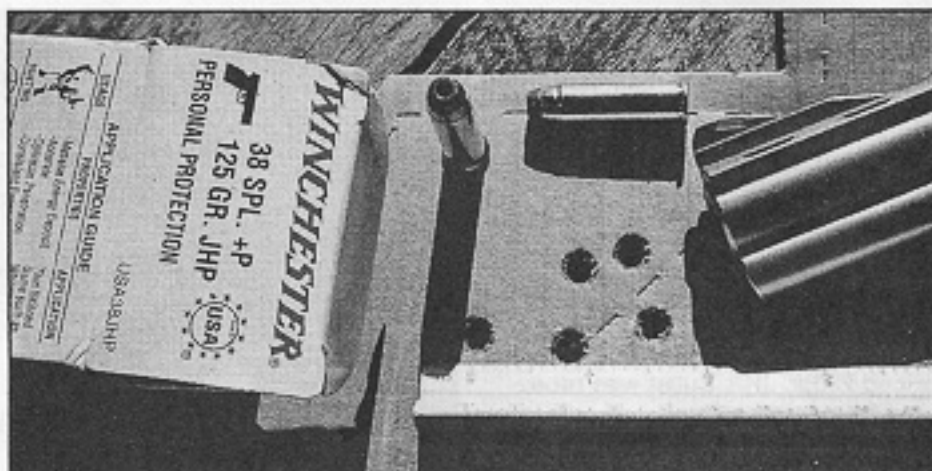
measurement tends to factor out human error and give a better idea of the pistol/load combination's mechanical accuracy potential.

All of the five-shot groups could be covered with a 3x5 card. As one who has fired a lot of .40 service ammo out of a lot of service pistols and concealment weapons, I can attest that this is impressive accuracy indeed. Note that with the exception of the SIG, none had "easy triggers," the other six being either double-action-only or the roughly eight-pound pull New York trigger GLOCK option.

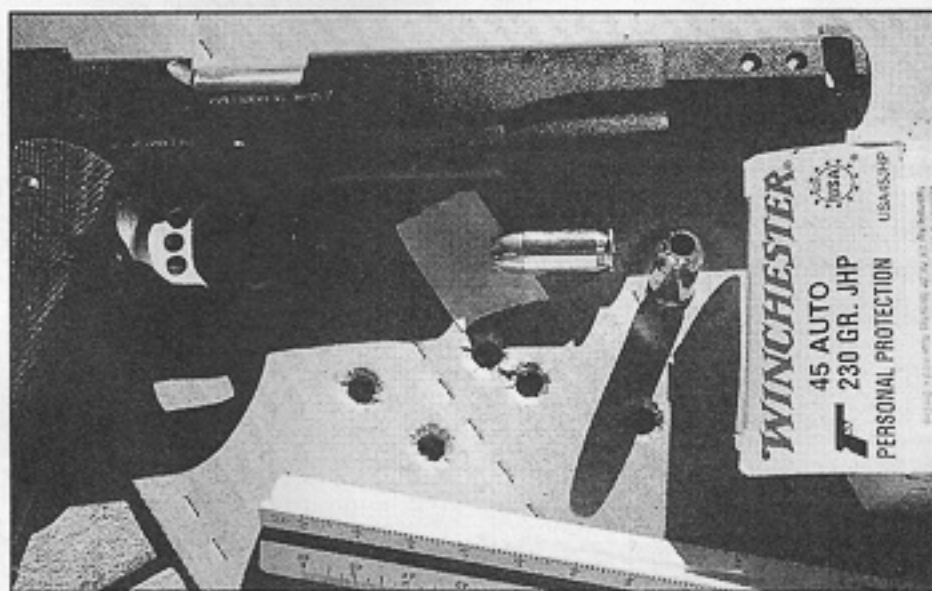
Let's talk power. The recoil is snappy, but nothing you can't handle if you're comfortable with, say, a .45 auto. Any autopistol can malfunction if it's fired with a limp wrist, and that tendency increases with weak ammo. Conversely, the hotter the load, the more likely the pistol is to cycle with a relaxed hold in, say, an injured hand. GLOCK instructor and police SWAT trainer Ed Gross and I deliberately tried to get this gun to jam in a weak hold. We succeeded only once in getting it to fail to return to battery, a situation that was quickly rectified. Muzzle flash is quite manageable in poor light.

This is a good compromise load for people who've heard two sides of what .40 ammo works best and don't know who to believe. On one side, the deep penetration advocates recommend the heaviest hollowpoint available in the caliber, going at moderate velocity, and insist on a minimum of 12-inch penetration in ballistic gelatin. Another faction has popularized 135-grain .40 bullets traveling at velocities in the 1300 fps range. These are devastating anti-personnel rounds that create extremely wide and violent wound channels, but only penetrate about ten inches into flesh and gelatin.

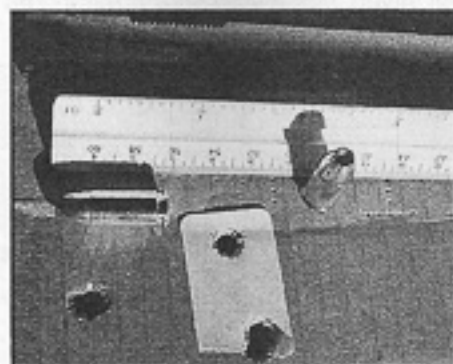
The .40 user caught between these two arguments may find the answer in the middle. This full-power 165-grain will tear a wound channel of impressive width, but should reliably make the 12-inch penetration standard. The Gold Dot bullet was expressly designed for maximum performance on the FBI test series, which has the same penetration requirement and includes shooting through sheetrock, car windows, and clothing. A round like this can solve the "crisis of confidence" with guaranteed acceptable performance no matter which side of the debate sounds most persuasive at a given moment.



Most accurate of the new USA hollowpoints was 125gr. +P .38S&W with 25yd. group from 6" MagnaPort Custom S&W 686.



USA brand 230gr. JHP .45 did this 25yd. group with Middlebrooks Colt .45.



S&W Performance Center 952 shot well with USA 115gr JHP 9mm.

Impressive performance plus great reliability and phenomenal accuracy: that's the story on Black Hills 165-grain EXP .40 S&W ammo. Suffice it to say my department has adopted this load for all officers who use that caliber for their backup and off-duty weapons. Our on-duty load for the issue .45s is Black Hills also, with the 230-grain Gold Dot, and it's proved effective since being adopted several years ago.

Winchester has expanded their



USA .40 180gr. JHP delivered average accuracy from this HK USP40 Compact.

inexpensive "generic" line, Winchester USA, to include a selection of hollowpoints. We mentioned in these pages some time ago that the 110-grain semi-jacketed hollowpoint USA load was the best inexpensive .357 ammo you could get for personal defense, and expressed the wish that the line would be expanded to include more good hollowpoints in other popular personal defense calibers. Winchester has listened, and the new line of ammo was introduced at the 2001 SHOT Show in New Orleans. My



High Noon scabbard carries this big ParaOrdnance double stack .45 comfortably and discreetly.



Para P-14 LDA .45 works fine as a lefty gun in this "reversed" right hand High Noon belt holster.

samples arrived in summer 2001, calibers .45 ACP, 9mm (Luger), .40 S&W, and .38 Special. The latter is a +P, and the rest are standard pressure in the most popular bullet weights.

The .45 appears to be identical to the standard 230-grain subsonic they sold for many years under their mainstream Winchester brand, a favorite of police departments. This fulfilled all the FBI gelatin protocols, fed well in a variety of guns, and worked on the street. In testing 230-grain .45 hollowpoints on live animals some years ago, I found it didn't perform much differently from the vaunted SXT premium-priced round. A friend of mine dropped a murderer with one, firing a single shot from a GLOCK 21, and was told later by the medics that the bullet had performed just fine.

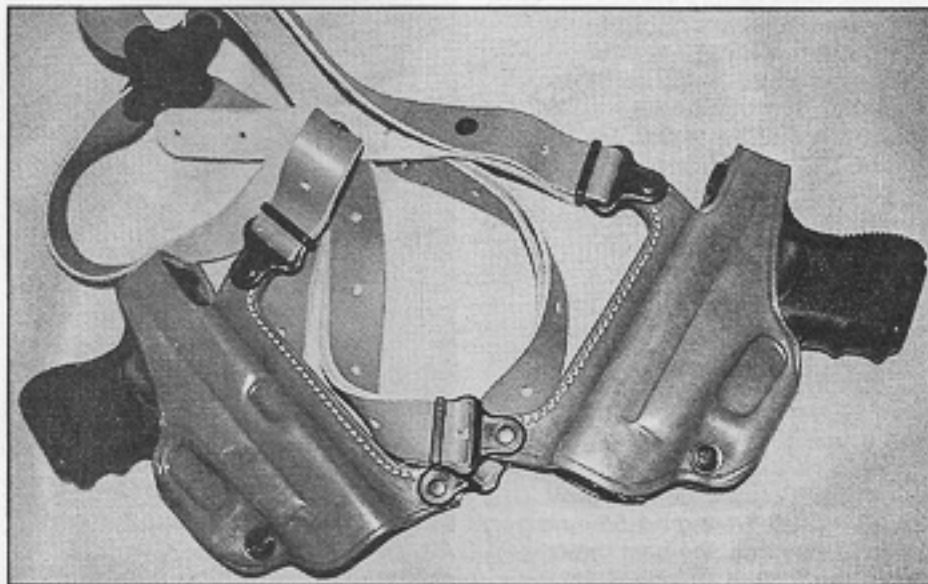
One of my students killed a large



Josh Bulman's hip scabbard exhibited top-notch materials, fit, finishing. Pistol is Kimber Custom II.



Top-line Galco Horsehide scabbard was impressive. This one carries Kimber Custom stainless .45.



Double shoulder rig from Galco carries a brace of mini-GLOCK .40s.

cow with a single round of USA 230-grain JHP out of a five-inch barrel Colt Gov't Model. Death was instantaneous. A photo of the recovered bullet accompanies this article. The bullet deformed, though not into a classic mushroom, penetrated to optimum depth, and got the job done. I tested for accuracy at 25 yards from a Colt Gov't Model fitted by D.R. Middlebrooks with his splendid JetComp and a Kart barrel. The five-shot group measured 2.80 inches, and the best three, clustered in the center, measured 1.15 inches.

The 9mm resembles nothing so much as Winchester's main-line Silvertip, with a standard copper jacket. The 115-grain JHP is going at mid-1100s in velocity. Over the years,

after several modifications in design, the 115-grain Silvertip at that speed has proven itself to penetrate about eight or nine inches of ballistic gelatin and mushroom effectively. This kind of performance delivers mild recoil, and is a popular choice for personal defense. Many police departments, from Miami to Las Vegas, also had good luck with the 115-grain Silvertip from which the generic USA round appears to have been cloned. At 25 yards, five of these from a S&W Performance Center M952 went into 1.70 inches center to center, the best three in a cluster that measured an inch on the nose. Winchester's generic USA ammo has been notably accurate in its various full metal jacket forms, and the 9mm JHP version

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continues the tradition.

In .40 S&W, the cheap open-nose load resembles the original Winchester 180-grain subsonic, but with a slightly tighter bullet cavity. In most of its forms by all its makers, the 180-grain subsonic worked better than many of us expected when it was introduced in 1990, but is still known to occasionally overpenetrate and fail to expand. The 180-grain subsonic has also never been famous for accuracy. From 25 yards out of an H&K USP40 Compact, the 180-grain JHP USA delivered a five-shot 3.75-inch group, with the best three in a more satisfying 1.45 inches.

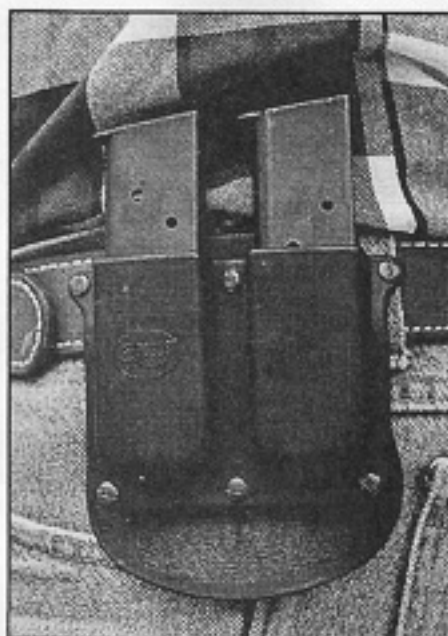
Finally, the .38 Special load is a 125-grain semi-jacketed hollowpoint at +P velocity. A big cavity and a generous amount of exposed lead are there to help expansion. In a penetration test of these four Winchester USA rounds in paperback books (to demonstrate the viability of bookshelves as cover during home invasions) this .38 Special was the only round that expanded. Some lead peeled off the mushroomed front, leaving a recovered projectile that had started at about 0.357 of an inch diameter and now measured .70 caliber by .38 caliber.

Most compilations of effective ammo in .38 Special have listed the 125-grain +P SJHP near the top of the list, usually beaten only by the 158-grain all-lead hollowpoint. This .38 load was the most accurate of the four USA HPs we tested, with a MagnaPort Custom six-inch S&W Model 686+ delivering a 1.55-inch group at 25 yards, the best three measuring 0.80 of an inch. This particular revolver was one of four handguns I recently tested with a fellow gun writer to examine the validity of that "best three shots" measurement. It turned out that his five-shot groups from a Ransom machine rest were within an average of a quarter inch of my best three out of five hand-held, using the same revolver and ammo from the same lots. If extrapolation is logical here, this means that the USA 125-grain .38 Special will be "one-inch ammo" from inherently accurate revolvers.

The 125-grain SJHP has historically been a very accurate .38 Special round, more so than the all-lead hollowpoint +P that beats it in stopping power and kicks more. I used 125-grain .38 +P to achieve my personal best at Bianchi Cup, and would use it in NRA Service Revolver



S&W 3913 fits perfectly in this southpaw Fobus holster.



Fobus magazine holders are coming on strong: affordable and functional.



Attached with belt loops, new polymer rig from Blade-Tech was very efficient with this GLOCK 22.



Paddle version of new Blade-Tech polymer worked best for author with paddle between belt and outer trouser surface, as shown.

matches if the rules didn't demand 158-grain all-lead bullets.

You want to run 200 rounds of your carry load through your gun to make sure it works before you trust it on the street. These new JHPs from Winchester make this much more affordable than was the case before their introduction. This is not to say that they supplant the mainstream and premium line of Winchester hollowpoints. The quick-opening Silvertip would probably be a better choice for home defense and urban carry in .45 ACP, and I would prefer the splendid 230-grain +P Ranger in that caliber for police work. In 9mm, I would pick Winchester's +P 127-grain Ranger or 115-grain JHP at the same velocity hands-down over any

standard pressure 9mm load. In .40 S&W, Winchester's splendid 155-grain Silvertip at 1200 fps easily eclipses any conventional 180-grain subsonic, including their own, as does the police-only Ranger Talon .40 load in either 165- or 180-grain. In .38 Special, the 125-grain USA round would be my second choice behind Winchester's main-line .38 SPD, also known as the FBI Load, the 158-grain +P all-lead semiwadcuter hollowpoint.

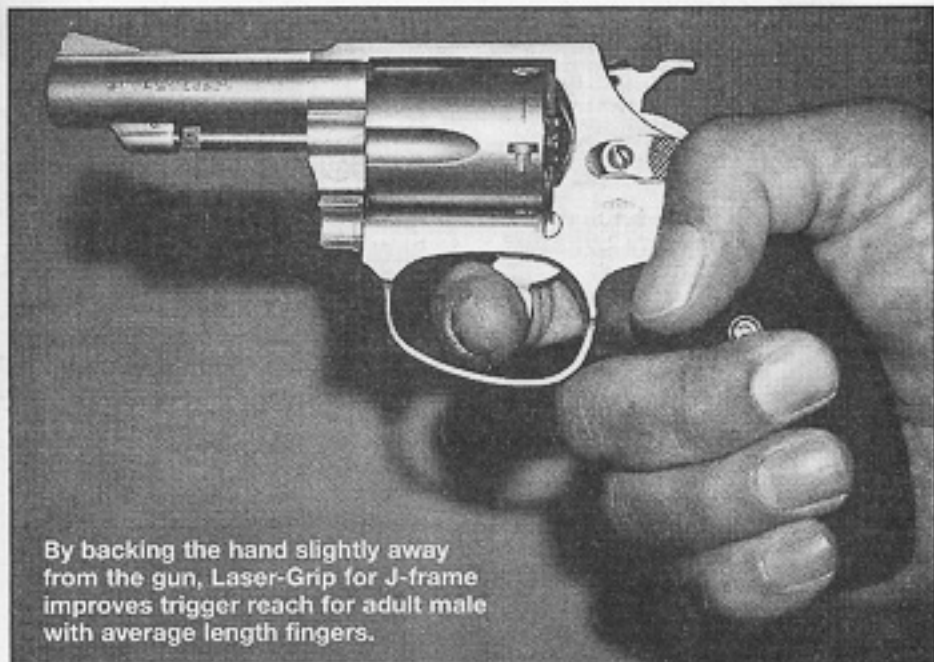
Still, the new low-price generic hollowpoints under the USA label make a lot of sense for a lot of people. Check them out at any gun shop that carries the Winchester USA brand.

Holsters—What Works

Fobus disrupted the fast moving Kydex holster appletart a year or two



Newest style J-frame LaserGrips provide cushion to web of hand with this S&W Model 60.



By backing the hand slightly away from the gun, Laser-Grip for J-frame improves trigger reach for adult male with average length fingers.

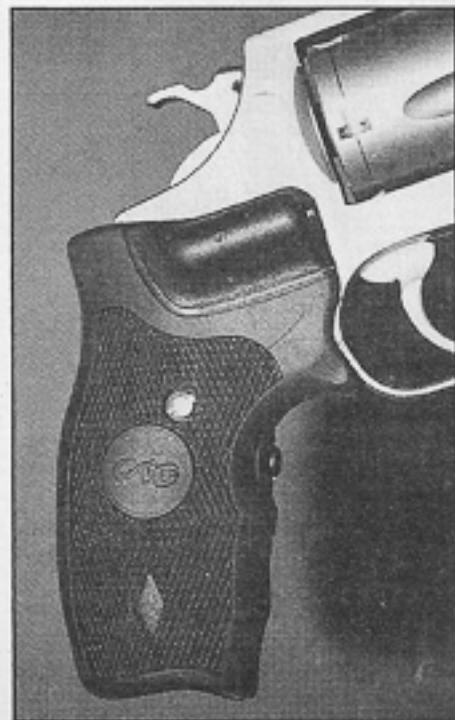
ago when they introduced a low-priced line of plastic holsters and accessories. These caught on immediately with everyone from off-duty cops to civilian CCW licensees to IDPA competitors. Everything in the line was under \$30, averaging just under \$25, with their basic belt scabbard going for \$19.99. The Israeli manufacturers touted their own proprietary polymer as being less heat-sensitive than Kydex.

Fobus was driving the market in 2000 when two firms challenged them on price point. Uncle Mike's (Michaels of Oregon) came out with a Kydex line that emphasized low price in its advertising. Though pricing was actually pretty much identical, the splashy "\$19.95" conspicuously displayed in the advertising caught the shooters' collective eye, and dealers can barely keep up with the demand. Hardest hit by this development were the higher-priced makers of Kydex holsters.

Blade-Tech, the acknowledged leader of the Kydex market, has fired back with a new line of polymer holsters that appear to be made of something very similar to what Fobus uses. Pricing is proportionally down.

All are good, and I've tried all three. My only complaint with any of them was that the Blade-Tech was a little sharp where my middle finger hit when I went to draw my GLOCK 22, and their paddle design seemed to work better with the paddle outside the pants but inside the belt than with the paddle inside the trousers, where most are used to wearing such a rig.

Innovations are coming from this world, too. Blade-Tech's new concealable speed carrier for revolver speedloaders is awesome. Fobus' new ankle holster, which I hadn't had



Rubber wraparound J-frame is latest LaserGrip from Crimson Trace.

a chance to wring out at press time, looks promising.

It's the American way. The more intensely the manufacturers have to compete for your dollar, the better you, the ultimate consumer, will benefit. Note: Currently they offer a new paddle lug adjustable holster made from Pylon.

In more conventional leather designs, Josh Bulman is a name to keep in mind. Judging by the overwhelming enthusiasm I've observed in those who use his product, you'll be seeing a lot more of his stuff in the future. Josh uses top-quality materials and puts them together with an artist's craftsmanship. Nothing tricky,



GLOCK 27 with Trijicon sights draws cleanly from pocket of TOTHERS, which conceal it well.

just time-proven designs, but the best time-proven designs. Josh's stuff works very well. It isn't cheap, but it's a lot less than comparable designs from more famous holstermakers, looks as good, and does the job as well.

Galco is never satisfied with the status quo, and is always introducing new models. Two of the best I've seen this year are a top of the line horsehide belt scabbard and a twin shoulder rig. The latter is available in either their Miami Classic or Original style. I've found it a very handy way to pack a matched set of GLOCK 27s. They're short enough that even on someone as thin as myself, nothing protrudes from chest or back when the twin holsters are adjusted properly. I carry them high toward the armpits with the

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barrels parallel to the ground. As Chic Gaylord first noted forty-some years ago, this may be the absolute fastest of all shoulder holster angles.

The horsehide belt holster comes in a velvet bag like premium whiskey, fits snugly, and conceals as well as anything in its size and style (mine is for a five-inch Gov't Model). Unlike the shoulder rig, it's not in your usual very affordable Galco price range, but the price is commensurate with the quality and the material. Nice stuff.

Less expensive is High Noon Leather. My friend Steve Bumgarner, a midwestern gun dealer, turned me on to this stuff a year ago and I've been quite impressed with what I've seen since. A number of students have shown up to LFI classes with High Noon holsters, and all have been happy with the performance. I borrowed a couple of Steve's, both for big guns: the GLOCK 21 and the M1911.

Slightly resembling Richard Nichols' much-copied Askins Avenger design done for Bianchi in the '70s, the High Noon scabbard holds its color well and doesn't scuff up easily. It's not so rigid that it digs into you, and not so soft that you can't easily and quickly reholster your pistol. Like Momma Bear's porridge, it's "just right."

I spent almost a week carrying the big .45 GLOCK and a high capacity ParaOrdnance LDA P-14 .45 in these holsters. My right arm was bunched up, and I sometimes carried south-paw, occasionally with one gun on each hip. The High Noon design, unlike the classic Avenger, secures to the belt with semi-pancake slots fore and aft of the holster. The rig bends just enough to make it comfortable, concealable, and functional. Since both samples I used were open-topped, "convertability" was complete.

This is a useful feature on a carry gun's holster. It seems that only the advanced professionals make a point of having a weak side holster (and an ambidextrous gun) not only on hand but grooved in with practice. If your dominant arm is injured, you want to be ready to strap something on and defend yourself and your family weak-hand-only the moment you come home from the hospital. Been there, done that. Pain, casts, and therapy make it a lousy time to prepare for weak-hand-only personal defense after the injury has taken place. The ambidexterity of the High Noon scabbard is another excellent reason

Performance: Black Hills 165gr. EXP .40 S&W Ammo

Make/Model	Barrel	Trigger	5-Shot Group	Best 3 Shots
Beretta Centurion 96D	4.25	DAO	2.30	1.25
GLOCK 22	4.50	New York	1.95	0.80
SIG-Sauer P-229	3.80	DA/SA	1.95	0.70
S&W Sigma SW40F	4.50	DAO	2.60	1.35
GLOCK 27	3.80	New York	2.80	1.85
Kahr K40 Covert	3.30	DAO	3.10	0.95
Kahr MK40 "Micro"	3.00	DAO	3.75	1.85

Barrel length and accuracy in inches.



Cocked and locked Para P-14 conceals well in this Alessi CQCS.

to buy one.

Alessi Holsters and my colleague Lt. Dave Spaulding have brought forth the CQCS. It stands for Close Quarter Combat (Snaps). Dave's very fast, very concealable high ride concealment scabbard is now available in a new option: Lou Alessi has added snap-loops front and back to secure the holster to the belt. An investigator whose supervisor likes a "gun-free look" in the detectives' squadroom can quickly doff or don this rig, locking it in an accessible desk. My fellow instructor and shooter Jim Carr introduced me to this neat little item. He wears one daily with his Colt CCO .45 (Officers frame, Commander barrel/slide), and swears by it. He furnished me one for a five-inch Gov't Model, and I spent a couple of weeks wearing it with a Kimber Custom II. I must say, the holster grows on you. It tucks the butt in so tight it annoyed me at first, but I quickly acclimated and learned to be comfortable with it. The CQCS conceals better than any paddle holster I've tried with the same size gun, and gives away nothing in



By unfastening belt snaps, CQCS and the Para P14 can be conveniently removed from the belt.

speed. It's well made, brilliantly designed, and affordably priced.

The stakes just went up at whatever poker table the makers of pocket holsters gamble at. Safariland's new entry will be tough to beat. At this writing I've seen it only for small frame revolvers, but this new pocket scabbard by master holster designer Bill Rogers is as fast and certain as you'll find. This inside Pocket Holder (Model 25) has a smooth synthetic lining (acrylic PVC) to help the gun slide free, while its suede outside holds it tightly to your pocket lining to keep the holster from following the snubby out when you draw. It's moderately priced, and available through your regular Safariland dealer.

Grips & Sights

Crimson Trace LaserGrips rarely displease their owners, but on the small (and especially, the small and light) J-frame revolvers, it has been noted that they don't do much to soak up recoil. Enter the new rubber wraparound version. These extend the backstrap rearward into the hand. This gives you a more natural reach to the trigger if you don't have very short fingers, and the design cushions recoil much better than the standard ones, which of course are still available. They are dramatically more



Uncle Mike's Kydex holsters have been an instant hit. This holds Kimber .45 with Pachmayr grips.

comfortable to shoot, as I found out in an extended session with an AirLite Ti Model 342 and an all-steel three-inch Chief Special M60. This is especially appreciated on the AirLite Titanium guns, and will be for the Scandium .357 Magnum J-frame as well. The LaserGrip's *raison d'être*, its brightly projected laser dot, is likewise appreciated on these small revolvers with their tiny, hard to see fixed sights.

Unique

You've seen the vests made for carrying and concealing guns. You've seen the jackets with built-in pockets. Now come pants for the same purpose. Blackie Collins, the famous knife-maker and designer, is a pistol-packer too. He came up with TOTERS, relaxed fit jeans with boot cut cuffs and reinforced pockets front and rear. The relaxed fit aids concealment of a groin holster like Thunderwear, or a low-mounted belly band, and makes that sort of carry more comfortable. The wide cuffs conceal ankle holsters extremely well. And you know exactly what those reinforced pockets are for.

The rear pockets are sized right for the smaller pocket autos. The front trouser pockets are capacious enough that I can carry a baby GLOCK or all-steel Kahr there very comfortably, all day and night. (I still like a pocket holster to shield the triggerguard. There's room for that too.) Thanks to the relaxed fit cut of the legs, these guns just don't show.

Only one guy so far has recognized them for what they are. He didn't like the idea of the contrasting colors of the exposed portion of the pocket

lining. Nobody else has expressed any indication that they thought it meant anything except some new type of designer jeans.

There's a knife pocket on the right thigh, but I'm so habituated to reaching for my tactical folder in my front trouser pocket that I use the thigh pouch for Kubotan keychains instead. It's an ideal shape for that. Try 'em out, gang. TOTERS are destined to be one of those "why didn't I think of that" items for those who lawfully go armed.

For more information contact:

Galco International, 2019 W. Quail Ave., Dept CH, Phoenix, AZ 85027; 800-874-2526; www.usgalco.com

Safariland, 3120 E. Mission Blvd., Dept CH, Ontario, CA 91761; 800-347-1200; www.safariland.com

Crimson Trace, 8089 SW Cirrus Dr., Dept CH, Beaverton, OR 97008, 800-442-2406; www.crimsontrace.com

Alessi Holsters, 2465 Niagara Falls Blvd., Dept CH, Amherst, NY 14228, 716-691-5615; www.alessiholsters.com

High Noon Holsters, P.O. Box 2138, Dept CH, Palm Harbor, FL 34682; 727-786-7528; www.highnoonholsters.com

Bulman Gunleather, P.O. Box 361, Dept CH, Newry, PA 16665; 814-696-8615; www.bulmangunleather.com

Blackie Collins, P.O. Box 100, Dept CH, North, SC 29112; 803-568-2444; www.blackiecollins.com

Blade Tech Industries, 2506 104th St., Ste. A, Dept CH, Lakewood, WA 98499; 253-581-4347; www.blade-tech.com

Michaels of Oregon, P.O. Box 1690, Dept CH, Oregon City, OR 97045; 503-655-7694; www.michaels-oregon.com

Fobus USA, 1300 Industrial Hwy., Ste. B3, Dept CH, Southampton, PA 18966; 888-999-9386; www.fobusholster.com

Winchester Ammunition, 427 N. Shamrock, Dept CH, East Alton, IL 62024; 618-258-2000; www.winchester.com

Black Hills Ammunition, P.O. Box 3090, Dept CH, Rapid City, SD 57709; 605-348-5150; www.black-hills.com



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