

Everything you want to know Before Buying Your Next (or First) Handgun

by Robert Tutt

Congratulations on deciding to buy a handgun! This report is everything you're going to wish you knew before you stepped into a gun store. This is not a report about marksmanship. It does not have everything there is to know about shooting. This is just about handguns and what to look for to consider your purchase. There are handguns others own and will tell you that certain criteria are important. As an instructor, I can tell you, those things are not important and thus have been omitted from this report.



Size

First. Consider the overall size of a handgun. The rule of thumb here is bigger is better. We're not talking about caliber, but the size of the object that will be in your hands. Many people hope the day never comes, but they want to have a handgun in case it does. So, logic tells them that if most days they won't need it, a smaller handgun is easier to conceal and lighter to carry on them all day every day.



Unfortunately, what they don't know is going to work against them. If they end up in a situation where one is needed a smaller gun is harder to control and fire accurately. They're giving the bad guy (who likely showed up with a firearm already out and likely was not alone) another factor in favor of said bad guy. Don't help the bad guy. Get a full size handgun.

Caliber

Someone, somewhere has told you that you need a .45. Of course, this is cemented in your mind and you'll never think about getting anything else. The same person also told you your first shot is your most important. Well, with a .45 it definitely is! It's a big bullet with a big kick and this is not something to start with.



When learning to shoot handguns, challenging yourself is encouraged. However, if you skip too far ahead too soon it will make your skill progression incredibly slow.

What you should first learn is safety, followed up by how the gun operates and how to maintain it. Then you should learn the fundamentals of handgun marksmanship. Then you should build marksmanship as a skill by practicing those fundamentals, pushing greater distances as you become more accurate. Then you should push yourself to shoot accurately but with less and less time between shots.

Start with your standard 9mm caliber handgun.

Material

These days, more and more manufacturers are producing handguns with polymer lowers. The lower is the part of the gun that includes the frame and the grip, the slide is the part that sits on top of the frame and moves back when a round is fired.



Polymer Lower

Manufacturers are more than willing to produce handguns that there is a market for. The uninitiated

general public that wants a small and light handgun is a large market to serve. Fortunately, you are being initiated just by reading this!

To get to the point, the material is about weight. When there is more weight in the lower the recoil is significantly and noticeably easier to manage. The faster you recover from recoil, the faster an accurate next shot can be fired.

The Gun Not To Get!!

This image summarizes exactly what you should not get. It's tiny and the lower is all plastic. What is important here is when you see guns like this (that are made for a market that doesn't know any better) stay away.



Brand and logo blurred out because many reputable manufacturers produce a similar variation.

All that we've covered doesn't come close to the biggest reason to stay away from something like this.

I've seen people bring this to the range after they bought it to make sure their daughter going off to college has some protection and knows how to use it.

While they're shooting it suddenly stops working. Broken. Done. Finished. That's right, it stops working before they've fired a single box of ammunition through it. These things are not your friend. You cannot and, therefore, must not rely on them.

Flashlight



This is in two parts but it's simple. First, make sure the handgun you're purchasing has a rail underneath the barrel for mounting a light. Second, make sure you buy a gun light. Could be dark when you need to shoot, even though it's daytime.

Yes, gun lights are not cheap, but there is an important bonus: It adds weight to help manage recoil, yay!

Also, let's be clear. I am absolutely talking about a very bright flashlight that mounts to your handgun. I am absolutely NOT talking about a laser.

Keep in mind, when considering a light purchase, it will affect your holster requirements.

Holster

Let's just start off with the fact that you absolutely need a holster. You also must ensure this holster 1) covers the entire trigger guard of your handgun and 2) is made of a hard enough material that nothing can manipulate the trigger through it.

If possible, you should buy a holster during or even before your handgun purchase.



DO NOT BUY CLOTH **“HOLSTERS”**

Those are simply not holsters.

Believe it or not, manufacturers don't usually design holsters for their firearms. They do, but not often. So, when you're considering purchasing a handgun, you'll save money and hassle by planning out ahead of time all the things that go with it.

When planning ahead, putting a light on your handgun and even what brand and model of handgun light is something you have to plan on for your holster purchase.

The majority of what you'll be looking for is called IWB and OWB. They, respectively, stand for Inside the Waist Band and Outside the Waist Band. Holsters can be exposed on your hip or tucked under your clothes, so you need to factor in both why you are purchasing a handgun (IWB or OWB), as well as if an accessories manufacturer even provides that type of holster.

Sights

While handguns come from the manufacturer ready to shoot, including sights, some firers want to upgrade to Reflex sights. These “red dot” sights are very popular and can make aiming and target acquisition much faster.



They are usually quite expensive. If they are cheap then they were made for paintball and/or air-soft and will break from the vibration and concussive forces within the first few times of firing.

You do not need to purchase your Reflex sight at the same time as your handgun.

If you are ever going to place an optic on your handgun, you need to make sure that the handgun has an “optic cut.” This is a spot (that is an intentional part of the original design) on the top of the slide of your handgun specifically for mounting an optic on there.

Some (not all) handguns that do not come with this can be cut by a gunsmith, usually in the price range of \$300.

Conclusion

It may seem like it's actually a lot to know before going and purchasing your first handgun, but I genuinely wish I knew these things or had someone with me that knew these things. Over the years before I learned and became an instructor (and I've definitely made SOME money back by selling the stuff I've bought) I've definitely lost several hundred dollars on just a few handguns. But, I also likely would have continued some bad purchasing habits and decisions before I learned what's important for marksmanship and for safety.

You will likely develop your own criteria over time and expand this list. Right now, though, you have a solid foundation to start from.

Even if you already own a handgun, you can now use this report to look at what you have and make a plan if necessary.

By reading this, you've saved yourself frustration, money, and even more time.

Good shooting!