

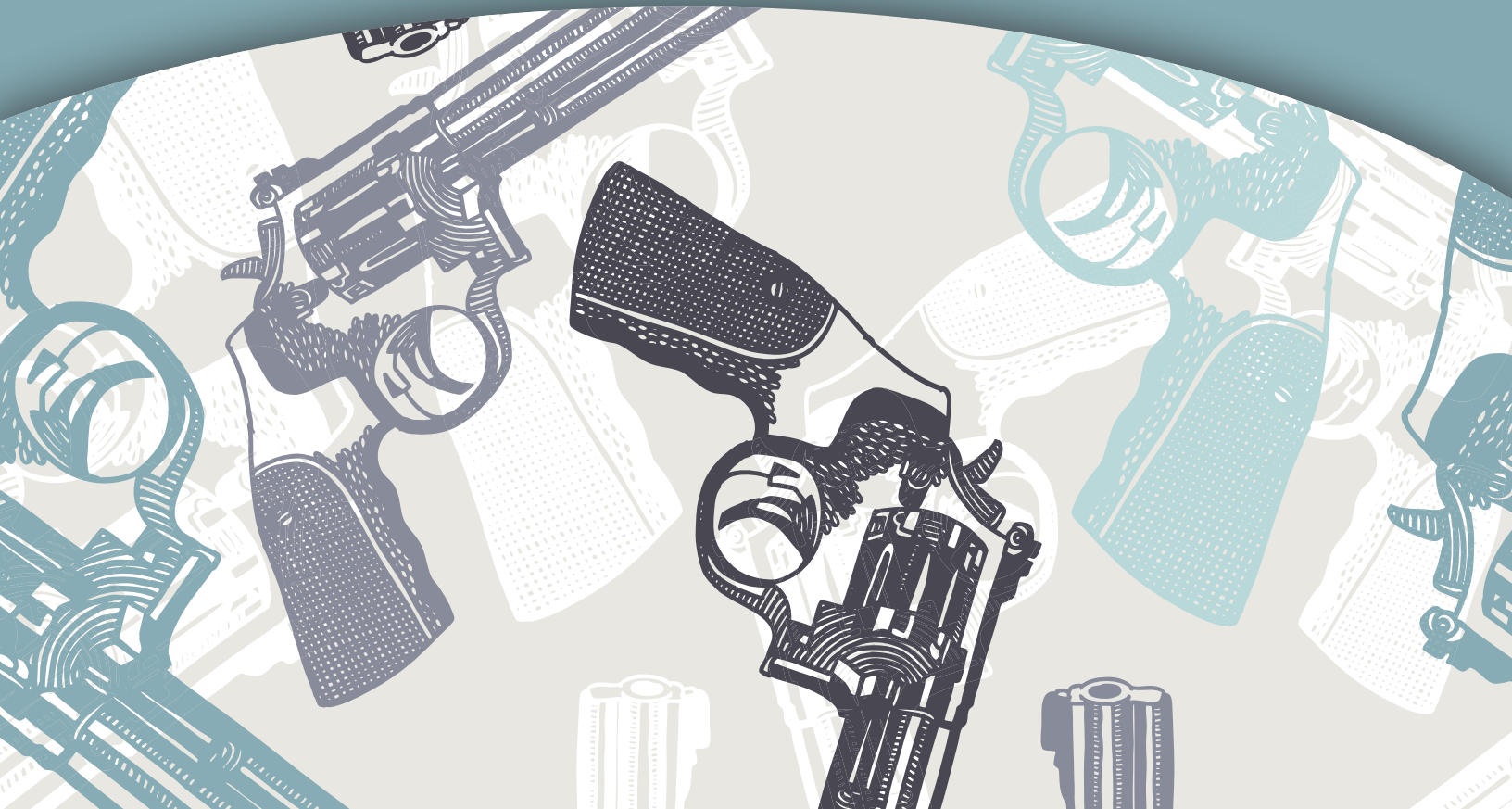


Liberty.me



How to Buy Your First Handgun

by Dick Clark



HOW TO BUY YOUR FIRST HANDGUN

GUIDE 1.0

DICK CLARK

This PDF is best viewed using [Adobe Reader](#). If you are having trouble accessing the hyperlinks, copy the footnote URL into your browser.

INTRODUCTION	3
LEGALITY	3
POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS	4
COMPETITION OR TARGET SHOOTING	4
HUNTING	4
HOME DEFENSE	5
SELF-DEFENSE OUTSIDE OF THE HOME	8
ACTION TYPE	8
RECOMMENDED MODELS	10
HOME DEFENSE	10
CONCEALED CARRY	10
DEALER OR SHOW?	12



Disclaimer

This guide is for informational purposes only. The author and Liberty.me make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this guide and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. Liberty.me is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, investing, medical or other professional services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. Neither Liberty.me nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an organization, book or website may be referred to in this work does not mean that the author or Liberty.me endorses the information the organization, book or website may provide or recommendations it may make.

INTRODUCTION

Okay, so something has finally tipped the scales of your judgment in favor of acquiring your first handgun. Maybe you know someone who was just victimized by a criminal. Maybe you have a new family and feel the urge to make yourself ready to protect them. Whatever the reason, you have decided to buy a handgun. Here's how to do it.

Whatever the reason, you have decided to buy a handgun. Here's how to do it.

LEGALITY

For most US citizens, purchasing a handgun is as simple as going to your local gun store, choosing a particular gun to buy, showing photo ID, filling out the background check form, and then paying for the gun upon approval from [NICS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Instant_Criminal_Background_Check_System)¹ (usually instantaneous, but it may take as long as three days). There are a handful of states where this procedure is more cumbersome due to some requirement imposed by state lawmakers. To check your state's particular rules, ask a local gun dealer or refer to [Handgunlaw.us](http://www.handgunlaw.us/)². National and state-level fire-



¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Instant_Criminal_Background_Check_System

² <http://www.handgunlaw.us/>



arms advocacy organizations also maintain resources for getting acquainted with local requirements. Each state's rules vary, so I won't cover them in detail here, but some states restrict not only who may purchase and possess a handgun, but what particular models are permitted for such possession within that state. Restrictions may apply to so-called assault pistols, those that are capable of accepting high-capacity magazines (usually 10+), or those that the state may classify as [Saturday night specials](#)³.

POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS

The first, most obvious question that you must ask yourself is, "What role(s) do I expect this gun to fill?" The possible answers include competition or target shooting, hunting, home defense, and self-defense outside of the home.

What role(s) do I expect this gun to fill?

COMPETITION OR TARGET SHOOTING

I can neatly avoid providing any useful information on this point because anyone who plans to spend cash on a [race gun](#)⁴, or high-performance target handgun, is best off making a purchase informed by their own shooting experience and that of their fellow competitors. It suffices to say that there are handguns designed for fast presentation, sight acquisition, and follow-up shooting that are advantageous for competition use, but not practical or economical for defensive uses. Likewise, there are target handguns that are designed for precise shot placement that may be too bulky, of insufficient caliber, or otherwise unsuited for most defensive applications.

HUNTING

Hunting handguns may be used to take a number of different varieties of game, from squirrel to deer to wild boar to bear. Regardless of the quarry, a hunting handgun is almost always a bulky sort of implement, either because the gun is chambered in a large caliber that requires a heavy frame and barrel, because op-

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_night_special

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racegun>



tics are mounted, or because it is fitted with a longer barrel that will allow a particular round to achieve greater velocities and flatter trajectories.

The most common hunting handgun type is the revolver. Many states permit deer hunters to hunt with pistols and revolvers above a certain caliber, usually .40. The [.44 magnum](#)⁵ cartridge is well known for its ability to take down even large, dangerous game like bear, and it may be found employed by all manner of medium- and large-game hunters. Revolvers in a large caliber like the .44 magnum are undeniably intimidating and effective enough for use in home defense, but they are too bulky for most personal defense applications where discrete possession of the handgun is preferred.

Rimfire revolvers are also popular with hunters, and they may be used for taking rabbits and other small game, or as a finishing pistol for wounded or trapped game. While the .22 magnum approaches the .380 ACP in energy levels, it is not an ideal defensive cartridge. Revolvers in this class most often load one round at a time via a loading gate on the side of the firearm, and the extraction and reloading process is slow and difficult to complete under stress.

Single-shot handguns utilizing either a break-action or bolt-action occupy another niche in the hunting handgun market. Mostly known from the offerings manufactured by companies like Remington, Savage, and [Thompson/Center](#)⁶, these guns are extremely specialized and are designed for one thing: to accurately fire a rifle bullet out of a package much smaller than the average rifle. The recoil is often tremendous, the time for a second shot is long, and the speed for target acquisition is as slow as it would be with any scoped weapon. These specialized firearms may be used for hunting or for long-range target shooting, but they have little else to offer.

These guns are extremely specialized and are designed for one thing: to accurately fire a rifle bullet out of a package much smaller than the average rifle.

For many users, a handgun is the best weapon for home defense.

HOME DEFENSE

For many users, a handgun is the best weapon for home defense. The handgun is more easily wielded than a shotgun by individuals with a slight build, and the shorter length

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.44_Magnum

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thompson_Center_Arms#Break-open_pistols



of a handgun allows greater maneuverability in close quarters than a shortened pistol-grip shotgun. Perhaps most importantly, a handgun by definition can be fired with only one hand, leaving your other hand free to ward off an attacker or to manipulate doorknobs and other objects in your defensive environment. In considering a handgun for home defense, there are several questions that you should ask yourself before making a selection:



1. Does the gun fit in my hand comfortably? Is it comfortable for the largest and smallest potential shooter? In a life or death situation, confidence is a necessary component of a potentially life-saving action. Having good, positive control of the gun in your hands is essential to confidently wielding it against an attacker. Additionally, you must be able to hang on to a gun in order to fire it safely and accurately.
2. Does the cartridge caliber/load make the handgun's recoil too severe for the people most likely to need to use the gun in defense? Recoil that is so strong as to be uncomfortable can make a shooter anxious and tends to dissuade the shooter from practicing regularly. Both of these may mean that the handgun is less useful when a situation requiring decisive action arises. A cartridge produces more felt recoil as the mass it has to displace decreases. Larger, heavier guns will typically have less recoil than smaller guns chambered in the same cartridge. In a smaller pocket pistol, .380 ACP may be the largest round a shooter feels confident with, whereas the same shooter might be completely at ease with a .357 magnum in a heavy, full-frame revolver. For the recoil sensitive, .380 ACP, 9mm, and .38 special are all safe bets that still offer reasonable power.



3. Is the cartridge for which the gun is chambered effective enough to insure that I will be able to stop an attacker? There is much debate over caliber selection within defensive handgun circles. Many shooters argue that anything less potent than 9 mm or .38 special is unreliable for self-defense. Except for extremely petite or physically weak shooters, I would tend to agree that cartridges like .32 ACP, .25 ACP, .22 Short, .22 LR, .22 magnum, and even the .380 ACP are all too impotent for a dedicated home defense weapon. While they are all superior to a pocket knife for self-defense, I think it is worth the slight extra recoil to move up to a more effective major caliber, including 9mm (although this round's effectiveness is sometimes questioned too), .38 special (also criticized as impotent), .357 magnum, .40 S&W, .44 magnum, and .45 ACP, among others.

If you buy a minor caliber, you will definitely have to purchase the more expensive, defensive ammunition in order to improve the round's efficacy against an attacker. Standard full metal jacket or hardball ammunition will work satisfactorily for defense if in the largest calibers, such as .44 magnum or .45 ACP. This should not be a major consideration, though, and I would generally recommend defensive ammo for regular carry because those rounds frequently feature corrosion resistant, nickel-plated cartridge casings and are manufactured to tighter specifications. Expanding defensive ammunition is also less likely to overpenetrate a target and is therefore safer for bystanders.

4. Does this manufacturer have a reputation for reliability? Unless you are really pushing the poverty line, it is hard to justify buying a gun that might not work when you need it. Stay away from guns manufactured by unknown or disreputable makers. My short list of quality handgun makers would include: Sig-Sauer, Heckler & Koch, Ruger, Glock, Smith & Wesson (revolvers), Colt, Walther, Springfield, Beretta, Browning, and Taurus. Some of these are better than others, but each has established a reputation for reli-

Unless you are really pushing the poverty line, it is hard to justify buying a gun that might not work when you need it.



ability and safety. There are many other companies that make good guns, but the companies listed above are major market players whose products are widely available and who have history of consistent excellence for at least the past ten years, and many for over a century.

SELF-DEFENSE OUTSIDE OF THE HOME

In addition to the considerations listed above, the selection of a handgun for self-defense outside the home requires the added consideration of size and weight constraints. If a gun is too bulky to be worn comfortably concealed on your person, you are less likely to carry it often and therefore less likely to have it at hand when the need for it arises. Be sure to select a gun that isn't too heavy for you to easily carry. For some, this means selecting a handgun chambered in .380 ACP or some other smaller caliber. While these calibers may not be optimal, they are preferable to being empty-handed in a situation where a gun could save your life.

ACTION TYPE

Handguns are most commonly available in one of two action types: revolver or semi-automatic.

A revolver holds five, six, or more rounds of ammunition in a rotating cylinder behind the barrel. When all the rounds are expended, the shooter must swing the cylinder out, eject the spent casings, and load each of the chambers with a new cartridge. The only revolvers that you should consider for defensive applications are double action (DA), meaning that you need not cock the hammer before pulling the trigger to fire a round.

Be sure to select a gun that isn't too heavy for you to easily carry.

A semi-automatic holds ammunition in a magazine, usually vertically inserted into the grip. When you pull the trigger to fire, the hammer strikes the firing pin, discharges the cartridge, and uses the force of the fired cartridge to cycle the action of the gun, reloading the chamber with a fresh round from the magazine. Semi-automatic pistols may be single action (SA), double action, or double-action only (DAO). A DA semi-automatic will fire if the user pulls the trigger when the hammer is at rest and there is a round in the chamber. The trigger pull for the second shot will be shorter and lighter because the action of the gun automatically cocks the hammer. A DAO has the same, heavy trigger pull each time, and the hammer is always at rest. DAO revolv-



ers usually have a concealed hammer, something that is advantageous when drawing from concealment as there is no hammer spur to snag on your clothing. The lack of an exposed hammer also means that DAO revolvers are more likely to work when firing from inside a coat pocket.

I would recommend that most first-time buyers avoid SA semi-automatics simply because the learning curve is slightly steeper and the time required to bring the weapon into action is longer since the hammer must be manually cocked prior to the first shot. The most popular SA semi-automatic is the [M1911 .45 ACP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M1911_pistol)⁷ designed by John Moses Browning and manufactured most famously by Colt. While this venerable design has much to offer, I cannot recommend it as the sole lifeline for a beginning shooter.

When choosing between a revolver and a semi-automatic, remember these factors:

SEMI-AUTOMATIC

- may be reloaded more rapidly by simply removing empty magazine and inserting a fresh one (and, depending on the model, either racking the slide again to chamber the first round or releasing the slide from its locked position)
- usually has a higher magazine capacity
- may be flatter and therefore more concealable
- more likely to have a manual safety
- malfunction/misfeed may require more steps to remedy

REVOLVER

- cleaning is easier because disassembly is usually not required
- in case of a misfire, simply pull the trigger again

I would recommend that most first-time buyers avoid SA semi-automatics simply because the learning curve is slightly steeper and the time required to bring the weapon into action is longer.

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M1911_pistol

RECOMMENDED MODELS

While I cannot offer an exhaustive list of suitable selections here, the following models are a few of those with which I have personal experience and thus can wholeheartedly recommend.

HOME DEFENSE

Any Smith & Wesson revolver chambered in .38 special or better, including:

- Smith & Wesson Model 10 (.38 special): less power, but more controllable.
- [Smith & Wesson Model 586](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smith_%26_Wesson_Model_586)⁸ (.357 magnum): potent .357 magnum.

Any Sig-Sauer pistol chambered in 9mm or better, including:

- Sig-Sauer P229 (9 mm, .40 S&W, or .357 Sig): less power than .44 magnum or .44 special, but each caliber is more powerful than the .38 special. High capacity in a reliable gun. Semi-automatic.
- Sig-Sauer P227 (.45 ACP): ten big rounds of .45 ACP. Grip may be a bit wide for some, but the ergonomics are very similar to the P226 and other classic Sig pistols

Any Glock pistol, including:

- Glock Model 17 (9mm): affordable, durable, reliable, and easy to shoot. Semi-automatic.

CONCEALED CARRY

The basic model Taurus pistols and revolvers chambered in .38 special or better, including:

- Taurus Millennium G2 (9 mm): more potent than .380 ACP, but slightly bulkier gun too. The second-generation model features better ergonomics

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smith_%26_Wesson_Model_586

and more solid-feeling construction than the original. Semi-automatic.

- Taurus Titanium Model 617 (.357 magnum): lighter than steel but stronger than alloy of S&W Model 638 below, this gun fires the potent .357 magnum. Relatively inexpensive compared to gun with same features from S&W. Revolver.

Any subcompact Glock, including:

- Glock Model 36 (.45 ACP): incredible potency, but limited magazine capacity. Semi-automatic.
- Glock Model 26 (9mm): ten rounds of 9mm in a sturdy but compact package. Semi-automatic.

Any Smith & Wesson J-frame revolver, including:

- Smith & Wesson Model 638 (.38 special): light alloy that is cheaper than the slightly more durable titanium revolver from S&W, fires slightly less potent .38 special. Concealed hammer makes for snag-free draw from concealed position

Note also that stainless steel is less likely to corrode than carbon steel, so paying extra for a stainless steel model or a model with a tough anti-corrosion coating is often a good investment for a carry gun that will frequently come into contact with your skin, dust, etc. Coatings like Duracoat, Ceracoat, and others have recently become popular, and they offer significant corrosion protection, but expect some visible wear with use.

Paying extra for a stainless steel model or a model with a tough anti-corrosion coating is often a good investment.

Titanium, scandium, and other alloys are used instead of steel in the frames of many revolvers to save weight. Titanium and scandium are more durable than the cheaper aluminum alloy frames, especially with regards to the finish of the gun.



DEALER OR SHOW?

Most guns at gun shows are being sold by dealers who are Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs). They tend to mark store prices down for the show because they want to be competitive with the other dealers present and they don't want to have to pack up the guns on Sunday. Individuals also bring guns to sell at gun shows, so you may happen across a great deal on a used gun from such an individual. In my experience, though, haggling at a gun shop tends to be about as effective as attending a gun show with regards to finding a good sale price on a particular gun. If you know what you want, you will probably get it either way. In either circumstance, paying cash tends to lower the price.

If you are looking for something unusual, or a model with a very specific configuration, attending a gun show may be advantageous. For a specialized order, you can also either order through your local FFL or find what you want on [GunBroker](http://gunbroker.com/)⁹ and have the local FFL transfer it to you for a fee — usually about \$25–\$50.

Federal law provides that an individual can only buy a handgun in the state of his residence. This means that an out-of-state dealer has to ship to your local dealer, who then performs the background check and maintains the required records. Most states place no restrictions on individual to individual transfers, although you should get a bill of sale — handwritten or in printed form — for the gun no matter who you buy from.

Good luck, and happy shooting!



DICK CLARK

Dick Clark first became a firearms enthusiast when he learned to point his finger and say “bang.” He grew up in southeastern Louisiana shooting with his father. He taught riflery, shotgunning, and archery at the Salmen Scout Reservation for two summers as a youth staffer and worked at a retail gun store during his time as an undergraduate student at Auburn University. Dick now works in public policy in Nebraska, advocating free markets, individual liberty, and personal responsibility. He also maintains a niche legal practice catering to entrepreneurs in the firearms industry as well as individual gun owners, and he is editor of silencernews.com.

⁹ <http://gunbroker.com/>