

# Handgun Fit

## **Handgun Fit: What it is and why it's important.**

It gets talked about but it isn't understood and it could be one of the biggest reasons that you miss your target. The good news is that you can do something about it unlike the cop who is saddled with the gun too big for his hand.

### ***Why Handgun Fit is Important***

When you think about purchasing a new defensive handgun there are many considerations that come into play. Many people focus on brand and little else. I think you also need to reflect on the size of the pistol, the caliber, as well as the type, and cost. Other things might be important to you like feel or aesthetics.

With all that to think about it would seem that some kind of consideration about handgun fit should enter into your decision as well. Often, it isn't so.

I have discovered through interacting with thousands of defensive shooters, fit is often left out of the equation.

This is a big mistake. Huge.

The reason fit has been ignored is actually pretty simple: Throughout the history of handguns there have been relatively few models to select from. You simply had to take what you could get. It wasn't the end of the world for most people. An ill fitting handgun is probably better than no gun at all. As a result, people made due.

But we don't have to make due any longer. There are plenty of quality defensive handguns to choose from today so just about everyone can find a gun that really fits. Why not take advantage of a handgun that fits? You have so few choices when it comes to violence. Take control of what you can BEFORE you ever face that violent attack and choose a handgun that FITS!

You see, handgun fit is an important aspect of defensive handgun selection. Fit can significantly impact your ability to use your defensive handgun efficiently when you need it most. Let's take a look at what handgun fit is and why it is important.

## ***Efficiency***

Efficiency is a big part of what I teach and why I teach the specific content I bring to my students. Efficiency seems to creep into all the skills I teach and the way I teach them.

It only makes sense that efficiency comes into play when I teach people just like you how to select a new, properly fit, defensive handgun.

*Efficiency is simply defined as accomplishing a goal with as little time, effort and energy as possible.*

*Time:* You want to end a violent encounter as quickly as possible. The longer it continues the more likely you are to suffer additional consequences of violence. Having the defensive tools you need can help stop the threat quickly. A properly fit handgun may solve the problem even faster.

*Effort and Energy:* Violence is a resource intensive activity. Fights that last only seconds can demand effort and energy that can match or exceed your capacity for work. You don't know how fast, strong or violent your threat will be so you need to make sure that your tools demand as little effort and energy as possible to use. A handgun that fits takes less effort and energy to operate.

Simply stated we want to make sure that our defensive handgun consumes as few resources as possible. An efficient handgun allows you to respond faster and focus more effort and energy on your threat. A defensive handgun that fits can have a drastic impact on how quickly we prevail when it matters most.

## ***Why Handgun Fit is Ignored***

Yes. Handgun fit is largely ignored. It has a long history of being a low priority for the handgun decision makers in the world. In some circumstances the overlooking of fit is almost logical. Let's take a look at the reasons you might not give fit the regard it deserves.

### ***Handgun Fit has been ignored because of poor handgun selection.***

A defensive shooter walking into a modern gun store is literally like a kid walking into a candy store. Regardless of your taste, there is something for everyone. It wasn't always this way. In 1975 if you were interested in a defensive handgun you had two real choices; A revolver (from Smith & Wesson or Colt, or a 1911.) Those were the big players. There wasn't the opportunity to spend a lot of time picking and choosing. That was about it, and the reality is people made due.

And so it seems the tradition continues and people simply make due instead of selecting the best defensive handgun. Today, you don't simply have to make due. There are many handguns to choose from and some will fit you better than others.

### ***Handgun Fit has been ignored because of logistical issues.***

The logistical concerns that surround service weapons play an indirect but important role in how proper handgun fit has been ignored. I'm sure that you have heard the advice that you should carry the gun that your local, county or State agency carries. I've heard it too and this advice might work well for you. But, just because some LE Officer carries a gun doesn't make it the right gun for you. Agencies have lots of issues to deal with that you don't and they often make concessions that you don't need to make.

When it comes to fit agencies can be limited by caliber choice, budget, and the simple fact that no one gun will fit every officer.

If you are an armed citizen you aren't likely to have these same constraints. As a result, the gun your sheriff has decided his department will carry might not be the best choice for some of his deputies. Those deputies, most likely, don't get to choose. You do!

### ***Fit has been ignored because of effectiveness.***

Even guns that don't fit can do the job. Throughout history there have been some guns that have been ergonomic disasters, but these guns have been tools on the winning side of gunfights. It doesn't matter if we are talking about an old west gunslinger or a modern day, small statured officer, when the chips are down you do what you need to do to win the fight even if that means applying more effort than you should to make an ill fitting gun work.

Today, effectiveness isn't enough. We need more than a gun that works; we need a gun that works well. Because you have so many options with modern firearms you have the opportunity to select a gun that requires less time, effort and energy to operate. We need more than effective. We need efficient. A handgun that fits properly is more efficient.

### ***Handgun fit is an issue of priorities.***

When we think about ensuring that our defensive handgun fits properly we have to use some logical priorities to achieve our goal. Many people mistake the feel of a handgun for fit. I could care less how the handgun actually feels in my hand. Just like your feet get used to a good pair of boots, after a bit of time, your hand will get used to a properly fit handgun. Let's take a look at the qualities that help us determine when a handgun fits just right.

### ***Trigger Manipulation***

The most important thing we will ever do with our defensive handgun is press the trigger in the defense of our lives for the lives of other innocent people. Statistically the first

shot may be the most important shot that is taken in a defensive scenario. For this reason, being able to properly press the trigger on a defensive handgun is the most important attribute of fit. If you are unable to press the trigger of the handgun smoothly and straight to the rear the other aspects of fit are trivial issues.

Trigger manipulation is certainly a matter of efficiency.

### ***Recoil Management***

Next to being able to press the trigger smoothly to the rear to ensure a good first shot, we need to make sure that we are able to follow up with additional shots quickly. This becomes an issue of recoil management. The more efficiently we can manage recoil the more quickly the gun will settle back on the target for us to press the trigger again.

A handgun that fits you properly transfers its energy into the big bones of the arm shoulder and the upper body which allows better recoil absorption. A poorly fit handgun transfers the energy of recoil into the smaller bones of the thumb and the hand.

Because of the many joints in the thumb and the hand, energy distributed here equals excess movement which in turn leads to a longer amount of time for the gun to settle back on the target.

Empirical evidence tells us that we are likely to need to take multiple shots to stop a threat with a handgun. As a result, improved recoil management is a matter of improved efficiency.

### ***Operation of Controls***

When we are forced to use a handgun to stop a lethal threat, the shooting itself may be one of the easier tasks that we must deal with. Even the most reliable, high capacity modern handgun has the potential to run out of ammunition or to fail. When we recognize a handgun that is empty or unable to function we need to fix it as quickly as possible. For this reason we want to make sure that we have the ability to operate the controls of the handgun that may come into play when things don't go exactly as we plan.

When we consider the operation of the controls of the handgun, the likelihood of needing to perform a specific function can help us to rank the importance of the different controls we will check for fit.

If you have selected a defensive handgun that "features" a manual safety this must be your first priority when it comes to the controls of your handgun. If you cannot operate your manual safety you will not be able to fire your gun when you need to.

*(It should be noted that I DO NOT recommend defensive handguns with manual thumb safeties. I have watched many talented shooters fail to disengage the manual safety on their handgun under the mild stress of training and competition. The consequences of failing to disengage your safety when your life is on the line are much too great for the*

*benefits that you may perceive.)*

Although it tends to be unlikely for individuals to need to reload a handgun in a violent defensive encounter, it is the most likely operation we may be required to perform. As a result, we will prioritize the ability to press the magazine release as the most important of the “other things” we need to do with our handgun. This puts the ability to operate the magazine release on the top of our list.

Even farther down the probable actions we will need to take is dealing with complex malfunctions of the firearm. We begin to deal with this issue in the selection of our firearm by only considering highly reliable modern handguns. Unfortunately, the selection of a reliable gun is no guarantee against a malfunction as all mechanical devices eventually fail. So we need to be able to fix those malfunctions when they arise. This means we will need to be able to operate the slide stop lever on the left side of the handgun.

If we can operate the magazine release and the slide stop lever as well as place our finger on the trigger in the proper place and center the gun in the web of our hand we have truly achieved a good fit in our defensive handgun.

## ***Making Sure Your Defensive Handgun Fits Properly***

Understanding the importance of handgun fit is the first step towards selecting an efficient defensive handgun for concealed carry or home defense. This understanding needs to be applied.

The following information should provide you with a frame work that can be used to check the handgun you already own for proper fit. In addition, you can use this information to check the fit of that new defensive handgun that you are thinking about purchasing.

### ***Safety Considerations***

You will need to place your finger on the trigger to test the fit of your defensive handgun. As a result we need to make certain that the firearm is in an appropriate condition for administrative trigger manipulation. If you are unsure if your handgun is unloaded you should seek the assistance of an individual with more firearms experience.

Start by making sure your handgun is unloaded. First, drop the magazine to the ground and then rack the slide completely to the rear several times. Lock the slide to the rear and visually inspect the chamber to make sure the handgun is unloaded. If possible verify with a second person to make certain that the firearm is free from ammunition.

As an additional safety precaution make sure that you have a relatively safe direction in which to point the handgun. This provides an additional safety measure in case you somehow made an error in unloading the handgun.

### *Trigger Finger Placement*

To determine proper trigger finger placement we need to grip the unloaded handgun firmly in your strong hand and place your index finger on the trigger. Ideally, your index finger should rest on the trigger between the center of the pad and the crease of the first joint. This position will allow you to press the trigger straight to the rear with the least possible deviation to the right or left.

If your handgun has a relatively heavy trigger pull like you might find on a double action revolver or double action only handgun you will probably want to place your finger with the trigger closer to the crease. Lighter triggers may not require placement this deep on the finger.

Regardless of where your finger is placed in the trigger, make sure that you are able to press the trigger smoothly and straight to the rear. In addition, your finger must be able to defeat any safety devices incorporated with the trigger.

In order to successfully use a handgun to save your life or the lives of other innocent people you must be able to press the trigger properly. This makes proper placement of the trigger finger the top priority when it comes to handgun fit. If you cannot properly press the trigger on the handgun you need to make a change to a handgun that fits you more appropriately.

### *Recoil Management*

Proper placement of the handgun in the hand is one of the most important keys to managing the recoil of a handgun efficiently. Since multiple shots may be required to stop a determined threat, recoil management is an aspect of handgun fit that needs to be considered.

To check your defensive handgun for proper placement in your hand make sure your finger is placed properly on the trigger of your unloaded defensive handgun. Next, with a strong hand only grip on the gun, drive the gun to full extension. Imagine a line that begins at the front sight and extends through the rear sight and continues across your hand and hopefully up your arm. Typically, the farther up your arm the line goes the better the placement is in the hand.

You should be looking for your imaginary line to cross your hand at the center of the web between your thumb and index finger. This meaty part of the hand is the perfect spot for the back strap of the gun to rest as it will transmit the recoil of the handgun into the bones of the arm, shoulder, and your upper body. More recoil absorption means faster follow up shots and that is a good thing.

One of the most common errors in handgun fit is for the back strap of the gun to be shifted in the hand toward the thumb. A gun placed here recoils into the joints of the thumb and recoil is sent into the flexible joints of the thumb instead of the stiff and heavy bones of the arm. The gun is likely to have more movement on recoil and the more movement the more time it takes to get the gun back on the threat.

Wasting time when we need to be shooting is a bad thing.

If you are able to center the blackstrap of the handgun in the web of your hand you should strongly consider looking at other handguns which may be more efficient.

### *Manipulation of Controls*

Our third priority in handgun fit is the manipulation of the controls of the handgun. To check this aspect of fit, get a proper, strong hand only, grip on the unloaded firearm with your finger placed properly on the trigger and the blackstrap appropriately centered in the web of the hand.

With your hand on the gun in this position you should be able to operate any other buttons and levers on the gun without shifting your hand on the gun. Make sure that you can release the magazine, press the slide stop lever up and deactivate your manual safety and/or your de-cocker if your handgun has one (a good defensive handgun shouldn't.)

If you find that you are unable to manipulate the controls on your handgun without shifting your hand, make sure to investigate ways that you can alter those controls with replacements that enhance your ability to operate the handgun. A few dollars spent on an aftermarket part may pay off big in a worst case situation.

As an armed citizen you have decided to take responsibility for your safety and the safety of those around you. Selecting the proper tools and training to make sure you are able to fulfill that responsibility when you need to is a big step towards the success when it is most important.

Although proper handgun fit is often ignored for various reasons it would be silly for you to not take fit into consideration when you shop for a new defensive handgun or evaluate your current handguns viability. A properly fit handgun can help to make sure your first round is placed where it needs to be, follow up shots are on the threat as quickly as possible, and that you are able to keep your handgun running when it is empty or malfunctioning. All of these tasks may be important for your survival when it matters the most. Evaluate your defensive handgun for proper fit and make the changes you need to now while you still have control over the fit of your handgun. In the middle of a life threatening encounter is not the time to be evaluating the fit of your defensive handgun. The stakes are just too high. Take a look today.