

The Efficacy of Centerline Primary Tool Carry

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Every Day Carry (EDC) of personal defense tools is a highly individual subject. Often, EDC is developed around specific mission requirements, personal experience or previous training. How and why a law enforcement patrol officer carries their tools is quite different than how and why a citizen may carry theirs. In this article I hope to explain the benefits and efficacy of centerline carry of primary EDC tools for personal defense.

I break the tools I carry into a hierarchy:

Primary weapons/tools- firearms, knives. Centerline carry

Secondary- extra ammunition, flashlights, in front of hip

Tertiary- personal emergency medical, behind hip or cargo pocket

Having done this it is important to take a few elements of EDC into consideration:

- 1) Personal Comfort
- 2) Accessibility
- 3) Applicability

Personal Comfort

Comfort comes first because ultimately we are lazy animals and if something is uncomfortable, no matter the utility, it will remain in the drawer or on the night stand after the novelty has worn off.

Having had this discussion with individuals who carry full-time, some feel that centerline Appendix-Inside Waistband Carry (A-IWB) is too uncomfortable. It was for me at first as well. But, like anything worth having it requires an open mind and a little work. A couple of guidelines if you're considering centerline carry:

- 1) If you have so much frontal real estate that you cannot see your shoes, centerline carry is not for you. Do something about that for more reasons than just EDC of tools
- 2) Centerline carry is not for those of us who are inflexible and will ONLY carry a full size pistol. If that is you, read no further
- 3) Like many things in life, change is scary and there is an acclimation period before you become comfortable with this method. Similar to the first time you went to the range and shot a gun

Sitting for long periods of time or riding in a car- not a problem if you can conform to 1, 2 and 3 above. The benefits far outweigh the detriments in my humble opinion.

Accessibility

Accessibility follows a VERY close second. No matter the tool, if I cannot access it under stress/duress then I am carrying something that is useless to me. This is where centerline carry of tools really shines. Everyday we work with our hands doing numerous jobs and utilities IN FRONT of us, close to our torso within our anatomic work zone. We are very efficient here, strong and comfortable. How many times have you tried to write on a piece of paper at arms length or type on a keyboard that is to far away from you?(How about reloading your pistol with your arm extended!! Lets keep that discussion for another time) Not easy or comfortable is it?

So why is it that the most common place to carry our primary weapon/tool is on our hip or behind the hip outside our anatomic work zone? Because that's the way it's always been done? Maybe because this method is a carry over from Law Enforcement where duty officers are required to carry on the hip? Let me ask you something. Where do undercover officers and agents most frequently carry? The ones I know and have discussed this topic with all carry Centerline/A-IWB. Which group of Law Enforcement officers mentioned most resemble civilian daily life? For me, it is the undercover officer.

How about safety? The most common time for a negligent discharge to occur is going into and out of the holster. This may be another reason hip carry is so prominently advocated for beginning shooters. If a discharge occurs on the hip, chances of a round impacting a vital area are low. Centerline carry may direct a discharge into the groin/femoral area. Also, not many people like having a 9mm, .38 or .45 pointing at their James Johnson. It requires a different mindset and confidence in the applicability of this method.

How about pistol size? With technological advancements over the last 10-15 yrs many "compact" and "subcompact" weapons have become available and more and more popular for CCW. Years ago these alternatives were not as readily available in such a wide array of models; with the exception of "snubby" revolvers. How about holsters and holster designs? Cross draw holsters have been available since the civil war and are common in various regions for larger framed firearms. The cross-draw made centerline carry more comfortable allowing the larger frame/barrel to lie within the hip-flexor crease.

Applicability

What are we carrying and why? Does it make sense to carry 3 knives, 2 guns, 2 flashlights and 40 extra rounds of ammo? Maybe, everyone has their reasons and mission profiles. The situation dictates the tactics. As a citizen CCW holder I want and need to be as low profile as possible. I need to be able to navigate through and within most common environments, open parking lots and cramped restaurant bars alike. I need to be able to move fast and I need to be able to access my tools in compressed and confined spaces possibly against multiple adversaries. These are all elements I try to consider when setting up my EDC gear. Another consideration is the potential legal consequences the tools you carry (legally or otherwise) may have if something happens and you are detained and questioned by police. What you carry needs to be applicable to your personal situation for those of us on the job or off.

Compare & Contrast

Considering all these questions and observations, let's look at off-centerline carry/hip/behind the hip carry:

1) This method requires rearward limb articulation. Access from the hip requires rearward articulation of the primary weapon bearing arm. This provides readily apparent visual stimulus/cue of ones furtive movement and intent to access (a cue which is often capitalized on in frequent FOF evolutions and training).

Training in ECQ has shown repeatedly that rearward articulation provides more opportunities for draw fouls and muzzle aversions by the attacker. Being clinched, tackled or grabbed causes most to "turtle up"; a body alarm reaction to this forward pressure, drawing the arms inward. Centerline carry and tool access when compressed; meaning someone has hands on and is readily tactile and sensitive to the movement of your limbs; outperforms hip/behind hip carry positions in a higher # of evolutions primarily because of our ability to access the tool while already in this compressed position.

2) Working outside our anatomic work zone- access from the hip requires we move one limb out of our anatomic work zone. This movement relies only on the rear deltoid and partial activation of the latissimus-dorsi muscles for strength and control of the tool. This puts the weapon arm in an anatomically weak position, easily attacked and controlled prior to extension of the firearm to target.

In contrast let's look at centerline access/carry:

1) Hands remain in anatomic work zone, No rearward articulation of weapon bearing limb

2) Working and gripping object/tools in this zone activates the latissimus-dorsi, pectoral, deltoid, biceps & core muscles providing superior retention and weapon control

3) Animals and humans under extreme stress have been shown to squat, hunch over, draw the arms close to the body with elbows tucked and butt back in preparation for impact, flight or flight

Your decision, not mine

As you probably can tell, I am a proponent of centerline carry. My good friend IDPA 3 gun Master, Veteran Law Enforcement Officer and training partner Mike Brown from United States Shooting Academy (www.usshootingacademy.com) does not like centerline carry. He has to carry on his hip for work and he has THOUSANDS of reps drawing from the hip. To switch up or add centerline carry now would be problematic to say the least. He would be adding another skill set to his decision tree/training regimen since he still has to carry on the hip for work as an active duty LEO. This is not something I advocate for someone his situation unless they're willing to put the work in required to take that skill to the unconscious competence level.

In summary, centerline tool carry is not for everyone and I believe those of us carrying in this fashion are currently in the minority and will remain so. But, if you are new to shooting and thinking of carrying a firearm or other tool for personal defense (and have a solid foundation in the safe handling of firearms) or have a strong desire to test out another effective carry method, give centerline carry a try. The results may surprise you.