



Real World CARRY GEAR

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Black Bear Flashlights, Fox Labs Pepper Spray, Bianchi Top Secret II Fanny Pack Holster and Benchmade Benchmite II

For this issue I have another collection of items that I like and use on a regular basis. Each of these items definitely qualifies as real world carry gear and may find a place in your gear box! As always, the products featured in this column are extensively used and evaluated; this is not just a regurgitation of press releases! The photos are of the actual products used, and they were taken after the evaluation period, so you can see how they hold up. There are no glossy, professional or doctored press photos in this column. I always like to hear from readers, so if you have some favorite carry gear that you would like to see featured here, please send me an e-mail at:

daiker@realworldcarrygear.com.

BLACK BEAR FLASHLIGHTS

I have owned, used and reviewed a lot of flashlights. I have 5 or 6 very good quality lights that I use on a daily basis. It takes something special in a flashlight to really impress me. The Black Bear lights, handcrafted by Juan C., are like no "off-the-shelf" light you have purchased. Each light is made to your specifications when you order it. Welcome to the world of custom flashlights!

Black Bear offers several models, but they all have a few things in common. First, and perhaps most obvious, is that all of the lights are based upon a well known company's aircraft aluminum flashlight bodies in "C" and "D" cell size models. However, the aluminum shell is where the similarity ends. Black Bear lights use different variations of upgraded bulbs, reflectors, lenses, switches, contact points, and power supplies. In addition, all Black Bear lights are rechargeable and include a charger.

By using all of the highest quality components, Juan C. is able to get these flashlights to deliver exceptional brightness with extended run times.

I tested two models extensively. My favorite is the Borealis 1050. This light is large by today's standards. The flashlight body was originally designed to accommodate three D cells and measures over 12 inches long. The Borealis, however, runs at an amazing 12 volts and almost 3.5 amps, which are provided by an innovative battery assembly of NiMH rechargeable batteries. All the extra power to the bulb generates a lot of heat, which requires a special switch, bulb holder, parabolic reflector and a Pyrex lens.

By cranking up the power, this light can deliver a blinding 1050 lumens for about 50 minutes! When you consider that your average high quality "tactical flashlight" puts out 60 to 120 lumens, this light is very impressive. The throw of

this beam at night is like a searchlight. In close quarters, it is blinding if you are on the wrong end. Outdoors, it cuts a swath of daylight through the dark for hundreds of yards.

I have also extensively tested the Bear Cub flashlight, which is based on a three C cell aluminum body. The Bear Cub is very similar in construction to the Borealis light, but it has a much smaller feel. The Bear Cub can still pump out 220 lumens for about 90 minutes! The extended run time in a flashlight this bright was previously unheard of until now.

By now, it should go without saying that these lights are large. You cannot carry either of them in your pocket or on your belt (at least without looking like a

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BLACK BEAR FLASHLIGHTS



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cop or a security guard). Nevertheless, these lights are extremely useful around the house, or in your car, boat, airplane, RV or the like. Of course, the lights also function as an impact tool if necessary, just like in the old days! I use both lights extensively and continue to be very impressed with the quality of the construction, the attention to detail, and the overall versatility.

My only caveat with these lights is that recharging them can be a bit more difficult than just plugging them in. Depending on the model, you may have to place the batteries in a provided battery charger, although the "Rolls-Royce" Borealis that I use has a single plug inside the unscrewed tail cap, which is quite easy. For the Borealis models, I do recommend spending the extra money to get the best battery carrier setup.

The Borealis lights retail from \$200 to \$260, depending upon the battery configuration chosen. The Bear Cub light sells for \$120. All orders are taken by phone, and Juan C. will help assess your needs and make recommendations.

As you can see, I highly recommend Black Bear flashlights. It is nice to have a large, solid flashlight for some purposes, and the light output is nothing short of amazing. If you are into flashlights like I am, you really need to consider treating yourself to a Black Bear flashlight. While the prices may seem high, this is essentially the flashlight equivalent of buying a semi-custom handgun, and you will use the Black bear flashlight more often than the gun! You can view all of the Black Bear products with listings of their features and specifications at:

www.blackbearflashlights.com

BENCHMADE BENCHMITE II

This nifty little folder is definitely practical, as opposed to tactical. In fact, it's darn right cute. Make no mistake though. This McHenry and Williams

designed Benchmade is a quality knife. But why did I choose this diminutive knife for a Real World Carry Gear column?

Many of us carry "tactical" folding knives with a serious cutting blade, and often a serious price tag too. A few years ago, I decided that it didn't make sense to subject an expensive tactical folder to the rigors of everyday cutting tasks. The tactical folder is designed to be sharp and ready for the largest and most important tasks that you may face, not slicing open envelopes or opening your latest shipment from Brownells. My solution was to carry a small, light knife that is up to these tasks. The size makes the knife easy to carry in a pocket, and less frightening to those around you, and you know the kind of people that I mean. (Imagine, if they only knew that you were carrying a firearm too!) After some experimentation, I decided that the world has too many \$8 "gun show special" pocket knives, and decided to look for something better.

Enter the Benchmite. The knife is 2.8 inches long when closed, with a nearly 2 inch drop point blade, and it tips the scales at only 1.6 ounces. The blade is constructed from quality AUS-8 stainless steel, which is a nice step up from the 440 stainless that is common on this type of knife. The Benchmite has an interesting lock known as a "levitator" style. The knife can't be opened with one hand, but locks open easily and securely. The lack of thumb studs and the like means that this knife will fit just about anywhere, without you hardly noticing it. This is a go anywhere, every day carry knife that will last for a very long time.

The Benchmite II lists for \$35 to \$40 and the street price is often under \$30. The knife comes in bead-blasted stainless (like mine), or black. And the inexpensive Benchmite II is also covered by Benchmade's lifetime warranty and Lifesharp service. This is certainly not the

only knife that fits this niche, but for me it represents the best value I have found in a small utility knife. For more information, go to:

www.benchmade.com
or call: (800) 800-7427

FOX LABS PEPPER SPRAY

There is an old saying, "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." I fear that those who carry concealed firearms sometimes fall into this trap. You are far more likely to find yourself in a physical altercation where deadly force is not required than one in which it is required. You don't want to be put in a position of having to use a firearm to defend yourself when it's not justified, just because you have no other tools to deal with the situation. Ideally, your other tools should include things like voice commands and unarmed defensive tactics, which are a matter of proper training. However, not all of us are ready to engage in hand-to-hand combat. There are tools to help bridge this lethal force versus non-lethal force gap, including self-defense sprays.

Most self-defense sprays in wide use are a type of oleoresin capsicum, also known as "OC" or pepper spray. The name is derived from the active ingredient in these sprays, a naturally occurring oily resin found in cayenne and other varieties of peppers. When in contact with an assailant's facial area, the OC causes an immediate and very intense burning sensation on the skin, involuntary closure of the eyes, and instant inflammation and swelling of the mucous membranes of the nose, throat and sinuses. In short, it is downright nasty. The unlucky recipient will be blinded and disoriented, and may also have temporary difficulty in breathing, buying you the time you need to escape from the threat. Once the OC is removed from the subject, recovery is reasonably quick and is complete. OC is considered to be very safe, and is regarded as non-lethal force.

When shopping for pepper spray, there are a few things to consider. Many companies stress the percentage of OC in their product. This figure can be a bit misleading because the "hotness" of the OC depends upon the types of peppers used. A more reliable indicator of "hotness" is the Scoville Heat Unit (SHU) rating. Most serious sprays will be at or above 2 million SHU. And of course, you have to consider the delivery device. OC sprays are available in all sorts of



BENCHMADE BENCHMITE II

shapes, sizes and spray patterns. Be aware that local laws may limit the size (i.e., the capacity in ounces) of OC spray that you may carry on your person.

While there are many OC spray manufacturers out there, I recommend Fox Labs International. First, the Fox Labs

formula is the hottest one on the market, rated at a searing 5.3 million SHU! This formula is much hotter than the typical OC spray, and is used heavily by law enforcement. I have to tell you that my testing stopped short of spraying myself; I am not that brave. Knowledgeable people have confirmed to me that the Fox Labs formula is top notch. Fox Labs also offers a wide variety of sizes, from the typical keychain model to 2 and 4 ounce sprays for you purse, home or car. I like their larger spray can setup that has an intuitive and effective spring-loaded safety device to prevent accidental discharges. You can also order them with nozzles that fire a heavy stream or a wider fogging cone, depending upon your preference.

Most importantly, Fox Labs is very reputable, with excellent customer service. You may pay slightly more for Fox Labs'

products that your bargain basement OC sprays, but the price difference is easy to justify. OC is not particularly expensive, and the Fox Labs key chain model with 11 grams of product retails for \$13 or less, with refills at \$9 or less. The key chain size model is perfect for a pocket or purse. For carry in your car or home, Fox Labs sells 2 ounce sprays for less than \$15, and 4 ounce sprays for less than \$20.

I have a keychain model that I carry with me all of the time. The quick disconnect keychain allows me to easily take the unit off when I enter secure locations like courthouses or airports. I also keep a 2 ounce spray in my car and a 4 ounce spray near my home defense handgun. OC sprays are an inexpensive way to open up a lot more defensive options than you have with just a firearm. I recommend you consider incorporating a non-lethal defense tool in your carry if you haven't already, and I highly recommend that you try the excellent OC defense sprays from Fox Labs. Please view their website at:

www.foxlabs.com
or call: (800) 369-5227

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FOX LABS PEPPER SPRAY

CW Series: Uncompromised Performance

The Kahr CW series (available in 9mm and 40 S&W) has the combination of features that makes it the best Concealed Carry Pistol in the market. It has the ideal combination of stopping power and shooting comfort, and is smaller, slimmer and lighter than competitive brands. Its smooth double-action trigger reduces flinch, improving shot placement, and is safer. In stressful situations, fine motor control is impaired contributing to the possibility of accidental discharge with traditional single-action triggers found on many semi-autos and revolvers. The CW Series' natural point of aim and low-felt recoil make them the ideal guns to shoot and carry.

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BIANCHI TOP SECRET II FANNY PACK



BIANCHI TOP SECRET II FANNY PACK

Everyone has a time in which a fanny pack holster might come in handy: sightseeing, walking, jogging, bike riding, hiking...you name it. You can conceal a decent size handgun in plain sight, and not have to worry about large pockets in your pants, a sturdy belt, or a cover garment. Furthermore, fanny pack holsters blend into the background in a lot of casual dress circumstances. While I certainly don't use one every day, they are handy to have available.

The problem is that all fanny pack holsters are not created equal, not by a long shot. There are a lot of cheap fanny packs out there that are turned into holsters by adding in a cheap nylon holster with Velcro. Don't waste your money. Anything that you can buy on eBay for \$10 isn't worth having. Buy a fanny pack from a reputable holster maker that was designed from the ground up to carry a gun.

The fanny pack holster that I like the most is the Bianchi Top Secret II. The Top Secret II has the features I think you need in a fanny pack. First, there is a hidden gun compartment. You can open what appears to be the main compartment of this rig and not expose the gun. I think that is very important if you want to carry anything other than a gun and a reload. The gun compartment is accessible by tearing back the large side-wings on either side of the pack, which are secured by Velcro. It is noisy, but it is

fast and secure. There is also sufficient padding to prevent the gun compartment from printing a gun shape. As all packs should, the web belt fastens in the front and the buckle is concealed from view, preventing a grab from behind.

The Bianchi Top Secret II has all of the features that you need in a fanny pack holster and works quite well. The model I use is for small snub-nose revolvers, which is the perfect gun for this kind of carry. I don't think that this pack is an obvious holster like some, although black is the only color choice for now. You could certainly camouflage it more by adding a patch from your favorite sports team or other non-firearms related organization.

The Top Secret II sells for \$50 to \$60 and should last you a long time. It's nice to have this type of holster around for those times when nothing else will work. You can view the Top Secret II at the Bianchi International website at:

www.bianchi-intl.com

or by calling: (951) 676-5621

About the Author:

Duane A. Daiker is a Contributing Editor for CCM, but is otherwise a regular guy—not much different from you. Duane has been a lifelong shooter and goes about his life as an armed, responsible, and somewhat opinionated citizen. Duane can be reached at:

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Additional RWCG columns can be viewed at:

www.RealWorldCarryGear.com