

BACKUPS

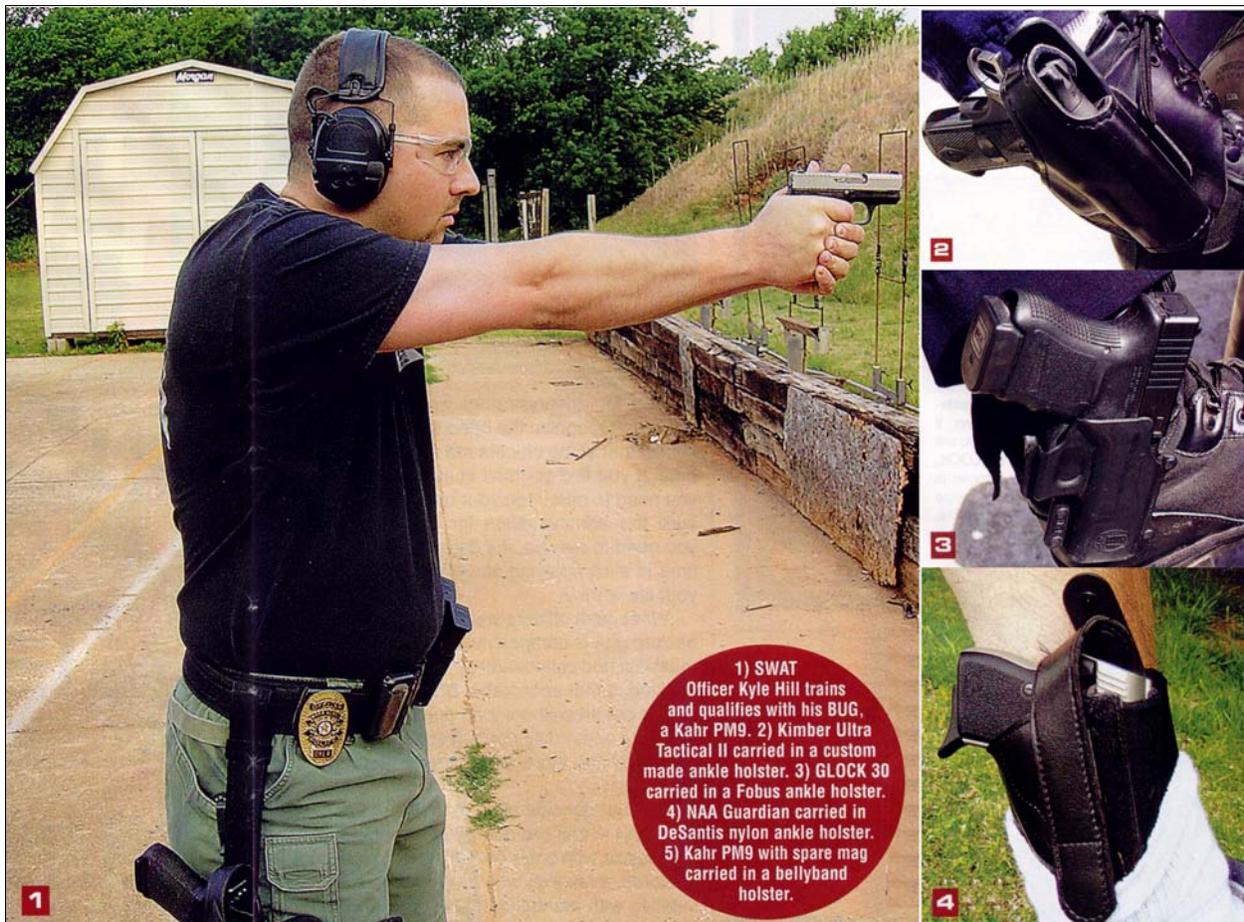
YOUR PLAN B

***Be prepared when PLAN A FAILS –
two do-or-die accounts testify!*** **By Matt Berger**

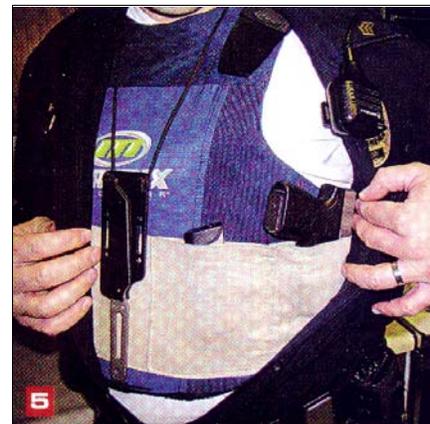
On the afternoon of Saturday, September 22, 2003, South Congaree Police (South Carolina) Officer Jason Pruitt was transporting a 44-year-old prisoner, Leavy Costello Rish, to the Lexington County Detention Center. Rish, a predator with a criminal history seven pages long, including robbery, reckless homicide, and assault and battery on a police officer, had just been arrested for drug charges, warrants and resisting arrest.

Shortly after 2:00pm, Rish complained of breathing problems, prompting Officer Pruitt to open the sliding glass separating the front and back seats of the patrol car to allow more air to ventilate. Rish, who was handcuffed with his legs shackled, has, unbeknownst to Pruitt, maneuvered his cuffs in front of his body and lunged through the opening, grabbing Pruitt's .40 caliber duty pistol. The pistol was fired at least twice, one round striking Pruitt in the hand, another striking Rish. Struggling with Rish while trying to stop the car, Pruitt drew a .38 caliber handgun from his pocket, which Rish knocked from his grasp, all the while cursing and threatening Pruitt. Pruitt then drew a second backup weapon, fired five shots into Rish, retrieved his .40 caliber pistol, and stepping out of the vehicle, fired one last shot. Rish died at the scene.

May 24, 2001, Officer Steve Staton initiated a traffic stop on a vehicle on 1-805 in San Diego, California, based on cues that caused him to believe that the driver was DUI. Officer Staton obtained the driver's information, returned to his patrol car, and ran a check on the driver, revealing an outstanding warrant.



Staton approached the vehicle again, informed the driver of the warrant, and advised him that the warrant would have to be taken care of. The driver then burst out of the vehicle with a revolver in hand. Staton, unable to outdraw the suspect, nor close enough to use empty hand techniques, took cover behind his patrol car. As Staton jumped over a guardrail, he took three rounds to the back, absorbed by his body armor. He drew his Smith & Wesson pistol and turned to face his attacker, who was chasing him. They both rolled down the embankment, Staton losing his radio in the process.



At the bottom of the hill, Staton fought the suspect over his 9mm S&W pistol, releasing the magazine, thereby rendering the pistol useless, due to the magazine disconnect. Staton ripped open his uniform shirt and drew a S&W CS9, and fired a round in the pitch blackness in the direction of the suspect, indexing his subsequent shots by the illumination of the muzzle blast, hitting the suspect seven times, killing him.

Officer Staton then climbed out of the ravine, and radioed: "I've been shot, I think he's dead." This was the second shooting Staton had been a part of in a matter of a few weeks.

GO TO PLAN B

These accounts vividly illustrate the reason we carry backup guns, and exemplify officers who've used them to save their lives. We carry backup weapons as a contingency plan, just as all cars are equipped with spare tires. We don't expect to have a flat, but just the same, we carry a spare, just in case. Backup plans, like backup guns, are just good common sense thinking.

Weapons are simple machines, and no matter how good, machines fail eventually. If your primary weapon fails, what is "Plan B"? Similarly, one may be relieved of his primary arm. One may also find oneself in a situation with a "less than tactical" mindset, off duty, or find the need to lend an arm to a cohort. If you find yourself asking, "Why bother with a second gun?" you may be overindulging in the art of rationalization. You may be saying to yourself, "I'm not likely to be involved in a situation where I need a backup gun," and you'll likely be right, but some officers obviously find it necessary to resort to second guns, since they didn't fall prey to such delusions.

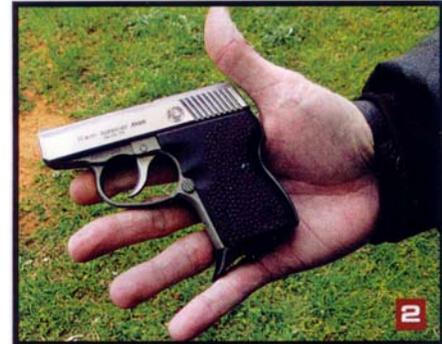
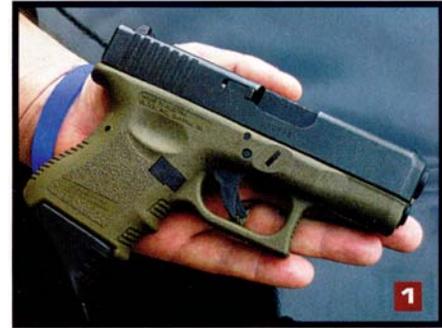
I've been lucky enough to have worked for administrators who had the sense to recognize the need for a Plan B. I know that some officers are not as fortunate. If you find yourself in such a place, you need to persuade your union to pressure the administration for the policies you need to survive. If it doesn't work, it's time to start applying elsewhere. What is your life worth?

What most officers want and need in a backup gun is compactness, light weight, reliability and concealability. Conventional thinking is that acceptable BUGs may be of less potent calibers than primary guns, though I personally don't like the idea of giving up any more in this arena than is necessary.

Another consideration in the selection of a BUG is that the operating system be compatible with one's primary arm. In other words, a revolver with revolver, manual safeties with manual safeties, double-action with double-action (DA), etc. The rationale here is that, under stress, you will fall back on your primary training. If your sidearm has no manual safety, but your BUG does, you may forget to disengage it in the heat of battle.

I depart a bit in my thinking on this matter from the convention. It is not a good idea to have an extra step in the BUG's operating system such as a manual safety if your duty gun has none; however, if your sidearm has a manual safety, you will probably be fine with a BUG like a GLOCK, since the worst thing that may happen is that you swipe your thumb down to wipe off an imaginary safety just before you fire. Similarly, if your duty gun is a double-action-only

1) New GLOCK 26 with olive drab frame is carried in a DeSantis nylon ankle rig. 2) Little NAA Guardian in .380 is stoked with RBCD Performance Plus Total Fragmentation ammo designed by Jim Cirillo and Roscoe Stoker. 3) (Left) GLOCK 26 and (right) Beretta Bobcat are both popular BUGs.





1) Two great BUGs from North American Arms: .380 Guardian (top) and Black Widow .22Mag (bottom). 2) NAA Black Widow filled with CCI .22Mag hollow point Maxi-Mags.

(DAO), or a first shot DA, you will probably be well served with a DA revolver as a BUG. In my opinion, any BUG that simply requires the shooter to point and press the trigger will probably work fine with any primary weapon system. If you feel comfortable only with completely compatible handguns for both the duty gun and BUG, by all means, follow your gut.

It is preferable that the BUG be carried concealed, as a hidden weapon is much more viable in certain dire situations, and worrying about retention of multiple weapons at all times is simply an added liability.

Make sure that you shoot a qualifying course of some sort with your BUG; some agencies have an abbreviated course for BUGs or weapons of smaller calibers, but at any rate, it is best to document your ability to fire and control the weapon, should the need arise. Our department at one time had a policy that anything in .25 caliber or less didn't require a qualification for carry. Later, an abbreviated qualification course for "backups" was created, which did not require the shooter to qualify at distances beyond 25 yards. Finally, the regular pistol qualification course is now required for the carry of BUGs, and I think this requirement gives the best protection for liability concerns.

BUGS

When I started my career, I began with what I could afford, a stainless Taurus Model 85, which by the way, was a surprisingly accurate little .38 snubie. I carried that revolver in a Gould & Goodrich leather ankle rig with a "calf" cuff for years, eventually replacing it with a stainless Ruger SP101 .357Mag snubie, an excellent hideout weapon, whose triggerguard drew blood due to the gun's sharp recoil, prompting me to smooth it with a Dremel. Lastly, and presently, I replaced the Ruger with a GLOCK 26 9mm, which I carry in a nondescript nylon ankle rig- soon to change.

All three of these weapons were utterly reliable, never failing to go bang when I squeezed the trigger. All three were durable, relatively light and concealable. The reason I now carry the GLOCK is that it is easy to shoot well (even with its short grip), compact, light, very durable and corrosion resistant. What it gains over the revolvers I have carried is that its profile is flatter, and I have 11 rounds instead of six. The 9mm is very controllable in this gun, despite its minuscule weight and dimensions.

In preparation for this article, I decided to speak with as many officers as possible to find out what is being carried by working cops in the way of BUGs. In each instance, I asked the officer not only what he or she carried, but how it was being carried and concealed, and why they chose the weapon and mode of carry.

What I found is that the "baby" GLOCKs seem to be the most popular choice, with the Beretta Bobcat .22s and Taurus PT22s coming in second. I did not run into any officers carrying these guns in .25 or .32 calibers (Tomcats, in the case of Beretta's .32 caliber), which I think is a good thing. I personally think that if one has to choose between these mouseguns, the .22 has the better ballistics.

For the most part, officers simply trust the rugged reliability and resistance to corrosion inherent to GLOCKs, combined with their shootability, (Please turn to page 96) reasonable weight, concealability and high capacity. Those that chose the little Beretta .22s or Taurus appreciated their tiny dimensions, light weight, and in the case of the Taurus guns, their low cost.

HOLSTER OPTIONS

The overwhelming majority carries their BUGs in ankle rigs, either of leather or, most often, nylon construction. The heavier the gun, the more important a good, secure ankle holster becomes. As anyone who has carried in an ankle rig knows, if the holster allows the gun to flop around on the ankle, it can become quite uncomfortable, even painful. And if it is not secure, you may even wind up with a gun on the ground in a scuffle or foot chase. The two best designs that I have found to keep the weapon secure and on one's ankle are those with the attached cuff that fastens over the top of the calf for stability, and even more so, those that incorporate lace eyelets for boot laces to weave through, mating the holster to one's footwear, and guaranteeing that the gun and holster stay put. The latter, of course, requires military style boots, which coincidentally, are the predominant choice in footwear for today's street cops.

A well-designed ankle holster will generally do a good job at concealing a compact pistol or revolver on all but the most slightly built officers. While accessible, it isn't nearly as quick into action as a belt holster. We accept this compromise in BUGs, since they are "Plan B" and must be necessarily covert.

Coming in second in the mode of carry are the bellyband holsters, and holsters that are specifically made to be carried in the gap between the front and rear panels of ballistic vests. Depending upon the weapon carried and position, these can also conceal quite well and are no less accessible than the ankle rigs. In the case of the bellyband, a spare magazine may also be carried. Galco offers a good bellyband holster, among others, and Kangaroo Industries offers a similar holster with a shoulder strap for added security and support.

The other two modes of carry that I encountered were the simple pocket carry, which I found some officers using for minirevolvers such as those made by North American Arms, and one detective who carries a GLOCK 26 in a small-of-back holster to back up his primary GLOCK 30. Though the reality is that most officers that carry in a pocket simply carry the pistol loose in the pocket, a pocket holster would seem a better, safer idea.

In addition to their line of mini-revolvers, North American Arms offers their stainless steel .380 Guardian in a gun about the size of most .25 semi-automatic pistols, but with plenty more power. If you insist on still less power, they also offer semi-auto pistols in .25 and .32ACP.

Also worth mentioning, are the Kahr Arms pistols carried by some officers, which they feel fill the niche quite well, but most find a bit pricey.

Snubbie revolvers also make great BUGs if you are a revolver fan, and there is a wide selection of suitable snubbies for the job, from the S&W J-frames to the wide selection of Taurus revolvers (Taurus even lists a section of "Instant Backup Revolvers" on their site), Rossi and last, but not least, my favorite, the Ruger SP1 01.

A virtue of the revolvers is that they can be had in the potent .357Mag chambering, boasting a lot of power in a small package. All of the aforementioned makers offer these magnum snubs, and the Ruger is built to withstand a steady diet of hot magnum loads. I haven't seen a Rossi carried as a BUG in some time, but they are very affordable revolvers, giving good value for the money. Of the revolvers, S&W has the best trigger. When I had my Ruger SP1 01, I had a local smith fit a trigger action kit, which didn't shorten the stroke any, but smoothed the action considerably. Colt offered the "Magnum Carry," which was basically a beefy Detective Special in .357Mag, and there are still plenty around.

For more information:

Beretta USA

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Accokeek, MD 20607; 800-636-3420
www.berettausa.com

DeSantis

431 Bayview Ave, Dept GW/LE
Copaigue, NY 11726; 800-424-1236
www.desantisholster.com

Fobus USA

1300 B-3 Industrial Hwy, Dept GW/LE
Southampton, PA 18966; 215-322-9227
www.fobusholster.com

GLOCK

6000 Highlands Pkwy, Dept GW/LE
Smyrna, GA 30082; 770-432-1202
www.glock.com

Gould & Goodrich

709 E McNeil St, Dept GW/LE
Lillington, NC 27546; 800-277-0732
www.gouldusa.com

Kahr Arms

PO Box 220, Dept GW/LE
Blauvelt, NY 10913; 845-735-4500
www.kahr.com

Kangaroo Industries

PO Box 926341, Dept GW/LE
Houston, TX 77292; 713-956-7279
www.tidepoolwebdesigns.com/kangaroo/

Kimber

1 Lawton St, Dept GW/LE
Yonkers, NY 10705; 800-880-2418
www.kimberamerica.com

Looper Leather Goods

2124 S Prospect, Dept GW/LE
Oklahoma City, OK 73129; 800-299-5667
www.looperleather.com

North American Arms

2150 S 950 E, Dept GW/LE
Provo, UT 84606; 800-821-5783
www.naaminis.com

Rossi USA

16175 NW 49 Ave, Dept GW/LE
Miami, FL 33014; 305-474-0401
www.rossiusa.com

Smith & Wesson

2100 Roosevelt Ave, Dept GW/LE
Springfield, MA 01104; 800-331-0852
www.smith-wesson.com

Sturm, Ruger & Company

200 Ruger Rd, Dept GW/LE
Prescott, AZ 86301; 928-778-6555
www.ruger.com

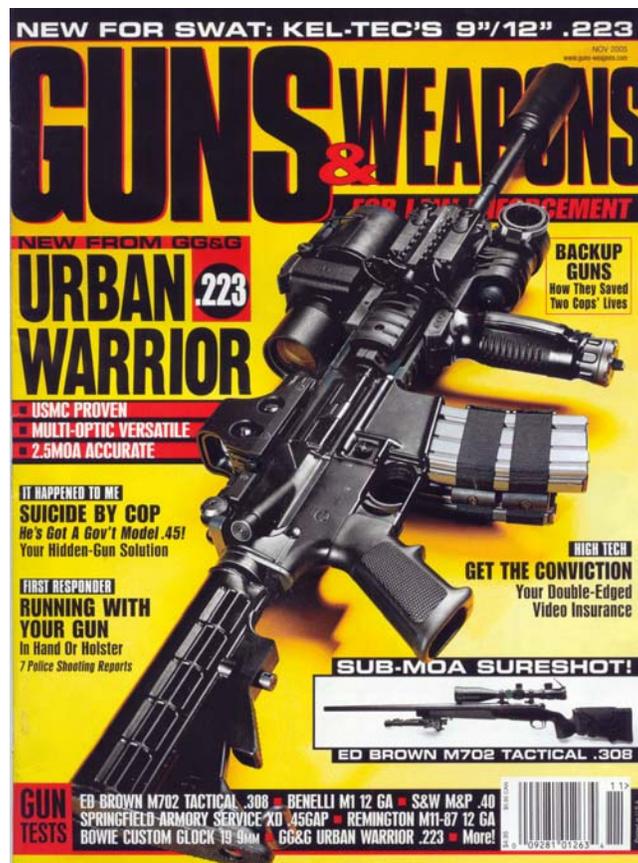
Taurus USA

16175 NW 49 Ave, Dept GW/LE
Miami, FL 33014; 305-624-1115
www.taurususa.com

I've saved the "honorable mention" BUG for last. Of all of the BUGs I've spoken to officers about, this one was the most interesting. One of the officers I work with, a good friend, actually carries a Kimber Ultra Tactical .45ACP in an ankle holster. The amazing thing is, the gun actually conceals quite well. The ankle rig was custom made by Danny Looper of Looper Leather in Oklahoma City, from a Gould & Goodrich #716 holster, which incorporates the interwoven bootlaces for maximum security (you need it for a gun this heavy). Danny basically took the holster apart and re-stitched it to the Kimber's contours, so that it fits like the proverbial glove. One caveat, "Big Rich" is a very big man, and this pistol and holster may not conceal quite as well with an officer of small build. This combo is definitely not for everyone. I really like the concept of the "laced on" ankle rig; seeing Rich's, I plan to obtain one myself. I will feel much more "secure" (pun intended) about my ankle gun staying where it belongs with one of these holsters.

FINAL NOTES

Consider your build, usual attire, the mode of carry you prefer-and choose your weapon. Train to become proficient in presenting and firing it. Stay alert, use sound tactics, and hopefully, you'll never need to use "Plan B." But it will be there if you do.



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