

# Hand Gun Mounted Lights for Canine Handlers

By Terry Fleck

As a nationally recognized police canine trainer, both in canine training and canine officer tactics, I wish to address the need for hand gun mounted lights for canine handlers. In addition to my opinion, there has been at least one other police industry article addressing the "essential need" for hand gun mounted lights for canine handlers.

The United States canine industry standard is to have hand gun mounted lights for canine handlers. I have seen over 5,000 United States canine teams in training and deployment. Of that amount, approximately 75% of the handlers have both hand gun mounted lights and a holster to accommodate both the gun and the mounted light.

Logistically, the handler cannot control his hand gun, a dog and a flashlight with only two hands. One of the three items will have to be compromised, resulting in officer safety issues. This issue is logical, two hands and three tools to manage.

Canine handlers also handle high risk calls. Typically, these calls are in low light conditions. The handler needs both better tactics and better equipment to deal with these low light, high risk calls. Allowing the handler to manage his hand gun, dog and flashlight with two hands is an essential officer safety issue.

Coincidentally, patrol officer safety tactics instructors are also addressing this issue for patrol. It is a fact that two handed shooting is more accurate than single handed shooting, for both patrol and canine. One recent study showed about 80% of police shootings are in low light conditions. Another recent study of patrol personnel showed about 50% of them are currently allowed to have a hand gun mounted light. I would not be surprised if hand gun mounted lights are standard for patrol within several years.

## **Concerns of management:**

Concern #1: The hand gun mounted light will be used as a flashlight, which means handlers will be pointing their hand gun at people unnecessarily.

Response: The hand gun mounted light does not replace conventional flashlights. Handlers will still need to carry a belt-mounted flashlight as part of their safety equipment, as a primary illumination tool.

Concern #2: Our agency does not have holsters to accommodate the hand gun and the mounted light.

Response: There are numerous manufacturers that produce holsters for both the hand gun and the mounted light. There are both belt mounted and thigh mounted holsters available. Holsters must allow for single handed holstering and single handed securing of the gun with holster safety(s). This will allow the other hand to control the dog.

Concern #3: The cost of the light and holster.

Response: If cost is an issue, allow the handler to purchase his own hand gun mounted light and holster.

Concern #4: How about a compromise of having the handler carry a gun light, not mounted to the hand gun, and having the handler attach the light when he draws his gun?

Response: Although I have seen this done, it is not safe. It takes two hands to manage the hand gun and then put the light onto the gun. This results in the same problem, three tools to manage and only two hands. The same issue arises when the handler decides to holster his gun. It takes two hands to manage the hand gun and take the light off the gun, in order to holster.

Concern #5: Our hand guns do not have a "rail system" to mount the light to.

Response: There are adaptor mounts and / or mounting rails available to allow hand gun lights to be mounted to a variety of hand guns.

Concern #6: The hand gun mounted light will make the hand gun malfunction.

Response: Although a possibility with earlier guns and lights, both hand gun technology and light technology have improved. I have not heard of these newer lights causing any hand gun malfunctions. In fact, several hand gun manufacturers produce their own hand gun mounted lights.

### **Product review:**

I tested the three most popular manufacturers of hand gun mounted lights. These lights were provided by the manufacturer for testing. The products are made of machined aluminum with a black finish and equipped with virtually unbreakable, high powered LED light. The lights are listed in order of my preference, based upon testing.

#### **Streamlight, Model TLR-1:**

I found the Streamlight, Model TLR-1 easy to mount, the LED light was bright and clear, and the gun mounted light was easy to holster. The light appeared brighter than the other two tested LED lights.

#### **Insight, Model SSL-1:**

I found the Insight, Model SSL-1 easy to mount, the LED light was bright and clear, and the gun mounted light was easy to holster.

**Surefire, Model X200A:**

I found the Surefire, Model X200A easy to mount. The LED light was bright; however there was some multi-color distortion which distracted me. The light has a "retaining pin" on the battery cover, which interfered with and slowed the holstering of the gun mounted light into my holster.

Surefire also has a Model X200B. This model was not provided for testing; however it has the same "retaining pin" on the battery cover.

**Insight, Model M3X:**

The Insight, Model M3X is different than the other lights, as it is made of plastic material with a black finish and equipped with incandescent light. I found the Insight, Model M3X easy to mount, the light was bright and clear, and the gun mounted light was easy to holster. The incandescent light appeared brighter than the other tested lights.

**Recommendations:**

I would strongly recommend that all canine handlers be issued and / or allowed to carry hand gun mounted lights, with a holster to accommodate the light mounted to the gun. This recommendation has been mirrored in one other police industry article addressing the "essential need" for hand gun mounted lights for canine handlers.

Canine teams operate primarily in low light, high risk conditions. It's time to enhance officer safety for handlers by improving their equipment to better control their hand gun, dog and flashlight in these low light, high risk conditions.