

“What Gun do I need for Fast Draw?”

That’s the question we often get, here at Fast Draw UK, and it is a good question.

If you’re new to the sport, it can be a minefield of confusion. Everyone has their own answer and many have their own agenda, too!

This article is not going to go into the history of UK blank-firing Pistols - that is dealt with elsewhere - but more simply what is available and the pro’s and cons of your first Gun. Before starting, it’s important to remind you that although we are talking about blank-firing guns they are still GUNS and, therefore, can be dangerous in the wrong hands and if not treated with respect. They also come under the Violent Crimes Reduction Act of 2006 (Imitation Firearms), and breaking this Law carries a Prison sentence. You will also be banned from any responsible club and certainly from any event organised by Fast Draw UK – possibly for life.

Another point worth mentioning at this stage, is that any pistol you use for Fast Draw must be **COMPLETELY STANDARD**; that is, in full working order as the maker intended, and with no modifications to any parts other than reasonable fine tuning to internal parts, so long as that does not change the way it operates. For instance, all baffles must be in place, triggers must be operational and no alterations to the hammer to make “fanning” easier. Again, a responsible Event Organiser will be checking your guns before you enter the competition and anything that even LOOKS suspicious won’t be allowed. Likewise, your ammunition must be acceptable to the Organisers, apart again, from needing to be legal (Ammunition will also be the subject of another Article; all that we will refer to in this guide, is calibre, of which more later).

Before we get to the good stuff, we don’t intend to argue the authenticity of whether Cowboys in the “Wild West” actually stood out on Main St, at Noon (or any other time!), and actually held “Gunfights”, or even if they often carried revolvers. Again, that’s well documented elsewhere and a subject for far better informed writers than this one! This is simply about the UK Sport of Fast Draw in the 21st Century in relation to useable pistols, OK?

Right, that’s got that out of the way! What you gonna get?!

You’ve probably been to a Western Club, or Event, and watched the Gunfighters shooting balloons, balls on strings or knock-down targets and wondered how a gun firing “Blank” rounds, can do that. It’s because guns come in two (or three?) types: “Front-“ or “Side- (or top, or bottom) venting. Which means that the gases from the detonation of the bullet exit either through the front of the barrel, “front-vent”, or from the sides (top or bottom) with a “side venting” or “side blaster”. The timer, or the light which indicates the fastest shot, will be activated by a switch connected to that balloon/ball/flap and show the winner. Now that only works if your gun actually allows the gases to exit from the front; if your gun has a factory-blocked barrel and exits from the side you will need to make sure the Gun Marshalls/Judges know that and if the target in use has a “Sound Judge” built in, that will detect the first “bang” rather than the target being hit. We are not going to attempt to discuss targets in detail here; again, it’s a subject in it’s own right.

So the question is, “Front Vent, or Side Blaster?”

As usual, cost is a big factor. The Fastest UK shooters usually use front-venting Colt SAA (Single Action Army/Peacemaker) Replicas in .38 calibre and with a barrel of 4.75” in

length. The most popular weapon in that spec has got to be a “Trinity”, made by a company based in the West Midlands (Or the Black Country to be precise!), who hold the only Patent in the UK for these pistols. The manufacture of blank-firing guns in the UK was banned in (and I stand to be corrected) 2012, so all the Trinity Guns you will come across will have been built before that, which partly explains the price tag that comes with one... A working Trinity in good cosmetic and mechanical condition, at the time of writing in 2020, will set you back around £700 - £750 with tuned or rare versions, such as the interesting 8-shot version, fetching almost double that with good provenance. Not an inconsiderable investment, if you’re not sure whether you will take to the sport! The good news is that they do hold the price, so long as they are kept well-maintained and looked after. Other advantages of buying Trinity include a full Service and Repair facility at the makers as well as plentiful supply of spares, when needed. They are the most robust and reliable gun available to the UK and, probably the European, Market and if you take to Fast Draw, you will without doubt eventually be swallowing hard and handing over your hard-earned bucks!

Occasionally, a Trinity comes along with a lower asking price. Maybe the seller needs the cash, or it’s from a deceased Shooter’s collection and you’ve found a bargain. More likely, it has been lying neglected under someone’s bed and hasn’t seen any oil in a while, or wasn’t too well looked after and needs some TLC. Be aware that a Trinity with a cheap asking price because it needs “tidying up” or such, will still cost you the same price as a good one by the time you’ve got it sorted, unless you have access to a friendly Gunsmith who owes you a big favour! We have had many people come along with Pistols that look like they have come out of a canal, have been “repaired” with dodgy parts or modified to the point of needing a rebuild. If it seems to be too good to be true, it probably is!

Ok, that’s enough about Trinitys. Before moving on, we need to add that there are other variants from that factory, including Pistols in various Barrel lengths such as 5.5” and 7”, as well as “Remington” replicas, which may be used for Fast Draw if you want to be different, but as this article is about “What to Buy for Fast Draw” we aren’t going to discuss those, here.

As was stated at the top of this piece, this isn’t a history lesson but it probably needs to be said that the early blank-firers used in the UK were imported from the Italian manufacturers such as Uberti and Pietta, who are still in business today making replicas but whose products no longer meet UK laws regarding our needs for Fast Draw. We mention this because there are many fine Replicas of Colt 1851 Navy’s and Army’s, “Sheriffs” and Peacemakers, as well as Walkers and other more unusual designs, out there which are great for your “Old West” Impression but are, mostly, not resilient enough or practical for our use.

Occasionally, one of the old front-venting Ubertis turns up but these are purely collectors pieces nowadays but probably don’t conform with the VCR Act (2006) and may get you into a lot of trouble if they don’t comply. You have been warned!

One “Front Venting” gun that is available without a mortgage is the Adler model. These conform to our draconian UK Laws and you can still find a good one for around half the price of a Trinity. A big “Pro”!

The “Con” is that they are heavier and less reliable when subjected to the punishment handed out by fast draw use. A great “starter gun” if you can find a good one, nonetheless, and will also hold its price if you look after it.

Then you get to the sort of “entry level” options. We all bought a Bruni or a Jackal when we started out and didn’t want to be spending big money. A new Bruni “Peacemaker” Replica, albeit with a 5.5” barrel, can be picked up for less than £100. These fire 9mm factory made rounds which are readily available over the counter with no license needed and make a satisfying bang without a lot of maintainance. In fact, apart from keeping it clean, there’s not a lot by way of user-friendly work you can do to them, anyway.

Pro’s: Cheap, Great Fun and easily available ammo.

Con’s: Not really robust enough for hard fast draw use. Difficult to find spares or repairers.

Other Peacemaker/SAA (*Single Action Army*) replicas in the same sort of price bracket include the Jackal, Sussex Armoury or Phoenix Arms and these are often available with .22 cylinders – not really enough bang to register on some targets but larger calibre cylinders were available, if you can find one. There are also a few from the Far East, with resin or alloy frames. Again, not really resilient enough for serious Fast Draw action but great “bucket fillers” at low prices. You can usually find second hand examples for as little as £50.

OK, so in conclusion, you pays yer money and takes yer chance!

One other factor to consider is the supply of ammunition. Later Trinity’s did come with 9mm cylinder as standard but almost all earlier models (up to the turn of the century) are likely to be either .38 or .38 Special which is slightly larger than 9mm and may give you problems if you don’t have access to .38 rounds, which aren’t so readily available, without a black powder license, whilst factory made 9mm shells can be had for around £15-18 per 50.

Best advice on that issue is to talk to the Shooters at your local Western Club and see what they use.

Well, we hope this has been some help with getting you started in the wonderful world of Fast Draw. Look out for other, more specialised, Articles on the History of Fast Draw in the UK, Fast Draw Rigs, Ammunition and Clubs and Events. FAST DRAW UK also hold Gun Marshall Courses at many of their Events, which include basic Gun care and tips on the Sport.

See y’all on the Trail; ‘til then, SHOOT IT LIKE YA MEAN IT!

(This article is not intended to be a comprehensive list of weapons available and any opinions are those of the writer. Further information can be had by emailing info@fastdrawuk.com)