Ahern Under the Gun: Remembering Lou Alessi

By Jerry Ahern, Photos by Sharon Ahern

When the first book in our series The Survivalist came out in 1980, I was regularly carrying the same little automatic pistols “John Rourke” carried, only rarely two at a time. When I did carry two, and quite often when I carried only one, I used an Alessi (alessigunholsters.com) shoulder holster with a pull-through snap that closed through the trigger guard. When I did carry two of those little pistols that Rourke carried, it was in a double Alessi shoulder holster. When you write novels in a series, you develop your own catch phrases. Sharon and I would frequently refer to John Rourke’s “...twin stainless Detonics .45s in the double Alessi shoulder rig.”

Now, as many of you know, when Detonics USA was up and running in Pendergrass, Georgia, I ran the operation. That was the only time I ever had any business involvement with the little pistols. I never did before the Detonics USA operation and haven’t since. I’m just a fan of the guns. And, it looks like a new version of the Detonics CombatMaster will be coming out one of these days soon. But, the guns are not what I’m referencing in this installment of “Ahern Under the Gun.” Rather, I’m referencing the wonderful holsters that were made by the late Lou Alessi. I first heard of Alessi holsters because of the original Detonics (Seattle) operation. Savvy people in the gun business know that handguns for which there are no holsters available tend to sell quite a bit less vigorously. The original Detonics had Louie Alessi manufacture holsters for their handguns. It was a perfect marriage. Louie was a super nice guy and an extraordinarily gifted holster designer and manufacturer. He was down there in the trenches, making the things. I know what those trenches are like, and so does Sharon, because we had a holster company ourselves for a number of years. It’s hard work, but rewarding if the end result is a piece of functional art. Louie’s holsters were that. When Lou died February 21, 2009, thankfully, his wife Idamarie and daughter Alexandra Alessi and longtime family friend Tom Kulwicki, all of whom knew the master’s technique, determined to keep Alessi holsters available to the legions of satisfied customers Louie had built up over the years. Today, they are making Lou’s holsters in the same way Lou made them. The Alessi holster business was founded in 1974. I have no idea about Louie’s marksmanship skills, but he was a straight shooter always. The holsters he designed were and are some of the finest concealment gear on the planet.

For the purposes of this installment of “Ahern Under the Gun,” I’m covering three Alessi holsters, each of these the current version of a holster that I used 20 or even 30 years ago.

The first of these is a single shoulder holster with a double magazine pouch on the offside. Drawing the pistol breaks open the snap against the interior of the forward portion of the trigger guard. This is fast and natural, requiring no added hand movements to draw the pistol. Simply reach up, grasp the weapon in a full combat grip and rip the pistol from the leather. It is because of the efficiency, reliability and conceivability of this holster, not to mention comfort, that Sharon and I decided on the Alessi gear for John Rourke and I used this equipment myself.

What has changed?

In days of yore, the balanced shoulder harness halves were joined together by snaps. This was a very good arrangement, allowing easy adjustment if the wearer would be using heavier and thicker than normal garments. A quick fix. Today’s version uses a small metal ring, to which the halves are riveted. The harness halves, as before, are contoured and the portions of the straps that would allow for adjustment are narrow. Adjustment of the harness for length is accomplished with Chicago screws and keepers.

The offside magazine pouch is an inverted double, the magazines secured with snap closure straps, these metal reinforced, as might be expected with a thumb break for a holster. The original unit from three decades ago carried one magazine horizontally and the magazine pouch had a magnetic strip to secure the magazine. The current pouch has a removable snap closure “tie-down,”