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An overview of

Pocket Multi-Tools

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Folders -



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Description :

Folding pocket tools with pliers, screwdrivers, knife blades, saws...

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Pocket Multi-Tools

Since the beginning of the XX th century, a lot of attempts have been made to create a pocket knife that would incorporate pliers. Most of the time, the result was the opposite, a pair of pliers which would receive a folding knife and other tools on one handle.

So the only affordable pocket multitool has therefore for a long time been the [Swiss knife](#), but it does not provide pliers, and is built on a knife frame.

It is not until 1970, two years after Tim Leatherman from Oregon traveled through europe with his wife in a small Fiat and felt the need for a folding multitool targeted at mechanics, that the solution appeared. (thanks Fiat![:]))

The Original Leatherman



Leatherman built this inventive new pocket tool, a pair of needle nose pliers, whose handles fold around the nose, and contain additional tools like flat and Phillips screw drivers, a file, a knife blade, a can opener. While targeted at mechanics, these tools are really useful outdoors to repair any mechanical parts of modern gear, or cars.

From there a few other makers entered the market (the second was Gerber) to provide similar tools. They now all provide such Multi-Tools, the main brands being: Leatherman, Gerber, Shrade, Victorinox (yes, even the swiss came to it), Kershaw, Buck, Spyderco, and a lot of brandless copies from different geographical origins and quality.

Schrade tough tool, note the opening

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Spyderco SpyderWrench





I will not in this article explain or review this or this tool, they all have advantages and problems, but rather try to orientate the buyer.

The first thing to do before buying is obviously to understand the needs we have.

There are two main trends: scissors or pliers. Pliers can be needle nose or blunt nose, some brands offer locking jaw pliers, to the expense of some tools.

Leatherman Juice KF4, very compact, the size of a Swiss knife, a great outdoor multitool



Leatherman Squirt, small scissors

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The big trend is to offer as many locking tools as possible, and direct access to a few blades when the pliers are folded (on most models you have to open the pliers to access the tools).

The locking mechanisms differ a lot from maker to maker, some are good, some are average.

The sizes and weights are very variable, and are an important consideration in terms of the versatility of the tool.

Different sizes

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The comfort of the tool is an important consideration. With the first Leatherman, the handle would offer a very bad comfort, when using the pliers, because they form an open shell, and only the opening come in contact with the palm. More recent tools have changed the opening mechanism, or padded the sided of the handle to provide a surface for the palm to rest when using the tool. Try before buying.

There are a few things I really like having:

- Needle nose pliers, I find blunt pliers rather useless.
- Scissors are always useful to have.
- Locking Knife blade.
- Screwdrivers, flat and phillips.
- File, preferably diamond coated on one side, it makes an excellent sharpening stone.

and then I also like any of these outdoor tools when available:

- Awl / scrapper blade
- Can / bottle opener
- Wood saw

Or any of these indoor tools:

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- Professional screw driver with bits heads.
- Adjustable wrench.

Obviously when you read this list, you discover that all of this can be found in a Swiss knife, presented as a knife, so, yes of course Swiss knives are multi-tools too.

I like to have a direct access to the knife blade at least.

I found that I rarely use anything else than the tools I listed here. That is my list, yours will probably differ a lot. It does not contain too many tools, so it is easy to find a maker for this list, and it stays cheap enough.

I like light gear, so my preference now goes to the more compact implements, rather than the more bulky things.

I have used these tools for a lot of tasks, from screwing unscrewing a variety of material (Snowboard base bindings with a leatherman micra!), removing or adding bolts, used the pliers to hold, or pull a variety of material (great to drive a needle in the leather of shoes when they need urgent repair). They are useful for an incredible number of occasions, only restricted by one's inventiveness.

The best lifespan I found is certainly the leatherman's, as I still have my first one, and it still works like when it was new. Some others like the Schrade tough tool is still ok, but finally not that tough, a Gerber's phillips screwdriver broke... I have heard a lot of good from the Swiss Victorinox models, but find them a bit bulky.

Leatherman Wave, complete, compact, sturdy



There are a few models I really like:

The Leatherman Wave, sturdy, compact, complete, and the Juice KF4, which is very compact and light, and rather

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outdoor oriented, and the scissors Micra or Squirt, both key_chain sized. For home DIY and for mechanics, the Spyderwrench for Spyderco is a good implement. But then that is only among the tools and brands I have handled. I have checked a Victorinox Swiss tool and only heard good things about it.

In conclusion:

Pocket multitools have their place. I find they fill the same kind of cutlery niche than the Swiss knife, They are just different by design, their main functional difference being to provide pliers. The choice for is a question of personal preference at the end.