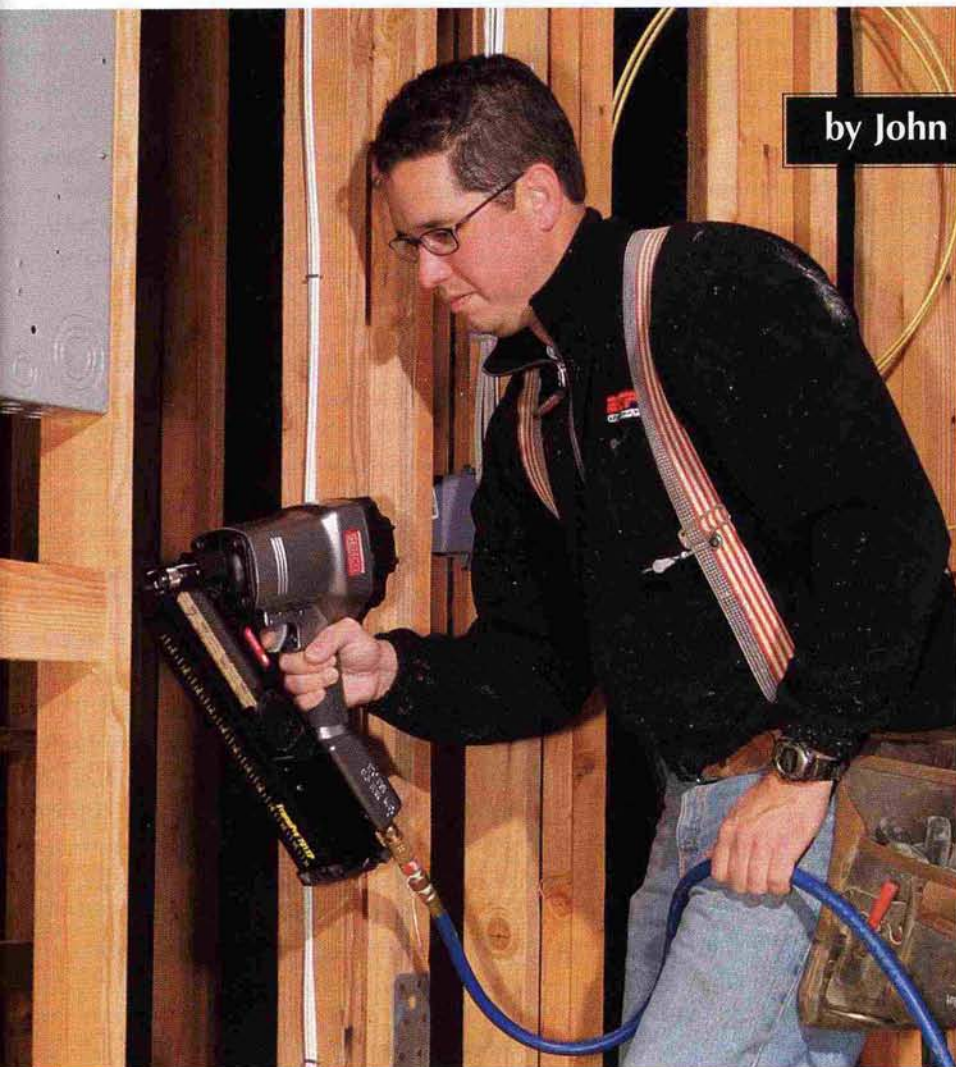


Paper-Collated Clipped-Head Nailers

by John Harman



The best guns are compact, have built-in rafter hooks, and won't fire when empty

As a framing contractor, I use nail guns just about every day, so it's hard not to notice the way these tools have changed over the years. Today's nailers work better than the ones I've used in the past: They are smaller and lighter and have features that make them easier to use.

For this article, my crew tested 11 stick nailers. We limited ourselves to models that drive 30- to 34-degree paper-collated nails, the fastener we normally use. (Clipped-head nails also come with 28-degree wire or plastic collation, a Bostitch standard that fits guns from a number of other manufacturers.)

We tested tools from DeWalt, Fasco, Hitachi, Makita, Max, Paslode, Porter-Cable, and Senco.

models, you can change depth settings without using tools, usually by turning a thumb-wheel located on the nose or just below the trigger (Figure 2, page 93). DeWalt's mechanism is adjusted by sliding an indexed button below the trigger.

The Senco FramePro 601 and Paslode PowerMaster both require tools to change the depth of drive (Figure 3).

In most cases, the front of the gun is less cluttered and the mechanism is less likely to get banged if it's mounted away from the nose of the gun. Still, the nose-mounted wheels on the Max and Senco FramePro 701XP are less exposed than others because they're tucked in fairly tightly.

Nonmarring tips. Many of these guns come with a plastic tip that installs over the teeth of the contact element. The idea is to prevent the teeth from marring visible surfaces. As a framer, I have very few opportunities to take advantage of this feature, though I have used it when nailing exterior deck members that will be at eye level. On some models, the tip stores on a clip on the magazine. It's a clever idea, but if you do a lot of framing, the tip is likely to fall off and get lost.

Generic Nails

I normally use Senco nails because that's what the nearest supplier sells. For this test, we also tried some generics to see if that made any difference. It did: The guns seemed to jam more with generic fasteners. The Hitachis — especially the NR 90AD — seemed more sensitive to the type of nail than the other guns did. They worked absolutely fine with brand-name nails, but the generic fasteners tended to bend or jam.

There was a time when my crew regularly used generic fasteners. We stopped because it just wasn't worth it. We use about 100 boxes (3,000 nails per box) of fasteners per year. Even though the generics are a few dollars less per box, the savings were offset by the time spent clearing jams and by fasteners that were wasted because the paper collation broke.

Favorites

When it comes to features, it would be hard to beat the Senco FramePro 701XP. This tool has good power, it's compact, and it won't fire when empty. The rafter hook is convenient for working up high, and it folds completely out of the way when you're not using it.

My next-favorite guns are the DeWalt D51823, Hitachi NR 83AA3, and Makita AN942. I like the DeWalt because it's light and has a rafter hook. The NR 83AA3 holds three strips of nails and comes from a series that has a reputation for durability. The Makita is comfortable to use because it's well-balanced and has very little recoil.

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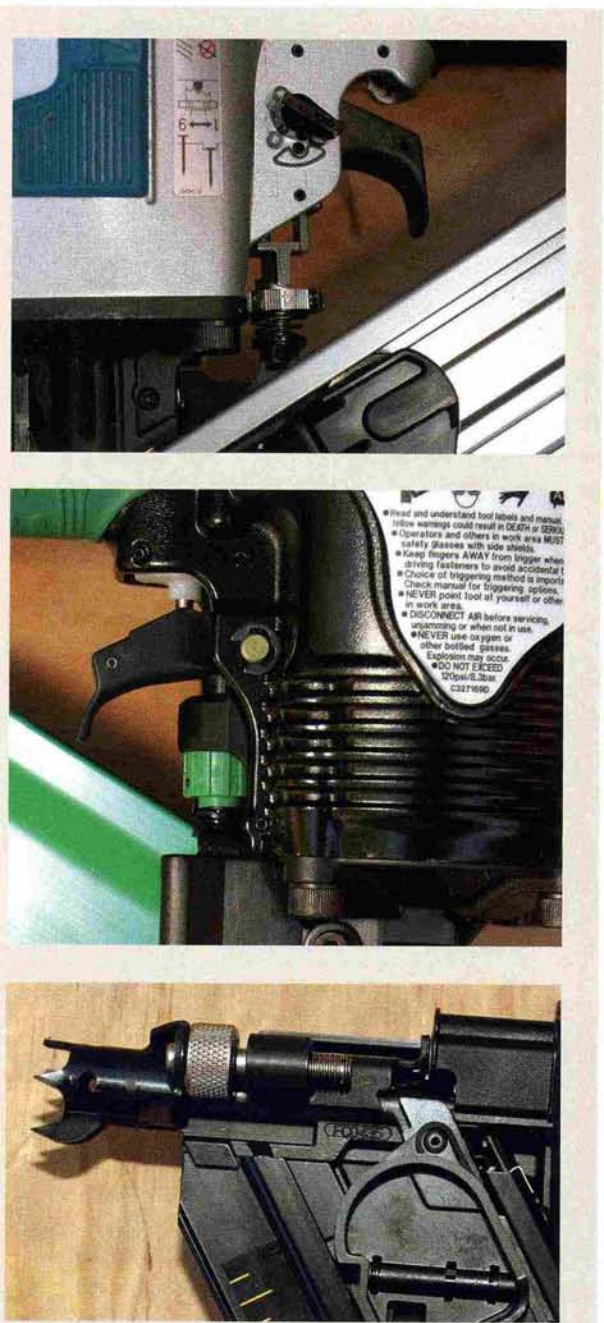


Figure 3. The Makita (top) and Hitachi's NR 90AD (center) have indexed thumb-wheels just below the trigger to control depth of drive. The thumb-wheel that controls depth of drive on the Senco FramePro 701XP (bottom) is cleanly integrated into the nose.