

Pry Bars and Nail Pullers

by Clayton DeKorne

No doubt, at one time you've wondered where that power nail puller is. After using a pneumatic nailer to put together a header with the wrong size stock, for example, you think there really ought to be such a thing. As far as I know, there isn't a nail puller that is powered by anything other than brute strength and a sledge hammer. But in this category of pullers and pry bars, there is an enormous variety to choose from. If you do a lot of demolition work, you will need a variety of bars for the tasks at hand.

Pry Bars

Crow bar is a term widely used for any type of demolition bar, but it has a very specific meaning. The term "crow bar" comes from a Dutch word that means "to dig." True crow bars are digging bars over four feet long, and are available with a *pinch point* or a *wedge point*. A wedge point tapers from two sides and is best for busting up concrete and stone. A pinch point bar, sometimes called a *house-breaker's bar*, tapers to one side and is best as a pry bar for heavy timbers.

Several other tools are similar. A tamping bar has a wide round tamp pad and a 2½-inch-wide digging chisel. The wide ripping claw on a *contractor's bar* is especially useful for stripping form work because it can reach to the bottom of a deep foundation form. A *construction bar* has one blunt end and one narrow chisel point. A *slate bar*, sometimes called an *ice bar* in cold climates, is sharpened to a point. A *San Angelo bar* has a narrow chisel on one end and a sharp point on the other. All of these bars make good demolition tools because they are long enough to provide good leverage, and are heavy enough to be driven deep between timbers.

Wrecking bars vary in length from 1 to 5 feet. They are curved at one end with a notch for pulling nails, and have a slightly bent chisel point on the other end. When the straight end has a notch and nail slot, it is sometimes called a *salvage bar*. A wrecking bar is also called a *pig's foot*, because the notched end is shaped like a cloven hoof, or a *gooseneck bar*, because of the curve. A *full gooseneck* bends 90 degrees, then curves, and the tip extends beyond the handle so it can be worked into a corner. A bar with the more typical curve is a ¾-

bend bar, a ½-bend bar, or, if it has just a slight bend, a ¼-bend bar.

The Japanese company Takagi makes a ½-bend *Bear Claw wrecking bar* with an I-beam shaft that is thinner and lighter than most bars. This bar has an extremely sharp notch for pulling nails, similar to a Japanese nail puller. On the other end is a very thin chisel point that works well for prying off salvageable trim.

A **ripping bar** is usually 15 to 18 inches long, and has a wide tapered head, which is notched and has a nail slot. The head is usually bent at about a 15-degree angle so you can dig the notch in and lever up to start a nail, and then hook the head on the slot to pull it out. A double-ended ripping bar, often called an *angle bar*, is usually bent at one end to 45 or 90 degrees and offset. Estwing makes a *Feather-weight Pry Bar* with a very long chisel, an I-beam shaft similar to the Japanese wrecking bar, and a short 90-degree pry tip. Similar in size and shape to a ripping bar, a *stripping bar* has a single-toothed chisel on each end for prying off form work.

A **flat bar** is usually about a foot long, slightly curved and made of 1½-inch-wide flat spring steel. This is also called a *carpenter's bar*, but is most commonly called a *Wonder bar*, a Stanley brand name. Other brand names include *Action Bar* (Plumb), *Handy Bar* (Estwing), *Handi-Bar* (Barco), *Super Bar*

(Vaughn), and *Utility Bar* (Baltimore Tool Works, Mayhew, Woodings-Verona). Because of the bar's thin section, it has some flex. It does not work well as a heavy pry bar, but it is great for pulling off trim that you need to salvage. Flat bars are available in a 6- or 8-inch lengths that are especially useful for removing delicate moldings.

A **molding chisel** is a short, wide pry bar, similar to a flat bar, but thinner in section and not curved. Because these are thin, they are better than flat bars for prying off trim without gouging the edges.

The wide-blade *floor chisel* and narrow-blade *ripping chisel* are made with stout enough steel to work equally well on either wood moldings, flooring, and siding, or tile and brick. Mayhew and Sargent make *long screwdriers* (16 to 24 inches) with bent tips that work well as either demo tools, or for forcing twisted floor boards into place.

Specialty wrecking bars solve special problems. The *Dasco Savin' Bar* has two notched blades that pry with equal pressure on either side of a joist or rafter to lift up plank flooring or roof sheathing with minimal damage.

The *Fulton Wizard Bar* is an awesome ripper and nail puller with an arc-shaped head and a long-handle that can save you from stooping over all day. It is available in 24-, 30-, 36-, and 48-

inch models.

The *Hart Tweaker* is sold for "tweaking" twisted studs and joists into place before nailing them off. But its pry points and notches would also make a favorable addition to your demolition arsenal.

A **connecting bar**, also called a *pinch bar*, *lining bar*, *fit-up bar*, *jimmy bar*, or *rolling-head pry bar* is really an iron worker's tool used to gain leverage when positioning steel beams. They aren't common demolition tools, but deserve a mention in the pry bar category. On one end is a straight or slightly curved chisel tip, and on the other end is a blunt, pointed "bull tip," used to align bolt holes.

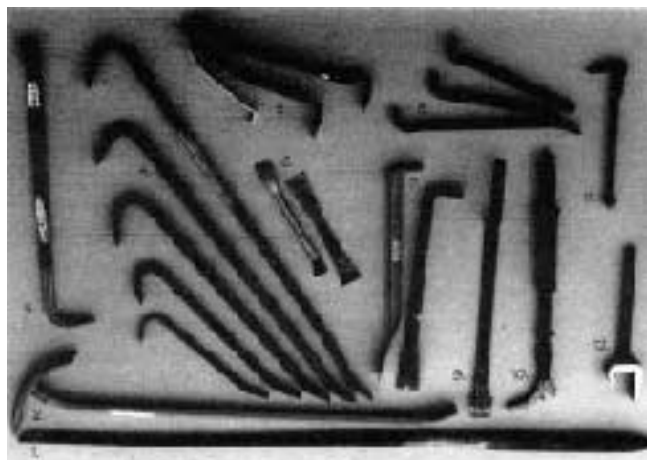
Nail Pullers

Cat's paws, sometimes called *gooney spoons*, are used to dig into the surface of a piece of wood to retrieve a nail by catching the head and prying it up. To fix framing flaws, I prefer a single paw with one blunt end because it won't tear my elbow off when it sits in my nail bags, the way a double-ended paw does.

To salvage trim, I prefer a *Japanese nail puller*. These come in 7- to 30-inch lengths for different size nails. For most finish nails, the 12-inch size is adequate. The jaws are thin and pointed so you can dig into the wood close to the nail with minimal damage to the board's surface. The inside of the notch has been sharpened, so a single hammer blow will embed the jaws into the shank of the nail. This way you can grab onto a long nail at any point, saving the trouble of using an additional block for added leverage.

Sliding-handle nail pullers were developed for long shoremen who need to open crates without destroying them. In construction, they work wonders for pulling nails from plywood. The pinchers are driven under the nail head by sliding a heavy, cast-iron handle along the shaft. As you pry against the fulcrum, the pinchers close with amazing ferocity on the nail shaft. All that's visible once the nail is out is the nail hole and a slight dent from the narrow pincher.

The **shingle ripper**, also called a *slate ripper* or *shingle thief*, is the only tool I know for seamlessly ripping out shingles for a skylight, roof hatch, or chimney. The long thin blade can easily slip under



Bust 'em up. For serious demolition work you can choose from a large assortment of pry bars and nail pullers, including: (1) crow bar with wedge point; (2) Fulton Wizard Bar; (3) Takagi Bear Claw; (4) goose-neck wrecking bars; (5) flat bars; (6) molding chisels; (7) ripping bars; (8) cat's paws; (9) shingle ripper; (10) sliding-handle nail puller; (11) Japanese nail puller; (12) Hart Tweaker.

shingles to hook the nails. You then hammer on the bend to pull or cut the nail.

The tack claw has a screw driver handle and a tiny claw that's great for prying up old carpet tacks.

Hammer claws are probably the most widely used nail pullers. A *curved claw* is a better nail puller; a *rip claw* is a better prying tool. It's rumored that a rip claw can also be used as a grappling hook to save yourself from falling off a roof. I'm glad I haven't had to test this because I'm not sure I'd have the presence of mind to pull out my hammer while tumbling towards the eaves.

Clip and punch. My favorite tool for salvaging trim is a pair of *end-cutting pliers*. Once a piece of trim has been pried off and has a bunch of nails in it that need to come out, you can pull finish nails through from the backside with the end-cutters. Common nails can be either clipped off or pushed out enough to pull without marring the face.

Pin punches will drive nails through the board if they can't be pulled out. A 1/16- or 1/8-inch straight punch works well on finish nails. A nail set is almost useless for this because it wedges behind the nail, gets stuck, and leaves a big hole. ■

Sources of Supply

Baltimore Tool Works

crow bars, full gooseneck and 3/4-bend wrecking bars, stripping bars, cat's paws, Utility Bar, floor chisels, ripping chisels, connecting bars
P.O. Box 27149
Baltimore, MD 21230
301/752-5297

Barco Industries

crow bars, wrecking bars, Handi-Bar
P.O. Box 14567
Reading, PA 19612-4567
800/234-8665

Cooper Tools

Crescent sliding-handle nail puller and end-cutting pliers, Plumb wrecking bars, ripping bars, Action Bar, nail claw
P.O. Box 30100
Raleigh, NC 27622
919/781-7200

Dasco Pro

Savin' Bar, ripping bars, cat's paws, molding chisel, shingle ripper, slate bar, connecting bars
2215 Kishwaukee St.
Rockford, IL 61104
815/962-3727

Enderes Tool Co.

wrecking bars, ripping bars, molding chisels, nail pullers
P.O. Box 24189
Apple Valley, MN 55124
612/891-1200

Estwing Mfg. Co.

Feather-weight pry bar, Handy bar, cat's paw, tack claw
2647 8th St.
Rockford, IL 61109-1190
815/397-9521

Fulton Corp.

Wizard Bar
Fulton, IL 61252

Hart Tool Co.

Tweaker, cat's paw
13120 Artic Circle
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
213/921-4499

Klein Tools

end-cutting pliers, contractor's bar, connecting bars

P.O. Box 599033
Chicago, IL 60659-9033
708/677-9500

Mayhew

wrecking bars, ripping bars, Utility Bar, nail pullers, long-handled screw drivers
Box 68, Sears St. Ext.
Shelburne Falls, MA 01370
413/625-6351

Millers Falls Tools

ripping bars, sliding-handle nail puller, tack claw, end-cutting pliers, straight punches
P.O. Box 1030
Alpha, NJ 08865
908/454-8400

Sargent Tool

crow bars, wrecking bars, contractor's bar, long-handled screw drivers, connecting bars
3347 State Rt. 132
Amelia, OH 45102
513/797-4200

Stanley Tools

wrecking bars, ripping bars, Wonder Bars, tack claw, straight punches
P.O. Box 1146
Bellmore, NY 11710
203/827-5237

Takagi Tools

Bear Claw wrecking bar, Japanese nail puller
P.O. Box 14355
Torrance, CA 90503
800/777-5538

Vaughn & Bushnell Mfg. Co.

wrecking bar, Super Bar
P.O. Box 390
Hebron, IL 60034-390
815/648-2446

Warren Tool Group

wrecking bars, connecting bars
P.O. Box 68
Hiram, OH 44234
216/569-3224

Woodings-Verona

crow bars, wrecking bars, ripping bars, stripping bars, slate bars, molding chisels
400 Jones St.
Verona, PA 15147
412/828-7000