



Hot-Melt Glue Gun

by Chuck Green

The hot-melt glue gun is one of those tools that often elicits a “Wow” from other tradesmen on site. When I first used one, it was a lot like my first encounter with a pneumatic nail gun: “Wow, is this for real?” followed by “Can I try it? How well does it hold?” and finally, “How much does it cost and where can I get one?” Like nail guns, a glue gun won’t answer all your fastening needs, but in some applications, there’s nothing better.

An Extra Set of Hands

A hot-melt glue bond has moderate strength, but it’s strong enough to hold considerable pressure from clamps. It doesn’t have much impact resistance, however, which means it can be broken down with a quick rap from a hammer or mallet. I use it most in my solid-surface work for temporarily attaching blocks to a countertop. These blocks give me a place to attach my clamps when drawing two large sheets of material together.

The glue bond sets up quickly. For the glue I usually use, 90% of the bond’s strength develops within one minute, after which I can set up my clamps. Then, after the solid-surface adhesive sets, the blocks I’ve attached to the countertop come off with a quick hammer blow, leaving an unmarred surface behind. Any glue remaining is pared off with a chisel; it comes up easily, but you want to be extremely careful so you don’t gouge the surface.

I also use the hot-melt glue gun when attaching a backsplash to a wall with construction adhesive. The adhesive is slow to develop its grab. But a couple dabs of hot-melt will hold it temporarily in place until the construction adhesive sets up. This eliminates all the clamps and boards I formerly had to set up and leave overnight.

Bill Karp, of Karp Woodworks in Holliston, Mass., has used a hot-melt

glue gun for about ten years. He calls it “an extra set of hands” — it’s just the tool for tacking any molding or wood piece in place while regular glue sets up. In the shop he uses the glue gun for temporarily securing small



A hot-melt glue gun delivers a fast-curing bond that will hold materials together on site until other more permanent adhesives set.

stop blocks to saw and router tables. On site, it’s useful for securing shims that would otherwise fall out during cabinet installations when working alone.

Gun Models

For most work, an electric glue gun the size of a hitchhiker’s outstretched hand is sufficient. I use the Bostik model 206, which retails for about \$15 (Bostik, 211 Boston St., Middleton, MA 01949; 800/726-7845). Bostik and others also make cheaper models, but the minor savings is more than offset by decreased reliability, which is likely to be low after kicking around in a toolbox and seeing hours of use. Bostik also makes a more expensive model — the TG-4. This heavy-duty, high-output gun is nice. It’s made for using all day long in industrial assembly and packaging. But it also costs close to

\$100. For the amount of time I use a glue gun, that would be way too much to pay.

Glues

The glues come in 7/16-inch-diameter rods in 4-, 8-, and 12-inch lengths. They feel like soft plastic and are not at all sticky. Pressing the tool’s switch mechanically feeds the rod into the heated tip, which produces a clear goo.

Specialty glues are available for bonding a wide variety of materials. The hot-melt industry provides glues for everything from bonding cardboard boxes to building speaker cabinets and bath vanities to assembling electronic components. Different glues have higher heat resistance (for bonding engine oil filters, for example), longer and shorter open times, different viscosities and resistance to solvents, and even different electrical properties.

I usually use a “general-purpose” glue stick, which is made of ethyl vinyl acetate (Bostik 6390). The glue sets up quickly. Bonding occurs in 15 to 30 seconds. This means you have to work quickly, pressing the glued pieces together after blobbing a dab or two on the pieces to be joined. When I’m finished working, I unplug the gun, leaving the unmelted stick in it. No cleanup is required. When I go to use it again, the extra glue left in the tip simply remelts.

That’s about all there is to it, though I do have three cautions: The tip is hot and can raise a blister. The glue is hot only for a few seconds, but not frighteningly so. And when the gun is first plugged in, it may ooze several drips as the remaining glue melts. I make sure the tip is over a scrap before I plug it in. ■

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