

Sweet Trim Guns

by Clayton DeKorne



Porter-Cable recently introduced a line of pneumatic trim nailers, including two 18-gauge brad guns, two 16-gauge finish nailers, and a 15-gauge angled finish nailer. I've had a chance to shoot up a couple boxes of nails with these guns, and while doing so, I formed some definite opinions about which ones I like.

First Impressions

Picking one of these guns up for the first time, I felt like I was holding an old standard instead of a gun from a company so new to the air tool market. These are solid guns. None of them would qualify as the lightest model in its class. However, balance has always been more important to me than weight, and the brad guns and the angled finish nailer are exceptionally well balanced and comfortable to use.

Porter-Cable has reduced the weight as much as it can without resorting to plastic parts. The body of each tool is forged from die-cast aluminum, then finished with a smooth, durable powder-coat paint. The castings are remarkably clean, without burrs or voids, and the machined surfaces mesh precisely and have almost no sharp edges. Parts nest well, and the bolts that hold them together have hardened threads and deep hex wells.

The aluminum magazines have been

anodized, which creates a smooth, slippery surface for the nails to glide across. Anodizing also hardens a surface, so the magazine will resist scratches and gouges from nails running through it. Over the years, this should keep the magazine from misfeeding, provided it's kept clean.

On the front end, all of the tools have hardened-steel driver blades and simple quick-release nosepieces. On the back end, Porter-Cable includes a 1/4-inch NPT hose connect, complete with a plastic cap to keep dust and debris out of the gun's innards when the hose is disconnected. This little cap stays collared to the gun when the air hose is attached.

The two larger nailers include muffled exhaust ports to quiet the blast and rubber safety tips to prevent the gun from marring the work.

Finish Nailers

Porter-Cable's finish line includes two straight-magazine guns and one angled model. Of these, I vastly prefer the angled version, Model DA250 (see photo, below left). Mostly, this is what I'm used to — the balance just feels right. I have never been too comfortable with any straight-magazine gun. However, I know a lot of carpenters who swear by them, if only because it's



Trim team. For trim work, Porter-Cable's DA250 finish nailer (left) and the BN200 brad nailer (right) work well together. The larger model drives stronger 15-gauge nails and has an angled magazine that's more maneuverable in tight areas. The brad tool shoots a wide range of 18-gauge fasteners, making it a versatile light-duty fastener.

easier to align the magazine parallel to a flat surface when speed nailing. I prefer the versatility of an angled magazine for fitting into corners. I also prefer 15-gauge nails. Even a 16-gauge nail can fold up in hardwood or near a softwood knot.

The DA250 drives nails from 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The FN250 straight-magazine gun shoots a wider range of nails — from 1 to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. If you can buy only one gun for running trim, this straight-magazine gun might be a good choice. Both nailers have plenty of power — enough so I had to back off the pressure to a low 70 psi to prevent overdriving nails in softwoods. At 100 psi, the guns set the longest nails in solid oak.

The smaller FN-200 straight-magazine gun drives nails from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 2 inches long. I wouldn't choose this as my sole finish gun, since I typically need a full 8d nail to drive through $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch stock and drywall to pick up the framing. This model might work as a good second gun, though. For general trim and remodeling work, however, I'd rather have a brad nailer as my second gun.

Brad Nailers

While brad nailers have the most uses in a shop, I depend on one for on-site trim work, as well. Even when I can use a longer nail, I prefer a thinner brad if the material I'm fastening is thin ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch or less). I can usually move faster when I don't have to worry about a blowout. And the 18-gauge pin is less likely to split an outside miter or a splice in a long run of trim. Also, the smaller nose of a brad gun usually fits better in tight corners and in the recesses of profiled moldings.

For these reasons, I found the largest brad nailer — the BN200 (see photo, page 62) — to be my first choice for trim work. This model drives the widest selection of brads — from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 inches long. A 2-inch, 18-gauge nail can be flimsy, but it's often perfect for securing thin stock when you have to reach through drywall to the framing without splitting the trim. An 18-gauge nail also seems to work the best on thin clamshell casings that have been recessed on the back.

The other two brad guns are equally

nice, even if they can't drive a 2-inch nail. The middle gun — the BN125 — drives brads from $\frac{5}{8}$ to 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. The smaller model, NS100, drives brads from a tiny $\frac{1}{2}$ inch up to 1 inch. This sturdy little gun (reminiscent of the Duofast BFN-70) is nice and short, so it works well in tight spots.

The safety mechanism on all these brad nailers is located behind the driver guard. This allows the fasteners to be driven tight into corners and the bottom of recesses on profiled moldings without the safety hanging up and preventing the fastener from being set below the surface. The only drawback is that it's easy to push any of these steel noses into softwoods when trying to push two trim pieces tightly together.

Well-Planned Peripherals

Each gun comes with a plastic carrying case. I'm not generally a fan of such "typewriter" cases, but I'm beginning to change my mind. These cases are well planned. It's immediately obvious where the gun rests, and they all have ample room for fasteners. If I'd had such nice cases for my old guns, I'm sure they would have stayed a lot cleaner and lasted longer between rebuilds.

Porter-Cable offers a full selection of fasteners to fit each gun, but all the guns will fire most sizes of other brand-name fasteners, including those from Airy, Campbell-Hausfeld, Duo-Fast, Hitachi, Paslode, and Senco. The catalog includes easy-to-read charts for each model showing the fasteners that fit each gun.

The company sells three simple maintenance kits for each gun that allow you to rebuild the top end of the gun, replace a worn or broken driver blade, or install a new bumper and bottom seal. The only part that is not easily serviceable is the trigger valve. To get at a trigger seal, you have to remove the steel pins holding the trigger and safety in place. For this, you're better off sending it to a Porter-Cable service center for repair anyway. It's too easy to misalign or damage the trigger and safety, which can lead to misfiring or jamming of the safety. I would never want to impose such failures on a crew.

For more information, contact Porter-Cable, P.O. Box 2468, Jackson, TN 38302; 800/487-8665. ■