

# New Roofing Coil Nailers

by Bob Richard

**N**ot long ago, I had the opportunity to try out some newer roofing nailers made by Senco, Makita, and Max. The timing was right because the Bostich nailer I own had gotten pretty beat. When carpenters see it they can't believe it's only four years old, but roofing work is tough on equipment. Dragging a nailer across asphalt shingles is like sanding it with 36-grit sandpaper, and that's before it falls off the roof a few times. Internal wear also shows up quickly, because the average roofer drives a heck of a lot of fasteners.

With older nailers, the only way to change the depth of drive was to fool with the pressure setting on your compressor. Roofers have to do this more often than you might think. Nails drive deeper in hot weather because the heat softens shingles. But in cold weather, shingles are stiff, so nails are harder to drive. The difference is especially noticeable when you roof over old shingles. The ability to make fine adjustments at the gun is a real plus. These newer guns have thumb wheels on their safety linkage that allow you to control depth of drive by extending or retracting the nosepiece.

All three of these nailers also come with a rubber grip and sell for between \$400 and \$470.

## Makita AN451

A roofer has a nailer in his hand all day long, so he doesn't want an ounce of excess weight. The first gun I tried was Makita's AN451, and I was really impressed by its light weight (5.1 pounds) and compact size. I also want a gun that's easy to load, because on an



The soft rubber strips on the sides of the Makita nailer do a better job of keeping it from sliding off the roof than the hard bumpers favored by some other companies.

average day I'll run through thirty 120-nail coils. With most nailers, opening or closing the magazine is a two-step process: You have to deal with both a metal door that closes over the feed mechanism and a plastic housing that covers the coil of nails. The AN451 is unique in that a single "door" closes over everything, so there are fewer parts to fool with when you reload.

Another feature I really like about the AN451 are the rubber strips set into the sides of the piston housing. They do a good job keeping the gun from sliding off the

roof when you put it down — a real convenience when you're fitting shingles around chimneys and skylights. I did an 8-pitch roof with the Makita gun and it always stayed where I put it.

The mechanical depth of drive on most guns is adjusted by turning a thumb wheel on the side of the nose. The wheel on the AN451 stands out, because it has numbered stops that allow you to reproduce earlier settings.

## Senco SCN40R

The best thing about this gun is that it doesn't need lubrication. Remembering to oil guns is a hassle, and there's always the chance you'll spill some on the roof and stain the shingles. After using the SCN40R for a while, I noticed how clean it was. Most guns have to be cleaned fairly frequently because oil gets into the feed mechanism and attracts dirt. The next thing you know the nose is caked with a black sludge-like material. This happened to both of the other nailers I tried, but not the SCN40R. Its front end remained clean and dry after weeks of use. I don't think there's any tradeoff to going oil-less, because according to Senco, the O-rings in their oil-less guns



The large tip on the Senco nailer takes a while to get used to, but the spring-loaded nail guides make it worth the trouble.



Senco SCN40R

Max CN450R

Makita AN451

last longer than those in guns you have to lubricate.

The head of a nail that goes in crooked doesn't lie flat, so the shingle may leak and is more likely to blow off in high winds. A unique guide mechanism on the nose of the SCN40R ensures nails go in straight every time. It consists of a pair of spring-loaded jaws that grip the shaft of the nail, then pop open as the head is driven by.

My only problem with the nail guide mechanism on the SCN40R is that it increases the size of the gun's tip. When I first started using it, the oversize tip made it hard to put nails where I wanted them because I couldn't tell exactly where they were going to come out. If you're not a roofer, you probably don't appreciate how important it is to drive nails in the right spot. Nails driven through a three-tab shingle should catch the edge of the shingle below; otherwise the lower shingle will blow off in a storm. The same is true with architectural shingles: If you don't catch the laminations glued to the bottom, they'll peel off and blow away. Once I got used to the gun, however, I had no trouble placing nails accurately.

The SCN40R weighs 5.2 pounds and comes with a plastic case.

### Max CN450R

Compared with the Makita and Senco nailers, the Max CN450R is a big gun (5.3 pounds) with a large piston housing. It reminded me a lot of the Bostich nailer I already own, so I wasn't surprised when I discovered that up until a few years ago, Max made guns for Bostich.

One of the most common accidents that occur with pneumatic nailers happen when a person carrying the gun by its handle with the trigger depressed bumps into something or someone, causing the nailer to fire accidentally. To solve this problem, the CN450R includes a unique built-in safety switch that allows you to lock the trigger so the gun can't be fired. Unlike the lock buttons on miter saws, the nailer trigger is normally unlocked, so you still have to remember to throw the locking switch before grabbing the tool.

Like the AN451, the CN450R has a



The Max nailer has a unique safety lock on the trigger that prevents accidental firing.

magnet mounted in its nosepiece to prevent the last nail in the coil from jamming. In some guns, the last nail tends to jam because by the time you reach it, it's no longer supported by collation to other nails in the coil. The magnet has no effect on the first 119 nails in the coil, but it holds the last one so the driver can strike it squarely.

The CN450R has a mechanical depth of drive mechanism and a small nose that makes it easy to place nails accurately. One drawback is that the gun is kind of loud compared with the Makita and Senco nailers. And from the number of times I heard the compressor kick in while using it, the Max nailer appears to draw more air.



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## Sources of Supply

### Makita USA

14930 Northam St.  
La Mirada, CA 90638  
800/462-5482

### Max Co. Ltd.

585 Commercial Ave.  
Garden City, NY 11530  
516/222-2184

### Senco Products

8485 Broadwell Rd.  
Cincinnati, OH 45244  
513/388-2000