

Heavy Hitters: 40-Pound Demolition Hammers

by Dave Crosby

Sometimes excavation and demolition require heavy impact and lots of it. Concrete or bedrock often means using a 90-pound pneumatic hammer, and after a day or two most of us remember why we don't like that tool. It's heavy, hard to maneuver, and difficult to use in any position but vertical. By the time you finish renting and hauling that 100-SCFM compressor trailer, it's plenty expensive, too. Add the inconvenience of a large, uncooperative air hose, and the result is a long, tiring day. The electric hammers in the 64- to 73-pound range are a little easier on the back, but they're still too heavy for all but vertical and highly localized uses — good at what they do, but not very versatile. So we tend to use them as a tool of last resort.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have rotary hammers and chipping hammers, but it's not hard to exceed the capacity of those tools when the going gets tough.

The Solution

If you find yourself wishing for a little more than your rotary hammer and dreading the thought of the 90-pounder, check out the Hitachi Model H65 and the Makita Model HM1500B. At about 40 pounds, these two tools are entirely maneuverable, comfortable to use, easy to transport, and they hit surprisingly hard for a light tool. Best of all, they are not by any means limited to breaking concrete. With over a dozen accessories (in standard 1¹/₈-inch hex steel), these hammers can do a lot more than you may have realized. If you don't do this type of work often, you can rent one quite reasonably (around Santa Fe they're about \$40 per day). Otherwise, you'll want to buy one.

Get to the Point

The business end of both these tools is truly versatile, and they offer far more than the chisel point and bull point. If you're breaking up concrete, those are the standard points to use, and on these lighter hammers, they're just right for punching through slabs next to houses, where a 90-pounder might do collateral damage (see Figure 1). With a dozen strategically placed 1-inch holes to control cracking, it's easy money. But you can also expand the capacity of these tools with clay spades, scaling chisels, bushing heads, asphalt cutters, ground rod drivers, pin drivers (up to 2¹/₂-inch I.D.), frost wedges, and plate tampers (Figure 2).

We shared these tools with several other contractors to get

different opinions and then worked them both out for over a year on a 4,200-square-foot total renovation that involved way too much digging in hard clay and removing old concrete. I don't know how we would have done the job otherwise — we couldn't fit a backhoe of any size into most places, and the soil was so dense that a healthy swing with a railroad pick generated little result. But with the clay spade, two people with shovels could barely keep up with one person on the



Figure 1. These lighter hammers are ideal for surgical demolition, like locating water lines that are right near the electrical service.



Figure 2. Along with the usual bull and chisel points, you can get a clay spade, a digging chisel, a tamper, and many other accessories.



Figure 3. An oil bath with a wick provides lubrication for the Hitachi and must be topped off occasionally.

hammer. The pin driver was wonderful for sinking fenceposts without any damage to the pipe, and the digging chisel (with a little help from the angle-grinder) made short work of those enormous roots that you never want to find. Before long, it was the tool of choice for digging spot footings, breaking up excavation waste into manageable size, and even gardening. Strange but true.

Although these tools are not ideally suited for mass concrete, they will do the job in a pinch. At one downtown address where there was no room for a trailer compressor, we removed over two yards of solid concrete (a miscreant barbecue and patio slab that the new homeowner wanted gone). It took about 3½ hours of hammering to get Franken-cue broken into chunks that could be shoveled up or wheelbarrowed out through the garden gate, so we were certainly at the upper limit of these tools' ability.

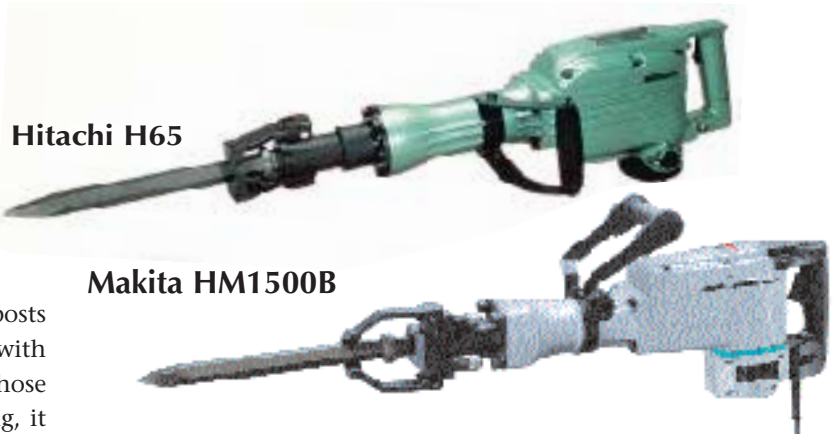
The Choice

The Hitachi Model H65 will be familiar to many builders because it is commonly available at rental yards. At 39.7 pounds with a 12.2-amp motor, it delivers 20.7 foot-pounds of impact energy. This tool has become the standard for good reason — it's reliable, well built, sturdy, and reasonably priced. It uses oil-bath lubrication supplied from a reservoir with a wick, which requires occasional topping off depending on

usage (Figure 3). The tool we reviewed developed a leak early on, which is no big deal for most work, but if you leave oil all over the barbecue patio (we did), the client might be unhappy.

Its price on the street is around \$720, a bull point is about \$20, chisels are \$24 to \$34, and the clay spade is about \$74.

The Makita Model HM1500B is substantially more expen-



sive, but it's by far the better of the two in terms of performance. At 42 pounds (with a 13.5-amp motor), it's over a pound heavier than the Hitachi, but it feels lighter. Between the surprising comfort and the noticeably greater amount of power (29.7 foot-pounds) being delivered to the work, the Makita was the clear favorite of everyone who used these tools. We ran it without mercy, often for hours at a time (until it was hot to the touch), and we never had a bit of trouble with it. Well balanced, comfortable, and more than powerful enough, it holds up to severe use and gets the job done every time. A cart is even available for storing the tool and rolling it around the site, along with extra bits.

The side handle on the Makita can be flipped so it faces toward or away from the operator, thus changing the center of balance. This is particularly useful when going from ditch work to out-of-position work. That's right — the tool is so well balanced that you can use it effectively in positions approaching horizontal.

Expect to pay about \$975 with a case, about \$24 each for the bull point and chisel point, \$85 for a clay spade, and \$99 for the cart.



TOOLBITS

DeWalt Nailbelt Redux

Shortly after the conclusion of our recent nailbelt review (*Toolbox*, 6/01), DeWalt announced its new nailbelt, available in leather and nylon. I put several samples into the field with a framing contractor and a roofing contractor to get an initial impression.

The framers liked the new belt a lot. Their only criticism was the notable absence of a sleeve for a cat's paw — an interior sleeve for a torpedo level would be nice, too. Otherwise, they thought it was well designed, comfortable, and looked like it would hold up well.

The two roofers were even more enthusiastic. Both rated the new nylon and leather belts as "excellent" and observed that the belts' increased

carrying capacity and better organization improved the quality of life for everyone on their job, especially the guys working below them.

Their favorite feature, after good organization and secure storage, was the snug fit of their 18-volt DeWalt cordless drills in the large right pouch. The price is \$130 in leather, \$110 in nylon.

Contact: DeWalt, 626 Hanover Pike, Hampstead, MD 21074; 800/433-9258; www.dewalt.com.

