New Nailer Makes Quick Work of Punchlists

by Ross Welsh

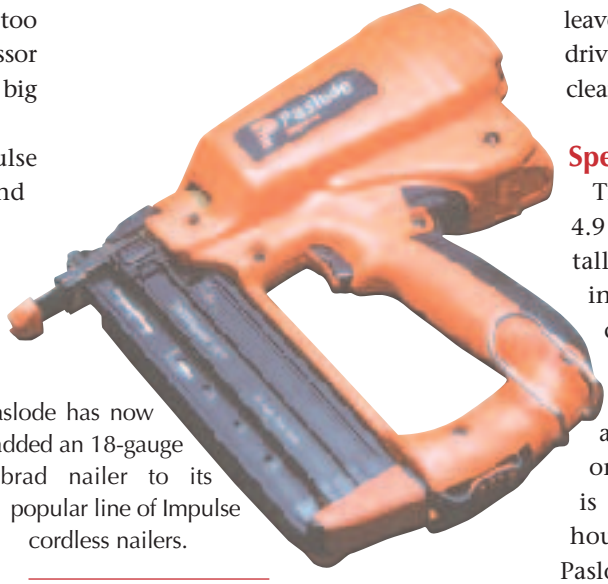
A year ago I had an opportunity to review the IM250A 16-gauge angled finish nailer (*Toolbox*, 12/00). Paslode's new IM200F brad nailer is actually a close cousin to that tool, especially in size and weight. Paslode produces various types of cordless nailers under the Impulse name. All of them use liquid hydrocarbon fuel to power a linear-drive combustion motor, eliminating the need for a compressor.

Our firm still relies on air hoses for most work because we find pneumatic tools faster, sturdier, and easier to maintain. And because we typically have three carpenters in a house all day, setting up a compressor requires relatively little effort. But we find cordless nailers very useful for pickup and service work. It's convenient to be able to grab an Impulse gun to install that missing piece of casing — and with the Impulse brad gun, that delicate piece of cabinet trim — on the spot. We also use cordless nailers when we install crown molding from ladders. Not having hoses is a real benefit when two carpenters with their ladders are moving around with long material. The Impulse nailers effectively eliminate the need for air from tasks that are too small to make setting up a compressor worthwhile and when hoses are a big inconvenience.

I had hoped that this new Impulse brad nailer would be smaller and lighter than it is, but I was not disappointed with its overall performance. Up until recently only a few brad nailers shot a fastener longer than 1 5/8 inches. This new Paslode nailer handles up to 2-inch 18-gauge brads. It's not excessively tall considering its capacity, but it is kind of thick and heavy compared to its pneumatic counterparts.

Although this brad nailer is relatively large and has a wide nosepiece, we were able to get it into all the tight spots that we typically come across. Visibility with the Impulse brad nailer is good. The depth-of-drive adjusts easily and holds its setting. The nose opens and closes easily to clear jams, but I've had no need to open it, even after shooting many thousands of brads. Two different no-mar tips are included with the nailer. One is very soft and tends to come off. The other is harder but still offers good protection of soft material and stays in place on the gun.

The soft-grip handle has a good feel, and the reach to the trigger is less of a stretch than on the angle finish nailer. This is especially important when you're working overhead and your fingers tend to roll away from the trigger. The trigger is comfortable and takes only a light squeeze. A light near the trigger alerts the user when the battery needs a charge. At the other end of the handle is a belt hook. I wish all nailers had a factory belt hook. This one is sturdy and well designed.



Paslode has now added an 18-gauge brad nailer to its popular line of Impulse cordless nailers.

Paslode's IM200F18 brad nailer is heavier and larger than a pneumatic, but then there's no hose.

Brads load easily from the side of the magazine, and you can see how many fasteners remain in the tool while you're using it. The angled finish nailer stops firing when empty to save fuel and avoid marring your work, and I wish such a lockout had been included on this gun. Because the driver blade leaves a small hole whether or not it drives in a fastener, it's not always clear if a brad is holding your work.

Specs

The new IM200F18 weighs in at 4.9 pounds and is 11 1/2 inches tall, 11 inches long, and 3 3/8 inches wide. It holds 120 standard, 18-gauge brads from 5/8 inch to 2 inches in length. Intermittent operation is rated at two to three nails per second, and continuous operation is limited to 500 fasteners per hour. A small 6-volt battery and Paslode's short fuel cell provide

power. The cell provides enough fuel to drive approximately 1,200 fasteners, and the battery will power about 4,000 fasteners.

Impulse Technology

Impulse tools have some eccentricities because of the internal combustion motor. They should be used in a well-ventilated area. When used at higher elevations, the thinner air can cause them to misfire. Paslode offers a high-altitude metering valve to provide more consistent performance at 4,000-foot-plus elevations. On very hot or very cold days, the tool may over or under drive fasteners because the compressed fuel will behave differently at different extremes of temperature. The Paslode fuel cells have a shelf life of 12 months and are marked with an expiration date on the bottom. The metering valve is shipped and stored unattached and must be firmly attached on top prior to use. I try not to store fuel very long and keep a small supply of fresh fuel on hand. My experience has shown that it's best to store fuel away from extreme temperature cycles.

Maintenance

Regular cleaning is important for this tool. The procedure is straightforward and is now covered in a free video available by mail after purchase, as well as in the instruction manual. I have found that cleaning is best done away from the job in the controlled environment of my shop. Besides a few simple tools, you will need Paslode's degreaser-cleaner, Impulse oil, and a lint-free rag. The filter on the head of the gun should be blown out or cleaned with soap and water about every fuel change, especially when working in dusty conditions.

I highly recommend using the case provided to store and transport this brad nailer. It holds the nailer, charger, an extra battery (not included), two large boxes of brads, four fuel cells, safety glasses, and Impulse oil for cleaning. The battery should be removed from the nailer when it's not in use and can be stored securely in the tool case.

Cost

The new IM200F18 is selling for under $400, and fuel cells are about $5 each. A pneumatic brad nailer can be bought for under $100, and our top-of-the-line favorite sells for about $150. When you compare pneumatic to cordless, you may see this new cordless nailer as a luxury. We afford ourselves that luxury because we are trim specialists and these tools excel at some tasks. In certain instances, it's tough to beat their convenience and speed of setup. Just this weekend I was delighted to be able to finish installing some wainscot and chair rail without dragging extra hoses and cords through the mud and rain. Impulse tools won't take the place of my pneumatics, however, which are reliable and do most of our nailing. I carry both types of nailers in my toolbox.

Ross Welsh *is a finish carpentry subcontractor in Sacramento, Calif.*

Compressor on Board

When I saw the advertisements for Porter-Cable's new BN200V12 brad nailer, I was excited to see another company offering a product to compete with Paslode's line of cordless finish nailers. Besides, the Porter-Cable ad promised a savings of at least a hundred dollars over the Paslode Impulse brad nailer. An added bonus was the elimination of the fuel canister; plus, the gun could be hooked to a compressor.

My first reaction to the tool was that it was the wackiest nailer I'd ever seen. On the back end of the housing, it has a huge bump — actually, a small compressor, which powers the tool. The compressor is a lot like the kind you keep in the trunk of the car. It's powered by Porter-Cable's standard 12-volt 2-amp-hour battery, which is included in the kit. Also included are a charger, a plastic carrying case, a small bottle of tool oil, a pair of safety glasses, a box of brads, a 1/4-inch quick coupler, two hex wrenches for maintenance, and a manual.

The BN200V12 is heavy — almost 8 pounds. Porter-Cable advertises it at 7 pounds, but that must be without the battery. For comparison, a pneumatic framing nailer is about the same weight, and Paslode's new Impulse brad nailer is 5 1/2 pounds. The nailer has a capacity of about 100 18-gauge brads. When you turn

it on, the compressor jumps to life and starts building pressure. After about ten seconds, the tool is ready to drive fasteners.

I first tested this nailer by installing a few lengths of casing. Using 1 1/4-inch brads, I fastened the thin side of the casing to the jambs. Then I went back with some 2-inch brads to fasten the thick side. Next, I made a soffit out of 1x8 pine, to box in a steel I-beam. As a torture test, I found some rough 8/4 maple in my shop and ran a magazine of 2-inch nails into it. It performed all tests without problems.

This tool has two settings. I used the normal setting for all of the trim and pine but had to use the higher setting for the maple. It also has an adjustable depth-of-drive and a quick-release nosepiece for clearing jams.

The BN200V12's portability comes at a cost. It's uncomfortably loud. The compressor runs constantly with use, and because it's close to your ears, the noise is magnified. Then there's the weight. I had to use two hands to properly place fasteners for the head casing on my doors. Even the grip kept sliding on the housing because of the weight.

This nailer could prove useful for punch-out items, like the Paslode IM200F reviewed above. But the noise and weight make it more of a burden to use. Eliminating the fuel cells and smelly exhaust of the Paslode is a step in the right direction, and the BN200V12 does cost about $100 less than an Impulse brad nailer. Porter-Cable should be applauded for its attempt at innovation. But maybe the manufacturer needs some tradespeople to take a look at its creations before it launches them.

This is Porter-Cable's second attempt at breaking into the cordless nailer arena. Its first try, the Bammer, proved to be a clunky tool and gained little acceptance, especially among professionals. The BN200V12 may fall short as well. Also, Senco unveiled its cordless brad nailer at the Home Builders' Show in February. Look for a test of the Senco tool in an upcoming issue.

—Patrick McCombe

Bosch Wormdrive Circular Saws

Although I've lived east of the Mississippi all of my life, I have always preferred a wormdrive circular saw. The extra reach of the wormdrive makes plywood crosscuts a one-step operation. The additional torque rips pressure-treated framing material with ease. But the single greatest wormdrive attribute is the unhampered visibility of the cut line. When Bosch introduced its new pair of wormdrives, I volunteered to give them a spin around the job site. I enlisted the help of several sidewinder fans to ensure balanced assessments of the two saws. The involvement of the sidewinder aficionados was especially important, because Bosch hopes to convert a few sidewinder users with the new saws.

Model 1678

Model 1677M

First Impressions

Bosch's models 1677M and 1678 are identical, with one notable exception: The 1678 uses a top handle, similar to a conventional sidewinder saw. A first look at the pair shows Bosch's typical high-quality construction. The rubber cord is long and rugged. The depth-of-cut adjusts smoothly and holds position. Bevel cuts go to 50 degrees, and there's a detent at 45. Blade changes are made easier with an arbor lock. A handy rafter hook folds out of the way when not needed. The motor and transmission housing are made of an aluminum alloy, for heat dissipation and durability. The design of the retractable lower guard prevents narrow offcuts from getting caught.

On the downside, the shoe seems a little soft. To get the maximum depth-of-cut, Bosch notched the ribs on the alloy shoe to make room for the transmission housing. This causes the shoe to flex in the center, and I think a direct hit would do some damage.

The saw comes with a high-quality, 24-tooth carbide-tipped blade. It spins at 4,400 rpm and is powered by a 15-amp motor. Bosch touts the saws as having better internal components than other comparable saws.

Real-World Workout

To give the new Bosch saws a real workout, I sent them to a builder on Cape Cod who used them for everything from cutting sheathing to making stair stringers. After that workout, I put the saws through my own series of tests. I ripped frozen pressure-treated and cut some aluminum extrusions; I made compound angles and cut plywood.

In the end, I concluded, along with my testers on Cape Cod, that this is a well-made tool. It's a little heavy compared to a sidewinder, but that's what

we expect from a wormdrive — a tool that can take abuse day in and day out. That kind of power and reliability comes at the expense of light weight and easy handling.

The motor has enough torque to cut anything. A really nice feature is the softer start, which starts the motor at a slower speed and prevents the motor torque from moving the saw. My own wormdrive requires me to line up the cut after the motor is turning, because it jumps when I pull the trigger.

The top-handle saw (model 1678) is pretty innovative. It gives sidewinder users the benefits of wormdrive in a platform more closely resembling what they're accustomed to. The excellent power and better visibility of the cut line may give sidewinder users reason to switch. On the downside for sidewinder fans is the extra weight.

Conclusions

I appreciate the power and sturdiness of the Bosch saws, but not everyone shares my enthusiasm. Other testers thought they were too heavy for everyday use. My as-tested weight is just shy of 16 pounds. For comparison, Skil's Mag 77, which is touted as the lightest wormdrive, weighs about 14 pounds, and a sidewinder weighs about 10 1/2. Sidewinder users will continue to complain about the skinny shoe on the wormdrive when making right-handed crosscuts. Sidewinders are slightly less expensive as well. Wormdrives should last longer by most accounts, but they require maintenance of the gear lubricant.

If you're in the market for a new wormdrive saw, or if you normally run a sidewinder and want mega power, these two new saws deserve a serious look. The street price runs about $200. —*P.M.*