

Senco Brad-Nailer Value Pack

by Jeremy Hess

It seems that an increasing number of products sold today are available in a “value pack,” and they’re no longer reserved for the warehouse club. Even tool manufacturers have jumped on the value-pack bandwagon, and Senco’s FP18 combo kit is a good example. For less than \$200, you get everything you need to start nailing trim, including a brad nailer, a tiny compressor, a coiled air hose, and even the air fittings and an assortment of nails. The compressor is so small that I can carry the whole kit in one hand, making it almost as portable as a cordless trim nailer.

The Brad Nailer

The 18-gauge Finish Pro18 included with the kit shoots nails from $\frac{5}{8}$ inch to 2 inches long. The gun is new to Senco’s line, but it seems well constructed and includes all of the features we’ve come to expect on a pro-duty nailer. Well-balanced and light (2.9 pounds), it has no trouble setting nails in hardwoods. And amazingly, it only misfired once during three months of testing.

The FP18 includes an adjustable depth of drive controlled by a thumbwheel on

the trigger, but it’s one of the features that need a little work. It works well in most cases, but sometimes I couldn’t set nails deep enough when using trim with an elaborate profile. The problem was most noticeable when the nosepiece was placed in the recessed areas of a molding. Fortunately this was only a minor inconvenience, and was easily resolved by paying attention to how and where I positioned the nosepiece. Loading and switching nails is easy, and the 110-nail magazine includes an indicator to tell you when you’re getting low on fasteners. However, it doesn’t have a lockout to prevent dry-firing.

The FP18 includes a plastic belt hook on the left side of the gun; you can switch to the other side if you’re left-handed. Unfortunately, with an air hose attached, it doesn’t hold the gun as securely as I’d like.

The Compressor

The tiny 1-hp 1-gallon compressor is definitely the most unique aspect of the kit. It weighs a mere 20 pounds, which makes it the lightest compressor

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The FP18 value pack includes a reliable 18-gauge brad nailer with adjustable depth of drive and a tiny 20-pound compressor to run it. It even includes the air fittings, a coil hose, and an assortment of nails — everything you need to start running trim in one box. You can get the whole thing for about \$200.



The heart of the kit is the PC1010, a tiny 1-gallon compressor. It delivers .6 SCFM at 100 psi, plenty of air to run the brad nailer, but using it with your 15- or 16-gauge finish nailer might leave you waiting for the pump to build pressure. Despite its small size, it uses standard components, including the gauges, the regulator, and the pressure switch, so finding replacement parts shouldn’t be difficult.

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I've ever used. Despite its small size, it works fine for a brad nailer, holding enough air to shoot about 12 nails before recharging. The downside to this portability is a small pump, which translates into longer charging times. When filling up from empty, it took just over two minutes to reach its maximum 150 psi, and 35 seconds to fill from 90 psi. The compressor is very quiet, however; you can keep it in the room where you're working without it

being too obnoxious. Other carpenters often asked me how big a nailer this compressor could power. The answer is it depends on what you're doing. When hooked it up to my 16-gauge finish gun, it fires about six nails before it starts recharging, so it's not going to keep up with a fast-moving carpenter installing trim. But I'm sure you could connect the same 16-gauge finish nailer and use it for punch lists or installing a prehung door or two.

The Verdict

For punch lists, installing base shoe, and other similar small jobs, I really appreciate not having to drag my 80-pound compressor through someone's house. At \$199, I also think this kit is a good value. After using it for several months, I decided to buy it.

Jeremy Hess is a carpenter with D.E.R. Construction in Bainbridge, Pa.

Hilti PD30 Laser Measuring Device

by Dave Haines

Hilti recently released a new compact laser measuring device, the PD30. I've had the opportunity to try one for several months, and I think it's a great addition to the company's line of laser measuring tools. The PD30's most noteworthy feature is that it's about half the size of other Hilti models. It measures 4³/₄ inches long, 2¹/₂ inches wide, and 1¹/₈ inches thick; it weighs about half a pound.

Operation

The user interface is new and easier compared with the other Hilti laser measuring devices. The big button in the middle turns on the device and starts measuring with a second push. All you do is push the button, hold the unit against one wall, and aim the laser at another wall (or other target). With another push of the button, you have the room's length or width. If you want to use it like a measuring tape, just hold the main button in for a few seconds and the tool goes into tracking mode. In tracking mode, you can aim the laser at a target and watch the measurement change as you move the tool closer or farther away from the target.

By using the + or - buttons you can add or subtract from any measurements stored in memory. After measuring a room width, for example, you can subtract the distance to a door to determine the door's location along the wall. The screen always shows the last three measurements together with the current measurement, which is helpful if you're recording dimensions on a sketch pad.

Features

Like other laser measuring devices, the tool has built-in functions for common types of measurements. If



Hilti's PD30 is about half the size of most laser measuring devices, making it easy to keep it in your pocket or toolbelt. The easy-to-use device has common geometric functions built in and includes a display that shows the last three measurements.

you want to record a room's cubic volume for hvac calculations, simply push the "cube" icon button, and measure the length, width, and height. When you've finished measuring, the tool will automatically display the total volume. You can also take measurements in yards, which is handy for estimating concrete. The "rectangle" button works similarly. Press the button, then measure length and width; the unit will show square footage.

Besides measuring in feet and yards to the nearest 1/8 or 1/16 of an inch, the unit can also take measurements in meters, millimeters, and decimal inches, feet, and yards. There's also a "fold-out spike" for getting into a tight spot or for

hooking over the end of a wall. When the spike is out, the tool automatically compensates for the added length. Plus, the device has a built-in spirit level to make measurements more accurate.

No Two-Point Function

The one thing the PD30 lacks is the Pythagorean function, which allows you to determine a measurement by doing indirect two- or three-point measurements. For example, other laser measuring tools allow you to determine distances when an obstacle prevents direct line-of-sight measurements. After prompting you to take the measurements, such tools will perform the calculations for you. If you need to make these kinds of measurements regularly, you'll probably want a tool with this function built in.

Maximum Range

The PD30's maximum range depends on the target material. Against drywall, it's 210 feet; against less reflective materials like concrete or brick, it's 150 feet. According to the manufacturer, the PD30 can take up to 10,000 measurements on a pair of AA batteries.

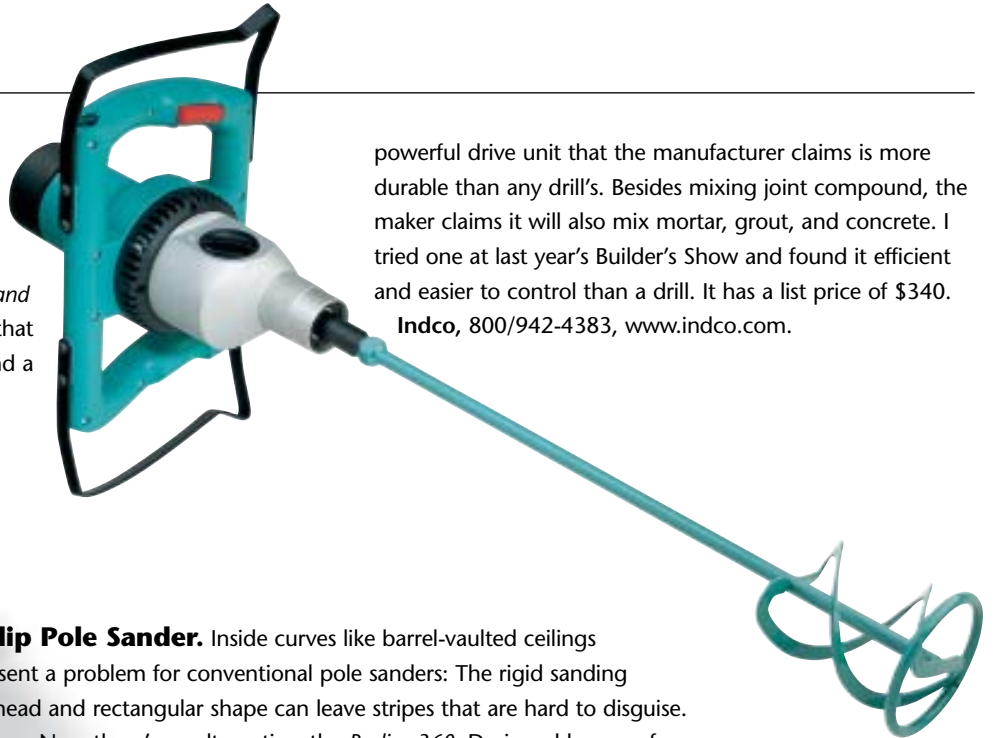
The Verdict

Even without the Pythagorean function, I like the PD30. It's small enough to fit into a shirt pocket and it's easy enough for anyone to start using right out of the box. It sells for about \$350.

Dave Haines did a complete test of laser measuring tools in the April 2004 issue of JLC. He's the owner of Haines Contracting in Doylestown, Pa.

DRYWALL TOOLS

Mud Mixer. Mixing mud with a heavy-duty electric drill works fine, but it's not exactly the right tool for the job. If you're looking for a better machine, you might try the *CX-20 Hand Mixer*. The tool has ergonomic grips that maintain an upright body position and a



powerful drive unit that the manufacturer claims is more durable than any drill's. Besides mixing joint compound, the maker claims it will also mix mortar, grout, and concrete. I tried one at last year's Builder's Show and found it efficient and easier to control than a drill. It has a list price of \$340.

Indco, 800/942-4383, www.indco.com.

No-Flip Pole Sander. Inside curves like barrel-vaulted ceilings present a problem for conventional pole sanders: The rigid sanding head and rectangular shape can leave stripes that are hard to disguise. Now there's an alternative: the *Radius 360*. Designed by a professional finisher, it has a round sanding head with a replaceable foam backing pad, which means the sanding head can better match irregular and curved surfaces. But perhaps the greatest benefit, according to the manufacturer, is that it won't flip or roll over when you change sanding direction — even when it's attached to a 20-foot pole. The sander uses 8³/₄-inch hook-and-loop sanding discs and sells for \$35.

Full Circle International, 888/284-7716, www.fullcircleinternational.com.



Track Bender. Barrel vaults, curved walls, and domed ceilings all require curved framing members. While you can cut the curves out of plywood or OSB, the process is slow and presents a problem when fire-proof materials are required. An alternative is subbing the work to a metal-fabricating shop, but you might need some extra time in the construction schedule. If you find yourself doing a lot of this work, you might consider the *Track Bender*. The portable tool takes to the curves by crimping standard C-shaped 20- or 25-gauge track and studs right on the job. Using 3⁵/₈-inch 25-gauge track, it can make inside radii from 22 inches and outside radii to 320 feet. Prices start at about \$4,000.

Radius Track Corporation, 888/872-3487, www.radiustrack.com.



DRYWALL TOOLS

Rock Ripper. Cutting narrow strips of drywall using a knife and tape takes time to master, and if you don't get it right, the wavy cut will make hanging and finishing more difficult. If you're looking for another method, you might try the *Speed Rocker*. The retractable utility knife holds the hook of your tape, so you can pay more attention to keeping your fingers safe and guiding the cut. The multipurpose tool also includes a folding keyhole saw and a rasp on the handle. It sells for \$22.

CH Hanson, 800/827-3398, www.chhanson.com.



Mud Shooter. If your company does its own drywall finishing, you might give serious thought to getting one of these good-looking and effective taping tools. The *Pneumatic Paper Taper* from Apla-Tech uses air power to dispense the compound, so there's less drag compared with cable-driven taping machines. The amount of compound applied to the tape is adjustable, and it works with flat seams, inside corners, and off-angle seams. It's available with 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-foot tubes, allowing users to fit inside closets and reach 10-foot ceilings without a ladder. The manufacturer claims the tool will run off of any 3/4-hp or larger compressor. It sells for about \$1,300.

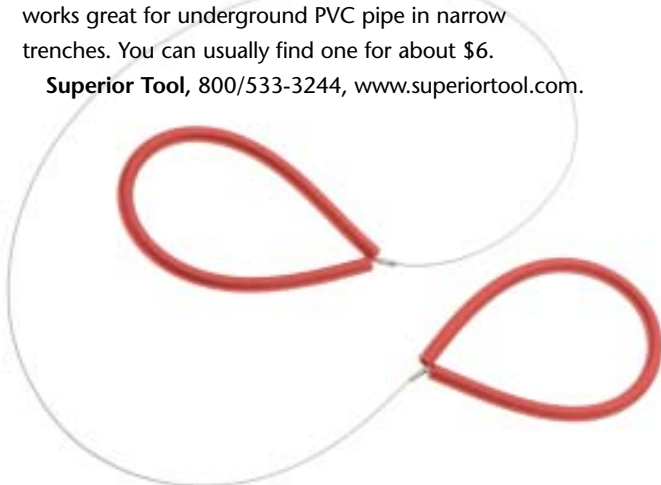
Apla-Tech, 800/827-3721, www.apla-tech.com.



PLUMBING TOOLS

Low-Tech Pipe Cutter. Bath and kitchen remodels frequently require tapping into the DWV lines for a new drain or vent. Unfortunately, there's not always a lot of room for a recip saw or hacksaw in many stud and joist cavities. However, *Cable Saws* like this one from Superior can fit in the tightest spaces possible. It also works great for underground PVC pipe in narrow trenches. You can usually find one for about \$6.

Superior Tool, 800/533-3244, www.superiortool.com.



Good Grip. Unless you're a plumber, it's tough to get excited about pipe wrenches, but the Vise-Grip's quick-adjusting *Pipe Wrench* could be the notable exception. The aluminum-bodied tool fits better in tight spaces and weighs 40% less than comparable iron wrenches. In addition, you can adjust it with one hand instead of two. It works with pipe up to 1 1/2 inches in diameter and sells for \$30.

Irwin, 800/464-7946, www.irwin.com.



PLUMBING TOOLS

Pedestal Sink Wrench. Removing the tailpiece or trap on a pedestal lavatory can be a tough job. Many times, the pedestal base prevents swinging a wrench or getting a sufficient grip with a pair of channel locks. Here's a specialty tool that makes it easier. The *Pedestal Sink Wrench* from Superior has a stubby handle with an offset that makes it easier to remove 6-, 8-, and 12-sided nuts on trap assemblies. It's offered in both 1¹/₄- and 1¹/₂-inch sizes and sells for about \$9.

Superior Tool, 800/533-3244, www.superiortool.com.



Copper Cutter. If you're looking for a new or better way to cut copper tubing or EMT, you might want to take one of the new Lenox *Tubing Cutters* for a spin. The new cutters improve upon just about every aspect of this handy tool, starting with the comfortable rounded housing that doesn't pinch your fingers. The mechanism that adjusts the cutting wheel is fast and smooth acting; even the slide-out reaming tool works better than most. But the best feature is the spare cutting wheel mounted on the handle — brilliant.

Lenox, 800/628-3030, www.lenoxsaw.com.



No-Sweat Crimper. Don't be surprised if your plumber shows up with one of these amazing tools sometime soon. The 320-E is Ridgid's new 14.4-volt cordless crimping tool, designed for its ProPress copper-crimping system. The tool squeezes gasketed copper fittings around conventional K-, L-, and M-copper tubing. The crimps take seconds, and the system eliminates the risk of fire associated with sweat connections. The system includes more than 240 different fittings from 1/2 to 4 inches in diameter. According to the manufacturer, plumbers using the system are reducing their labor costs by 50%. The downside: The fittings cost three times that of conventional sweat fittings, so don't expect any big changes in your estimates. I found it on the web for about \$2,100, which includes three sets of jaws for 1/2-, 3/4-, and 1-inch tubing.

Ridgid, 800/769-7743, www.ridgid.com.

