

Toolbox

Hitachi NR90AE Round-Head Framing Nailer

by Tim Uhler

Early this year, Hitachi introduced a new round-head framing nailer, the NR90AE.

As soon as the gun came out, *JLC* sent me one so I could test it. I was immediately struck by its distinctive styling — it looks like something out of a Spiderman comic book. I was eager to see if its performance was equally distinctive. I especially wanted to know how the new gun compared with other nailers, like Hitachi's earlier NR83A, which has been around forever and is — according to our repair guy — nearly bulletproof.

Features

The NR90AE drives fasteners of up to .148 inch in diameter, which is convenient if you work in a wind or seismic zone where fasteners of that size are required.

Like most framing nailers, the gun has a tool-free adjustable depth-of-drive mechanism, in this case a thumb-wheel near the trigger. Above the trigger, a switch allows the user to go back and forth between bump and sequential firing modes.



Hitachi NR90AE Specs

Weight (with air fitting): 7.6 pounds

Size (H x L): 12¹¹/₁₆" x 18³/₁₆"

Nail type: round-head; 21-degree; plastic collated

Nail length: 2" to 3¹/₂"

Nail diameter: .113" to .148"

Capacity: 64 .131" nails

Street price: \$320

Courtesy Hitachi

Hitachi
800/706-7337
www.hitachipowertools.com

Unlike some other guns, the NR90AE does not have an adjustable exhaust cap, a rafter hook, a swivel air fitting, or a built-in air filter. Of all those features, the only one I really missed was the rafter hook. The fact is, though, few manufacturers include one on their framing nailers.

Performance

Aside from its appearance, the most unusual thing about the NR90AE is how light it is.

We weighed it empty with an air fitting and it was only 7.6 pounds. Since the average round-head framing nailer weighs about 8.25 pounds, the difference is quite noticeable.

The gun has plenty of power — enough to drive nails flush in LVLs and other dense engineered materials.

On the downside, the NR90AE doesn't absorb the blow — or recoil — very well. I think this is because it's so light. Although we didn't experience an excessive amount of recoil, we could definitely feel the difference between it and the heavier NR83A. The recoil made the new nailer a bit less comfortable to use, but not enough to affect my buying decision.

Because the NR90AE is so compact, it's easy to maneuver in tight spaces. I like its rubber grip, too; it's "grippy" and didn't slip in my hand even when rain was falling and the tool was wet.

Normally I would gripe about a rear-loading magazine, but with this gun it worked so flawlessly I can't complain.

Verdict

I enjoyed using this gun. It's light, powerful, and very well-balanced. I'm not the

only one who felt this way — the other four framers in my company who used it also liked it.

However, there is one thing about this tool that bothers me: It didn't feel that solid. I doubt it would last very long if we used it as roughly as we use our other guns. For example, we sometimes use our guns as "hammers" to nudge framing over when it's slightly off the layout mark. We've done this for years with an NR83A, but doing it with the NR90AE didn't feel right.

That said, I think it would be a fine gun for a carpenter who doesn't frame every single day and doesn't beat on tools the way we do.

Tim Uhler is a lead framer and exterior trim carpenter for Pioneer Builders in Port Orchard, Wash.

Toolbox | Roofing Tools | by Patrick McCombe

Top Gizmos. Roof Mates offers some great tools for roofers. The *Gable Master* (\$300) provides a level platform for ladders and staging on sloping roofs with pitches from 3/12 to 18/12. Ladders can be placed in the device in a variety of positions; the square box in the center accommodates pump-jack poles. The aluminum *Shingle Sled* (\$99) holds an entire bundle of shingles and includes a PVC skid plate so that it can be dragged over new shingles without damaging them. And the *Pole Bracket* (\$69) makes it possible to set a ladder up against a pump-jack pole; thanks to integral rollers, the ladder can be adjusted up and down without moving the staging plank.

Roof Mates, 866/766-3628, www.roofmates.com. **Circle #17**



Spare a Shingle.

Replacing old shingles is tough. If you bend the tabs on the overlapping shingle too far when you drive in new nails, the shingle breaks. This common problem inspired the design of the steel *Roof Snake*, which holds the roofing nail so that you can insert it under the overlapping shingle with minimal bending. Once the nail is in position, you strike the arched portion of the handle with your hammer. The tool sells for \$25.

PacTool, 800/297-7487, www.pactool.us. **Circle #18**

Higher Power. Tired of picking up nail-riddled old shingles at the end of roofing jobs? Consider getting a *Roofers Buggy*. The cargo box on the self-propelled dump trailer rises 11 feet in the air and extends beyond the truck's rear wheels to clear foundation plantings and basement access doors. Its doors can funnel up to 4 cubic yards of waste or 12 squares of roofing into the dump box. With a price tag of nearly \$30,000, the trailer isn't cheap, but it might allow you to fire your bleary-eyed helper. Wouldn't that feel good?

Roofers Buggy, 866/332-8449, www.roofersbuggy.com. **Circle #19**



Toolbox | Truck Racks & Boxes

Load Management. Spending a lot of time securing ladders and material to your truck rack probably isn't what you want to be doing at the end of a long day. One of the best ways I've seen to speed the process of tying down a load is by using *TieHooks*. These handy contraptions contain sliding cleats that allow you to quickly and safely tie off any reasonably sized rope and then pull it really tight. A short video on the company's Web site demonstrates. Expect to pay about \$80 for a pair of TieHooks plus a length of looped-end rope.

TieHook, 415/462-0599, www.tiehook.com. **Circle #20**



Back Support. Most truck-bed covers are strictly for show, but DiamondBack's *Commercial Series* product is a notable exception. Made from 1/8-inch-thick aluminum diamond plate, the three-piece cover supports up to 1,600 pounds and boasts stainless-steel external hardware, zinc-plated internal hardware, compression gaskets, and center-panel water channels. Alone, it costs \$1,500; with a matching ladder rack and window guard, it costs \$2,800.

DiamondBack, 800/935-4002, www.diamondbackpro.com. **Circle #21**



Hard Body. With its optional alarm, compartment lighting, and remote-controlled locking system, Reading's new *Classic II* may be the safest place for your tools. The good-looking service body also features hidden compartment hinges, EPDM gaskets, adjustable prop brackets, and enough bed space to transport 4x8 panels lying flat. Prices start at just under \$6,000 for the body only.

Reading Truck Body, 800/458-2226, www.readingbody.com. **Circle #22**