Toolbox

Bostitch MCN150 Strapshot

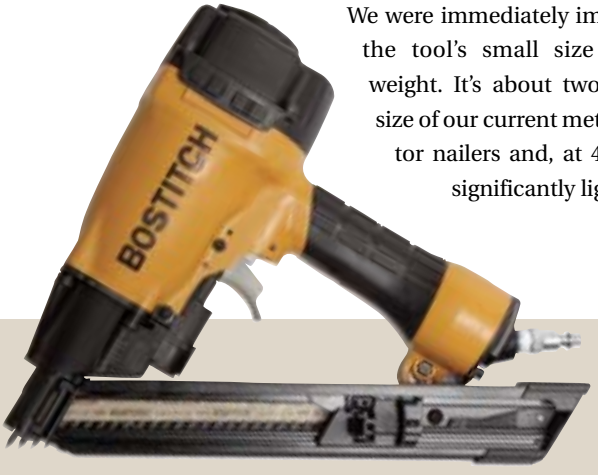
by Jeff Bailey

We're a general contracting company that specializes in earthquake retrofitting, so we install an incredible number of framing anchors, angle clips, ties, and straps — often in very tight confines. These connectors seem to harbor an endless number of holes, all of which must be filled with nails to achieve the manufacturer's listed capacity.

To avoid driving all those fasteners by hand, we use several positive-placement nailers, some from Paslode and some from Hitachi. They make it much easier to nail off hardware — but when space gets tight, which it often does beneath the house, we have to switch to palm nailers or, even worse, actual hammers. Both tools slow work down considerably.

A Light Compact Gun

Then, last year, another option turned up: Bostitch's new metal-connector nailer, the MCN150 Strapshot, which we tested for *JLC* during the summer months. We were immediately impressed by the tool's small size and light weight. It's about two-thirds the size of our current metal-connector nailers and, at 4.6 pounds, significantly lighter.



Bostitch MCN150 Specs

Height: 10.5 inches
Length: 11.5 inches
Weight: 4.6 pounds
Driving power: 450 inch-pounds
Magazine capacity: 29 nails
Nail size: 1½ inches by .131 to .148 inch

Bostitch
800/556-6696
www.bostitch.com

We tested the MCN150 by cycling it from van to van for several months so that each carpenter in the company could get a chance to use it. Our nail guns take a real beating, and we didn't go easy on this one. We dragged it through dirt and cobwebs in many different crawlspaces and used it to drive a lot of nails — usually into old, dry wood that was very hard.

After all that abuse, pretty much everybody agreed that the tool was comfortable to use and well-balanced. Aligning the shot is easy because the nail that's about to be driven sticks out of the end of the gun; all you have to do is put the tip of the nail in the hole.

Perhaps best of all, the Strapshot — thanks to its small size — made our use of palm nailers and hammers much less frequent.

Right Power for Short Nails

The reason the MCN150 can be so small and light is that it drives only 1½-inch nails — a job it does very well. Our other positive-placement guns take the same type of fasteners as the Bostitch but also accept 2½-inch nails, which is partly why those guns are bigger and heavier.

Although being restricted to driving shorter fasteners could be a problem for some carpenters, it isn't one for us: Ninety-five percent of the nails we use to fasten

hardware are 1½ inches long.

I've heard that Bostitch plans to introduce a second, more powerful version of the gun this summer. It will be called the MCN250 and is supposed to be able to drive both 1½-inch and 2½-inch nails.

A Short Magazine

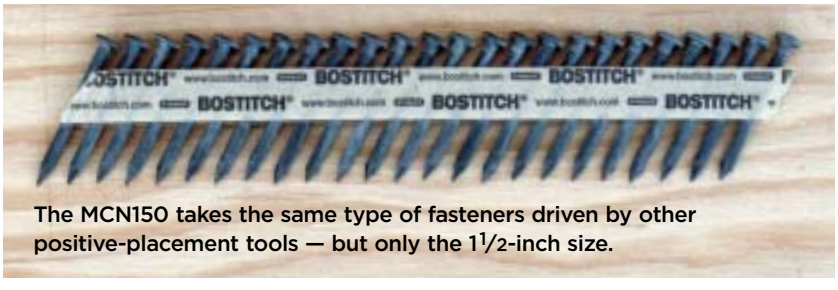
The only downside to the MCN150's compact design is that the magazine is short, too. Instead of holding the usual two strips of nails (24 nails each), it holds just one. However, this didn't bother us much, because even with full-size hardware guns we often load only one strip of fasteners. We have problems with jamming when we load more. Jamming is a common headache for us, probably because of all the dirt that gets into the magazines — an unavoidable predicament when you work in low, dirt-floored crawlspaces.

We were hoping that the MCN150 would be immune to this problem, and at first it was, especially when we used Bostitch nails. But eventually we experienced some of the same jamming that we did with our other guns. Apparently the contact element was not "detecting" the metal connector, so it would refuse to fire — a built-in safety feature that worked as designed. When this happens with our other hardware nailers, we can usually fix it by quickly pulling back and releasing the pusher, a method that works with the MCN150 as well.

Given how much cleaner a framing site is than a crawlspace, I doubt any framer would have trouble with the Bostitch gun.

The Bostitch gun is significantly smaller than earlier positive-placement tools from Paslode (top) and Hitachi (center).

Since the nail that's about to be driven hangs out of the gun, aligning the shot is easy: You simply put the tip of the nail into the hole in the hardware.



The MCN150 takes the same type of fasteners driven by other positive-placement tools — but only the 1½-inch size.

Bottom Line

Because it's so much lighter and easier to use in cramped quarters than a full-size gun, the MCN150 would be a good fit for any carpenter who needs a positive-placement tool and can get by with one that drives only 1½-inch nails.

It would not be a good choice for someone who drives a lot of 2½-inch fasteners into hardware, obviously — but if you drive only the occasional 2½-inch nail, consider pairing this gun with a palm nailer and using the palm nailer on those rare occasions when you need to drive something long.

***Jeff Bailey** is operations manager and co-owner of Bay Area Retrofit Inc., in Berkeley, Calif.*

JacPac CO_2 Portable Power System

by Aaron Telian

As a handyman and finish carpenter specializing in small jobs, I struggle with a recurring dilemma: whether or not to bring the compressor, hoses, and nail guns to simple jobs like hanging a prehung door or installing a few pieces of trim. I usually do decide to haul it all to the site, because the additional hassle and setup is offset by improved quality and faster completion.

Still, carrying and setting up the stuff is a pain. So when the JacPac (Supplierpipeline, 800/567-0864, www.supplierpipeline.com) came on the market, it struck me as a great way to minimize the hassles of using nail guns for small jobs.

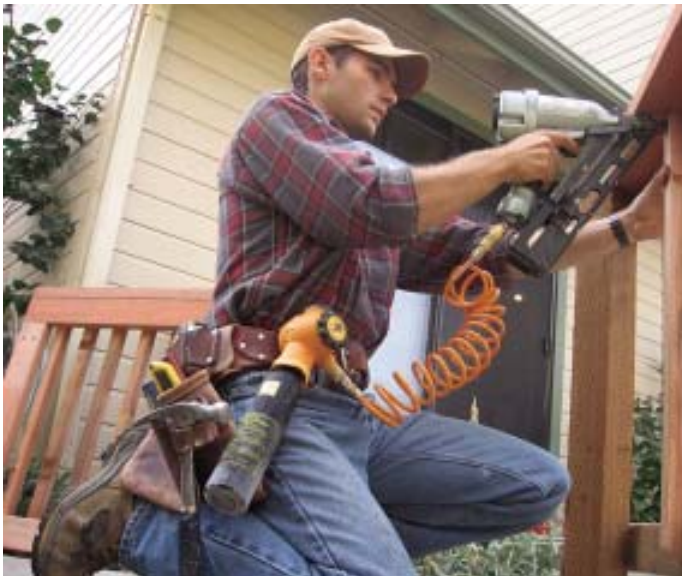
The JacPac is a small aluminum bottle — with a rather conventional-looking air regulator — that holds about 3 pounds of CO_2. The manufacturer claims that you can use it in place of a compressor as the air supply for just about any pneumatic nailer. Since the whole setup is very small and light, you can hang it off your belt and go right to work.

The prospect of carrying nothing but a little bottle to knock out a small job was extremely appealing. That I could use the product with my existing inventory of nail guns and fasteners was the icing on the cake. I decided to give it a try.

Perhaps because the JacPac is such a new product, I was given a bit of a run-around when I tried to order one, but ultimately I received good service from Workshop Supply (519/475-4947). The tool shipped fast, and the company included a few extras like a notepad and a complimentary copy of *Canadian Woodworker* (the JacPac is a Canadian product).

JacPac Performance

Tool	Fastener Length	Number of Shots
18-gauge brad nailer	1 inch	125
15-gauge finish nailer	2 inches	75
framing nailer	8d (2 3/8 inches)	59
roofing nailer	1 1/4 inches	33



The Kit

The JacPac kit contains a 10-ounce CO_2 cylinder, a regulator, a coil hose, and safety glasses. Everything is packed in a small blow-molded case.

The regulator includes a plastic clip, so you can hang it from your toolbelt. Although the clip is functional — it easily grabbed my heavy-duty Occidental toolbelt — it felt a little flimsy; I got the impression it might eventually break.

Operation

Before using the JacPac, you have to get the cylinder filled at a paintball shop, a sports shop, or an industrial gas supplier equipped to sell small quantities of CO_2. I filled mine for $3 plus tax at a local hunting outfitter that sells paintball guns and supplies. (If you live in a rural area, make sure there's a local CO_2 supplier before ordering a JacPac.)

With small guns, the little tank functions much the same as any other air supply; it's hard to tell you're not on a compressor. But with larger, air-guzzling guns — like roofing or framing nailers — you may have to wait a few

Shooting small fasteners rapidly or using a framing, siding, or roofing nailer can cause the tool's aluminum tank to frost, slowing air delivery.

seconds between shots to allow the tank to rebuild pressure. Also, when the tank is discharged quickly — either because of rapid firing or because the gun you're using demands a lot of air — the tank gets extremely cold and frosts up dramatically on the outside. I've seen the same phenomenon with some aerosol products, but it's more severe with the JacPac.

Before heading out into the field, I wanted to see just how many fasteners I could shoot, so I tested all my commonly used guns, using a fresh tank of gas for each trial. The results are shown in the chart on page 136.

The Verdict

Admittedly, I was hoping to get more shots per tank than I did — but it's hard to complain when, at about $120, the tool is priced so reasonably.

Certainly its limited capacity makes the JacPac unsuitable for production work. But for small jobs and punch-list-type work, it can be very handy. And as the technology improves and the industry catches on, it wouldn't surprise me if someday you could get the CO_2 tank filled at your local lumberyard, which would make this product even more convenient.

One suggestion: When you're using the JacPac, add a hook to your toolbelt for the gun. Otherwise you'll waste air disconnecting and reconnecting it.

Aaron Telian *is a carpenter for Telian and Sons in Oakhurst, Calif.*

Straw Shooter.

Spreading straw mulch on a large building site to prevent erosion or to protect grass seed can be a slow and mind-numbing process. If you rent a straw-blower, though, you could have the whole site covered in an hour or two. Finn's *B70* can spread between 6 and 7 tons of straw per hour, shooting it as far as 60 feet. The chute rotates 360 degrees and provides 70 degrees of vertical travel. Prices vary with location, but I'm told you can rent a B70 for about $150 per day. A smaller machine, the B40, rents for about $100 per day.

Finn, 800/543-7166, www.finncorp.com. **Circle #13**

Puncture-Wound Prevention.

Let's hope it doesn't take a call from a past client saying one of his or her kids just stepped on a nail for you to see the value of the *Magna-Rake.* This well-made magnetic pick-up tool sports a flat side for cleaning smooth surfaces like asphalt and concrete and a toothed side for sifting through dirt, grass, and mulch. I found it on the Web for $30.

Magna-Rake, 800/820-8785, www.magna-rake.com. **Circle #14**

Light-Footed Loader.

Do you often find yourself dealing with boggy job-site conditions that stymie rubber-tired equipment? If so, take a look at this cool little loader from ASV. The *SR-80's* 20-inch tracks exert slightly more than 3 psi of ground pressure, allowing it to float over obstacles and wet conditions without getting stuck. Powered by an 80-hp turbo diesel engine, it boasts a 3,100-pound operating capacity. Attachments include a power auger, a grapple, a brush-cutter, pallet forks, and buckets and blades. Prices start at $47,500.

ASV, 800/346-5954, asvi.com. **Circle #15**

Powder Placer.

Spreading the powdered dye and hardener used with concrete can create quite a mess — on your hands, your clothes, even your customer's landscaping. That's why contractor Brian Bettencourt invented the *Color Spreader.* The 18 1/4-inch aluminum-framed, steel-meshed sifter lays down a 14-inch path of dye with every pass, and does so with greater consistency than hand-spreading, Bettencourt says. It attaches to standard screw-in or plug-in poles and sells for $125.

Innovative Tool Design, 209/522-7334, www.freewebs.com/thecolorspreader. **Circle #16**

Dust Mask.

Tuck-pointing, grinding, and cutting concrete and masonry can generate clouds of dust. In addition to being messy, these airborne particles pose a health hazard. The *Dust Muzzle,* available for most handheld grinders, is a great solution. When connected to a "dustless" vacuum, the plastic shroud can reduce airborne particles by 95 percent, the manufacturer says. The company makes similar products for worm-drive and cutoff saws, die grinders, and dual-action sanders. Prices start at around $28.

Dust Collection Products, 800/568-3949, www.dustmuzzle.com. **Circle #17**

Slick Tube Form.

Cardboard tube forms have always struck me as wasteful and overpriced, but what's the alternative? Here's one: *Straight-Sided* and *Tapered Column Forms* from Superchute. The reusable polyethylene forms can be made to virtually any length and diameter. Aluminum clasps and hex bolts join the edges, making the tubes easy to strip and flatten for storage. Twelve-inch forms sell for about $50 per foot; 24-inch forms for $110 per foot.

Superchute, 800/363-2488, www.superchute.com. **Circle #18**