

Weigh In!

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EDITED BY BRUCE GREENLAW



DeWalt Dual-Speed Cordless Framing Nailer

BY JOHN SPIER

My crew and I tested a bunch of cordless framing nailers for a 2007 issue of *Fine Homebuilding*. Like their current counterparts, the nailers used an internal combustion engine powered by a disposable fuel cell and a rechargeable battery to drive collated round-head or clipped-head nails up to 3 ¼ or 3 ½ inches long. We learned that the tools weren't powerful enough to consistently sink 3 ¼-inch nails into framing lumber or ring-shank nails into our sheathing and shear walls, which ruled them out for serious framing.

The cordless convenience seemed to be ideal for small jobs such as installing blocking or adding soffits, closets, and window openings. But after keeping a cordless nailer on the truck for a while, I gave it away because almost every time I needed it, the fuel

cell was empty or its nickel cadmium battery was dead.

Gas-powered nailers have incrementally improved since then, but they still use fuel cells. When DeWalt recently introduced the first gas-free cordless framing nailers, I jumped at the chance to try one out for *JLC*. DeWalt launched the single-speed DCN690 first, and that model is already being replaced by the more efficient dual-speed DCN692. After running quite a few boxes of nails through a DCN692 over the past few months, I think it nicely complements our pneumatic coil framing nailers.

FLYWHEEL POWER

Powered by DeWalt's 20V Max 4-amp-hour battery, the DCN692 has a brushless motor, drives paper-tape clipped-head and off-

set round-head nails from 2 to 3 ½ inches long, is supposed to sink up to 700 nails per charge, and has dry-fire lockout. Unlike its gas-powered rivals, the DeWalt nailer can bump-fire in addition to firing in a sequential mode.

The rotor of the brushless motor doubles as a flywheel, propelling the driver blade to sink each nail. Several cordless finish nailers substitute flywheel power for internal combustion, but the DCN690 and DCN692 are the first framing nailers to do so.

The dual speeds of the DCN692 let you choose the best flywheel speed for the job. Speed 1 is tuned for driving 2-inch to 3-inch nails, and it accelerates the bump-firing of these fasteners while extending the battery runtime. Longer fasteners are driven at speed 2. Unlike compressed air, which delivers in-



Unlike the fuel-cell-powered competition, the DCN692 can switch from sequential- to bump-firing.



Two speed settings allow you to select the best flywheel speed for driving fasteners.

stant power, the flywheel goes from 0 rpm to firing speed in 0.5 to 0.7 seconds.

ON SITE

The DCN692 weighs 9.1 pounds with the battery installed, while the gas-powered models all weigh less than 8 pounds. Despite the extra weight, the DeWalt is comfortable, well-balanced, and easy to use. It's 13 3/4 inches tall, which helps when nailing in tight spaces, and has an aggressive nose for easy toenailing. You can change the mode from sequential to bump action at the flip of a switch, and the gun hasn't double-fired even in bump mode. It has a stall-release lever that's supposed to help reset the driver blade if the blade fails to return to the firing position after driving a nail, but I can't comment on it because the tool has yet to stall. I like the belt/rafter hook, which rotates to accommodate lefties or righties and parks beneath the handle when you don't need it. And of course there is no burning-fuel smell, which some crew members really appreciate.

But like the gas-fired models I've tried, the DeWalt just doesn't have enough power to sink our spikes consistently. Working in a coastal environment with high-wind codes, I exclusively use galvanized round-head framing nails. If I'm deliberate, the tool will dependably drive our 3 1/4 inch nails all the way into green Douglas fir or kiln-dried spruce. But it leaves some of the nails proud when firing into seasoned wood, engineered lumber, and much of the other material we work with.

I did learn two techniques that help. First, I wait until the flywheel is spinning at full speed before firing. The gun won't fire until the flywheel is almost up to speed anyway, but you gain a power boost by pausing for that extra moment. Second, I push hard on the gun to minimize power loss to the recoil. The instruction manual says you need to allow some recoil, but if you allow too much, the gun won't set spikes at all. Unfortunately, my first technique slows me down, and the second tires me out. Speed 1 delivers enough power to sink our 2 3/4-inch ring-shank sheathing nails, but our pneumatic nailers are much faster for nailing off sheathing and subfloors because we don't have to wait for the flywheel.

I also have a few quibbles. To clear the occasional jam, you have to use an attached Allen wrench to unscrew two captive bolts and swing the magazine clear. Even then, you sometimes still need pliers or a bent nail to clear the jam.

The battery allowed me to do interior framing for about half a day per charge and has a built-in fuel gauge with three lights. The gauge isn't intuitive and the manual doesn't explain it. It turns out that when the battery has drained until just one light is lit, only 15% to 1% of the charge remains, which is good to know. The kit includes only one battery. That wouldn't be an issue if I had a fleet of DeWalt 20V Max tools and batteries—but I don't.

Also, the tool has a plastic magazine and housing. DeWalt says it has drop-tested it from two meters onto concrete with no damage done. Still, I wouldn't use it to thump things into position as I do with my alloy-bodied pneumatic guns.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The DCN692 lacks the speed and power for full-time framing, but it has been a great tool to have on the truck for those small projects where setting up a compressor and hoses is inconvenient. The kit I tried, which includes a roomy case, costs about \$100 more than the best gas-powered one. But the nailer eliminates the expense and hassle of using fuel cells and is a much better option for occasional use. The bare tool (DCN692B) is also available.

DCN692M1 Specs

Weight with battery: 9.1 pounds
Nail type: paper-tape clipped head or offset round head
Nail length: 2 to 3 1/2 inches
Nail angle: 30° to 34°
Capacity: 55 nails
Price: \$500
Included in kit: 4-Ah battery, charger, no-mar tip, plastic case
Warranty: 3 years, 1 year free service, 90-day money-back guarantee

DeWalt / 800.433.9258 / dewalt.com

John Spier is a builder on Block Island, R.I.



Senco FinishPro 23-Gauge Pinners

BY FRANK CAPUTO

When I was first introduced to 23-gauge pin nailers more than a decade ago, they instantly changed the way I fastened small moldings to wood and tacked freshly glued miters together to ensure a tight joint. Finish and brad nailers can split delicate woodwork and they leave obvious holes that must be filled with putty before painting or staining. Headless pins, on the other hand, virtually eliminate splitting and leave tiny holes that hide beneath the finish with no filling required. Also, you don't need to compress a spring-loaded nose to fire a pin, so the nose seldom dents soft materials.

I normally use pins ranging from $\frac{3}{8}$ inch to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, but occasionally I use longer ones for special jobs, such as installing thick foam moldings. When *JLC* invited me to field-test Senco's two new 23-gauge FinishPro pinners—the $1\frac{1}{8}$ -inch model 23SXP and the 2-inch model 23LXP—I was happy to compare them with my two similar, and excellent, Grex pinners. After using the Sencos for eight months and driving the full range of pins, I'm impressed.

FEATURES & PERFORMANCE

Like my durable Grex pinners, the new Sencos sport plenty of metal and they look

like they can take a beating. The padded handles are the first in the category to be angled like a pistol grip, which is supposed to reduce wrist fatigue and increase maneuverability, but I can't tell the difference. I love the reversible belt hooks, which allow me to hang the lightweight guns from my tool vest.

The magazines automatically adjust to accommodate different fastener lengths, so loading is a breeze. Thanks to a viewing slot, you can easily see when you're down to about 20 fasteners. A dry-fire lock-out mechanism leaves about five pins in the magazine, and an override button allows you to fire the remaining pins if necessary.

The conventional dual triggers require you to pull a spring-loaded safety with your middle finger before firing a shot with your forefinger. I wish the safety springs were a bit stronger, like the ones on my Grex pinners, because my middle finger can feel the extra tension, and that tells me I'm ready to fire. Sometimes when I'm holding the Senco pinners, I don't realize that I'm unintentionally pulling the safety, which could be dangerous.

The helpful no-mar tips have four embossed lines that act like the sights on a gun,

helping you place your fasteners with pinpoint accuracy. An extra tip stores near the rear of each gun, but after my extras repeatedly fell off, I started keeping them in the pinner cases.

Pinner should be powerful enough to consistently set the pins, because it's hard to set high ones manually without enlarging the holes. Except when driving 2-inch pins with the 23LXP, I've had no problem sinking every pin, provided that I hold the tip of the nose flat against the material. I haven't been able to sink the 2-inchers consistently, though, even when shooting into pine. I don't recommend modifying your pinners, but if I owned these guns, I would touch the end of the no-mar tip with a couple of file strokes so the nails would set every time. The two guns haven't jammed, but if they do, you gain access by simply loosening two screws with the on-board Allen wrench and removing the front plate.

THE BOTTOM LINE

I wouldn't replace my two trusty Grex pinners with the two new Senco models. But if I were starting from scratch, I would definitely buy the $1\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Senco, and I'd also buy the 2-incher if I planned to drive a lot of $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch or 2-inch pins. They have all the features I want, appear to be built for the long haul, come with a sturdy case, are locally available (along with Senco fasteners), and cost less than my Grex models.

23SXP Specs

Weight: 2.5 pounds
Pin length: $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches
Price: \$160 (with plastic case, 5-year warranty)

23LXP Specs

Weight: 2.7 pounds
Pin length: $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to 2 inches
Price: \$230 (with plastic case, 5-year warranty)

Senco / 800.543.4596 / senco.com

Frank Caputo is a finish carpentry contractor in Cool, Calif., and presents the "Exterior Details—Create Lasting Curb Appeal" clinic at JLC Live New England.