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Toolbox



Compact Framing Nailer

BY DOUG MAHONEY

Framing guns are big and heavy tools—or so I thought. Then I had the chance to test Paslode's new F325R Compact Framing Nailer. It's nothing at all like my old framing guns; in fact, it's actually smaller than some of my finish guns. I've found it to be a great tool to have on hand, especially for remodeling work.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

As framing guns go, the F325R is small—really small. And at just under 6 pounds, it's a good 2 pounds lighter than the average stick framer (my old Bostitch gun weighs more than 8 pounds). According to Paslode, much of this weight reduction is because the body is made out of magnesium instead of the usual aluminum.

The reduced weight is nice, but what I really like about this gun is the size. At less than 13 inches long, it fits in a stud bay with room to spare, and the short nail magazine makes it more maneuverable in corners and closets where clearances are tight. When I'm working, the smaller magazine doesn't get hooked on the air hose like the larger ones do.

POWER. I was happy to learn that the size reduction doesn't cause any loss of power. I knew I'd have no problem nailing regular 2-by stock, but the gun performed just as well when I worked with LVLs and pressure-treated lumber. As a test, I even unloaded about 20 nails in fast sequence into a PT 6x6 and every nail went in below the surface of the wood.

Nail capacity. The only real sacrifice for this compact size is nail capacity. Regular paper-tape guns traditionally hold three racks of nails, but the Paslode holds only one, amounting to about 40 nails at a time. On a framing crew, that isn't going to last long, but if you spend your time boxing out for medicine cabinets and reframing door openings, the reloading isn't as constant, and I never thought of it as a nuisance. I'll still keep the larger gun for production work, but for most daily tasks, I'll stick with the new Paslode.

The F325R has a couple of other features that I like. The large rafter hook works great and can be switched to the other side of the tool with just a hex key; it's big and deep enough to be hung from a 2-by rafter without any problem.

The nose of the gun is similar to other Paslode nailers I've used, with an aggressive claw and a large "glove-friendly" depth-of-drive adjustment. I also like how the rubber overmold on the handle extends up and forms a ring around the body of the tool. This serves as protection when the gun is placed on a finished surface.

NIGGLING DETAILS

I have only a couple of complaints about the tool, and they are incredibly minor.

First, like all Paslode guns, the F325R does not come with an attached air-hose coupler. I understand there are a lot of people who use different size connections, but it seems like every other manufacturer supplies a standard $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch male coupling with its tool.

It's a small point, but whenever I get a Paslode gun, I end up needing to pillage the connector off another air tool until I can go back to the hardware store to get a new one.

The other small issue is the toggle between sequential- and bump-fire modes. To make the switch requires repositioning the angle of the trigger, and in order to do that, you first need to remove a nearly microscopic O-ring that holds the trigger in place. The only way I've found to do it is with the point

of a utility knife, which is risky, to say the least. And once this O-ring is released from the tool, it can be easily lost on a construction site. Basically, if you drop it, you've lost it.

I tend to keep my framing guns on sequential fire for safety reasons, but it would be nice to be able to quickly toggle back and forth if I needed it. I've used plenty of other guns that can make the switch with a little button or a toggle, and it's a mystery why Paslode hasn't done something similar.

BOTTOM LINE

The downsides to this framing nailer are slight, however. If Paslode's mission was to create a light, manageable, easy-to-use framing gun, it has definitely succeeded. Since I'm not a framer, I'll happily take the smaller nail capacity in exchange for a lighter tool that's easier to use and less of a workout on my arm.

Paslode F325R Compact Framing Nailer Specs

Dimensions (HxWxL): 12.9 inches by 4.3 inches by 12.3 inches
 Weight (w/o air fitting): 5 pounds 15 ounces
 Fasteners: 30-degree; paper collated
 Fastener diameter: .113 to .131 inch
 Fastener length: 2 to 3 1/4 inches
 Magazine: holds one strip (up to 44 nails)
 Features: simple reversible rafter hook; dry fire lockout; adjustable depth-of-drive
 Operating pressure: 90 to 120 psi
 Country of origin: Assembled in the U.S.A. with foreign and domestic components
 Suggested pricing: \$270

Doug Mahoney is a carpenter in Harvard, Mass., and a regular contributor to Tools of the Trade, where this review originally appeared.



Innovative Edge Clamps

BY DAVID FRANE

Rockler sent me a pair of Bandy Clamps when the company announced the product in March. As soon as I saw the packaging, I knew what the tools were about; they're intended to clamp solid edging against the edges of plywood—though they can also be used for almost any task where it's necessary to squeeze something against the edge of a piece.

The clamps are spring clamps with a wide rubber strip spanning the jaws. Using them is a matter of squeezing the grips, pressing the band against the edge you want clamped, and releasing the grips so the pads grasp the piece. If the band is stretched, it will apply constant pressure to the piece being held. These clamps will easily hold straight edging in place, and I've used them to hold 1/4-inch wood edging against a concave edge. They did the job, though I wish I'd had more than two of them to work with.

The clamps are solid but light. A steel spring holds the composite body of the clamp closed until you squeeze the rubberized handles. The pivoting jaws are covered with substantial rubber pads and will open far enough to clamp 8/4 stock. The spring is stiff and the clamp grabs very well. Because the band is rubber, it will automatically conform to irregular pieces.

Bandy Clamps are a good alternative to placing a caul against the edge piece and spanning the substrate with bar clamps; it's faster and there are fewer items to handle.

I like these clamps better than the three-way edging clamps I once used for this task, because neither the jaws nor the band will mar the piece. The band can't press as hard as a screw-style clamp, but it is able to supply enough clamping force provided the edge piece is not so thick and bowed it needs to be forced into position.

The Bandy Clamps are not just for clamping pieces that are being glued; I've used them to hold edging in position while fastening it with 23-gauge brads. Yes, I could have relied entirely on glue, but 23-gauge pins are so small that it's hard to see the entrance holes.

I've also used the clamps to secure hoses, cords, and camera tripods while shooting video in the shop—each clamp is like a handy third hand.

It's worth noting that if you plan to use these clamps for more than minor repairs, you're going to need more than two of them. If you plan to do much edge-gluing, six clamps would be the minimum. I'd want 12.

Bandy Clamp Specs

Maximum opening: 2 inches
 Jaw depth: 1 5/8 inches
 Price: \$20 for one pair; \$50 for three pairs
 Country of origin: China

David Frane is the editor of Tools of the Trade.



Top-of-Class Cordless Hammer Drill

BY MICHAEL SPRINGER

For those who keep only one drill/driver on hand, a full-sized 18-volt cordless hammer drill can be a good option. You may not need the hammer function all the time, but it's helpful to have the capability of drilling into dense materials such as steel, concrete, and masonry when you need to.

I recently tested 10 different 18-volt models for *Tools of the Trade*. With all of them, users can switch between three modes: drilling, clutch-controlled driving, and hammer drilling. While all of those tools are capable of everyday drilling tasks, I was looking for the heavy hitters—those with the muscle to handle the jobs that often come up for remodelers, but that smaller drill/drivers just can't do.

I put each of the drill/drivers through a series of tests to evaluate overall speed and power, measuring the average time in seconds to drill holes through 2-by Douglas fir with a 1-inch auger bit and with a 2 1/16-inch self-feeding bit, and through a 6-inch Douglas fir beam with a 1/2-inch auger bit. I also measured how many 1-inch holes through

2-by Douglas fir I could drill before depleting the battery, to evaluate runtime.

PERFORMANCE

The tool that showed the best pedal-to-the-metal horsepower was Makita's new XPH07T. Among the 10 18-volt models I tested, the Makita dominated the field by posting the fastest times in every power challenge of the test, as well as topping the runtime ratings. Winning all of the time trials showed that it had power to spare and could perform the same work faster than the other tools.

The complete details on the test, as well as the outcomes from the other nine contenders, can be found in the slideshow "18-Volt Cordless Hammer Drill/Drivers," at toolsofthetrade.net. Next in line after the Makita came the tools from DeWalt, Metabo, and Milwaukee. These models kept a strong pace through the toughest work and also were at the top of the runtime ratings. Festool and Hilti ranked next. They could perform most of the heavy lifting, but their

four- and three-speed gearboxes (respectively) meant that their low-gear application speeds were slower than those of the most capable tools.

PROS AND CONS

The Makita has a couple of nice features: a belt hook that mounts on either side and an extra-long side handle that maximizes leverage for resisting big bits. The side handle attaches without sliding over the bit and chuck.

On the downside, clutch settings are too weak for driving larger fasteners, so the tool must be used in drill mode, which can overdrive fasteners or subject users to high reaction torque since the tool is so strong. As with other Makita batteries marked with a star logo, the new 5.0-Ah pack will shut down when the tool is overloaded and require a full check-up charge—even if it is fully charged. This can slow you way down, so avoid repeatedly pulling the trigger once the tool stalls.

Overall, however, the Makita is a standout brushless-motor tool. It mastered every challenge, posted the fastest times in every trial, and set the bar for 18-volt cordless hammer drill/driver power.

Makita XPH07T Specs

Battery: 18 volts; 5.0 Ah
Battery gauge: Three bars; on tool
Weight (pounds): 5.35; with handle, 6.03
Rpm: 0 to 550; 0 to 2,100
Hammer Bpm: 0 to 8,250; 0 to 31,500
Features: Brushless motor; double LED headlights; 14 5/8-inch side handle; stop rod; belt hook; onboard bit holder
Price: Kit, \$350; bare tool, \$150
Includes: Tool; two batteries; charger; large plastic case
Country of origin: Tool, China; battery, Korea and Vietnam
Notes: Also available in a kit with 4.0-Ah battery packs (XPH07M)

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