BY CHRIS ERMIDES

Photos: Courtesy of Hitachi

Two Hitachi Cordless Nailers

Last fall, Hitachi released three new cordless nailers: a 16-gauge straight finish nailer (NT1865DM), an 18-gauge straight brad nailer (NT1850DE), and a 15-gauge angled finish nailer (NT1865DMA)—all running on the company's 18-volt battery platform. In lieu of a flywheel, an "air spring" system runs the nailers, so there's no wind-up time. An internal brushless motor lifts a piston and the attached driver to the top of a sealed cylinder, compressing air behind it. When the trigger is activated, the compressed air drives the piston and driver into the nail. The motor immediately raises it back up to prepare for another shot. For the past six months, I've been testing the 15-gauge angled model while Mike Triller, a finish carpenter, tested the 18-gauge brad nailer.

ALL THE FEATURES YOU'D EXPECT

As with other battery-powered finish nailers, the Hitachi line has an on/off button and a trigger lock. The nailers stay on for up to 30 minutes when not in use and have an LED work light that stays on once the power is activated. The on/off functionality is quick to engage, unlike the buttons on other nailers on the market that need to be held down for several seconds.

These nailers offer sequential (the default mode) or bump-fire modes. The 15-gauge nailer has a dry-fire lockout feature and holds two full clips. The 18-gauge nailer doesn't have dry-fire lockout, which Triller found annoying. It holds two full clips of nails, as well.

The battery status lights change as the battery depletes, and we both found these to be somewhat elusive. You need to press and hold the battery indicator to check the status, so there's no telling when the lights change from two to one, or to blinking. The recharge time from zero to full took about 45 minutes.

On the 16-gauge and 18-gauge models, you can move the pivoting belt hook to either side of the gun housing. With the 15-gauge nailer, however, while the hook pivots, it is on the right side of the gun and can't be switched. Like Milwaukee's nailers, these Hitachi nailers all use the same body but incorporate different magazines for each of the various gauge guns. On the angled nailer, the magazine kicks out to the side and ties in where the belt hook would typically go. Having the magazine kick out to the left of the gun also puts the nosepiece at an angle to the work surface. That took some getting used to, but all in all, the line of sight is excellent on these nailers thanks to the low-profile toolless jam release.

The depth-of-drive adjustment takes some effort to spin with both thumb and forefinger; Triller said it best when he called it

"cumbersome and vague." It's possible to unscrew the depth-of-drive pin so much that you unwittingly disengage it. There is no power adjustment dial on these nailers, but neither of us missed one. The nailers have plenty of power, even for hardwoods (Triller used the brad nailer on oak with no issue). Neither nailer jammed for us in regular use. I jammed the 15-gauge gun purposefully in my shop; it was easy to clear and the air spring drive system retracted the pin so I didn't have to set it.

The specs on the 15-gauge gun say that it will fire up to 1,100 nails on a single charge, depending on fastener length and material. When I ran 2-inch nails to install 1x6 poplar door and window casing, I went through close to 1,000 nails on a fully-charged battery. In my shop, I shot 2-inch nails through poplar into framing lumber in bump-fire mode. In this mode, I set about 850 nails before the gun turned off completely (I never turned the gun off during firing). Triller found that when running 2-inch brads into pine and poplar, as well as some oak, the runtime suggested by Hitachi (1,500 nails per charge) seemed accurate.

SOME RECOIL, BUT NOT A LOT

There is some recoil in the 15-gauge nailer—but it's easy to manage. There's hardly any recoil on the 18-gauge model. When firing in either sequential or bump-fire mode, you have to maintain pressure against the work surface throughout the full firing cycle. If you move too quickly, it's easy to get caught in a rhythm in which you're pulling the nailer up before the drive-pin fully sets the nail. I was firing in sequential mode through old, hard poplar and plaster, and I had no issue with the nailer's power.

Weighing in at 7.3 pounds, the brad nailer isn't the heaviest on the market, but it's close. However, Triller had the same experience that I did: The nailer's grip and balance make it feel lighter than it actually is. His take was that it is nimble and easy to use in tight conditions. The body design offers an excellent line of sight, thanks to a smallish nosepiece that sits behind the point at which the nail exits the gun—so you can see right where you're placing a nail. He liked the ease at which the nailer engaged, also; it doesn't require pushing firmly or at a specific angle to engage properly.

BOTTOM LINE

If you're in the market for a battery-powered nailer, this new line from Hitachi is worth serious consideration. The nailers have plenty of power and function and are similar to pneumatics in terms of their speed and ease of use. There's a bit of an adjustment period to get used to the minimal recoil, but you're going to have that to some degree with most battery-powered nailers. The recoil on the 15-gauge is minimal, and nearly nonexistent on the brad nailer. Triller and I both expect the 16-gauge nailer to perform similarly to these two. If the belt-hook size and location limitation (with the 15-gauge only) and the weight aren't deal-breakers, you can't go wrong with these. Hitachi did a nice job here. hitachipowertools.com.

Chris Ermides is the editor of Tools of the Trade.

Features at your fingertips and good sight lines. The power dashboard (top) sits just below the trigger and offers clear indicator lights. Battery status can be checked only when the nailer is on. Switching from single to bump-fire mode is a matter of pressing a button; a solid blue light shifts to blinking to alert you of the mode. Though sight lines are good, the nosepiece is canted on the 15-gauge gun (above left). On the 18-gauge brad nailer (above right), the push lever sits behind the nose, improving the line of sight.

SPECS

NT1865DMA 15-Gauge Angle Finish Nailer
Fasteners: 1 ¼ inches to 2 ½ inches (34-degree DA style)
Weight: 7.5 pounds
Runtime: up to 1,100 nails per charge
Kit includes: bag, gun, charger, and one 3.0-Ah compact battery
Cost: $370

NT1850DE 18-Gauge Brad Nailer
Fasteners: ⅝ inch to 2 inches
Weight: 7.3 pounds
Runtime: up to 1,650 nails per charge
Kit includes: bag, gun, charger, and one 3.0-Ah compact battery
Cost: $340

Photos: Chris Ermides

Grundens Neptune is designed for fishermen and fit for the trades. Stretch polyester and neoprene cuffs make for a comfortable, watertight fit.

Helly Hansen Chelsea features Cordura fabric on common wear points like shoulders, elbows, sleeves, and hips.

Two Raincoats For the Trades

It rains a lot here in the Pacific Northwest, and my crew and I don't get to go home when the raindrops start falling (unless it is unsafe, of course)—if we did, we'd never make any money. So we need good rain gear. My last coat was a Grundens Petrus, which I wore for about two or three years, until it started wearing out and wasn't waterproof anymore. When I went online to order a new one, I found out that Grundens had stopped making the Petrus and replaced it with the Neptune. Right after I bought the Neptune, Helly Hansen sent me its new Chelsea shell coat for review, giving me an opportunity to compare the two coats.

Grundens Neptune 103 Anorak Coat. I like the pull-over style, and after having rain blow down my neck on so many days last year, I decided I wanted a coat with a hood.

The Neptune is made of a lightweight polyurethane stretch polyester that's comfortable even when I'm wearing nail bags. If the weather is cold and windy, I wear it as a windbreaker. This coat is 100% waterproof, with Radio Frequency (RF) welded seams and neoprene cuffs that stay tight around the wrist and keep the water from rolling down onto your arms. I've always recommended Grundens, and still do; I bought this coat on Amazon for $68 in hi-vis yellow.

Helly Hansen Chelsea Shell Jacket. The Chelsea Shell jacket is made of Helly Hansen's coated and breathable 100% polyester waterproof fabric and features Cordura fabric at the shoulders, elbows, sleeves, and hips. These are common wear points on coats that I've worn in the past, so the durable fabric should contribute to a longer-lasting coat. The zippers have a coating that keeps water from penetrating their teeth, which is nice protection for a phone, gloves, or the like. Even though the jacket is breathable, I still get warm quickly and my safety glasses fog up. I can unzip the armpit area to allow for better circulation. The jacket also has a drop hem, so it is slightly longer in the back, for better protection.

I was a little skeptical of this coat at first. I have always worn rain gear designed for fishing—when I was a teenager, that's what all the framers and siders wore, and I've had great success with it. But I've been wearing this jacket at work, with my nail bags on, and so far, I don't have any complaints, and I get a lot of compliments on it. At $200, its cost is more than double the Neptune's, but I only ever got two to three years out of my Petrus and I hope to get more than that out of this coat, with its Cordura reinforcements.

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