

Weigh In!

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TOOLS

OF THE TRADE

Cordless Coil Roofing Nailer

BY TONY BLUE

Every roofer worth their weight in scrap copper will tell you how many square of asphalt shingles he or she can put down in a day. Just like that fish caught when no one was looking, the size gets bigger every year. With that said, I recently put down 10 square (30 bundles) of architectural shingles on a 90°F day, and I did it cordless, because I had my hands on DeWalt's new 20V Max 15-degree coil roofing nailer.

If DeWalt had a specific job in mind when it designed this tool, I think this was the one: A boat house on beautiful Lake George in upstate New York's Adirondack Park. Who wants to lug a compressor and hoses down through the woods and over boulders to shingle a 1,000-square-foot roof over the water? Not this guy. So away I went: Step out of the truck, grab the DeWalt bag, head down the trail, climb up on the roof, hold down the trigger, and bump fire four nails into each shingle. Pop-pop-pop----pop. It did the job, and I would never want to do a boathouse again without it.

After about four hours of shingling, I switched from 1¹/₄-inch coil nails to 1³/₄-inch nails for the ridge caps. Again, it performed well. Had I used my trusty old pneumatic Hitachi nailer, I would have shaved about 30 minutes off my shingle install. But then I would have added more than that much time in loading the compressor at the shop, unloading at the job, setting it up, taking it down, and lugging it back to the shop.

The nailer came with a 2.0-Ah battery, which lasted through almost two square (six bundles) installed. With a larger, 5.0-Ah battery, I installed about five square. With the 2.0-Ah battery and

no nails, it weighs about 7.4 pounds (for comparison, my Hitachi pneumatic nailer weighs 6.2 pounds); the size and balance make it feel a little awkward in the hand.

The nailer was reliable in shooting and setting nails consistently. Over a span of four days, we shot approximately 7,000 nails, and I only had a problem with about 20 of them. I wasn't able to pinpoint the cause, but I believe it was due to a slightly bent nail coil that resisted a proper feed into the chamber.

With no hoses to trip over, no need for a compressor (or the power to run it), no gas to fill, no breakers being tripped in the house, this tool is a no-brainer for the average carpenter who may shoot on a couple of roofs a year. And while it won't replace a pneumatic gun for the full-time roofer, it will have a useful place for him almost every day for repairs, skylights, drip edge, nailing caps, shooting on a small roof, and other tasks. It does require a slight ramp-up period before firing the first nail, but that's a minor quibble.

Roofing is harsh on tools; in just four days of use, we had worn through a small portion of rubber buffer on the side, starting to expose the plastic underneath. Therefore, this nailer will need a little more TLC than an aluminum-body pneumatic nailer. Even so, I am ordering another one. It's about \$400 in a kit with a charger and 2.0-Ah battery; \$340 for the bare tool. dewalt.com

Tony Blue owns @SquaredAwayContracting in Greenwich, N.Y. He is a general contractor who enjoys nerdy energy efficiency and moisture management details.



With no hose and no compressor, the DeWalt DCN45RNB 20V Max 15-degree coil roofing nailer is a good choice for smaller jobs and repairs, or where power is unavailable (far left). It is powered by a brushless motor that requires no gas canisters, and it accepts ³/₄-inch to 1³/₄-inch-long fasteners.

Photos by Tony Blue

A Pair of Rebar Tying Guns

BY TIM UHLER

When our engineer makes site visits, he stresses how important it is to tie bar in a clean way, exactly per his specifications. But often, it's the lowest-paid guy who is tying the rebar (which is how I started), so I know from experience that it may not end up being the straightest or best job. A rebar tying gun makes it much easier to get it right. This past summer, we had a young guy working with us who had never been on a jobsite before, but with this tool, he could tie three times faster than I could on his second day of work.

I became familiar with rebar tying guns in 2012, when I reviewed the Max RB397. Work was slow then, but we had landed a foundation and framing job for another builder, so I asked to review the rebar tying gun because I thought it would help us out. I sent the gun back after a week (which was the stipulation from the rep) but never stopped pining for it, because I was right:

It had drastically lowered the number of hours we spent tying rebar. When the market rebounded a couple of years later, we decided to buy that Max gun. We self-perform foundation work, framing, siding, and some flatwork here at Pioneer Builders, and the rebar tying gun turned out to be a very good investment for our two-person crew, especially since we ended up building a series of steel-intensive foundations.

Max introduced a new version of the gun earlier this year, the RB441T TwinTier gun, which we had the opportunity to try out recently. We also have been using Makita's 18-volt rebar tying gun for more than a year, giving us a chance to compare the two guns.

MAKITA XRT01ZK 18V LXT

The Makita can make three ties in less than one second using #3 wire. You can tie two #5 bar or four #4 bar, so this gun is perfect for residential construction. There are two modes for tying: single or continuous. We leave it in single mode unless we are tying a mat of bar; then, in continuous mode, about as fast as you can step on, around, or

between bar, you can tie. The 18-volt tool has a handy belt clip and weighs less than 6 pounds with a 5.0-Ah battery.

If it gets damp at all (which happens often here in the Pacific Northwest), we make sure to blow out the gears. Taking this a step further, Makita uses a transparent cover over the wire wheel to protect it from the weather and dirt. The Makita gun has been good to us over the last year and a half (though at one point, it showed an error code, and I had to send it in to have it fixed). On Amazon, the gun costs \$2,000. makitatools.com

MAX RB441T TWINTIER

Max has been producing rebar tying guns since 1993, with the TwinTier being the latest iteration. I was blown away by how fast and compact this new gun was when I saw it at the International Builders' Show last year, and recently had the chance to use it on a basement foundation we were forming. It definitely proved to be faster than previous versions of the Max gun and about twice as fast as the Makita.

The TwinTier uses a special wire because of its "dual feeding" mechanism, so it's essentially tying two wires simultaneously. And while it seems counterintuitive, the gun uses less wire to tie the same amount of rebar as the earlier Max gun and the Makita gun—about 120 more ties with this gun per roll compared with the other two. The rolls for the TwinTier cost about \$8.39/roll (\$0.033 per tie), and for the other guns, \$5.59/roll (\$0.043 per tie), so it is a bit less money per tie and faster. The larger jaw will tie up to a #7 x #7 (7/8 inch x 7/8 inch) rebar, and will work just fine with #4 x #4 rebar.

One of the big improvements Max made to this gun is that it is better sealed than the older RB397 we bought in 2014, so the wire rolls aren't open to the elements. The tool is light and compact, weighing just 5.6 pounds. You can buy the TwinTier online for \$2,700. maxusacorp.com

Tim Uhler is a lead carpenter for Pioneer Builders in Port Orchard, Wash.



The Makita LXT rebar tier uses #3 wire and has a plastic cover to keep moisture and dirt out of the tying mechanism.



The Max TwinTier is about twice as fast as the Makita and has a larger jaw, allowing it to tie up to #7 x #7 rebar.

Bosch Flexiclick 5-in-1 Drill/Driver

BY ANDREW WORMER

I own a number of tools that are powered by Bosch's 18V battery platform, thanks in large part to "show specials" the company used to offer out of its large booth at JLC Live/Providence. This includes a few different drill/drivers and impact drivers, so I was curious about the new "Chameleon" Flexiclick 5-in-1 GSR18V-535FC 18V drill/driver system when Bosch first announced it last spring, and asked the company to send me one to try out.

The kit came with a 4.0-Ah battery and charger, a nylon tool bag, and three different attachments: a standard 1/2-inch keyless metal chuck; a right-angle attachment, also with a keyless chuck; and an offset-angle attachment, which has a 1/4-inch hex bit holder with quick release. Also available is an optional rotary hammer adapter that accepts SDS-plus bits for drilling into masonry. That's four optional attachments; so what's option number five? The drill/driver is designed with an integral 1/4-inch hex bit holder, and in tight spaces can be operated like an impact driver, without any of the attachments. Keep in mind, though, that it is a drill, not an impact driver, though it does have an adjustable clutch mechanism that seems to operate a little more precisely than the clutches on my other drills.

The drill also has what the company calls Kickback Control, which is a built-in acceleration sensor that shuts down the motor when it detects sudden movement, limiting tool rotation. I learned about this feature when I first started using the drill (who reads op-

erating instructions?) and was both relieved and a little freaked out when I bound up a bit while drilling through a 1/4-inch metal plate and the tool simply stopped. I was thankful that I hadn't scraped any skin off my knuckles, but feared that I had burned the motor out. But, no worries—after a brief pause, I was able to back the bit out of the hole.

Is 535 inch-pounds of torque a lot? I don't know, but that's what Bosch claims the brushless motor delivers, and it feels like the drill has more power than my older ones. It doesn't have any trouble powering a 2 1/2-inch-diameter hole saw through a 2-by, and while it doesn't have the brute strength of a Hole Hawg, it also won't slap you up against a stud or sprain your wrist if it binds up—partly because of its Kickback Control system.

For you tech nerds, the drill can be connected to Bosch's free Toolbox app via Bluetooth, as long as you've installed one of the company's GCY42 Bluehound modules (about a \$20 item). Apparently, this will allow you to "customize your tool" and check battery status, though more important to me is the fact that the drill comes with a toolbelt clip, a bit holder, and a built-in LED light. A kit with a Core 18V 4.0-Ah battery costs about \$300 online; adding the SDS attachment to the kit boosts the price to \$400 on Amazon. boschtools.com

Andrew Wormer is JLC's executive editor.



Bosch's Flexiclick drill/driver comes with three attachments, including an offset-angle attachment for driving fasteners close to an adjacent surface (left, right). Its integral 1/4-inch hex bit allows it to be operated without any attachment (center).

Photos by Willem Wormer