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# TOOLS

OF THE TRADE

## Cordless Nailers for Trim Work

BY TOMMIE MULLANEY

**Most days, I use one** of my pneumatic nailers powered by a Makita quiet series compressor for the light framing and trim work that I do. It's hard to beat this combination for its light weight, durability, consistency, and lack of recoil. But when a jobsite is lacking power, or I'm on a quick punch-out job, or I don't want to lug a compressor up a set of stairs, battery-powered nail guns shine. I'm not one of those carpenters who have switched over to battery-powered nailers completely (I've found them to be too heavy to carry around on a toolbelt all day), but I've come to appreciate their versatility, portability, and convenience compared with that of their pneumatic siblings. Recently, I've been trying out four 18-volt-battery-powered offerings from Metabo HPT: a 15-gauge angled nailer, a 16-gauge straight nailer, an 18-gauge brad nailer, and a 23-gauge pin nailer. What follows is an overview of each nail gun, including an explanation of which gauge works the best for the task I am completing.

**MultiVolt Brushless 15-Gauge Angled Finish Nailer.** This nailer (NT1865DMAS) is a versatile and powerful tool capable of shooting 15-gauge nails up to 2 1/2 inches long, a recommended length for installing interior door jambs. With this great power comes increased weight—7.6 pounds without a battery—something that I definitely noticed when nailing overhead. On the other hand,

the added weight didn't bother me when I was installing interior door jambs, and I didn't have to worry about tripping over a hose while moving the door slab back and forth.

This gun has a standard magazine capacity of 100 nails ranging in size from 1 1/4 inches to 2 1/2 inches, and it can shoot up to 800 nails per charge with the new, smaller, 2.0-Ah compact battery that comes with the kit. While the compact battery saved on weight, I found the battery life to be far less than that of the larger Metabo batteries, so for installing door jambs all day, I opted for one of the larger MultiVolt batteries that are compatible with the nailer. This nailer has a dry-fire lockout and comes with a built-in belt hook, but with the additional weight, I tried to keep the gun on a rolling cart versus my toolbelt when not in use. Suggested retail price: \$300.

**MultiVolt Brushless 16-Gauge Straight Finish Nailer.** I consider this gun (NT1865DMST) to be the Swiss army knife of nailers and find myself using it for fastening larger trim details such as poplar crown where I need the holding power without the large hole that a 15-gauge nailer leaves, as well as for fastening smaller trim. It weighs in at 6.6 pounds without a battery, a weight I found bearable but certainly noticeable when on my belt or at the end of the day. This nailer also has a built-in belt hook that can fold out of the way and dry-fire lockout.



For trim work that requires holding power, the author prefers Metabo HPT's MultiVolt 15-gauge angled finish nailer (1, 2). Metabo HPT's 16-gauge straight finish nailer weighs about a pound less and leaves a smaller hole (3).

Photos by Tommie Mullaney

With the 2.0-Ah compact battery, the 16-gauge finish nailer is capable of shooting 950 nails per charge, and up to three nails per second with zero ramp-up time. The magazine capacity is 100 nails ranging in size from 1 inch to 2½ inches, making the nailer suitable for a variety of applications. Suggested retail price: \$300.

**MultiVolt 18-Gauge Brad Nailer.** Metabo says that its new and improved 18-gauge brad nailer (NT1850DF) is 30% smaller and 31% lighter than its previous model. Now weighing only 4.4 pounds (without a battery), it still has the same 100-nail magazine capacity that handles ⅝-inch to 2-inch brads, and keeps other great features, such as the LED light, from the first generation. That 31% weight reduction is a very big improvement, especially for overhead work, resulting in a lot less fatigue. The belt clip on this gun comes with the kit and can be installed with a supplied Phillips-head screw.

This versatile brad nailer can shoot 1,300 fasteners per charge when fitted with a 2.0-Ah battery, which lasted up to a whole workday for me, depending on the project. Because of the small holes it makes, this is the nailer I reach for the most out of all the gauges for fastening trim work, with the exception of interior door jambs. When additional holding power is required, I will switch to a 15-gauge or 16-gauge nailer. Suggested retail price: \$280.

One thing to be aware of with all three of these nail guns is that the tiny compressed air cylinders that power their firing pins—Metabo HPT calls it an air spring drive system—might occasionally need to be recharged. While you can send the tool back to the company for recharging, you can also purchase a \$65 adapter and do this yourself. Considering that the adapter consists of two pieces

of brass and a short rubber hose, it's not exactly a cheap fix, but by attaching the adapter to the gun and a regular compressor, you can quickly return the gun to full pressure.

**MultiVolt Brushless 23-Gauge Pin Nailer.** This compact nailer (Model NP18DSALT) has a different firing mechanism that left me with mixed feelings. Looking at the spec sheet, I'd say it has great features, such as the ability to fire 3,000 nails per charge, a weight of only 3.3 pounds, and an LED work light, making it convenient to use. But when I fired the gun, each shot had a weird vibration that was very different from what I felt with its larger siblings, due in part to the spring and cam internal action versus the compressed canisters used in the larger-model nailers.

When using a 23-gauge pinner, I am typically nailing stain-grade moldings or delicate pieces, and with this nailer's recoil, I struggled to get it to perform like a pneumatic. The gun size and features are great, but I would love to see some improvement in its overall performance before I got another. Suggested retail price: \$230.

**New battery.** If you've ever used the original Metabo HPT nailers, you may have been frustrated by the lack of battery gauges on the batteries and by the slightly confusing gauges on the guns that weren't convenient to use. While the gauge remains on the guns, Metabo HPT's new batteries—including the 2.0-Ah batteries that come with these kits—now have a traditional-style four-block battery gauge that is clear to see and easy to operate.

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Metabo HPT's 18-gauge brad nailer (4) and 23-gauge pinner (5) both have on-board battery gauges (6), though the company's new 2.0-Ah battery has a simple meter that is easier to read. If a nailer loses power, a reduction valve set (Hitachi 371208 J-394) is available for refilling the air chamber (7).



# Kreg ACS Plunge Saw

BY GARY STRIEGLER

**I am not an early adopter.** When I first discovered track saws, it was a good five years before I bought one, primarily because of sticker shock. But once I did, I quickly found out what I had been missing, and it wasn't long before I was regularly using a track saw for trimming doors, safely cross-cutting sheet goods, making long tapers, cutting wide shelving, and making all kinds of angle cuts.

Most of my track saw experience has been with models offered by Festool and DeWalt, the companies that first introduced them to market. Now, however, most tool companies make a track saw in both corded and cordless versions, and—surprisingly—one of the more affordable corded options is from Kreg Tools. Its ACS (adaptive cutting system) plunge saw has many of the same features—such as a positive stop position for blade changes, a chip guard, and a riving knife—as more expensive models from other track saw manufacturers. With its 6½-inch-diameter blade, it can make cuts up to 2⅛ inches deep at 90 degrees and 1½ inches deep at 45 degrees; the bevel is adjustable from -1 to 47 degrees.

This saw also has one unique feature: The blade is on the left side, so it is easier for right-handed users to see the cut. I know, the track guides the cut, but I still want to be able to check it and make sure I'm not straying off my cut line or over- or under-cutting. It's driven by a 120-volt, 12-amp, variable-speed motor with an electronic brake.

The saw comes with a small dust bag that catches a lot of dust, but it fills up quickly. If I am cutting outside or just making a couple of cuts, I don't take the time to hook up dust collection, but the saw can also be hooked up to a standard vacuum.

When it comes to power, smoothness of plunging action, and adjusting the depth of cut, I can't say it is quite on the same level as the best track saws I've used, but its performance is perfectly adequate for the kind of work I do.

Unfortunately, the saw isn't compatible with tracks from other manufacturers. If you need a track longer than Kreg's 62-inch-long guide track, you can join tracks together with available connectors. For some long cuts, I like to clamp the track, and Kreg makes a clamp that fits under the track. I've used its clamps but have discovered that clamps from other manufacturers fit the Kreg track fine and work better (of course, they cost more too).

If you are on the fence like I was about buying your first track saw, I think the Kreg saw is a great option for all but the most demanding users. The saw and a track sell for around \$400 (the saw alone sells for \$300, and a track sells for \$100), so unless you are committed to cordless tools, the Kreg ACS plunge saw is an option worth considering. [kregtool.com](http://kregtool.com)

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The Kreg ACS plunge saw has a 6½-inch-diameter blade and works with the company's 62-inch guide track (1). The saw features a blade-left design (2). Tracks can be joined together with special connectors and fitted with clamps (3).