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April
2007



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23-Gauge Pin Nailer Test

By Chris Marshall

Brad nailers sure beat hand-nailing, but even they have their limits. An 18-gauge nail head can leave a noticeable hole on a small project, and brads will occasionally split thin or brittle stock. Every now and again, you'll get a wayward nail that veers off course and blows out the side of a workpiece. The damage can be tough to fix. Sometimes you simply need a thinner nail, and that's where a 23-gauge pin nailer can save the day.

It sinks headless nails about the

thickness of a stick pin into the tiniest moldings without splitting them, and the nail holes virtually disappear (see *sidebar*, page 86). These guns have tapered tips that take the guesswork out of placing nails, so they're perfect for installing slender glass retainers or sneaking a nail into a tight corner or small fillet. You probably won't reach for one of these peashooters on every project, but they definitely fill a need for those really finicky, delicate fastening jobs.



If you wish you had a nailer that could properly handle the small stuff, here's the gun you've been looking for. These pint-sized nailers are perfect for delicate fastening, and the nails leave almost no holes behind.

Pin nailers are designed for detail work, so that's how I set up a recent test of eight nailers. I ran a clip of 100, 1" nails through each gun to see how they would fasten 1/2" x 1/2" sticks of pine and poplar to larger boards. I also shot pins through some even narrower 1/4" oak strips to see if the tiny nails

would split the wood or blow through the edges. Well, the results were impressive. Despite differences in lumber hardness, density and thickness, there wasn't a split, blowout or misfire after nearly 1,000 nails. These nails may be puny, but they're plenty capable. Generally, the guns were also up to snuff, but a few still shone as superior tools. Here's what I learned about each one and which nailer received my top-dog honors.

Bostitch HP118K

Bostitch's HP118K has some features that are attractive on any nailer: a rubber overmolded grip, side-loading magazine and rear exhaust port to keep annoying blasts of air away from your face. It also has a "hi-low" control for adjusting nail set depth. The tool made a decent showing here.

Pin nailers have an unusual trigger style that sets them apart from larger guns. Instead of a safety on the nailing tip, there's a second trigger behind the main trigger that prevents it from firing. Without a safety on the gun's tip,

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TOOL REVIEW



BOSTITCH

Model: HP118K

Price: \$145

Phone: 800-556-6696

Weight (lbs.): 2.17

Fastener Range: 1/2" to 1 1/8"

Exhaust: Rear

Standard Accessories: Carry case, 1,500 nails, air-hose fitting, oil

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The fine tips on these guns make it easy to direct pin nails into tiny molding details where they'll virtually disappear.

nails are easier to position exactly where you want them. Once you squeeze the safety, the gun will fire every time you pull the main trigger. There's no reset.

On this Bostitch gun, the safety is larger and longer than others, and it covers up much of the grip area. I had a tough time picking up the

gun without deactivating the safety. From a safety standpoint, I liked the trigger setup better on other guns with shorter levers.

During nailing, my test gun left many nails flush with the wood surface rather than setting them properly. Adjusting the "hi-low" control didn't help. Flush-setting

nails isn't a major misdemeanor, because the shanks are so tiny. Trouble is, these headless pin nails are nearly impossible to set manually without marring the wood if the nailer doesn't do it for you.

Given its reasonable \$145 price, Bostitch definitely makes pin nailing affordable. The gun comes with a plastic carry case, 1,500 nails in various sizes and an air-hose fitting — everything you'll need.

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CADEX

Model: CPB23.50

Price: \$369

Phone: 604-876-9909

Weight (lbs.): 1.95

Fastener Range: 5/8" to 2"

Exhaust: Rear

Standard Accessories: Carry case, belt hook, two protective nose tips, swiveling air-hose fitting, oil

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Cadex is the only gun that has a lever-activated blower. Not a critical feature, but a handy extra for cleaning up.



Cadex CPB23.50

The folks at Cadex really hammered out the details when designing the CPB23.50. Although it sets the high bar of pricing for this test group, the gun was a delight to use. It comes with two simple but effective rubber tip protectors that prevent marring around the nail holes. A side-loading magazine makes it easy to ready the gun for use, and a long viewing slot helps you keep track of the nail supply as you work. The safety and trigger were amply sized and easy to manipulate, and the gun's tapered and overmolded grip felt good in my hand.

Exhaust air blows out of a beaded metal filter in back, which helps muffle the noise. Cadex also provides a lever-activated blower on top that's slick for tidying up your work area.

In testing, this gun popped nails into hardwood and softwood like a champ. I removed the no-mar tip to help improve accuracy, which resulted in some slight denting on pine but not on harder woods. The CPB23.50 fires the widest range of fastener lengths, up to 2" long. It

will also shoot 23-gauge brad nails. While you could buy a framing nailer for the price of this gun, it will do precise, flawless work.

Craftsman Model 18292

If a pin nailer won't be the gun you'll need for every project, Craftsman's bargain-priced Model 18292 may be the sensible choice. Aside from some slight marring on pine,



Although tiny in stature next to a brad nailer, Craftsman's pinner is still plenty powerful.

it was up to task for nailing all three wood types. The gun is quite literally pocket sized, which should help it squeeze into the tightest spots.

Despite its strengths, this gun has an unusual safety that was troublesome for me. To activate the firing trigger, you push the safety forward with your index finger instead of pulling it. However, it's easy to bypass the safety by just slipping your pointer finger between the two levers, which can lead to accidental firing. It happened to me more than once — my fault — but the safety still doesn't quite keep you safe. Use it with caution.

This gun shoots the narrowest range of fasteners, topping out at 3/4". At around \$100, the gun doesn't come with a storage case, nails or an air-hose fitting. However, considering the champagne pricing of some of these test nailers, getting fewer bells and whistles with the Craftsman seems a fair tradeoff if you're woodworking on a modest budget. It'll certainly do the job.

CRAFTSMAN

Model: 18292

Price: \$100


Phone: 800-932-3188

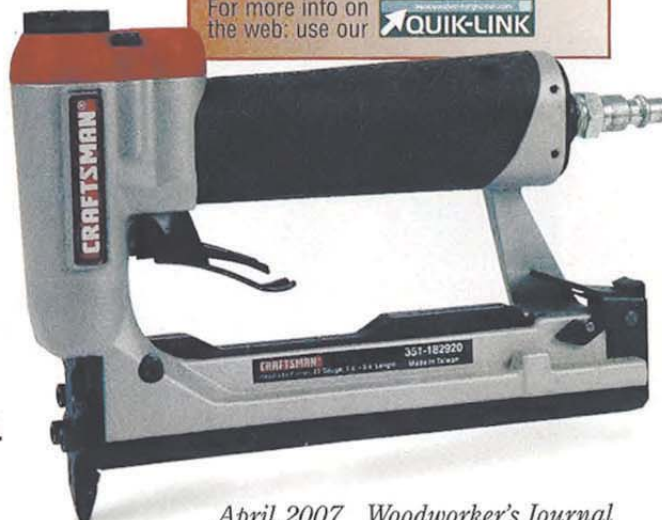
Weight (lbs.): 1.5

Fastener Range: 3/8" to 3/4"

Exhaust: Front, adjustable

Standard Accessories: Oil

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GREX

Model: P635

Price: \$219

Phone: 626-289-7618

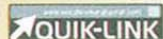
Weight (lbs.): 2.21

Fastener Range: 3/8" to 1 3/8"

Exhaust: Rear

Standard Accessories: Carry case, belt hook, two protective nose tips, air-hose fitting, oil

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GREX P635

The GREX P635 ran a neck-in-neck race with Cadex for best all-around performance in this test group. It doesn't have the nifty blower, and it won't shoot 2" nails, but these are the only differences that really separate these two guns. And, considering that the P635 will leave \$150 more in your pocket, the playing field levels out quickly.



GREX outfits the P635 with a removable protective nose tip to cushion its blows.

Like Cadex, GREX fits this pinner with a pair of soft, no-mar tips to ensure perfect nailing surfaces. Even without the plastic tip, the P635 left only hints of dimples on softwood, and hardwoods were unaffected by the metal tip.

Nail clips slip easily into the magazine, and the dual triggers functioned without issue. This gun is mid-sized and comfortable to hold, with exhaust air that blows



out behind the grip through a muffling filter. An on-board Allen wrench will be handy when the eventual jam occurs, although I never needed to use it. (Incidentally, clearing jammed nails from all these guns is a similar job,

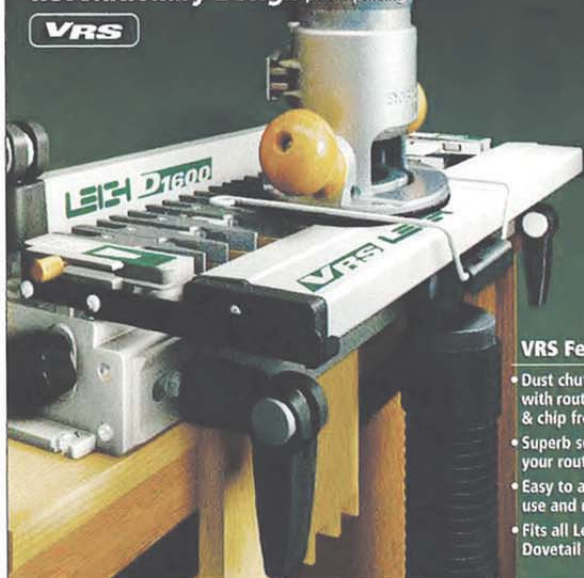
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TOOL REVIEW



A rotating exhaust deflector (top) allows you to direct the air blasts away from where you're working.

NIKLE

Model: NS2340A

Price: \$269

Phone: 604-876-9909

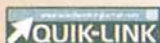
Weight (lbs.): 2.2

Fastener Range: 1/2" to 1 9/16"

Exhaust: Front, adjustable

Standard Accessories: Carry case, air-hose fitting, oil

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involving loosening or removing two Allen screws and pulling off the front nose plate.)

A carry case and belt hook fill out the standard list of goodies you get for around \$219. All in all, this bright green pinner is one sweet pea, and it steals the brass ring from Cadex as my "Best Bet" tool in this test.

Nikle NS2340A

Nikle loads the NS2340A with a respectable collection of standard features. The gun should prove to be more versatile than some, since it shoots eight different nail lengths up to 1 9/16". A top-mounted deflector swivels in any direction to redirect exhaust air. Nails load easily from the side, and there's a tiny port for

monitoring the end of a nail clip to prevent dry-firing. I found the nailer comfortable to hold. The tandem triggers worked fine, although the area between the trigger and magazine may feel snug if you have large fingers.

This gun was a serviceable performer in testing. It seemed to

Tool Review continues on page 84 ...

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PORTER-CABLE

Model: PIN100

Price: \$129

Phone: 888-848-5175

Weight (lbs.): 2

Fastener Range: 1/2" to 1"

Exhaust: Rear

Standard Accessories: Carry case, 2,000 3/4" nails, air-hose fitting, oil

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Nail clips were easy to slip in and out of Porter-Cable's bottom-loading magazine. Notice the arrows that indicate the chisel tips on these nails. They're too small to see otherwise.

As far as value goes, the Omer comes up short for me. A \$279 price tag makes it one of the costlier nailers, yet the tool doesn't come with a carry case, supply of nails or an air-hose fitting. Its nail range also tops out at 1 1/8" — shorter than the similarly priced Nikle and GREX guns. On the basis of nailing performance alone, this Italian-made nailer drives like a Ferrari. But it needs a few more appointments to justify a "sports car" sticker price.

Porter-Cable PIN100

Porter-Cable's PIN100 offers workaday performance and many extras for an affordable \$129. As far as niceties go, the gun has an overmolded grip, good trigger/safety arrangement, rear exhaust and bottom-loading magazine that's simple to load and unload. It shoots a few sizes of nails up to 1", which could be limiting if you mostly work with 1x stock. Even so, this gun comes with 2,000, 3/4" nails that may serve your small-project needs for a long, long time.

A rounded steel nailing tip left marring on all three wood

types, which is frustrating if you're looking for perfection. But, given the general characteristics of the guns that I tested for this article, perfection will require stepping up to a "top-shelf" nailer and doubling or perhaps even tripling the

pricetag. It's really up to you to decide how big a deal those little dents really are.

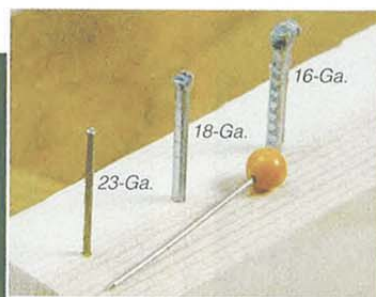
Spotnails SP2340

If we awarded "Best Value" honors, the Spotnails SP2340 would bag the prize. This gun won't dazzle you with extras, but it works every bit as well as the other budget-priced nailers here, and it accepts lots of different fastener lengths from 1/2" to 1 9/16" long. What it lacks in ornamentation it makes up for in nailing versatility.

I wish this gun offered a more generous grip area behind the triggers; it felt a bit cramped. Still, it was slightly roomier than the Bostitch design so you can wrap two or three fingers around the grip without also hitting the safety.

Exhaust air blows forward on this tool, and you'll feel those startling puffs of air if you work close to the gun. Its rounded metal tip left dimples in the test woods.

In the end, what you really score is a bargain-priced nailer that shoots a broad range of nail sizes for any detail job that comes your way.



Pin Nails: Petite but Potent

Compared with ordinary 18- and 16-gauge brad nails, 23-gauge nails are downright miniscule and not much thicker than the average stick pin. Still, these nail guns will drive them deftly into hard or softwood. Once in, they're surprisingly tenacious. Even without heads, friction is enough to give them plenty of holding power for general tacking or molding installation. Best of all, the entry holes they create are miniscule — there's scarcely a need to hide them with putty.



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Model: PIN100

Price: \$129

Phone: 888-848-5175

Weight (lbs.): 2

Fastener Range: 1/2" to 1"

Exhaust: Rear

Standard Accessories: Carry case, 2,000 3/4" nails, air-hose fitting, oil

For more info on the web: use our



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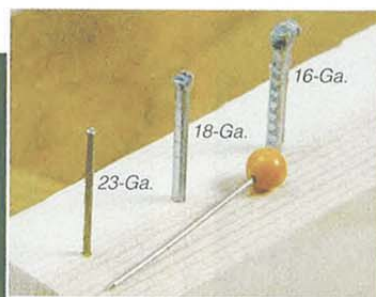
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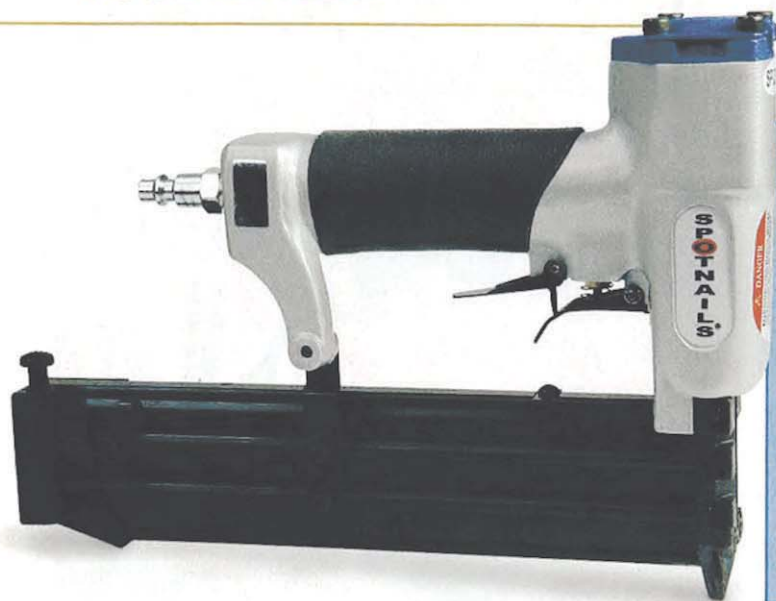
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SPOTNAILS

Model: SP2340

Price: \$110

Phone: 800-873-2239

Weight (lbs.): 2.6

Fastener Range: 1/2" to 1 1/16"

Exhaust: Front, non-adjustable

Standard Accessories: Carry case, air-hose fitting, oil

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A safety trigger behind the firing trigger is standard layout on all but one of these guns. Moving the safety up off the nose creates a smaller tip for greater precision when placing nails.

Real Players or Just Pipe Dreams?

When picking a pin nailer for your shop, you've got some tough choices to make — nail size ranges that vary with each gun, some degree of marring around the nail holes and, of course, choosing a tool price point that won't stun your

pocketbook. Despite these cranial conundrums, one thing I learned from my shop test is that these teeny nail guns are anything but frivolous purchases. They belong in our tool cabinets right alongside the brad nailer and stapler, especially if you're sometimes

vexed with the blemishes a brad nailer can leave behind or wish for an even smaller fastener. A micro pinner is the closest you'll get to a truly invisible fastener.

Chris Marshall is Field Editor for Woodworker's Journal.

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