

Self-Feeding Screw Gun Adapter

by James Frane



Increasingly, builders are using screws instead of nails to fasten subflooring and deck boards. Unlike nails, screws won't work themselves loose when the framing lumber shrinks, so floors won't squeak. Screws are also the fastener of choice for drywall, because the heads won't pop through the finish surface as easily as nail heads will.

A screw gun is a good tool for these applications — the depth stop and slip clutch prevent overdriving — but it has its drawbacks. For one, even though a screw gun bit is magnetic, you have to place each screw individually on the bit before driving it. Also, when you are driving screws into a floor, you have a long reach and must bend over, which is a tiring position. You have a long reach when you drive screws into a ceiling, as well. And climbing on scaffolding or stilts puts you at risk for falling.

Fast Driving

Enter the Rocker. It's a screw gun adapter that fits onto a Makita or Black & Decker drywall screw gun and feeds screws automatically. This saves you the hassle of loading each



Using the Rocker, a worker can drive the 50 screws on the flat plastic tape just as fast as he can find the right spot and push. This increased production can help offset the investment in the tool.

screw onto the driving bit individually. All you have to do is keep pressure on the trigger to keep the motor running and push the gun against the surface into which you want to drive a screw. The photo below shows the standard drywall screw gun/Rocker combination in action.

The Rocker is a development of John Wagner and Associates, a company with its headquarters in Concord, California (800/477-8876).

The Rocker consists of a screw feeder mechanism that replaces the screw gun depth adjustment collar and an extra-long P2 bit that extends through the feeder mechanism to drive the screws. The flat end of the feeder rests against the surface of the work, and provides a screw depth adjustment in the form of a locking collar. Screws for the Rocker come in a flat plastic tape that holds 50 screws. (If you want to restuff used tapes with screws, the tapes are good for about three uses before the holes become too stretched and worn to hold the screws.) Every screw feeds smoothly — from the first to the last — with no misses.

To load the screws, you thread the end of the tape through a curved guide they call a banana clip (its curved shape resembles the shape of a banana, with the use of a little imagination) and on into the feeder mechanism. The tape then advances automatically each time you push the feeder into the work.

Operating the Tool

Using the Rocker is easy, but it takes a little getting used to. First, you pull and hold the screw gun trigger so that the motor is running. As you push the screw gun firmly into the work, the feeder mechanism advances the tape, placing a screw directly under the driving bit. The bit also engages with the screw head and the driving clutch so that the screw is driven into the work. As the screw is driven to the preset depth, you can hear the clutch disen-

gage the bit shaft from the motor — your cue to release the pressure on the screw gun feeder and move it to the next location. You can keep pressure on the trigger during this period if you wish. Each time you push the feeder into the work, you cause the mechanism to advance and drive a screw.

There are two slightly different versions of this tool: The Rocker 7 is for longer screws — from one inch up to 1³/₄ inches — and the Rocker 8 is for 7/16-inch to 1¹/₄-inch screws. Either will fit on a Makita or Black & Decker screw gun, and either can be used with or without a handle extension to increase your reach. The extension enables you to drive floor and deck screws without bending over, a definite plus that your back will thank you for. It also allows you to drive ceiling screws without stilts, scaffolding, or ladders.

Downside

Occasionally, a screw will cock to the side when being driven, and the clutch disengages with the screw sticking out of the work, but this is rare and decreases as you get used to the tool. Also, the three small screws that hold the feeder mechanism nosepiece in place come loose periodically, and you have to stop and tighten them every few hours to keep the nosepiece aligned. I just carry a small Phillips-head screwdriver in my pocket for this task.

The main drawback to this tool is cost. List price is around \$239 — in addition to the price of a screw gun. The cost of the screws in the plastic strips is about three times that of loose screws. For me, however, both of these costs are quickly offset by the time savings in using the tool. Just imagine being able to drive screws as fast as you can locate the end of the tool on the work! Jab ... jab ... one screw after another. Another advantage of this machine is in the handling of the screws. At last, you no longer have to reach into a box or pouch full of sharp-pointed screws that seem as eager to be embedded in you as in the work. The learning curve with this tool is short, and you'll soon be able to drive screws as fast as you can push the mechanism in and out. ■

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