

Lightweight Hammer by Mark Clement

DWHT51138 15-Ounce MIG Weld Framing Hammer
DeWalt Industrial Tool Co.
800/433-9258
dewalt.com
Street price: \$60

If you're old enough, you remember nailing off decks with fistfuls of hot-dipped-galvanized sixteens. Your bags were loaded with pounds of nails, and your hammer was in your hand for a significant portion of the day. How efficiently you drove a nail mattered.

Today, of course, our hammers hang from our belts, and we drive most of our nails with pneumatic tools, so who cares if there is a new hammer on the market?



Well, I do. And one big reason I care about it is because 20 ounces of steel pulling on my tool pouch all day literally digs my belt into my hips. I feel it at the end of the day.

So, I want a light hammer, but I also want it to be durable and affordable. To reduce the weight, I have been carrying a hickory-handled hammer. It's a great hammer, but I am one mega-pry away from breaking it, whereupon I know I would not replace the handle. Despite being cheap, I am also in a perpetual hurry, so I would buy a new one.

The good news is that light weight, durability, and affordability are the three main features of DeWalt's new DWHT51138 light steel hammer. The tool is configured and hits like a traditional 22-ounce framer's hammer, but it weighs only 15 ounces. It's all steel, and I don't think I can possibly break it. Finally, it retails for about \$60.

With the three big criteria covered, I hasten to add a fourth: I would not even consider purchasing this hammer if it didn't have a well-designed claw. The main uses for my hammer these days are to pierce, pry, rip, and split. I also use it for carrying large timbers — by plunging the claw into the end grain and using the hammer as a handle. For that, I want an aggressive claw with a very gradual “fetch,” or curve. In other words, I want the claw to be sharp and almost straight. The DWHT51138 delivers.

For driving the fasteners I do drive (cap nails or roofing nails on a porch remodel, stubborn hanger nails, the occasional hand-driven spike), I like this tool's balance and handle design. Somewhat in the hatchet style, its contours make gripping different areas of the handle comfortable.

Finally, I generally wear my hammer at the small of my back, and when I am walking fast it can whack me in the back of the leg. That hurts. The DeWalt hammer, however, swings in unison with my step. It's incredible. I realize that this may be due to a magic combination of my height, the tool pouch, the pace of walking, and the like. But I noticed it right away. Tough, effective, affordable, and comfortable, this hammer is a hit on my sites. ❖

Contributing editor Mark Clement builds decks in Ambler, Pa.