

Compact Positive Placement Nailer

BY TIM UHLER

From joist hangers and strapping to A35 framing angles and other seismic connectors, a lot of metal hardware needs to be fastened on my company's jobsites, making positive placement nailers invaluable. Last fall, Max USA sent us its new SN438J SuperLocator positive placement nailer (which I had first seen at last year's International Builders' Show) to try out.

This is a lightweight, compact nail gun with a purposely short magazine to allow it to squeeze into small places. It comes with a plastic belt hook that swivels, and it has a fully adjustable exhaust cap, a useful feature when you're working in tight quarters. The gun shoots only 1½-inch-long metal connector nails, but in 0.131-inch and 0.148-inch diameters. Instead of using a probe to locate the hole in hardware, this gun uses the tip of the nail to find the hole, which I find is more accurate.

The company says that it designed this gun for durability, with a driver blade that is 21% thicker (I don't know whether this is noteworthy, as I've never broken a driver blade in the 17 years that I've been using positive placement nailers). Max also says that it built

the gun with a thicker contact arm to provide more protection from breakage due to nail jams or accidental drops. In our experience, Max has always produced high-quality tools, of which we own many. They have always been reliable and durable, so I don't doubt the company's claims.

Like other Max nailers, this one has a filter that self-cleans when the hose is disconnected. For safety, the gun cannot double-fire, and it has an anti-dry-fire mechanism that prevents operation when the magazine is empty. It has an operating pressure of 70 to 120 psi.

In short, this lightweight gun does exactly what it is designed to do: reliably and accurately shoot nails through the holes in metal hardware. At a retail price of about \$280, it's more expensive than similar nailers but—at least for my crew—well worth the price. maxusacorp.com

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The Max SN438J SuperLocator positive placement nailer has a compact magazine that holds 1½-inch metal-connector nails and allows the gun to fit between joists; an air deflector cap that rotates 360 degrees so you can aim exhaust away from your face; and a swiveling belt hook. Instead of a probe, the tip of the nail is used to locate the hole in the hardware.

Photos by Tim Uhler

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at tools@hanleywood.com.

A Hybrid-Powered Reciprocating Saw

One question I commonly hear about cordless tools is, “What happens when the battery dies?” My answer is to make sure that you always have batteries charged and ready to go. Metabo HPT has a different answer, though: It has a line of tools—called MultiVolt—that can be used either with the platform’s 36-volt battery or with an adapter that plugs into a conventional AC power outlet. For the last year and a half, we’ve been using the Metabo HPT MultiVolt reciprocating saw on our framing jobsites, giving us a pretty good idea of the saw’s characteristics.

In either cordless or corded mode, this saw does precisely what I need it to do: cut aggressively. The 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch stroke can be used in straight or orbital mode. Since we mostly cut wood, we keep it in orbital mode, but switch to straight mode when cutting metal.

The saw comes with a large rafter hook, which we find easily accommodates 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-wide I-joists. It also has a variable-speed trigger, which allows for a “feathered” start when plunge cutting. Another feature on this saw that I like is what Metabo HPT calls User Vibration Protection. It does what the name sounds like: I don’t have any numbing or tingling in my hands or arms during use. In a video that I recorded of my using the saw to cut through a 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-by-14-inch LVL, very little vibration can be seen through my arm, even when the video is played back in slow motion (you can see the video in the online version of this article).

There is one feature on the saw that I’m not fond of: the tool-free blade change. It always seems to be stuck and never seems to want to lock in a blade. As a result, we don’t change blades very often when using this saw, but—to be fair—the Diablo blades we use last a long time, so it doesn’t end up being too much of an inconvenience overall. But if for some reason one of the crew needs to change a blade, we hear loud complaining.

Rated at 4.0 Ah at 36 volts, the MultiVolt batteries last plenty long and give this recip saw a lot of power. I’ve never run out of battery power using this saw, thanks in part to its handy fuel gauge. If I see the battery is at two bars (out of four) and I’m making a trip to the van or taking lunch, I put it on the charger; it takes less than an hour to charge. Even on a drained battery, the saw is still capable of cutting through an LVL.

The tool isn’t cheap at \$230 (tool only and battery). A battery costs about \$120, but instead of buying a solo battery, buy a Metabo HPT MultiVolt Triple Hammer impact driver kit. Then you’ll have my favorite impact driver, two batteries, and a charger. metabo-hpt.com —T.U.



The Metabo HPT MultiVolt reciprocating saw has a brushless motor that can be powered by plugging it into a 110-volt AC outlet or by attaching its 36-volt 4.0-Ah battery. The smooth-operating saw features a variable speed control, straight and orbital cutting modes, and a toolless blade lock mechanism.

Smart Work Lights

The Pacific Northwest's winter gloom lasts from November through February, so we rely on temporary lighting on our job-sites as soon as we get the roof sheathed. In the past, we used Wobble Lights, but a few years ago, we switched to Milwaukee's battery-powered LED lights (I've also tried clipping a headlamp to my hard hat). This winter, we added Milwaukee's M18 Radius site light (model 2150-20) and M18 Rocket tower light (model 2120-20). Spoiler alert: I love these lights. Our three-man crew framed all winter long using just the two lights in this review and an older (and smaller) battery-powered Milwaukee Flood light that has more than proven itself over the years.

M18 RADIUS LED SITE LIGHT

Similar in size and shape to our old wobble lights, this IP54-rated (for water and dust resistance) light has a two-battery bay that can sequentially charge M12 or M18 batteries. It also features Milwaukee's One-Key system, which allows the user to create profiles in the Milwaukee app, track the unit, set light schedules, or manage inventories.

The M18 Radius provides 360 or 180 degrees of light, with the option of turning off sections of the light in thirds. It provides 9,000 lumens at full power, 4,800 lumens at two-thirds power, and 2,500 lumens at one-third power. The company claims that a single battery charge can run the light for up to 14 hours; at full power, we've found that we can get about a full workday out of two 12-Ah batteries. Most of the time, we leave the unit plugged in to the one cord we have rolled out, so we can keep the batteries charged for the other cordless LED lights that I can't plug in.

I like being able to keep the light connected to power to charge batteries, and I like that up to six of these units can be daisy-chained together (even though I have only one unit). That means that other plug-in tools can be connected to the light, such as the wet/dry vac that we had to use on one job. At nearly 3 feet tall and almost 2 feet in diameter, the Radius Site Light is big, but it doesn't take up a lot of room, and it can easily be moved around to wherever illumination is needed. The bare tool is \$600, so buy it when you can find a deal on batteries. This is a staple light to have.

M18 ROCKET LED TOWER LIGHT

Unlike other Milwaukee tower lights that I've used, the M18 Rocket folds down and packs away easily, which I think is a major advantage. This IP67-rated light doesn't have a built-in charger like the Radius light, but you can plug in two batteries and run it all day and night (or it can be plugged into an extension cord). To maximize runtime, I try to operate lights at the minimum brightness level that I feel is needed for the task at hand; at full power, the Rocket provides 5,400 lumens of light.

While this light can provide lighting for larger areas, I find it best suited for task lighting. The height is adjustable up to about 5½ feet, and the head can be rotated to bounce light off the ceiling, which provides plenty of light for us in most cases. There are three leg positions and multiple ways the light can be deployed (think Transformers); I primarily use the light in a basic tripod position. This light also features One-Key compatibility. Like the Radius, the Rocket costs \$600 (bare tool), so it isn't cheap, but it is powerful and versatile. milwaukeeetools.com —T.U.



The Milwaukee M18 Radius site light (1) can be plugged into a standard 120V outlet, has a built-in dual battery charger, and can power additional lights or tools. Milwaukee's M18 Rocket tower light doesn't have a built-in charger, but it can run for up to 24 hours on a pair of batteries. The tower extends up to 5½ feet tall (2) and can be folded down into a compact package (3). Both lights feature variable output—up to 9,000 lumens for the Radius and 5,400 lumens for the Rocket (4).