

Toolbox

Ridgid R350RHA Round-Head Framing Nailer

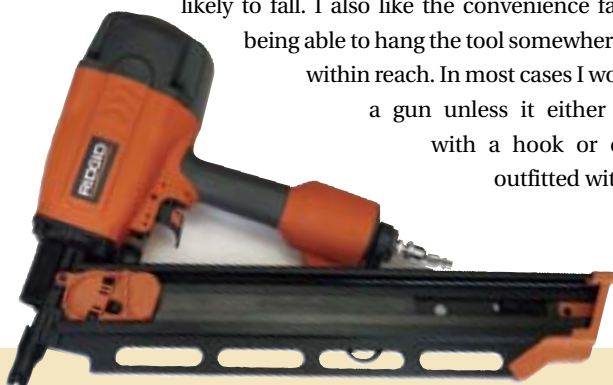
by Tim Uhler

Earlier this year, *JLC* sent me a Ridgid R350RHA framing nailer to test. Ridgid-brand power tools have not been around for very long, so I was curious to see how the company's first framing nailer would perform. When the gun arrived, I took it to work and shared it with the other carpenters on the framing crew. The model we tested drives full round-head nails, but there's also a version that shoots clipped-head fasteners.

Features

The R350RHA has nearly every feature that can be found on a modern framing nailer. It comes with a swivel air fitting, which I like because it cuts down on hose repairs by reducing stress where the hose enters the gun. A self-cleaning filter prevents grit from getting into the tool by blasting it out of the fitting when you disconnect the hose. The selectable trigger makes it easy to switch between bump and sequential firing.

My favorite feature is the rafter hook, which prevents damage by reducing the number of times the gun is likely to fall. I also like the convenience factor of being able to hang the tool somewhere easily within reach. In most cases I won't buy a gun unless it either comes with a hook or can be outfitted with one.



Ridgid R350RHA Specs

Size: 14" H by 20³/₄" L

Weight: 8.4 pounds

Nail length: 2"–3¹/₂"

Nail diameter: .113"–.162"

Street price: \$289

• **Ridge Tool Co.**
866/539-1710
www.ridgid.com



Other features include an adjustable exhaust cap, tool-free depth of drive, and a muffler to dampen sound. I appreciate these features, too — but nowadays just about every tool has them so they aren't worth getting excited about.

One thing I don't like about the Ridgid gun — and this is just a personal preference — is the rear-loading magazine. We change nail sizes a lot, and I think it's easier to get nails out of the tool when it loads from the top. I do, however, like the fact that the gun won't fire when the magazine is empty.

Performance

The R350RHA shoots fasteners measuring up to 3¹/₂ by .162 inches (full 16d). Like most framers, I rarely shoot nails that big, but it's nice to know I can if I need to. The nosepiece is very aggressive, which makes it easy to toenail hard materials like engineered rim. Some of

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our other guns slip when we try to toenail this material to the sill.

The Ridgid gun has a powerful motor, so our crew had no problems using it to nail LVL material. The dial-controlled depth-of-drive mechanism made shear nailing a breeze. We normally fasten sheathing with a coil gun, but sometimes we use Bostitch Sheather Plus nails in a stick nailer. With their oversize heads, these fasteners tend to jam in guns they were not designed to fit. Although the Ridgid gun is not on the list of tools designated to take these nails, it drives them just fine.

It wasn't until the testing was nearly complete that we noticed the gun's slide switch, which is for adjusting the magazine to accept different diameter fasteners. One setting is for .131-inch to .162-inch nails and the other is for .113-inch to .120-inch nails. We had left it on the high setting the entire time. Nevertheless, we did not notice any problems shooting smaller nails.

This nailer is comfortable to use; it's well balanced and has an overmolded rubber grip. Even when driving full 16d nails, it does a good job dampening the blows. According to the manufacturer, the gun weighs 8.4 pounds, which is about average for a tool of this type. The rafter hook is made from what seems to be a durable type of plastic. It works very well and folds close to the grip when you want to get it out of the way. The gun comes in a nylon storage bag and retails for around \$289.

The Verdict

The R350RHA has a longer list of features than most other guns; even so, there's nothing terribly special about it. It works well, but so do many other



A rafter hook makes it easy to hang the tool, yet only Ridgid and a few other manufacturers include one as a standard feature.

framing nailers. If there were something unusual about this gun, I might be more tempted to buy one — but as it is I'd be reluctant to do so because it's from a new product line and I don't have any way of knowing how well it will hold up over a period of years.

In fairness, the tool does appear to be well made and it comes with a three-year warranty. The manufacturer is currently offering a free service agreement that covers the driver and O-rings for the life of the tool. You have to register for the service agreement, however, and even if things went as promised, I personally wouldn't want to be without the tool for the time it would take to get it repaired at a service center.

Tim Uhler is lead framer for Pioneer Builders Inc. in Port Orchard, Wash.



The R350RHA's toenailing claw doesn't look unusual, but it's better than most at grabbing on at an angle.

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Toolbox | Job Cameras

Neither Snow, nor Rain, nor Gloom of Night. Your digital camera should work when you do — regardless of the weather. A metal body sealed with rubber gaskets makes the 8.0-megapixel *Stylus 800* virtually impervious to bad weather. Maker Olympus claims the camera has exceptional low-light sensitivity — a handy perk for dark attics and basements. It also has a built-in microphone, so you can add narration to your images for estimating purposes. At 4 inches wide, 2¹/₄ inches tall, and 1¹/₄ inches thick, it sells for about \$450.

Olympus America, 800/622-6372, www.olympusamerica.com.



The Little Camera That Could. The *Canon SD500 Digital Elph* is a small camera with a surprising large 7.1-megapixel chip. Measuring 2¹/₂ inches tall, 3¹/₂ inches wide, and 1 inch thick, it boasts a 3X optical zoom and a 4X digital zoom. It's also "Pict-Bridge Compliant" — Canon's term for the ability to print to any brand of compatible printer — which should be a great feature for less tech-savvy users. It lists at about \$500.

Canon USA, 800/652-2666, www.usa.canon.com.



Look Inside. Old homes are full of surprises — and most aren't good ones. To see what's going on in the mysterious spaces behind walls and under floors, consider getting a *SnakeEye Inspection Camera*. What's cool about this high-tech video camera is that you can use the LCD monitor to share with a client what you see. You can also record the footage — for estimates, for consultations with subs, and to protect yourself against lawsuits. All in all, the camera provides a great way for you to distinguish yourself from the competition and justify your estimate. The basic kit consists of the probe-mounted camera with an LED light, a 5-inch handheld color display, two niMH batteries with a charger, AC and 12-volt car adapters, and a case. It sells for about \$2,000.

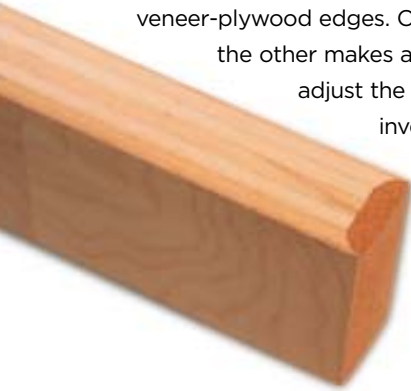
Aqua Communication,
781/ 642-7088, www.aquacomm.com.



Toolbox | Cabinetmaking Tools

Competitive Edge. Despise edge banding? Check out *The Burgess Edge*. This pair of patented router bits simplifies the whole process of finishing veneer-plywood edges. One bit prepares the edge with a D-shaped dado and the other makes a corresponding piece of solid stock to fill it. Shims adjust the cutters to the plywood thickness. According to inventor Michael Burgess, a longtime carpenter, this method is less expensive, better-looking, and more reliable than other, more familiar edge-finishing techniques. The $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-bit set costs \$129; the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch set \$119 — or you can buy both for \$200. Burgess sells a similar setup for spindle shapers.

Burgess Edge, 802/233-1489, www.burgessedge.com.



Hinge Locator. With the *EZ-Mount*, you can install cabinet doors in less than a minute, claims its maker. The clever plastic jig makes it easy to position cup-style hinges on both inset and overlay frameless-cabinetry doors. (A model for face-framed cabinets should be available by press time.) The jig holds the hinge plate with a nice tight fit, so there's little or no adjustment needed when it's time to hang the door. Inventor Stan Klanowski, a cabinetmaker with 30 years of experience, came up with the device as a way to compete with cabinet shops that use automated equipment. Available for Blum and Salice hinges, the kit includes jigs for inset and for overlay doors, and costs about \$20.

EZ-Mount, 480/829-1214, www.ez-mount.com.

Pin-Placement Help. Drilling holes for shelf pins can be a time-consuming process, and if you don't get it right the results look pretty awful. The *Gladstone Shelf Drilling Jig* strikes me as a great way to make shelf-pin holes accurately and efficiently. Designed for $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch and 5-millimeter holes, the jig spaces them $1\frac{1}{4}$, $1\frac{3}{4}$, or $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches from the edge on 1-inch centers. The kit includes both $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch and 5-millimeter bits with matching stops and sells for \$75.

Gladstone, 800/243-0713, www.gladstonetools.com.



Toolbox | Cabinetmaking Tools

Slot Machine. Amana's new slot cutter, the *E-Z Dial*, is unlike any I've ever seen. A dial on the bottom allows you to adjust the thickness of the cutters $\frac{1}{32}$ inch with every turn. The tool comes in two models: The 55500 adjusts from $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, and the 55510 from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Both have a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch shank. Amana says the tool is perfect for making slots for drawer bottoms because it allows you to easily fine-tune the thickness of undersized plywood, without shims or improvised spacers. It sells for about \$100.

Amana Tool, 800/445-0077, www.amanatool.com.



Feathered Friends. Shopmade feather boards work fine in many instances, but sometimes they're a little clunky for precision work. The *FeatherBow* and compact *FeatherBow Jr.* — both of which are made from high-impact plastic — mount easily on your woodworking equipment and set up faster than conventional feather boards, says the manufacturer. The bow-shaped side that gives the tools their name looks especially handy. And in a stroke of brilliance, the manufacturer made the packaging recyclable. When you break it apart, it yields up to five plastic push sticks. The Featherbow sells for \$35 and the FeatherBow Jr. for \$23.

Mystic Works, 860/896-0683, www.featherbow.com.



Stick to It. Are the rip-fence measurements on your table saw showing their age? Do your homemade jigs and miter-saw station lack measuring scales? For these and countless other applications, get yourself at least one of the *ProCarpenter Peel and Stick Tape Measures* from FastCap. Sold in 12-foot lengths with black-on-white measurements, they come in both left-read and right-read versions, and unlike the broken PowerLock blade you're using now, they lie completely flat. They cost \$12 apiece.

FastCap, 888/443-3748, www.fastcap.com.

