

Tools of the Trade
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Paslode Angled 16-Gauge Nailer

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The reach of a 15-gauge trim nailer with the finesse of an 18-gauge brad nailer

In my architectural woodworking business, finish nailers are the pneumatic tools we use the most, and having a good complement of nailers for every application is critical to the success of a custom job. My primary arsenal of finish guns includes a 15-gauge finish nailer and an 18-gauge brad nailer. I also have a 16-gauge finish nailer, but I've always preferred the 15-gauge tool for its angled magazine and – for some uses – slightly larger fasteners. The straight magazine and perpendicular shooting angle of the 16-gauge nailer make it difficult to get into tight places. It's just too clumsy for most installations. So it stays in the shop, and even there it sits on the shelf most of the time.

That's why the 20-degree angled magazine design of the Paslode T250A-F16 16-gauge pneumatic nailer caught my eye. Other than Paslode's hoseless, fuel-powered version, this is the only angled 16-gauge trimmer out there. Since it seemed like a 16-gauge tool for the 15-gauge user, I added one to my arsenal last year and put it to the test on everything from small assembly work in the shop to some large-scale trim installations.

When evaluating a new tool, I pay attention to first impressions – the case, the included accessories, the fit and finish, and the tool's overall appearance. Packed inside Paslode's molded plastic case with the nailer are safety glasses, two no-mar tips in dedicated slots, a contact-trip trigger, and tool oil. Yes, oil. I prefer an oil-free trim gun, but it's not a deal-breaker. The angled form of the Paslode is much friendlier looking than my old straight-body 16-gauge nailer, and picking it up boosted my expectation that this newer design was going to be a huge improvement over standard models in its class. Besides boasting greatly improved access to tight spots, angled nail guns have better balance; both qualities are very important in finish nailing applications.

The plastic handle and magazine frame help keep the weight of the tool down to a very light-feeling 3.8 pounds, and the rubber handle grip is comfortable. Paslode provides a long two-finger trigger, but I feel more in control of the tool if I use only one finger to activate the trigger and use the rest to hold on to the tool.

There's also a generously sized reversible belt clip mounted on the rear of the gun, a feature I found very helpful when working on a ladder. The rear-loading magazine is easy to fill and fits 100 nails. A graduated scale and cut-out windows along the magazine show the approximate number of fasteners remaining. The tool is engineered with a dry-fire lockout feature that won't let it shoot when the nail supply gets low (about eight fasteners). This refill reminder is a key feature and keeps you from dropping a piece of crown to the floor because you didn't realize your last dozen shots were shooting blanks. It also spares the tool the brutal wear caused by dry firing.

Another feature I really appreciate is the aim-able exhaust port on top of the piston housing that rotates to direct exhaust air away from your face or from the corner dust pile. Nail jams can be easily reached by snapping open a latch cleverly integrated into the front of the tool, but I never ran into any jams.

For setting the nail depth on the Paslode, there is a simple depth-of-drive dial just below the trigger. It works well enough, but without graduated marks, establishing repeatable settings for different materials and applications is difficult. Without any reference, you have to shoot test nails each time you adjust the dial to determine the correct setting. I tested the range of depth settings and found that the tool will drive nails from about 1/16 inch above the surface to 1/4 inch below in softwoods. (continued on next page)



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I also tried out both triggers that came with the unit. Straight out of the box, the tool had the sequential-fire trigger installed. This single-fastener firing mechanism is my preferred mode since most trim work requires careful placement of individual nails. An accidental bounce-firing can cause damage or even injury when you're holding up small pieces. And finish nail holes usually need to be filled, which means you want as few of them as possible. With the contact-trip trigger installed, the nailer had no problem bump-firing quickly. Changing between triggers is as easy as removing a rubber grommet that holds the trigger pivot pin in place and sliding out the pin.

I used the Paslode in the shop while we were building some simple bookcases. I normally use an 18-gauge brad nailer in the controlled environment of the shop because I can always use a clamp if the nail doesn't draw the joint tight enough during glue-up, but I didn't have that problem with the Paslode nailer. The wider 16-gauge fastener, along with the tool's extra punch, easily drove the nails home, pulling the face frame to the carcass. Controlling the driving direction of the fastener was easy with the angled body style, and the extra clearance afforded by the design meant the magazine was not likely to bump against the face of the workpiece the way a straight magazine can. One thing I have always liked about 16-gauge nails is the shape of the nail head. Whereas 15-gauge nails have a round head, which matches old-school hand-driven nails, 16-gauge nails – including the angled-Paslode nails – have a little rectangular T-shaped head. The advantage to this design is that the slender hole it leaves is easier to conceal on wood receiving a natural finish; you just need to make sure the rectangle is oriented parallel to the grain.



To see if this tool would be worth adding to the burgeoning collection of tools and gear that we haul to job sites, I tested it in the field on a large trim job that included two-piece crown molding, two-piece base, and 5/4 casing. The nailer had no problem pounding 2 1/2-inch nails through molding and studs and even made firm connections when nailing up sections of 2-by blocking. It handled comfortably all day; its light weight, compact size, and comfortable grip really reduced the daily fatigue level.

The only task I didn't feel comfortable using the Paslode for was intricate detail work like mitered returns. I assembled some crown returns in both solid cherry and MDF, and although the nailer worked in this application, it was somewhat awkward to hold in position compared with the 23-gauge pinner I would normally use. For returns, the fastener only has to hold the profile together while the glue sets, so in my opinion 16-gauge nails are too large for this type of detail work and pose too much risk of blowing a nail out the side of the molding. To make the tool's sightline as accurate as possible, I sometimes used the Paslode without its no-mar tip, as I do with many of my trim nailers. To its credit, it did not noticeably mar the wood when used this way.

The Verdict The Paslode T250A-F16 is a real winner, and the best 16-gauge finish nailer I've ever used. I will probably maintain my practice of using 15-gauge nails for most work along with 18-gauge brads for the small stuff, but if I could have only one finish nailer, I would pick this Paslode for its versatility. It easily handles larger jobs and is still small and accurate enough to take care of most detail work.

It's not a suitable replacement for other nailers in all instances; I would still use heavier 15-gauge nails in door jambs, and brads or pins for small details like mitered returns. However, its perfect combination of ergonomics, performance, features, and price make this tool a great option for the finish carpenter anywhere 16-gauge finish nails are right for the job. It's a tool I wouldn't leave sitting on the shelf.

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Paslode
T250A-F16 Trim Nailer
Price \$179
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