

NW Builder

THE BUSINESS OF BUILDING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST | OCTOBER 2002 | \$4.95



Tools & EQUIPMENT



Titanium Smack Down

We nail the pros and cons of two high-tech hammers

by Art B. Waldal

IL BET MOST OF YOU OUT there have more than one hammer in your possession. When I counted the ones lying around here at Waldal Homes before writing this review, I came up with 21 hammers, eight mauls and seven sledges.

Nail guns may have taken most of the work out of fastening things together, but they haven't negated the importance of the hammer. As good as they are at driving nails in, nail guns just aren't much use at pulling them out. Nor are they as portable or as good for all the little adjustments you can make tapping with a hammer.

So if a hammer is such a great all-around tool, why not invest in a really good one? After all, who wants to mash a thumb with a \$2 piece of garage sale junk when you can do it in style?

This brings me to a couple of framing hammers I recently had the chance to swing: the 16-ounce Vaughan Ti-Tech™ and the 14-ounce Stiletto TiBone™. Both have rubber-pad-insulated heads of titanium, a tough, light metal that is very strong and durable and absorbs shock. Both also have interchangeable smooth and milled (the one that looks like a meat tenderizing mallet) heads with magnetic nail starters.

That's where the similarities end.

The Stiletto Ti-Bone looks like a prop from a Mad Max movie: Its skeletal frame has a mean military look, with openings in the one-piece titanium head and frame where you'd expect to see solid metal. The claw is well designed, sharp and seemingly indestructible. No matter how you swing or pull on this hammer, it stays with you,

thanks to a sticky rubber grip. But the grip could be fatter where you hold the hammer. It could also extend up another inch or so closer to the head. When I choked up on the handle, something you do for finer, more accurate nailing, my index finger got sore from contact with the metal frame. A longer grip would solve the problem. While they're reshaping the grip, they might as well shave a little off the bottom edge that juts out enough to slow down holstering in the tool belt's hammer loop.

But hey, you won't break the Stiletto, and I don't believe the claw will ever fail you. Plus, it will draw a lot of attention at the jobsite. At \$195, it had better. Remember when the Pentagon was nailed for buying \$455 hammers back in the late '80s? At least this one is made of an exotic metal and is less than half the government price.

The \$110 Vaughan Ti-Tech is one nail-driving piece of equipment that works great for just that: driving nails. The rubber-cushioned interchangeable head is precision-made, and the wooden handle puts all the weight where you really want it: up front.

The only real disadvantage is the wooden handle. You can't pull the wheels off a train with it. Oh, it will pull nails just fine, as long as you don't let Burt have at it (he's the guy who's built like a boxcar and doesn't know his strength yet). Side-bending nails is also a no-no, as it will loosen the head or break the handle sooner or later. But hey, replacement handles don't cost that much. It is still a nice hammer to use.

The Ti-Tech and Ti-Bone handles are about the same length, but the Vaughan's wood handle is more comfortable because

Our tool tester found that the Stiletto's grip (R) made his fingers sore.



it has a larger diameter in the area where you're most likely to grip. But it is also more slippery than the Stiletto's molded rubber handle.

The heads are virtually the same, except on the Vaughan you can rotate the magnetic nail holder to the bottom of the head so the point of the nail is in full view.

As for swing and balance, I would use the wooden handled Vaughan over the Stiletto primarily because of the grip when choked up. Though both are lighter, neither of these hammers would get me to trade in my Vaughan steel-handled hammer with rubber grip. Their lightweight design and cushioned heads might be a big advantage if you are one of the last nail-gun holdouts, frequently pound on steel stakes or do a lot of concrete work, but on most jobsites these days machines absorb the abuse of repetitive nailing.

Still, I like both hammers, for different reasons. The Vaughan costs less, but the handle will eventually break. The Stiletto looks virtually indestructible, but it isn't as comfortable to hold. With some minor changes, the Stiletto would be a contender for top honors. Keep hammerin', and thanks for the visit. ♦



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