

Graco MiniMax cordless paint sprayer

Say goodbye to blocked nozzles with this gun

You can't beat a good spray job for the ultimate finish. But while the compressor and HVLP gun is perhaps the best combination for fine-tuning and adaptability, it requires a hose to supply the air to fire the finish through the nozzles.

The problem here is that the drag from a hose on any system – compressed air or turbine – can affect the fluidity of your spray action, and could drag across a sprayed surface as you work. The solution has been found in the latest Lithium-ion battery technology.

This gun is firmly aimed at the pro end of the market, dictated by the price initially, but also with excellent build quality, some clever innovation and, of course, performance.

It certainly looks the part with its piano black finish but it is big, and pretty heavy, and that's without a canister of finish hanging from the bottom.

However this plump primate (or chunky monkey to you and me) has excellent balance and feels comfortable in the hand. On test the lack of hose certainly allowed a more fluid movement through the strokes of each pass.

Nail gun lookalike

The Graco MiniMax reminds me of the DeWalt DC618 battery nail gun with the nail clip replaced by the paint canister, and is of similar size. The angled grip puts the battery under the wrist so it acts as a sort of counterbalance to the canister when full.

A single LED just above the battery indicates the status, only illuminating to show that it needs charging, or flashing to indicate the



battery temperature is too high or the paint nozzle is clogged.

Unclogging nozzles can be the bane of spraying as any slight impurity affects the finish, and it's usually a case of stripping the nozzle assembly to clear and clean it. Here, though, a clever little design allows you to rotate the spray tip through 180° and fire a jet of air through the nozzle to blast out any debris that has lodged behind the tip.

To do this you have to release the pressure in

the canister so you can rotate it – which is equally simple. A large cam lever on the side operates the priming valve, so all you have to do is flick the lever, rotate the nozzle, engage the lever and blast out the obstruction with a squeeze of the trigger.

That alone is worth volumes as a problem with a finish halfway through can cost time and money if you have to start stripping back anything you've already started to spray because of a blockage.



▲ Two different suction tubes are supplied – these simply push on



▲ Inserting the green plug restricts the flow of thinner fluids to avoid runs and sags



▲ The suction tube is then placed directly over the plug



▲ The priming lever is used to get the paint into the gun or to release pressure



▲ The nozzle rotates through 180° to allow easy unblocking



▲ A simple polythene bag serves as a liner to minimise clean-up after spraying



▲ The gun also comes with two other nozzles



▲ Though an effective performer, this is an 'all or nothing' gun – you can't control the amount of output in the usual way

No nozzle fine-tuning

It's a turbine-type operation so there's no fine-tuning of the nozzle, but you do have a rotating horn for differing spray patterns. However, with no actual air passing over the spray pattern, this is limited to the fan position, vertical, diagonal or horizontal. There's no option for doing a spot pattern.

The trigger is either 'on' or 'off' as well, with no finer control by altering the trigger pressure, so finishes must be at a viscosity that is consistent and suitable for the nozzle.

To help get that right, three different nozzles are supplied to cover thin, medium and thick viscosity finishes, and in the case of the thinner finish there's a 'fine finish optimiser' which fits into the suction tube so that the gun doesn't suck too much finish and lay it on too thickly.

Shooting from hip

To get it to work, you first have to prime it, so with the canister (containing suitable finish) in position, the lever is flipped to its 'up' setting and the trigger pulled for 10 seconds. A change in tone as the fluid enters the gun indicates that it's ready to fire.

The gun lays on finish at an unbelievable rate, so you need to make sure that your movement over any workpiece is quick and

fluid if you don't want to end up with sags and runs.

Using the gun with a General Finishes Milk Paint on a little MDF shelving unit in my porch, I had it fully coated in less than a minute.

As mentioned earlier, speed of the arm is the essence to avoid laying it on too heavily and getting excessive build-up, and once you have that right, the results are excellent.

You need to be aware of the pressure it fires at, though, as it's quite high – more than I expected. But the bounce back wasn't huge even inside the unit where this effect is usually more noticeable.

As an additional test, and because the weather was reasonable, I stained a framed ledged and braced door that I have to hang for my mother-in-law. I did this outside, and if I'd thought to time myself, I reckon about 15 to 20 seconds gave me a good coverage on one face, so it really does blast it on.

Conclusion

Getting used to no trigger control, it's either spraying full tilt or not at all, and the fact that it is maybe a little stiffer than a normal gun trigger is probably where the art lies – getting used to that 'fully on' or 'fully off'. Even if you are a good sprayer, the speed at which this gun works could take you by surprise.

The performance of the gun is first rate though, applying a uniform coating throughout, and in good coverage levels once you have the speed ratio sussed out, but it's definitely not a gun for the novice to learn the ropes with.

Of course, my decision to spray the unit in the porch has backfired somewhat. In masking the unit, I used masking tape which seemed to have superglue properties, and ripped half the emulsion off the wall in the process of removing it.

So now I have to redecorate the porch... I wonder what the Graco MiniMax is like at spraying emulsion? 🛠️

Good The Woodworking Verdict

+ Very quick; superb results; free from hoses
- Trigger a little stiff so you need to be quick

Rating ★★★★★

Typical price: £624
Made in: USA
Working pressure: 2000psi (maximum)
Batteries: 18v 2.4Ah Lithium-ion
Canister capacity: 1l
Tel: 0115 9737287
Web: www.generalfinishes.co.uk