

Didn't See This Coming

Reviewing the new ProShot Fine Finish sprayer



By Scott Burt

One thing I respect is when a manufacturer,

or any business, refuses to rest on its laurels. In 2010, Graco revolutionized the previously haphazard market for cordless handheld airless sprayers. They defined the market for that technology with the launch of the ProShot. By most units of measure, the ProShot was highly successful in terms of meeting a need for painting contractors. How do you follow that one up? If you are Graco, you bring a ProShot Fine Finish sprayer to the line.

The first print publication review of the ProShot took place last October in this column, and the tool went on to attract much attention within the industry while successfully crossing over into related trades such as carpentry and woodworking. The first-generation ProShot was (and still is) a straight-up 2,000 psi sprayer powered by an 18-volt lithium-ion battery that accommodates tip sizes from 211 through 517. My contracting company used the ProShot frequently and in a lot of different applications, mostly as a convenience tool capable of efficiently delivering nice finishes. The primary suggestion I made in my review of the ProShot last year was that the tool needed a variable-speed pressure control system on board. I won't pretend to take credit for the fact that Graco is now rolling out the ProShot Fine Finish sprayer equipped with a ProControl system, but I am sure glad that they are. This is one of the fundamental advantages of the Fine Finish unit. Instead of the ProShot's constant 2,000 psi, the Fine Finish unit offers a variable range from 500 to 1,500 psi controlled by a knob on the side of the unit. Another improvement is the ability to run the motor at two

different speeds, similar to motor speed controls on other cordless tools. Both improvements give the user much more control and flexibility in the finish process.

Along with the lower, controllable pressure range, the Fine Finish unit is geared for a variety of smaller tip sizes (from 208 to 412). Also, the brushless motor is fully enclosed and therefore capable of dispensing flammable solvent-based products. This was one line we never crossed with the original ProShot. Finally, the ProShot Fine Finish is more ergonomically sound. It is 25 percent lighter than the original ProShot and more slimline for improved handling in tight areas. The battery packs are lighter and smaller, and most important, the batteries and chargers are interchangeable between the original model and the Fine Finish.

It is important to note that the entire line of Graco handheld airless sprayers is not intended to replace other spray technologies such as airless, HVLP or air-assisted. The ProShot line is intended for small projects: to be used as a convenience tool. That is exactly how we have used the ProShot and is how we will use the Fine Finish unit: as a supplement to our sprayer fleet.

There are so many situations, both in the shop and on the job site, when miscellaneous items crop up that need to be finished efficiently and to a trim- or cabinet-grade standard. It's desirable to have a tool that is quick to set up, easy to use, capable of a nice finish, and more convenient to break down and clean up than other more complex spray systems. This appears to be Graco's goal with the ProShot Fine Finish, and that is how we tested it.



Between the shop and the field, over just a few weeks, we found ourselves pulling the unit out for many miscellaneous, smaller-scale finish tasks. In the shop, if we had a couple of stacks of beadboard that needed acrylic primer, the Fine Finish could do it. If we needed a quick waterborne topcoat over that primer, the Fine Finish could do it again. In the field, we had a dozen existing door jambs on a remodel project that required the application of a quick bond coat – a perfect situation for the Fine Finish. In all of these examples, compared to completing these small tasks manually or spending the time setting up and breaking down a more elaborate sprayer, the benefit of the tool is clear.

One of the significant advantages of the Fine Finish unit over the original ProShot is in the ability to shoot solvent-based finishes. So when the opportunity to use the Fine Finish on a small cherry countertop in the shop arose, we had a solid test for the primary intended application for the unit.

For the cherry countertop, we ran the unit in the #2 motor speed using a 210 tip at approximately 800 psi shooting Watco Danish Oil. Watco is a typical, relatively low-viscosity penetrating oil. It sprayed well with this setup, facilitating saturation of the wood as desired. The first clear coat application was completed using Zar Ultramax satin oil modified urethane with the same motor speed and tip setup and a bit more pressure. With each successive coat of lapped passes, we increased tip size, moving up to 310 on the second topcoat and 410 on the third (sanding between coats).

The result was the same hard yet soft finish that this product combination typically yields when applied using HVLP or air-assisted technologies. The clear-coat dry times were a little slower than usual due to the absence of air in the application, but sometimes that is actually a benefit because without that type of atomization, the product can actually stay wet a little longer, which helps it to lay down better. For those moving into this unit from an HVLP or AAA background, this would be the most significant point of which to be aware.

Most painting contractors come from a strong background in airless spraying, both in drywall applications and in fine finish tip situations. This is a very easy crossover to make because the ProShot Fine Finish behaves and performs very much like a microcosm of airless technology. In other words, the spray pattern, coating thickness, leveling characteristics, and overall application and drying experience should feel familiar to airless users.

For those painters who have used the original ProShot extensively, there are a couple of differences you should expect in transitioning to the Fine Finish unit. I try to be aware of the sounds that a tool makes when I am using it. Because my ear was so well attuned to the original ProShot, the Fine Finish unit sounded boggie to me. I had to make a conscious effort to wrap my head around the reality that they run two completely different motor technologies and that the Fine Finish unit is running at a lower psi. The maximum psi you can get out of it is only 75 percent of what the original ProShot runs at all the time. At first, the Fine Finish unit when dialed down below 1,000 psi sounded a bit like the original ProShot on a fading battery pack. Do not be alarmed; this is how it is supposed to sound, and the unit will prove it by pumping heavy-bodied materials at those pressures effortlessly.

The other significant difference is that if you, like me, were able to manipulate nice finishes out of the original ProShot, the experience of hitting that mark with the Fine Finish unit is a bit different. With the ProShot, the best you could do is go to a small tip, move fast, back a little farther off the target, lay it out and encourage leveling. The Fine Finish is a smoother ride in the sense that you don't have to move nearly as

fast; you can get in closer and enjoy better control over your finish.

All in all, the ProShot Fine Finish is a tool worth owning for painting contractors who run into random, miscellaneous on- and off-site tasks that require a trim-grade finish, such as moldings, doors, cabinets, and stair parts and pieces. Again, it is not going to replace your airless, HVLP or air-assisted

units, but it will definitely be a more convenient and efficient solution to many of the problems that you currently solve with sprayers. **APC**

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