



Best air compressors for shop

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Nearly every professional contractor uses an air compressor. Of course, it's not just a construction tool. Automotive, woodworking, aviation, marine, and many others use compressors to power air tools. When I got our team together to decide on the best air compressor, we sparked a fierce debate concerning brands, styles, prices, and much more.

The first questions were "What size?" and "What's the application?" Good points. The selections below are the result of many hundreds of hours of testing and use--not to mention several more hours of internal discussion! Now that the physical and relational bruises have healed, I'm ready to share our expert opinions across a range of compressor categories.

Coming off of the success of the Metabo HPT pancake air compressor (also called "The Tank"), the 8-gallon EC1315SM delivers more CFM and capacity. Max pressure is 225 PSI--which you'll likely never use. However, what you may use is the 5 CFM (at 90 PSI) which lets you run up to 3 framing nailers or 4 roofing/siding nailers simultaneously.

Running a trim crew? Connect as many as five 15-gauge or 16-gauge finish nailers and get to work! In either of these scenarios, each tool would have plenty of air to drive nails. Another great feature is the quick ramp-up time--just 55 seconds to get from 0 to 125 PSI from empty. When you do run it below 95 PSI, the recovery time is a brisk 14 seconds.

For the money, you get a lot in this capable package. Between the wheeled portability and capacity--this compressor is my all-around go-to workhorse on any jobsite.

Choosing the best small air compressor used to mean grabbing a pancake model. Lately, however, smaller "hot dog" compressors have proven their worth on small punch lists and trim jobs. The almost unbelievably small DeWalt D55140 features a 1-gallon tank and weighs less than a Cocker Spaniel. I can stand this compressor on the rear floor of an F150 SuperCab without a second thought and get to work.

The key to enjoying this trim compressor is application. It consistently drove 18-gauge brad nailers and 23-gauge pinners without any difficulty. If you want to do some remodeling with a framing nailer, you'll want to get a larger model (like the DeWalt 6-gallon pancake compressor or one of my other recommendations).

Lastly, the D55140 doesn't make a ton of noise. It's around 4-5 dBA quieter than most other trim compressors. That's more than enough to be noticeable.

At 60 decibels, the Rolair Ultra-Quiet 2.5-gallon air compressor is quiet enough to hold a conversation next to

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it. As impressive as this is, the noise level represents just one of many features we liked after choosing it as the quietest portable air compressor.

Lastly, the cycle times are short--nearly identical to the larger 8-gallon Metabo HPT model that's our overall top pick. Expect it to take around 14 seconds to get from 95-125 PSI. I also consider Rolair one of the best air compressor brands on the market, with models ranging from hand-carry models to wheeled and stationary units up to 200 gallons in size.

Both the DeWalt FlexVolt and Milwaukee cordless compressors make solid cordless compressors and carry similar specs. However, the 2-gallon Milwaukee earns the nod for several reasons. First, it's a full 11 decibels quieter (just 68 dBA). Audibly, that sounds about half as loud as the DeWalt! It does trade a bit of that for weight, however.

While it's certainly helpful on jobsites with no power, our plumbing pro also successfully used it to bleed heaters (which typically have to be done manually) and air-test PEX on several re-pipes. It even worked to pressure test a new sewer line.

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