

TOOL KIT

Speedy Hidden Fastening System

by Greg DiBernardo



HIDfast Hidden Fastening System

HIDfast

603/772-9649

hidfast.com

Street price: Decker, \$580; 175 2 1/2-inch fasteners, \$100

Unlike other hidden fastener systems, which rely on separate clips and screws, the HIDfast system uses collated fasteners that are reminiscent of hardwood flooring cleats. These fasteners are driven through the edge of a deck board and into the joist with a tool HIDfast calls the Decker. Protruding from each embedded fastener is a prong onto which the next board is driven. The fasteners space the boards either 1/8 inch or 1/4 inch apart, and their rosin coating makes them hold incredibly well. Though made of heavy-gauge stainless steel, they are not recommended for coastal applications.

Fastening decking with HIDfast's Decker is fast and requires little effort. The tool resembles a pneumatic flooring nailer and operates in much the same way. At each joist, I place the Decker on the deck board's edge and actuate the tool by hitting its pressure cap with a supplied rubber dead-blow mallet. Once the first board has been fastened to every joist, I place the next board in contact with the exposed fastener prongs. Standing on the installed decking, I drive the new board onto the prongs with the same dead-blow mallet I used to strike the tool. While this last step is relatively easy, installers need to develop a feel for how hard to swing the mallet, to avoid overdriving the board onto the prongs. After the board has been tapped onto every prong, the process of installing fasteners with the Decker is repeated.

Installation is extremely fast and relatively foolproof. It's easiest with grooved boards, but also works with nongrooved ones. The Decker seems sturdily built — and has a price tag to back it up. At a street price of \$580, the Decker probably doesn't make sense for a contractor who builds only a handful of decks a year. For serious deck builders laying down thousands of square feet a month, though, it's a no-brainer. It excels on cellular PVC decking and can be used on nearly any synthetic decking or wood — even ipe. Just check with the decking manufacturer, before you install, to make sure it warrants its decking with HIDfast.

The HIDfast system allows me to offer hidden fasteners competitively even on boards that are notoriously tough to install with other hidden fasteners, including nongrooved cellular PVC products and softwoods like cedar. I'm able to offer a more diverse product line, and I can install it faster too.

Fitted with an adapter — included with the tool — the Decker can fasten decking to joists at an angle. If you'll be doing an angled installation and pregrooved boards are available, get them — you will save time over using a square-edged board. Installing nongrooved boards on an angle takes a little getting used to.

Perhaps this system's strongest feature is that the installer doesn't have to spend time on his or her knees, which you will appreciate every time you use it. No other hidden fastener system I know of can claim that. Just being able to stay on your feet speeds things up substantially.

My crews have used the Decker on about 5,000 square feet of decking to date, the majority of it cellular PVC. They experienced only two jams. While the jams weren't too difficult to clear, hex wrenches are required to remove the magazine.

The biggest problems my crews experienced were overdriving the fasteners and overdriving the boards onto the prongs. This led to gapping inconsistencies that were overt to trained eyes. We found it's better to underdrive a fastener or a board than to overdrive it.

We had a couple of other problems: As with any hidden fastener, sometimes things got a little off kilter, and shimming between boards was needed to get back on track. Also, the dead-blow mallet included with the tool is black rubber, and it can mar certain types of decking. I would love to see the tool ship with a nonmarring mallet.

Other than that, all my crews have taken a liking to the HIDfast system. At about \$1 per square foot, the fastener cost is on par with other hidden fasteners. It's highly productive and has increased our efficiency and profits; it is, I think, a real threat to the more common screw-and-clip systems.

Greg DiBernardo owns *Bergen Decks in Waldwick, N.J.*