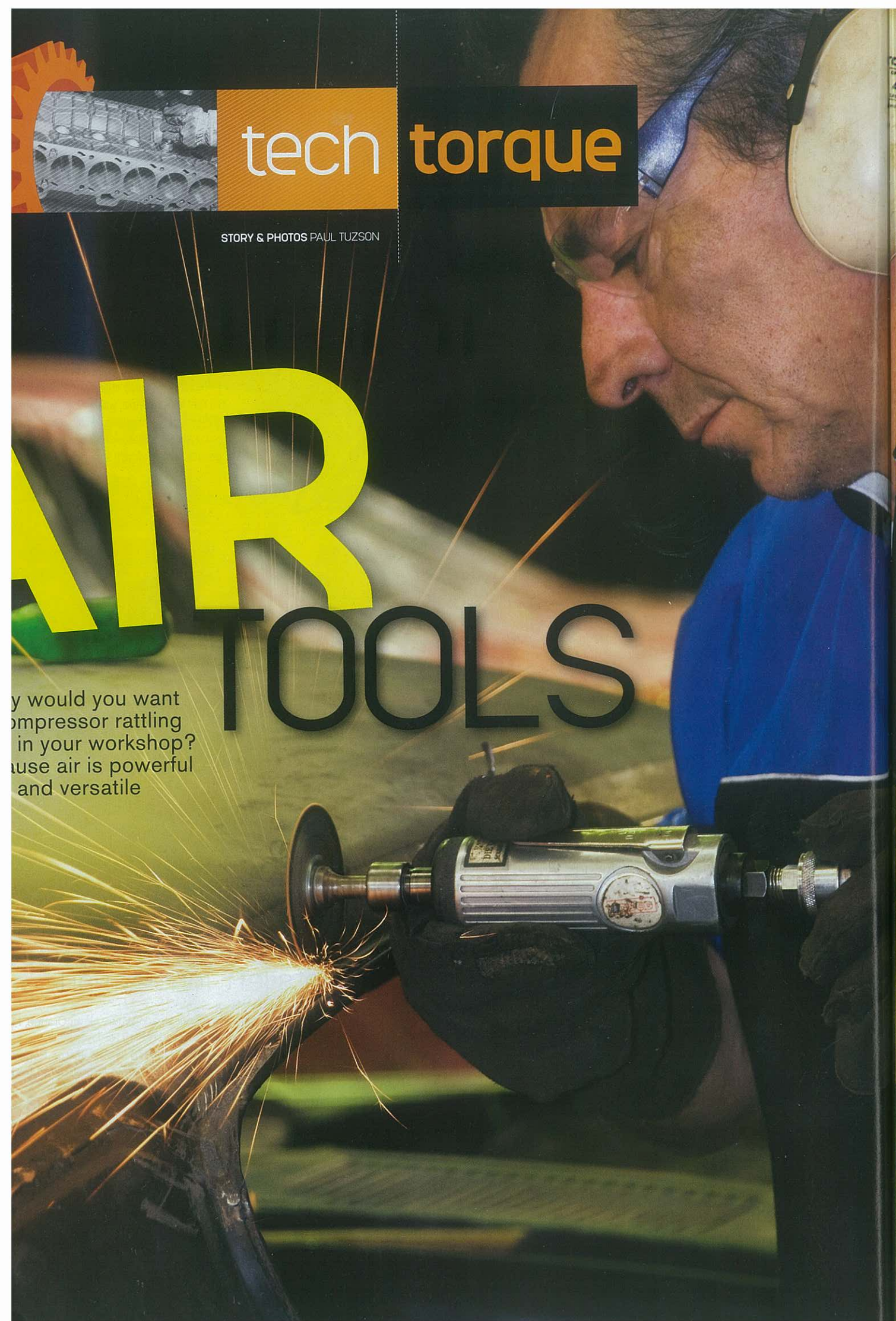


tech torque

STORY & PHOTOS PAUL TUZSON

AIR TOOLS

Why would you want a compressor rattling in your workshop? Because air is powerful and versatile



THE reason all professional automotive workshops have air compressors is because there's an air-powered version of almost any tool you can think of. A blow-gun is the most common as it can be used to dry, clean or 'blow off' all manner of things.

While many air tools have electric equivalents, the air versions often offer many advantages and having air tools at home is a good idea. In America something like 10 per cent of homes have an air compressor. In Australia the figure is only about one per cent. It seems that we haven't caught on yet to the usefulness of pneumatic tools.

SATISFY YOUR NEEDS

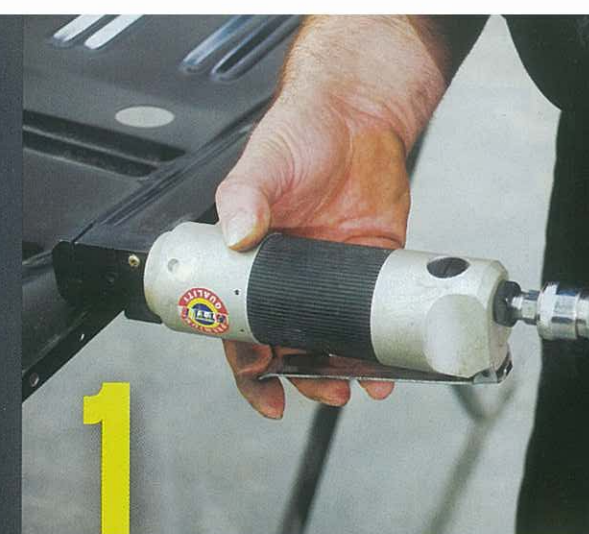
WHEN buying a compressor to drive air tools, you'll need to determine how much flow you need. Traditionally, this was described in cubic feet per minute (cfm) but these days specifications are in litres per minute (l/m). One cubic foot equals 28.3 litres. Most manufacturers offer a range of models but if you're going to be working on cars, simply buy the biggest one you can plug into a regular 240Volt power outlet (about 270-320l). If you have a dedicated 20Amp outlet you can jump to 350l/m, and significantly larger again if you're wired for three-phase. This is because air tools such as die-grinders, polishers and spray guns consume a lot of air and a small compressor will not be able to supply enough air to keep them running properly.

SIMPLE BUT DEADLY

THE simplest of all air tools — the blow gun — can be extremely dangerous. Its jet of air can be so intense that it can pierce your skin and inject air bubbles into your blood stream, which can be fatal. Compressed air can also enter the body through small cuts and then dangerously puff up the surrounding area, which happened to a friend of mine. In short, never point an air gun at your own skin or towards anyone else.

RATTLE AWAY

THE impact wrench or rattle gun is another common air tool. There's nothing like the ease and convenience of a rattle gun for undoing or doing up less sensitive bolts such as those on exhaust systems or even wheels. Most wheel manufacturers insist that wheel bolts should be tightened with a torque wrench, which you will see at better shops. But the fact is that most people don't handle wheels that way. Mind you, there



1 MAIN: An air-operated cut-off saw is an invaluable tool when doing body work. It slices through sheet metal like butter

A pneumatic punch to make holes in sheet metal for manual spot-welding (puddle welds)



2 SP has two sanders that look identical but have different orbital actions. One is for working on body filler while the other is for sanding primers. Both feature fittings for dust evacuation



3 Dual-action air sanders are standard issue in any body shop though they're only suited to near-flat panels and won't get into tight corners. They make a lot of dust and consume lots of air



4 FAR LEFT: You can never have too much air. Compressors should only run at 50 per cent duty cycle. If too small they'll run constantly and wear out. About 320l/m (11cfm) is the biggest you can plug into 240V. A bigger tank helps

Oil of the correct type is essential both for compressors and air tools