

Triangle Detail Sanders

by Clayton DeKorne



One of the most innovative, though specialized, power sanders to come along in recent years is the triangle sander (also known as a detail sander or corner sander). These sanders feature an oscillating triangular sanding head that vibrates back and forth in tiny sweeping arcs. The oscillating motion will leave sanding marks, but you can prevent this by keeping the sander moving, and not applying too much downward pressure. Only a very light touch is required.

The detail sander's main advantage is that you can sand into corners. I find it especially useful for removing dried glue squeeze-out in the corners of cabinet carcasses and drawers, but there are a host of other applications. In general, it speeds paint prep or finish sanding of any corner where two surfaces meet. Examples include the recesses in a raised panel door; spaces between stairway balusters and around the contours of handrails; areas under countertop overhangs and in kickspaces; the reveals and edges of installed window and door trim; window muntins, louvered doors and shutters; the corners above and below shelves ... the list goes on. If you build a lot of kitchens, built-in furniture, stairways, and doors, this tool will serve you well.

I tested three models: the Fein MSX 636-1; the Bosch B7000; and the Ryobi DS2000, which is an upgraded version of the light-duty Ryobi DS1000. While each one of these tools fits the general category of "detail sander," each one is distinctly different.

Fein

Fein Power Tools was the first tool-maker to introduce a triangle sander, and its model is by far the most powerful and solidly built (Fein Power Tools, 3019 W. Carson St., Pittsburgh, PA 15204; 412/331-2325). This tool's cast-metal front end and simple no-frills styling suggest a durable machine that will run virtually forever.

Power. Like every other Fein tool

I've used, this is an industrial-quality machine suitable for continuous use. Running at 20,000 opm (versus 12,000 and 13,000 for the other machines), the Fein is noticeably more aggressive than the other sanders. In fact, I found I had to choose a finer grit paper than I would with a typical pad sander or random-orbit machine. Though the Fein sander is powerful, it also runs surprisingly smooth. It produced the least vibration of the three models I tested.

Options. Having been out with a triangle sander the longest, Fein's had a chance to explore the most options for its machine. For starters, both hook-and-loop and "sticky-backed" PSA (pressure-sensitive adhesive) backing pads and paper are available. The paper — a high-quality resin-bonded aluminum oxide on an F-weight backing — is available in 13 grit sizes from 36 to 320. Fein also offers a felt polishing pad and an assortment of nonwoven pads. The felt pad is good for buffing clear finishes, or polishing metals (the ultimate for buffing up the chrome on your rig). Nonwovens (similar to Scotch-Brite pads) work well for removing rust on metal parts, or, with paint remover, for refinishing wood (the pad can be rinsed out with water).

Fein also offers an extension pad, that positions a smaller hook-and-loop sanding pad out in front of the motor head.

This allows the pad to fit between louvers or in other similar narrow openings.

There's also an optional dust collection setup that allows you to hook the tool up to a vacuum, and pull dust through the pad (perforated paper is available). While it's nice to suck the dust away from any project, I don't think this feature is as important on a triangle sander as it is with other types of sanders. The pad covers such a small, specific area that it's not removing a lot of material at once, and so it's just not kicking up a lot of dust.

The Fein goes beyond detail sanding, too. An optional scraper works well for chipping heavy paint, and removing window glazing, caulk, expansion-joint sealants, and mastic-applied carpet and vinyl flooring. Finally, there's the Saw Set — an extra-thin-kerf blade for specialty cutting applications (see "Tools for Tight Spots," 10/94).

All these accessories make the Fein machine a more versatile tool, which helps to justify its high price tag.

Price. With a list price of \$275, the Fein is by far the most expensive model. I've seen it advertised for as low as \$185, but at that price, it's still more than twice the price of any other detail sander. If you will be using it every day (either as a sander, scraper, or specialty saw) and want a machine that will last, or simply want a top-of-the-line tool, this is the machine to buy.

Bosch

Bosch's detail sander was introduced in 1993, but only started showing up on tool store shelves this past summer (S-B Power Tools, 4300 W. Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60646; 312/286-7330). It has a stylish, well-designed housing



Triangle sanders.

The main advantage of these innovative power sanders is that you can sand into corners, speeding paint prep and finishing of everything from raised panel doors to contoured stair parts. The author tested three models (from left to right): the Ryobi DS2000, the Bosch B7000, and the Fein MSX 636-1.

that's lightweight (2½ pounds vs. 3½ pounds for the Fein) and comfortable to hold, and it features built-in dust collection. For the professional builder or remodeler who wants a powerful sander, but doesn't expect to use it every day, this is probably the best choice.

Power. Though not quite as aggressive as the Fein, the Bosch B7000 takes down material at a rate that's comparable to most pad sanders.

This model vibrates a bit more than the others I tested. But keep in mind that this is only in comparison with the other two models. The vibration is less than most pad sanders and you probably wouldn't notice it unless you were sanding for long, uninterrupted periods of time.

Options. The Bosch is only available with hook-and-loop paper. Packs of resin-bonded, aluminum oxide paper (with holes for the dust collection) are available in five grit sizes from 60 to 240. Bosch also sells nonwoven pads, a felt polishing pad, and an extension pad that extends the full-size pad in front of the tool.

Price. One of the most attractive features of the Bosch is its price. The list price is \$122, and it often retails for \$75 to \$85. This seems like an appropriate price for a well-made specialty tool that probably won't see everyday use.

Ryobi

Ryobi's newest detail sander, the DS2000, is a big step up from the company's first model, the DS1000 (Ryobi America Corp., 5201 Pearman Dairy Rd., Suite 1, Anderson, SC 29625;



Profile sander. A piece of foam under the sanding sheet helps when sanding contours. An optional foam pad, which is sold as a polishing pad, is available with the Ryobi DS2000, shown here.

803/226-6511). Yet in price and quality, it still falls below the other two detail sanders I tested.

Power. Ryobi offers two speeds on this tool. Low runs at 9,000 opm; high runs at 12,000 opm. The low speed works for scraping the paint off window panes around muntins (with optional scrapers), but it's not much good for sanding. Even at high speed, this sander seems underpowered compared with the other two models. It will do the job, but at a much slower pace than the other two models. The main advantage of this sander is a low price tag.

Options. The Ryobi is only available with PSA paper. Aluminum-oxide paper is available in six grits from 40 to 220. Two triangle scrapers (small and large) and a teardrop scraper are available. These work well for cleaning the overpaint off windows and scraping thick paint from moldings. Nonwoven pads, a polishing pad (this one made of foam), and a vacuum attachment are other options. This sander doesn't need an extension pad, as the sanding head is designed to extend in front for sanding in narrow spaces.

Price. The new Ryobi lists for \$134. As of this writing, there are no published retail prices, but it should sell for less than \$60 — not bad for a specialty tool.

More to Consider

In addition to the basic differences in power, price, and options, there are other differences to consider before buying a triangle sander.

Specialized paper. The backing pad for each sander has a different shape and size, so each sander requires a special paper. If availability might be a problem, choose a model that uses PSA paper (the Ryobi or Fein), so you can cut triangles out of sandpaper sheets and apply them with a spray-on sandpaper adhesive, such as NAPA 4085 adhesive.

Like most people, I tend to work only the front tip and one edge of the triangle pads as I sand. This chews up one edge of the paper quickly, so I need to reposition the paper on the backing pad frequently. The backing pads on both the Fein and Bosch are symmetrical, so the paper can be turned. The Bosch backing pad quickly detaches, then clicks on in any position. With



Quick-change pad. To ensure even wear of each sanding sheet, the symmetrical Bosch backing pad quickly detaches with the press of a button, then clicks on in any position.

the Fein, I have to pull the hook-and-loop paper off, then reapply it. Or I can rotate the pad to any position by loosening a hex nut (the PSA paper has a hole in the center to expose this hex nut). The Ryobi pad, however, is fixed and has an asymmetrical shape. While this narrow triangle is a convenient shape for reaching into tight corners, you can only apply the paper in one way. I end up using a lot more paper since I can't conveniently sand with all three edges.

Sanding profiles. While detail sanders are best suited to sanding flat surfaces along corners, you can smooth out profiled moldings and contoured stair and cabinet parts. This works best with a foam pad behind the paper that allows the paper to conform to the contours and doesn't gouge the surface. Ryobi provides a foam pad, which they promote as a polishing pad, but which works well under the PSA paper. I also made my own foam pad, using a piece of foam carpet pad and spray-on sandpaper adhesive. I applied the foam to Fein's optional PSA backing pad.

New model. Skil, working off its alliance with Bosch, will introduce a scaled-down version of the B7000 in early January. While I didn't have a chance to use this tool extensively, I tried it out at the 1994 National Hardware Show. It's very similar to the B7000, though noisier and probably not as durable. On the other hand, it's expected to retail for around \$50. ■

Clayton DeKorne is senior editor of JLC and editor of JLC's Tools of the Trade.