Toolbox

Makita 5377MG Hypoid Saw

by Greg Burnet

West Coast carpenters aren't the only ones who love their wormdrive saws — we in the Midwest love them, too. I've been using a Skil 77 or the Bosch variant for more than 25 years, so when *JLC* asked me to review the new Makita hypoid framing saw, I was a bit skeptical. Why would anyone use a hypoid drive train rather than the time-tested and nearly bulletproof wormdrive?

I discovered the answer pretty quickly: Comfort!

The Skil HD77M and the Bosch 1677M each weigh 14 pounds. With its magnesium housing, the Makita weighs 13 pounds. Over the course of a day spent picking up and putting down the tool, that one pound can make a real difference. Rubberized grab parts increase the comfort quotient, too — and the handle, depth, bevel, and blade-guard levers are all oversized and easy to grasp.

Performance

Of course, all the creature comforts in the world are irrelevant if the saw doesn't perform well. So on top of using it for my remodeling jobs, I lent it out to three of my carpenter friends to get their feedback.

Since the other carpenters were also die-hard wormdrive users, I found their reviews somewhat surprising. I expected strong loyalty to their preferred saw, but they loved the Makita; they commented on how comfortable the saw felt and how easily it handled all the cutting chores they threw at it.

The saw never missed a beat for us, either. In addition to typical framing tasks — cutting studs, joists, stringers, treads, and sheathing — we used it to undercut doors and for extensive subfloor repairs on a 100-year-old house we were remodeling. Perhaps the most challenging test consisted of cutting dense, bone-dry 2x12 fire-retardant–treated Doug fir for an entire day. The saw plowed through the material without a problem — though it did seem to have a little more difficulty than our Bosch wormdrive did.

Makita 5377MG Specs

Weight: 13 pounds
Depth of cut: 90 degrees at $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches; 45 degrees at $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches
Drive train: 15-amp inline motor; permanently lubricated hypoid gearbox

Makita
800/462-5482
www.makita.com

Padded levers make adjusting the bevel and depth settings easier and more comfortable. The small knob is a 45-degree stop; turning it a quarter turn allows the table to swing to a maximum bevel of 51 degrees.

A foldaway rafter hook keeps the saw within reach and prevents drops.

Aside from comfort and power, the saw offers a number of nice conveniences: Unlike wormdrives, which have an oil-filled gearbox that must be changed and checked regularly, hypoids don't require any maintenance outside of ordinary brush changes. The 5377 can bevel to 51.5 degrees with positive stops at 22.5 degrees and 45 degrees, and it has a built-in rafter hook, on-board storage for the blade wrench (an Allen wrench), a 9-foot rubber cord, and a spacious nylon carrying bag.

Hypoids vs. Wormdrives

So has Makita created the ideal saw? It depends — mostly on how durable the 5377 turns out to be.

Wormdrives and hypoids have different types of gears: Hypoid saws use ring-and-pinion gears similar to those found in an automotive differential, whereas wormdrives have a cylindrical-shaped "worm" gear on the motor armature that meshes with a cog on the blade arbor. Diehard wormdrive users and manufacturers claim that this gear arrangement is stronger and offers more torque than a hypoid's. Only time will tell if the 5377's gearing is as durable as a wormdrive's. My concern with the hypoid arrangement is based largely on conversations I've had with framers who've made the switch to hypoid saws but found they didn't last as long as their wormdrives.

There was also that slight discrepancy in performance between this saw and our wormdrive that I noticed when cutting the 2x12s. Admittedly, it was noticeable only when we were pushing the saws very hard through some of the most unforgiving material I've ever cut. Both the Makita hypoid drive and the Bosch wormdrive have 15-amp motors, which makes me think that the difference lies in how power is transferred to the blade.

A cautionary note. All the wormdrives I've used have diamond arbors — which eliminate blade slip, allowing the saw to power through almost anything in its path — but the Makita hypoid has a round arbor much like the one found on a sidewinder. We didn't experience any problems with it, but this round arbor could conceivably allow the blade to slip under tough conditions.

The Verdict

My misgivings about the 5377's power may not be an issue for remodelers and more casual users, but framers who push their saws to the limit every day might want to take heed. Still, Makita has clearly raised the bar for this class of saws — and if you're looking for comfort and features, the tool is hard to beat. I'll certainly consider buying one the next time we're looking to add a framing saw to our fleet.

The hex-key blade wrench stores on the forward handle. Unlike wormdrive saws from Bosch and Skil, the 5377 has a round arbor.

With a soft-sided case and a carbide blade, the 5377 costs about $180.

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Powerful Baggage. Despite claims to the contrary, many contractor bags aren't up to the task of carrying certain types of demolition waste. That's why I was so excited to find *Demobags* at last year's Hardware Show. Made from woven polypropylene, the 110-pound–capacity containers won't tear when punctured, says the maker. Twenty 38-gallon bags sell for about $20.

Global Strategies, 866/420-3366, www.demobags.com.

Casting Call. Your recip saw — so often the go-to tool for demolition — isn't much help when you need to cut a cast-iron fixture or waste pipe. Although you may be able to get through, it won't be easy. Lenox has a solution: Its new *Diamond* recip-saw blades cut cast iron three times faster than carbide-grit blades (the next best option). The company's secret: industrial diamonds brazed to the blades' narrowed edge. The blades cost about $15 each.

Lenox, 800/628-8810, www.lenoxsaw.com.

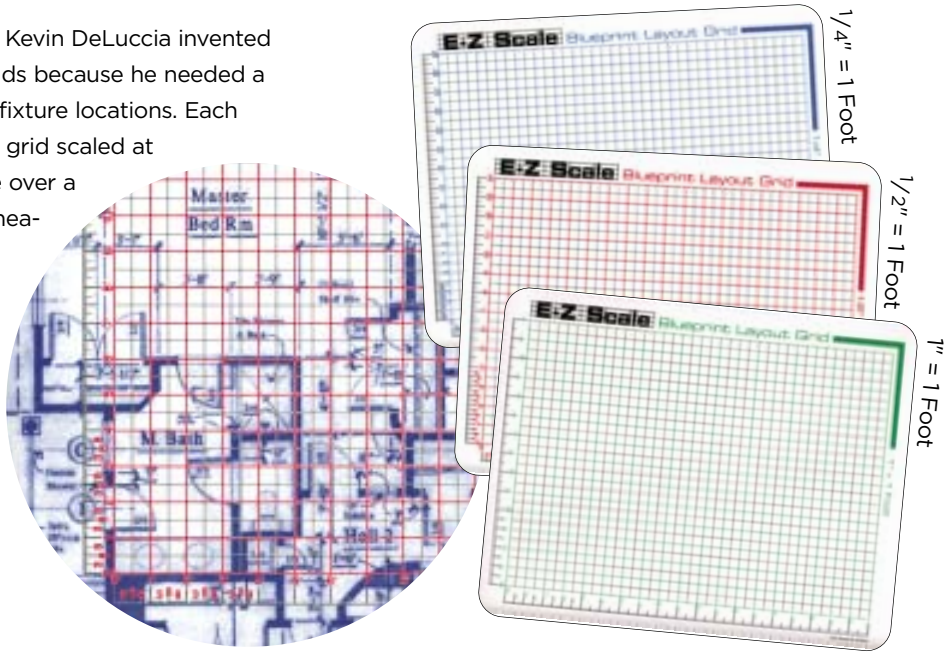
Break Free. Think you need either electricity or a giant tow-behind compressor to run a breaker hammer? Think again. The *Red Hawk* gas-powered breaker has its own two-stroke engine. Weighing in at 50 pounds, the machine can cut clay, concrete, and asphalt; tamp soil and fill; and drive posts and ground rods. A large muffler and a vibration-dampening handle reduce user fatigue. The Red Hawk costs about $2,200.

Chicago Pneumatic, 413/746-0020, www.cpconstructiontoolsusa.com.

Clear Scale.

Electrician Kevin DeLuccia invented *E-Z Scale* blueprint layout grids because he needed a good way to scale prints for fixture locations. Each clear plastic sheet contains a grid scaled at 1/4, 1/2, or 1 inch; placing one over a print makes for quick, easy measurements. A three-sheet set costs $20 — but you might want to consider buying a few sets because they're unlikely to stick around once your subs and employees catch sight of them.

E-Z Scale, 201/665-7255, www.e-zscale.com.



Sweet Square.

I considered the rafter square impossible to improve upon, but I was wrong. Hanson's *Pivot Square* adds a number of new features to the old standby, including three level vials for measuring roof pitches and making plumb and level lines. The device also has an adjustable leg for faster and more accurate repetitive cuts. It comes in a nice nylon case with a roof framing guide and costs $84.

C.H. Hanson, 800/827-3398, www.chhanson.com.

Perfect Pitch.

Do you trust that little pointer on your table saw's bevel adjustment? If not, take a look at Lee Valley's *Tilt Box.* This digital inclinometer measures from 0 to 90 degrees left and right with an accuracy of .2 degrees, says the manufacturer. Rare-earth magnets on both sides of the housing attach to saw blades and cast-iron tables and fences. The device is powered by a 9-volt battery and sells for about $40.

Lee Valley, 800/871-8158, www.leevalley.com.