EDITED BY BRUCE GREENLAW

Two Cutting-Edge Cordless Circular Saws

BY JOHN SPIER

Two new cordless circular saws, the 18-volt Milwaukee M18 Fuel and the 36-volt Makita 18V X2 LXT, claim to wed corded performance with cordless convenience. Can these new saws really stand in for corded framing saws and do serious production work? After putting both saws through their paces over several months, I'm ready to report my opinions.

MILWAUKEE M18 FUEL

The 6 ½-inch left-bladed M18 Fuel (model 2730-22) is the first cordless circular saw with a brushless motor, and it is part of Milwaukee's Redlink Plus advanced electronics system, which the company says protects against overloading, overheating, and overdischarging.

The shoe and the blade guards are made of rigid lightweight magnesium, and the saw bevels to 51° and can cut through a 2-by at 45°. The saw is also equipped with an electric blade brake, an LED headlight, a pivoting rafter hook, an onboard blade wrench, and an easy-to-read accurate depth gauge. The kit's 4-amp-hour batteries have built-in fuel gauges and take about 1 ½ hours to fully recharge.

According to Milwaukee, the saw cuts up to 30% faster than other 18-volt models and can consistently crosscut more than 225 2x4s per charge under optimal testing conditions. I didn't do my own tedious runtime testing, but I have cut a wide range of materials using this saw, including all of our routine framing materials. I have found it to be smooth, powerful, and well-balanced.

That said, what matters is how fast you can push the blade through the wood you're cutting. While this saw performed well, it isn't as fast as a corded Milwaukee sidewinder, which spins at 5,800 rpm versus 5,000 rpm for the M18 Fuel. Although higher rpm ratings don't always translate to higher cutting speeds, coupled with the larger blade circumference of the corded saw, the difference is definitely noticeable.

Nevertheless, the lightweight Milwaukee has become my go-to saw for small jobs and for quick cuts. My

1. The 6 1/2-inch Milwaukee can cut through a 2-by at a 45-degree bevel. **2.** Unlike the Makita, the Milwaukee has a built-in rafter hook. **3.** The author did some serious framing using the 7 1/4-inch Makita, including trimming LVLs.

crew and I have used the M18 Fuel a lot on staging and roofs, where it has been perfect for adjusting our trim cuts and sawing red-cedar roof shingles and caps. I have also used it for breaking down materials at the lumberyard and the Dumpster. I already have a fleet of compatible M18 tools, so I always have plenty of fully charged batteries on hand.

Like other cordless circular saws, this one has a safety that you have to press with your thumb before pulling the trigger. Milwaukee's safety is easier to operate than others I've tried, but when cutting in awkward positions, I wish it wasn't there.

MAKITA 18V X2 LXT

Like the other tools in Makita's unique 18V X2 LXT line, the new 36-volt, 7 1/4-inch, right-bladed sidewinder (model XSH01X) is driven by two batteries from the company's flagship 18-volt LXT platform (which now includes more than 80 tools). The shoe and the blade guards are made of magnesium, and the saw bevels to 50° and has a positive stop at 45°. It has protective electronics, a blade brake, and an onboard blade wrench; unlike the Milwaukee, the saw doesn't have a rafter hook or a headlight.

The X2 is clearly designed to replace its corded counterparts on the jobsite. According to Makita, it crosscuts up to 250 2x4s per charge, and cuts as fast as its corded 7 ¼-inch model 5007F sidewinder. I've comfortably framed with it all day long, cutting mostly 2x4s, 2x6s, plywood, and LVLs. It's rugged, smooth, powerful, and nicely balanced despite the two batteries.

On the downside, the blade wrench quickly fell off the saw and disappeared, the depth scale is inaccurate, and the trigger safety is a bit of a stretch for my average-size hands.

This saw would fit seamlessly into a collection of 18-volt LXT tools. But I don't have other compatible 18-volt Makita tools, so the kit's single-port charger created a battery management problem. Each 3-amp-hour battery can fully recharge in less than 30 minutes, but I can't simultaneously charge both of them at lunchtime or overnight. This means that they don't stay equally charged, and when one is depleted, the saw shuts down. And although there are two LED lights on the tool that tell you when a battery is almost dead, there are no fuel gauges on the tool or the battery.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If I had to choose one of these saws to keep on the truck, I'd go with the Milwaukee M18 Fuel. It can handle most cutting tasks where corded sidewinders would be impractical, it has a rafter hook, and it provides fuel gauges on the batteries.

That said, if you've already bought into Makita's 18-volt LXT platform and are ready to cut the cord on your circular saws, the 36-volt dual-battery Makita appears to be capable of handling the job. The saw might also be ideal for mobile applications, such as cutting floor joists in place or building concrete forms.

The two-battery Milwaukee and Makita kits that I tested are pretty pricey, but you can buy the bare tools for about $200 less. Milwaukee also sells a one-battery kit.

Milwaukee 2730-22 Specs

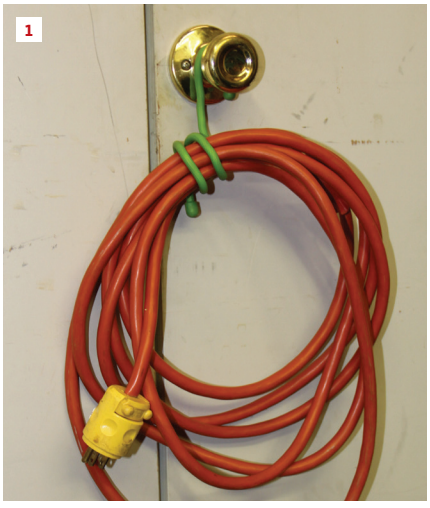
Blade diameter: 6 1/2 inches
Battery: 18 volt, 4 amp hour
RPM: 5,000
Weight (with blade and battery): 8.5 pounds
Cutting depth at 0º: 2 3/16 inches
Cutting depth at 45º: 1 5/8 inches
Cutting depth at 51º: 1 7/16 inches
Price: $400
Included in kit: two 4-Ah batteries, charger, blade, blade wrench, and tool bag
Warranty: 5 years tool, 3 years battery

Makita XSH01X Specs

Blade diameter: 7 1/4 inches
Batteries: dual 18 volt, 3 amp hours
RPM: 4,800
Weight (with blade and batteries): 10.4 pounds
Cutting depth at 0º: 2 5/8 inches
Cutting depth at 45º: 1 7/8 inches
Cutting depth at 50º: 1 11/16 inches
Price: $420
Included in kit: two 3-Ah batteries, charger, blade, blade wrench, and tool bag
Warranty: 3 years tool, 1 year battery

John Spier is a builder on Block Island, R.I.

Photo 3: Scott MacGillivray



1. A 12-inch tie is coiled to secure a power cord. **2.** Shown are 18-, 24-, and 32-inch ties. Also available are 3-, 6-, 12-, and 64-inch ties.

Nite Ize Gear Ties

BY DAVID FRANE

About a year ago I was in a big-box store and happened upon a display of Gear Ties—brightly colored twist-tie wraps that consist of wire with a grippy ribbed rubber coating. They looked interesting, so I bought a few, took them back to the shop, and used them to secure some air hoses and electrical cords. They worked great, so I ordered more online—medium (12- and 18-inch) ones for the shop and small (3- and 6-inch) ones for the office and travel. Nite Ize also makes larger (24-, 32-, and 64-inch) ties, and it's just a matter of time before I find an excuse to try them out, too.

Gear Ties can be coiled around the item to be secured or twisted like a twist tie—either way will work. In the shop, I use them on hoses and power cords. In the office, I use them to organize cords for electronics: chargers, USB cords, ear buds, and the like. But these things are not just for cords, they can be used to tie or hold just about anything you can fit them around. The same ties can be used over and over again. I suppose the wire core might eventually succumb to metal fatigue, but that has yet to happen to any of mine.

As for their handiness, Gear Ties are second only to duct tape. I use them all the time and yet it didn't occur to me to write about them until I was reviewing a video shot at JLC LIVE. The video showed the interior of Brian Way's Cool Shop on Wheels, and there on the wall (at about the 1:50 mark) were a bunch of hoses secured with Gear Ties. Brian and I have never discussed Gear Ties, but I figure that if we both like them, then they're probably worth talking about.

The items shown here are simple ties, but Nite Ize incorporates the same twist-tie material into a variety of products that can be clipped to or mounted on different types of surfaces.

Gear Tie Specs
Lengths (inches): 3, 6, 12, 18, 24, 32, 64
Country of origin: USA
Available: single, multiple, or assorted packs

This review first appeared on JLC's sister website, toolsofthetrade.net.

CRESCENT CONNECT MODULAR CLAMP SYSTEM

Each clamp in the Crescent Connect Modular Clamp System has 500 pounds of holding power, 60% more than similar clamps, according to the manufacturer. And these clamps are more versatile, thanks to a unique cam-like connector at the end of each clamp head that makes it possible to connect clamps to one another through a full 360° rotation.

Together with the Twin Lock Connector accessory (sold separately), you can position a series of clamps in a variety of positions and at unusual angles, making it possible to clamp corners, for example, or to use one clamp to support another. (Go to the Crescent website to see photos from users showing the clamps in action in a variety of configurations.)

Flipping the heads transforms the clamp into a spreader. In addition, removing the protective rubber pads exposes an area of the head that can clamp onto a pipe or other round object. A pair of 12-inch clamps costs about $40; two 6-inchers run about $35. The Twin Lock Connector accessory adds about $6. connectclamps.crescenttool.com

Photos: 1, 2, David Frane