

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at JLCTools@hanleywood.com

'Dual-Mode' Random Orbit Sander

BY NATHAN RINNE

Ask anyone who works with wood what their least favorite part of the job is and you're bound to hear "sanding" more often than not. Whether because of the dust, the time-consuming monotony, or the physical pain in your hand from using a random orbital sander for hours on end, it is by no means a fun job. As such, I am always looking for ways to expedite the process while minimizing the dust that I have to deal with. Enter the Makita dual-mode sander. With its 6-inch pad, 6.6-amp motor, and dust-extraction port, this sander is built to cleanly remove material fast. It impressed me with its power, its tight, swirl-free orbit, and its strong dust collection.

NOT YOUR AVERAGE ROS

The first time I used this sander, one thing that stood out almost immediately was its power. Most of my previous experience has been in using 5-inch random-orbit sanders that have motors less than half its size; it was immediately clear that this was a whole different animal. Its tight orbit diameter ($7/32$) leaves a swirl-free finish, in my experience, and the variable speed (1,600 to 6,800 opm and 3,200 to 13,600 sanding strokes per minute) allows you to tone it down for more delicate work or go full blast when you need material removed fast. The machine's weight and side handle allow for extra leverage when needed, but for the most part, the tool does all the work. While stripping an existing finish or smoothing out an uneven surface, you can switch over to a random-orbit mode with forced rotation and see it really shine.

STRONG DUST COLLECTION

When I use Mirka Abranet sanding discs, the dust extraction performs almost flawlessly, leaving very little dust behind. I've used the sander hooked to my Fein turbo for everything from sanding face frames to stripping furniture and have been thor-

oughly impressed with its ability to mitigate dust. On a recent bunk-bed project that involved sanding a good amount of Bondo, this feature was indispensable. We spent a solid six hours sanding and there was no lingering smell or airborne particles to contend with. The design of the extraction port is also convenient: The hose connection is on the rear of the handle so it is out of your way and less likely to get accidentally knocked off.

The only issue I have with this sander isn't related to performance, but rather the price of consumables from the manufacturer. Makita has made a proprietary hole pattern on this sander and charges about \$2 per sanding disc for it. The simple solution is to buy mesh-backed paper, such as Abranet, that doesn't use a hole pattern but pulls dust through the backing. Overall, I would definitely recommend this sander to anyone who, like myself, feels time is money. Cost: \$320. Includes: Abrasive disc, pad, pad protector, removable side handle, removable dust nozzle, and interlocking case.

Nathan Rinne is a finish carpenter in central Missouri specializing in ornamental built-ins. Follow him on Instagram @rinne_trimcraft.



The Most Compact Cordless Router

BY CHRIS ERMIDES

The **Bosch GKF12V-25N** is a compact cordless palm router that runs on Bosch's 12V Max platform. It has an EC Brushless motor and a unique design that positions your hand directly over the spindle. An elongated baseplate provides additional support on the surface being routed. The motor runs at a max 13,000 rpm and is reported to have a runtime of about 23 feet of round-over per Ah of battery. It has an easy-change spindle lock, fast macro depth adjustment, and a fine depth-adjustment knob that changes 0.04 inch per revolution of the dial. An internal sensor stops the motor if the router is dropped while running. Cost: \$150 (tool only).



Chris Ermides is the editor of toolsofthetrade.net. Follow him on Instagram @toolmagazine.

Remote Start for Festool CT Extractors

Auto-start functionality has been a staple in dust extractors for years but has always relied on a power cord being plugged into the tool for it to work. If you own a Festool CT extractor, you now have the option of turning it on via remote or a tool equipped with a new Bluetooth-enabled battery. The remote control CT-F I/M set is an affordable plug-and-play conversion kit that allows you to turn on the extractor remotely without having a tool plugged into it. In addition to the remote-control functionality, Festool has two Bluetooth-enabled 18V battery packs that will start the extractor automatically when the respective tool is turned on. Officially, Festool says that module installation should be "carried out by a qualified electrician." But I can report from personal experience that it's as simple as unscrewing two screws, pulling out the blank face plate, plugging in the new module, and then reinstalling the two screws (be sure the extractor is unplugged before you begin). The kit, which can be retrofitted onto the CT 26, 36, or 48, costs \$80 and includes a Bluetooth reception module, one remote control, and two straps (for mounting the remote to a hose). Additional remotes (CT-FI) can be purchased for \$45 each. Bluetooth-enabled 18V batteries are available in 5.2 Ah (\$110) and 6.2 Ah (\$125) sizes. —C.E.



3-in-1 Concrete Levels

Expanding on the Redstick box level line, Milwaukee has added a new set of concrete levels. The levels are designed to be three tools in one: hand darby, screed, and spirit level. For lasting rigidity and to eliminate potential deformations, the levels are constructed of a magnesium core that is said to create a durable, protected setting for the vials. A plastic and rubber overmold provide added grip and make the levels easy to clean—just spray with water and wipe down with a cloth. Magnified bubbles are reportedly highly visible and are marked with four black band lines to delineate $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch and $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pitch or 1% and 2% grade—useful for necessary water run-off applications. To help with grip and usability, the levels feature a keyhole shape, a precision-milled bottom, and a 2-inch-wide working surface with a rounded edge for smoothing and an angled edge for screeding or striking. Milwaukee is backing the levels with a limited lifetime warranty and limited accuracy warranty. The levels are available in three sizes: 24 inches (\$100), 48 inches (\$150), and 72 inches (\$220)—sold separately, not in a kit. Carry bags will be available in 2019. —C.E.



A Small Cordless Radio and Speaker

The Ridgid R84086B compact FM radio and speaker works with the Ridgid Radio App. It pairs your smartphone to stream music, set jobsite alarms and alerts, and control the radio remotely. Charge your devices via the onboard USB port and connect via the Aux port for non-compatible Bluetooth devices. It has a fold-down, rotating antenna, and it is water resistant and compact. AAA batteries back up the clock memory and any other settings when an 18V battery is not installed. It is backed by the Ridgid lifetime service agreement. Cost: \$70 (tool only). —C.E.

