

Tools of the Trade

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Festool ETSC 2 150 Cordless Sander

by TOM O'BRIEN

I was helping a young tradesman load in his power tools recently when I noticed that not even one was of the plug-in variety. I bought my first cordless drill (Skil 9.6V) in 1985, and I've steadily built up a significant arsenal of battery-powered devices. But I never considered cutting the cord for operations that demand long runtime or generate

significant amounts of dust, especially power sanding.

When Festool announced the release of the first cordless model in its highly regarded line of random orbit (RO) sanders, I was eager to find out if it could change my mind.

Options

The ETSC 2 features a brushless motor with a 3.5mm orbit. It's available as model ETSC 2 125, which comes outfitted with a 125mm (5-inch) sanding pad, or as ETSC 2 150, which features a 150mm (6-inch) pad. Each can be purchased in kit form or as a bare tool without batteries or charger. As I'm not invested in Festool's cordless platform, I requested a full kit, with the 150mm pad since my corded RO sanders are that size.

In addition to the sander, the kit included a TCL 6 charger, two 18-volt, 4.0-amp/hr, Bluetooth-enabled batteries, dust bag, plastic pad protector, 5mm Allen wrench, and a bit of sandpaper (see photo, left). For testing purposes, Festool sent along its Granat D150 starter set of six 10-packs of grit sizes ranging from P60 to P320.

Positive Vibes

As I was unpacking the kit, several impressive features leaped out at me. What struck me first was how light and well-balanced the machine felt in my hand. The 4-Ah battery provided a perfect counterweight to the business end of the tool. And when I turned it on, I was surprised by the lack of vibration.

If one feature stood out—truly deserving the clichéd title “Game-Changer”—it would be the LED ring light (see photo, opposite page). Unlike the tiny spots that most cordless tools feature nowadays, this one is a flood. I fell in love with it while I was scrambling to finish an exterior paint prep job before nightfall, only to discover with the push of a button that nothing could stop me now. That wasn't even the best part; when I turned the sander loose on shop work, the shallow angle of light served to highlight the slightest swirl mark or imperfection. No longer would I have to reach for a flashlight to make sure I didn't miss anything.

At full power, this light was blindingly bright. By pushing the on/off switch twice, I was able to cut the intensity in half. Once I became familiar with Festool's smartphone



The ETSC 2 150 cordless sander kit comes in Festool's Systainer SYS3 M box.

PHOTOS BY TOM O'BRIEN



The author found the built-in light a stand-out feature. Note the removable edge guard.

app, I discovered that I could control a large number of options—including the length of time the light remains on after the tool shuts off—using the touchscreen.

As someone who has frequently complained (in print) about Festool's skimpy paper operating instructions, I was delighted to find a wealth of information on how to operate and maintain this tool readily available on the app and in an easy-to-follow visual format. The video tutorial on how to pair the batteries with a dust extractor via Bluetooth was especially helpful (users who exclusively work outdoors or on new construction might never have to worry about being tethered to an extractor).

Little or No Dust

In terms of dust collection, the sander impressed me with two significant innovations. Most obvious was the dust bag, which proved surprisingly effective at preventing most debris from becoming airborne. Thanks to its quick-release connector, it never popped off during operation (unlike every other bag I've ever used). If not for the ring light's ability to highlight the thin but consistent plume wafting out around the edges of the spinning pad, I might have been tempted to forgo the dust extractor altogether.

When I needed to work completely dust-free, it was easy to connect a suction hose to the sander. That was thanks to the newly designed sculpted metal dust port that accepts a D27 hose like a plug in a socket and holds onto it just as se-

curely. Even when tethered to a dust extractor, the tool was significantly easier to operate without the added weight and hassle of an electric cord.

Battery

With the battery, the ETSC 2 150 weighed 4 pounds 8 ounces, about ½ pound heavier than the corded Festool 150/3 EQ that's been my go-to finisher for almost 20 years. After just a few side-by-side comparison tests on rough hardwoods and softwoods, it was apparent that this cordless sander could hold its own and was ready for full-time professional use. The most noticeable difference was how much less vibration the cordless sander produced. Due to its low center of gravity, perfect balance, and the fact that it didn't make my hands buzz, the ETSC 2 150 proved less tiresome to use for extended periods (despite the weight penalty).

I often had to swap batteries during big finishing jobs but never ran out of power. I was able to get at least 30 minutes of continuous runtime on a full charge and recharge a dead battery to 90% in roughly the same amount of time. So, two batteries ought to be enough for most applications.

I found the Festool ETSC 2 150 4,0 I-Plus 6-Inch 18V Cordless Orbital Sander Kit online for \$705. The bare tool costs about \$530. festoolusa.com

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1620 Workwear Durastretch Cargo Pants

by ARON JONES



Durastretch Cargo Pants have front and back zippered pockets, cellphone storage, a reinforced area for a knife clip, and more.

1620 Workwear in Massachusetts is one of the hidden gems of the construction industry. While I could begin by talking about how comfortable and durable the company's pants are, I'd like to start with its warranty. The company backs its gear with a lifetime warranty. That tells me the company's not just confident in its craftsmanship—it's committed to standing behind it. This is also the first workwear company that ever repaired a pair of pants for me instead of replacing them, which speaks to sustainability practices.

These pants are entirely manufactured in the U.S.: The fabric is woven in the U.S., and the pants are sewn just outside of Boston. And 1620 is doubling down on its commitment to quality workwear made in the U.S. When many companies were looking abroad for cheaper manufacturing alternatives, 1620 bought a factory in Massachusetts, which I had the opportunity to tour. It enables the company to continue to deliver quality products made in the U.S. by a workforce who are paid a living wage.

As a carpenter, I have put these pants through the wringer over the past year. These pants have seen every phase of construction, from rebar and concrete to flying trusses. They have fought with gusset plates, the occasional nail snag, abrasive sheathing, and more. And after more than a year of service, they do not have a single hole. I have never experienced that type of durability in a pair of pants before.

If you are going to wear a pair of pants eight to 10 hours a day, five to six days a week, they need to be comfortable. 1620 nailed comfort with its Durastretch fabric. The stretch is perfect no matter the task; whether you are hand-bombing lumber or climbing staging, these pants will move with you. They are hands-down the most comfortable work pants I have ever worn.

Admittedly, these cargo pants are an investment at \$300, but they've already proven they can handle the job better than most. If you're tired of burning through "work" pants that barely last a season, give the Durastretch Cargo Pants from 1620 a shot. I have tried several articles of clothing from this company and have not been disappointed yet. Check it out at 1620usa.com.

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PHOTO BY ARON JONES

Shark Nail Puller

by NATHANIEL CARLSEN

To keep my toolbelt lightweight, I pare it down to essential tools that are only as large as they need to be for the job. However, sometimes bigger is better. That is the case with the Shark Corp. 14 1/8-inch nail puller—a tool that eclipses smaller cat’s paws and has earned a permanent place in my demo and framing rig.

Much of the tool’s utility comes from its shape. The sharp teeth and flat grind on the inside of the paw dig into wood with ease, and the tapered notch grips a slightly proud nail without needing to be set with a hammer. In addition, the acute angle on the notch lets the tool pull an entire spectrum of fasteners, from 18-gauge finish nails to 4-inch spikes. Finally, the curve along the head of the tool enables a smooth, easy pulling motion. All these details add up to suit the tool for a wide range of situations.

Then, these characteristics are supercharged by the tool’s size. At 14 1/8 inches, the Shark has all the leverage I need to pull or pry anything that doesn’t require a wrecker bar. While this does result in a heavier tool, I have been able to leave my Wonderbar in my toolbox since acquiring the Shark, which frees me up to carry one tool to do what I previously needed several to accomplish. The thick handle is stiff and transmits force well. When in the past, for example, I might have struggled to pull apart a double top plate using smaller or flatter pry bars, I now simply drive the pointy end of the Shark between the plates, using its size and heft to wedge the plates open enough to cut the nails.

The nail puller’s size is especially an advantage when I’m pulling a lot of nails. Its length allows me to pull them significantly faster because I don’t need to switch to a hammer to deal with the stubborn ones. Rather than using a cat’s paw to pull a nail up, then switching to a hammer claw for leverage, I can pull it in one swift sequence with the Shark.

Set, hit, pull, repeat speeds up the task. And the comfort of knowing my fingers are good and clear, far away from where the hammer hits the tool, lets me hit with force. Although, the Shark’s shape means the weight of a falling hammer alone is often enough to capture a nail.

With the set, hit, pull rhythm, I can pull nails out of a subfloor with speed and ease. I pulled a few hundred nails



The “V” of the nail puller grabs the nail’s shank, not its brittle head (1, 2).

the other day, and I could barely count on two hands the number that needed another tap or pull. At around \$25, this tool is a must-have. sharkcorp.com

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PHOTOS BY NATHANIEL CARLSEN