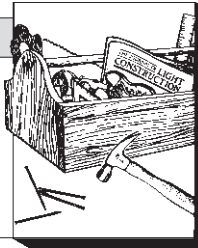


## Two New Sidewinders

by Clayton DeKorne



Two new circular saws hit the market this year. In April, *Hitachi* brought out the *C 7BD* and this month, *Black and Decker* will begin selling the *Super Saw Cat 3064*. Both of these saws are 7 1/4-inch "sidewinder" saws that feature strong motors, lightweight designs, double-insulated electrical systems, and electric brakes. I tested prototypes of the *Hitachi* and *Black and Decker* models, but since I'm used to a worm-drive saw, I use a sidewinder with less success than other carpenters. So I also left each saw with a few other builders to try out.

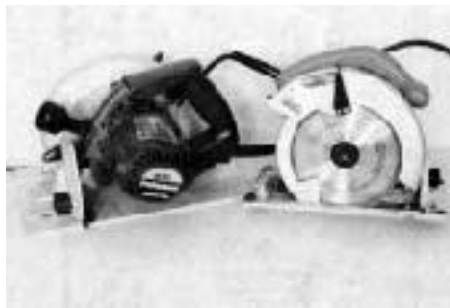
### For Small Hands

The *Hitachi C 7BD* is tough, compact, and refined in its simplicity. It weighs about 11 pounds, is very well-balanced, and has a simple "pivot foot" depth adjustment (the motor pivots at the front of the table to raise and lower the depth of cut). The *C 7BD* has a 13A motor and is surprisingly powerful for its size. It can handle light framing, but, because it is so lightweight and maneuverable, it is best for sheathing and finish work.

The *Hitachi* looks and handles similar to the *Makita 5007*, a saw that has proved itself on job sites in recent years and has become a new standard to many who use sidewinders. But the *Hitachi* differs from the *Makita* in these four ways: First, the *Hitachi* has an optional vacuum port for dust collection. This fits on the outside of the blade guard and seems like an excel-

lent feature on remodeling jobs where dust might be a problem. Second, the *Hitachi* shoe plate is made of a metal alloy, not aluminum. The alloy is lighter, but not as strong. Consequently, the *Hitachi* shoe has a grid of cross ribbing over it. These supports catch a little saw dust but the *Hitachi* shoe seems less likely to bend if the saw is dropped. Third, the *Hitachi* saw has indexed lines in both inch and metric scales on the depth adjustment. These lines are marked on a track on the outside of the blade guard which the adjustment arm slides in. They are easy to read here but the track makes the handhold tight for large hands. Several carpenters showed sore knuckles from the serrated edge of the 1/8-inch increments. Still, this didn't deter them from wanting to use the *Hitachi* and eventually they found a way to reposition their hand so this wasn't a problem. Finally, the front knob on the *Hitachi* is placed at the front of the handle and high over the shoe. Compared to the low front handle on the *Makita*, the front end of the saw was harder to control with this handle. But this is only a minor shortcoming, since few carpenters I know rarely use more than one hand to hold the saw.

The list price on the *Hitachi C 7BD* is \$230. *Hitachi* also has a similar new model without an electric brake, the *C 7SB*, which lists for \$219. The electric brake stops the blade in less than two seconds and, for safety, seems worth the



Two new circular saws—the *Hitachi C 7BD* (left) and the *Black and Decker Super Saw Cat* (right)—both feature strong motors, lightweight designs, and electric brakes.

## TOOLBITS

**Speaking of circular saws.** I just recently learned that *Skil* introduced a new 8 1/4-inch sidewinder (model 5660) with a table that swings to 60°. This extends the versatility of the saw for roof framing, especially for cutting cheek cuts on unequal pitch roof intersections. *Skil* is reportedly including this table on their worm-drive saws beginning this fall.

**Dust control** looks like it's going to be the big issue in European tool design. According to James Klaus, senior product manager of *Skil* power saw division, the West German inspectorate (equivalent to a locally enforced UL) will require either a dust bag or a vacuum port on all hand-held power saws. This ruling reportedly went into effect June 1 and Klaus suspects all other European inspectorates (and maybe even the UL) will follow suit.

few extra dollars. As of this writing, neither model was available through discount tool houses, but when they are, I suspect the price will be similar to the *Makita*s: around \$120.

### Straight Edge Bloop

The *Black and Decker Super Saw Cat* is an exciting saw. Clearly a lot of thought went into the design of this saw; many of its features are innovative by any standard. Unfortunately, one oversight in the design eliminates the ability to use any kind of saw guide.

The *Super Saw Cat* is well-built. The 13-amp motor cuts very quickly at full depth and seems to have more torque than other 7 1/4-inch sidewinders I've used. The sturdy aluminum-alloy shoe plate can be replaced by removing eight recessed, Torx-head screws and can be readjusted to remain parallel with the blade if it ever goes askew. The table can swing over to 50° for cutting steep bevel cuts and some cheek cuts on unequal pitch roofs. And the front quadrant has an adjustable indicator to set at exact degree marks. The 0 mark can be adjusted as well, so, as parts wear, the table can be reset to 90° with the blade.

One of the most innovative features is the depth-of-cut adjustment. Like a "drop foot" type adjustment, the front handle loosens to make the adjustment. But instead of the saw body moving up and down, the table and blade guard pivots up and down from the rear. The adjustment is quick and easy, since all you do is push forward on

**Blade update.** Some thin kerf blades will give a ragged cut at the end of a long rip. I've been told this is because the blade begins to "run out" or warp when it heats up. However this does not happen if the blade is "tensioned," which is sort of like prestressing in concrete. One such blade, made by *Freud* (218 Feld Ave., High Point, NC 27264; 800/334-4107), also has HOOK carbide, an extra-dense, long-lasting carbide that was previously used only on larger, higher-priced table saw blades (see *JLC*, For What It's Worth, 4/90). The new KT blades are sized to fit smaller circular saws and they're inexpensive. A 24-tooth, 7 1/4-inch framing blade, for example, costs about \$12. You'll recognize these by a distinctive hump rising off the shoulders of the teeth that makes them look especially mean. This is an anti-kickback feature that limits the amount of bite each tooth can take and keeps it from binding when the saw is pushed real hard. —C.D.

the front handle once it is loosened. A 1/8-inch scale on the blade guard indicates the depth of cut and this indicator is also adjustable.

Every other circular saw I have ever used has had an odd-sized shoe. *Black and Decker*, however, has made the table exactly 5 1/2 inches wide to the left of the blade and 1 1/2 inches wide to the right, to conform to framing lumber dimensions. This feature is very convenient for setting up a rip guide. However, the adjustable indicator on the front quadrant protrudes beyond the edge of the shoe, which makes any guide useless. Even the blade of a *Speed Square* hits this protrusion. All of the carpenters who tested this saw, including myself, use a *Speed Square* to guide the saw for accurate cross cuts. Despite all its good features and tough construction, we all agreed the *Super Saw Cat* was useless to us because of this small oversight.

When I pointed out this blemish to John Padbury of *Black and Decker*, he acknowledged it as a design error. But he informed me that it was too late to make any alterations in the design of the tool on the first production run. Padbury suggested that a *Speed Square* could be ground down to accommodate the saw and he hopes to correct the problem by the second run this fall.

The list price on the *Super Saw Cat* is about \$240. Once the quadrant indicator is repositioned, it should be one of the most competitive sidewinders on the market. ■