

New Orbital Jigsaws

by Dan Williams

A jigsaw isn't the first power tool most tradesmen buy, but if you do trim work or install cabinets, you've got to have one. Over the years, I've owned or used many different saws, so I was pleased recently at the chance to try out some newer models.

Jigsaws come in two basic styles, barrel grip and overhand grip. I prefer overhand grip because that's what I'm used to and because the trigger usually doubles as a speed control. By comparison, barrel-grip saws have simple on/off switches; speed is regulated by a separate mechanism. I often change speed during cuts, going fast on the straight parts, slow on the curved. Carpenters who like barrel grips claim they're easier to guide and more comfortable to use for long periods of time, but I only use a jigsaw intermittently, so comfort's not much of an issue.

Saws with orbital blade action have been available for more than 10 years. They cut faster because the blade pivots forward and backward as it goes up and down. The orbital motion is fine for cutting wood and sheet goods, although it usually creates more splintering and rougher cuts; orbital action is not recommended for cutting metal. Every saw I tested will operate with varying levels of orbital action or in a simple up-and-down mode.

The corded saws I tested had a number of speed ranges to choose from. In general, wood is cut at high speed, metal at medium speed, and laminate or veneer at low speed. All the saws had multiple bevel stop settings on the base, making it quick and easy to set up common bevel cuts.

All of these saws can be equipped with collection systems (the saws I used were not, however, so I couldn't test this feature). You might have trouble getting

DeWalt's system, however, because they don't market it in the U.S.

Every saw, with the exception of the Bosch, came with a removable shield over the blade. The clear plastic shield is intended to increase dust collection efficiency, but without a collector, it blocks your view of the blade and prevents the dust blower from clearing chips in advance of the saw. The first thing I did when I got a saw was remove the shield so I could see what I was doing.

Milwaukee 6266

This overhand-grip jigsaw has the best blade clamp I've ever seen. Instead of using an Allen key or screwdriver to change blades, you just pull back the lever on the nose, insert the blade, and release the lever. No other clamp I know of is as fast or as easy to use.

The 6266 runs smoothly and cuts powerfully, but I'm not wild about the way it feels. The handle is extremely tall and the trigger's so long it's easy to accidentally turn the tool on when you lift it. Worse, the trigger is a simple on/off switch, so to change speed, you



have to turn a separate control wheel.

The plate steel base comes with a snap-on plastic guard to prevent it from scratching finish materials. There are index stops at 0, 15, 30, and 45 degrees

in both directions, and as with most saws, you use an Allen key to change bevel settings. But unlike other saws, the key clips into a slot on top of the base. This is a much better place for a key than on a rubber holder attached to the cord, because the key is nearby and out of the way at the same time.

The 6266 has three orbital settings, draws 5.7 amps, and runs at 450 to 3,100 strokes per minute (spm). The saw weighs 6 pounds 3 ounces, does not have a case, and costs around \$160. A barrel-grip version of this saw (Model 6276) is also available.

DeWalt DW321

At 6 pounds 10 ounces and 5.8 amps, the DW321 is a big, powerful saw. The first time I used it, I had trouble with the blade clamp mechanism because I assumed there was some trick to operat-



ing it. A quick look at the manual showed that it was really quite simple: Just lift the lever on top of the handle, give it a couple of turns, insert a blade, then turn the lever the other way.

The trigger is variable speed, so the rate of cut is determined by how hard you squeeze. A control wheel on the trigger lets you select a speed range, but I usually set it to run full out and control speed with the trigger alone. The

DW321 is the only jigsaw I've seen that lets you change bevel settings without using an Allen key. The base is held in position by a lock lever projecting from the back of the saw, making it fast and easy to change bevel settings. The base is made from cast metal instead of the usual plate steel, so it won't bend if you drop the saw. The base has positive stop settings at 0 and 45 degrees and comes with a non-marring plastic cover.

The DW321 has three orbital settings, a multispeed blower, and a lock-on switch that's impossible to activate by accident. The kit version of this saw (DW321K) includes a plastic case and sells for around \$170. DeWalt also makes a barrel grip version (DW323).

Bosch 1587VS

I'm partial to this saw because I already own one. Like the other overhand-grip saws I tried, it's smooth and powerful, but noticeably more compact.

Bosch was one of the first companies to put keyless blade clamps on jigsaws. The procedure for changing blades is similar to that for the DeWalt, except that on the Bosch you twist the blade after putting it



in the clamp. Also, Bosch's speed control wheel is on the trigger.

The one thing I don't like about this saw is the base. It's plate steel, so if you drop the saw, the base may bend. And the base hasn't got a plastic cover, so you have to put tape on it to protect laminate or veneer. Like most other saws, it comes with an Allen key clipped to the cord for changing bevel settings. There are stops at 0 and 45 degrees.

The 1587VS draws 5 amps, runs at 500 to 3,100 spm, and weighs 6 pounds 8 ounces. It has three orbital settings, a

two-speed blower, and costs around \$150. An extra \$15 gets you a plastic case; another \$30, a metal one. Bosch also makes a barrel-grip (1584VS) and dust-collecting version (1584DVS) of this saw.

Makita 4305

Like most barrel-grip jig saws, Makita's 4305 has the speed control wheel on back of the motor housing. The on/off switch, however, is mounted on top of the barrel instead of on the left side. This makes it easier to use the saw left-handed, because



the palm of your hand doesn't cover the switch. Even though I'm right-handed, I like this switch location because some cuts are easier to make left-handed.

The 4305 has a cast-metal base with a nonmarring plastic insert and stops at 45 and 90 degrees. Bevel settings are made with an Allen key stored in a clip on the cord. Unfortunately, this saw has an old-fashioned blade clamp, the kind you tighten with an Allen key. Makita ran into patent problems with its first keyless clamp and is busy developing a new one.

At 5.1 pounds, the Makita is lighter than many other saws. Even so, it has a powerful solid feel to it; the saw draws 5.5 amps and runs at 500 to 3,000 spm. The 4305 comes in a plastic case and costs around \$170. An overhand-grip version (Model 4304) is also available.

Milwaukee 6267-02 Cordless

In the past, other companies have made cordless jigsaws, but this is the first one I'd consider buying. Milwaukee made this saw by taking the front end of their corded barrel-grip saw (Model 6276-6) and putting a 12-volt battery and a different motor on it.

The blade clamp, baseplate, and drive gears are identical to those on the corded Milwaukee saw I tested. Its batteries store a lot of power, and I was impressed with how long this saw cut on a single charge.



The housing is low profile and comfortable to grip. However, the 6267-02 has only one speed, 1,700 spm, which as far as I'm concerned is too slow. The switch is on the left side, and there's no dust blower. Also, the battery hangs off the back of the saw, making it somewhat tail-heavy. Still, if you want a cordless jigsaw, Milwaukee's the only company making one for the professional tradesman. The 6267-02 weighs 6 pounds 2 ounces, comes with a battery and charger, and retails for between \$269 and \$299.

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