

Cordless Drill for Tight Corners

by Michael Standish

When does it make sense to buy a new tool? Some purchasing decisions are simple, either because the need for the tool is self-evident, as when buying hammers, circular saws, or extension cords, or because the purchase falls into the category of wishful thinking, as with the Rheinhart (the \$12,000 Swiss table saw) I have often thought would make a handsome addition to my shop. Between these two extremes, however, is a thorny gray area. The key question is whether the tool can earn its keep, and the answer depends on the buyer's



particular needs. This is increasingly true as tools become more dedicated to specific tasks.

A fine example of this is Panasonic's Predator EY6780 — a cordless driver/drill that is identical to the manufacturer's standard 9.6-volt offerings, except for its nosepiece. The offset turret has an 8-position rotating mechanism whose resemblance to a Gattling gun is bound to be seductive to any tool junkie. Not only does the turret head look slick, it allows drilling or driving

perpendicular to the face of the work piece to within $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. of adjacent surfaces, like corner walls or cabinet partitions. This ability to work at 90 degrees in cramped quarters (as with some laminate-trimming routers) can circumvent many construction headaches. No more angled screw heads in door hinges, for instance — the offset turret allows setting screws flush with the leaves, where they can't foul the hinge action. And adding that bottom drawer slide to an in-place cabinet is a breeze, as is starting "self-tapping" screws in metal studs, channel, or ductwork.

Quick-Change Chuck

Moving the drive outboard to provide close access would be pretty meaningless if Panasonic had used anything like a normal chuck. Instead, the Predator has an extremely trim quick-change bit holder. Retracted, its spring-loaded outer collar accepts any $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. hexagonal bit; released, a ball detent captures any such bit that's been grooved for that purpose (plain-shank bits will fall out). Since the sleeve can rotate independently, it is far less likely to mar abutting surfaces than a standard chuck, which spins along with its driven bit. Switching bits with this rig can save enormous amounts of time whenever a screw needs a pilot hole; together, the chuck and turret make this tool exceptional under cramped working conditions.

Precise Control

From the nosepiece back, the Predator shares some excellent attributes with its traditionally configured cousins. It's compact (a little over 2 x $8\frac{1}{2}$ x $8\frac{1}{2}$

inches), concentrating its $3\frac{1}{2}$ -pound weight in a well-balanced package with a comfortable handle. The electric brake and 22 clutch settings promote precise control, as does a variable-speed (120-800 rpm) trigger that's exceptionally easy to modulate accurately. The Predator seems as powerful as any 9.6-volt cordless I've tried, and will easily drive $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch screws into framing materials (say, for deck railings), given a reasonably fresh battery. The battery pleasantly surprised me by charging in the advertised time of 15 to 20 minutes, quickly enough to make it unnecessary to buy extra batteries to avoid downtime.

Although a pricey \$200 (including case, charger, and one NiCad battery), I know of nothing that approaches the Predator's close-quarters capability. Its unique features don't interfere with normal drilling and driving, so this tool could be used as an everyday lightweight cordless, with the added convenience of a quick-change chuck. Even if you already own a cordless drill, the Predator is an attractive proposition: It's awfully good at its specialty. 

Michael Standish is a carpenter and writer in Jamaica Plain, Mass.

TOOL BITS

Air Nailer Bag

If your pneumatic nail gun is riding unprotected in the back of your truck, you may want to pick up a padded bag called the *Gatemouth Gunner Jr.* The \$40 bag is specifically designed to carry one large nailer or coil nailer along with one finish nailer. Extra pockets carry nail clips and other accessories.

Contact: BucketBoss, 5200 Quincy St., St. Paul, MN 55112; 800/688-2677; www.fiskars.com/bucketboss.



Ladders and Accessories

Two noteworthy new ladder lines are the *Jaws* series of telescopic multi-position ladders and the *FT2000* series of fiberglass tripod ladders. *Jaws* ladders come with 250- or 300-pound ratings and have five-position center hinges that connect telescopic sides. Five models accommodate stepladder heights ranging from 3-foot 2-inches to 11-foot 6-inches, and extension ladder heights ranging from 13 to 23 feet.

The bases on both sides are flared for stability; other working positions include a staggered leg setup for stairs. Contractor prices start at \$225.

Tripod ladders, which have traditionally been popular in Colorado and the Pacific Northwest, have the distinct advantage of enabling users to set the ladder up through the studs of a rough framed wall. Seven models of the



FT2000 tripod ladder series range in height from 4 to 12 feet and are rated for 250 pounds. Contractor prices start at \$150.

Contact: Louisville Ladder Corp., 1163 Algonquin Parkway, Louisville, KY 40208; 800/666-2811; www.louisvilleadder.com.

The *QuickClick Ladder Stabilizer* (\$60) has a spring-loaded locking latch and quick-release attach pins that allow a user to connect or disconnect the stabilizer by hand. The QuickClick spans 46 inches and includes non-marring rubber grips.

Contact: Werner Ladder Co., 93 Werner Rd., Greenville, PA 16125; 724/588-8600; www.wernerco.com.



Everyone who works on ladders knows that long hours off the ground can stress the legs and back. The *Ladder Buddy* (\$30) increases the width of one ladder rung — a real advantage when you're working at one particular height for long periods. The painted aluminum no-slip step hooks over standard ladder rungs and increases the working rung width to a comfortable 7 inches.

Contact: P.B. Distributing, 5631 E. Superior St., Duluth, MN 55804; 800/622-1087.

