

New Power Finish Saw

By Mitch Hannon

Since my back went out, I've had a lot of time on my hands, so I was excited to be asked to review one of the most intriguing new tools I've seen in years. The Bosch 1640VS Finecut Power Handsaw is basically a reciprocating saw made for trim work. It's unique because it can be used either as a freehand tool or can be mounted in its own miter jig to become a small chop saw. What's really cool is that all the parts, including spare blades and clamps, come in one compact carrying case (getting all those parts to fit back into the case, however, is another story).

Easy Setup

I'd rather get my teeth drilled than have to read complicated assembly instructions. I want to be able to pull a new tool out of the box and get right to work. Thankfully, setting up and running this tool was completely straightforward; even changing blades was easy. As with its well-known jigsaw,

Bosch uses a tool-free "Clic" system here, which makes installing a blade as easy as hooking a tab and pressing a lever. Well, almost as easy. After having the blade fall out a couple of times while cutting, I realized I had to pull up really hard with my thumb on the underside of the lever, which locks the blade in place. Even then I never felt completely confident that the blade was securely attached.

Freehand Difficulties

Based on the descriptions I'd read, I thought this might be the perfect tool to fill the void between my rough-cutting Sawzall and my fine, but slow-cutting, handsaws. I was disappointed.

Part of the difficulty for me was ergonomic. Even in my large hands, the barrel handle felt way too big to get a firm grip on the tool. My frustration was compounded by the location of the on/off switch. The switch is on the top of the tool but my natural grip (I'm right-handed) put my thumb to the left

side. So to turn the tool off, I either had to use my left hand, or rotate my thumb and cradle the tool in my palm.

Freehand cuts were made even more difficult because the variable-speed feature is controlled by a recessed dial near the end of the barrel rather than by the trigger. This makes it impossible to start a cut slowly and speed up once the kerf has been established. Don't even think about plunge-cutting with this tool.

Using the fine-tooth blade produced a perfectly smooth cut, but the vibration was so intense that I had to clamp the work piece and keep two hands on the barrel to stay in control. Since the blades are very thin and flexible, I learned the hard way that if I didn't keep a sharp eye on my line, the cut would easily wander. It was even worse with thick material. I was hoping this saw would make short work of architectural columns, which I tediously cut with a fine-tooth hand saw. Unfortunately, the deflection of the blade going through 6/4 column stock left such an uneven surface that the time saved by the saw was canceled out by the time spent with the belt sander.

Flush Cutting

As a freehand saw, the one place where the Bosch 1640VS excels is flush cutting, especially for trimming door jambs and casings to allow underlayment or tile to run underneath (see Figure 1). The flush-cutting blade has a great offset design and it's reversible, so it can be used to cut from either side of the saw. My only gripe is that the mounting tabs on the free end stick out a full inch beyond the blade, blocking access into a tight corner. I understand the economic value of a single reversible blade, but I think Bosch



Figure 1. The Finecut Power Handsaw's flush-cutting blade makes it easy to trim door jambs and casing to allow room for flooring.



Figure 2. One bolt is all it takes to convert the 1640VS from freehand saw to power miter box.

should offer left and right narrow-point flush-cutting blades as accessories.

Small Miters Only

Converting from a freehand to a

miter saw was quick and easy; all I had to do was fasten the saw to the miter jig with one bolt and secure the jig to a sawhorse with the two clamps provided (Figure 2). Used as a miter saw, Bosch claims the 1640VS can handle

1/2-inch- through 2 3/4-inch-wide trim on the flat, and 1/2-inch through 3 5/8-inch trim on edge. In my experience, it worked a whole lot better with narrow trim than wide. It was great for base shoe, doorstop, and small coped trim that my 12-inch DeWalt would splinter or hurl across the room. With narrow trim, this saw produced a beautiful, razor-sharp cut and allowed me to follow the cut line effortlessly. As with freehand cuts, however, I discovered that for anything wider than 2 inches, the blade deflection left a bend in the cross cut.

To assure the work wouldn't jump from the blade's action or wander with the cut, I found I needed to clamp even the smallest trim. Because only one clamp is provided with the tool, I kept having to move the clamp from one side to the other; a second clamp would have been a big time saver.

Short of major improvements, I think the Bosch 1640VS will serve a niche market at best. Flooring contractors will find its flush-cutting capability, miter jig,

TOOL BITS

Titanium Framing Hammer

Cyclists and golfers call titanium the "miracle metal" because of its high strength and light weight. Perhaps carpenters will soon feel the same way. The *Titan* hammer weighs just 12 ounces, but the manufacturer claims it packs as much nail driving power as a 21-ounce framing hammer, while helping to alleviate muscle strain and repetitive motion injuries. The head design also incorporates an ingenious magnetic nail holder for starting nails with one hand. The \$64.95 Titan comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee. A 14-ounce Titan is also available for those who prefer a heftier feel.



Contact: Stiletto Tool Co., 174 E. Broadway Ave., Atwater, CA 95301; 800/987-1849; www.stilettotools.com.

Adjustable Rethreading Tool

Anyone who's ever tried to thread a nut on a stripped and concrete-encrusted anchor bolt will appreciate the *Nes Universal Thread Restorer*. Simply place the tool over the damaged threads, tighten the blades, and rotate like a pipe cutter. The manufacturer claims it will recondition threads of any diameter or pitch, right- or left-hand, English or metric. Available in four models for bolt diameters of 5/32 through 5 inches, the \$35 Nes 1 (1/4"-3/4") should be the most useful model for builders.

Contact: Shilo Technologies 66-15 Main St., Flushing, NY 11367; 718/575-5507; www.nes.co.il.



Roof Tear-off Tool


Tearing off old roofing will never be glamorous work, but *The Beast* shingle remover looks like it might make the job a bit less miserable. The best features are the wide, pitched blade that provides the leverage to pry up large chunks, and the variable-length teeth that can pull nails and pry shingles at the same time. The 48-inch long-handled Beast has a replaceable blade and is available with a fixed head (\$39.99) or with an adjustable head for working on any roof pitch (\$49.99). The company also makes a 58-inch-long adjustable head model (\$56.99) as well as a short-handled tool (\$24.99) for cap shingles and tight spots.

Contact: Malco Tools Division, Malco Products, Inc., P.O. Box 400, Annandale, MN 55302; 320/274-8246; www.malcotools.com.



and portability invaluable. Production trim crews may find the miter jig setup to be a valuable complement to their full-size chop saw. If you've ever had to wait for someone to finish making shoe cuts so you can reset your crown angles, you can see the value. For basic free-hand work, however, I'll stick to my hand saws.

The Bosch 1640VS Finecut Power Handsaw goes on the market in April.

With three blades (fine-tooth general, coarse-tooth general, fine-tooth flush-cutting), the saw is expected to sell for between \$120 and \$140. The complete kit, which adds the miter jig fixture, three clamps, and the carrying case, will sell for between \$220 and \$240. 

Mitch Hannon is a carpenter in Ashland, Va.

TOOL BITS

Super-Long-Lasting Drill Bit

If you have to drill a lot of large holes in dense wood, you might want to check out the *Vortex DHC* (Deep Hole Cutting) high-speed steel drill bit. Designed for production log-home builders, this bit incorporates a centerpoint, 4 flutes, and 8 spur points on a high-carbon steel shank. If you don't hit a nail, the manufacturer claims you can expect to drill 1,000 holes before re-sharpening, and at least 60,000 holes over the bit's lifetime. The bits are available by custom order only, in diameters ranging from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 3 inches, and in overall lengths from 10 to 20 inches. Expect to pay from \$200 to \$225 and to wait 8 to 12 weeks for delivery.

Contact: Fisch Precision Tools, Inc., P.O. Box 644, Claysville, PA 15323; 724/663-9072.



Combination Rasp and Chisel

Organizing a pouch full of trim tools just got a little bit easier. Nicholson tools has created a "3 in 1" wood chisel that incorporates a half-round as well as a flat wood rasp into the top and bottom surfaces of the blade. Made from high-quality chisel steel, the *WoodChuck* might become the perfect "default" chisel, freeing up space in the toolbelt and



doing the dirty jobs, thus keeping the premium wood chisels sharp for precision work. Available in $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and 1-inch widths, individual tools sell for \$9.99; the 3-pack is \$29.99.

Contact: Cooper Tools, P.O. Box 30100, Raleigh, NC 27612; 919/783-2013; www.coopertools.com.