

Handsaw Revival

by Dave Crosby

A handsaw isn't a tool you use every day, but sometimes it's exactly what you need. It's perfect for finishing up a stair stringer or birdsmouth, or for making a careful flush cut or a precise kerf. Sometimes a handsaw is the best choice because it would take longer to drag a power cord than it would to make the cut.

You won't believe how well the new saws work until you try them yourself. The triple-edged teeth on these saws are much harder and far more aggressive than the teeth on the handsaws you learned the trade with. About the only thing you can do wrong with one of these saws is get in its way.

Takagi Sharksaw Series

This full line of pull saws includes more than a dozen models for carpentry, ranging from 8-point saws for dimensional lumber to 24-point flush-cut saws for cabinetry, plus specialty saws, pruning saws, and pocket utility saws.

On a pull saw the blade cuts while it is in tension, so it can be much thinner than a conventional handsaw blade. This thinner blade not only makes remarkably accurate, straight cuts with minimal effort, it is also more flexible, so you can make flush cuts that you wouldn't attempt with a push saw. And the teeth should be plenty durable — they're impulse-hardened to Rc78.

With all of these saws, a relaxed, smooth arm movement produces fast

clean cuts with no binding or buckling. But if you're accustomed to push saws, pull saws will take a few minutes of practice to get used to. Unlike push saws, which function best at a relatively steep angle, pull saws work best when held almost parallel to the work surface — maybe 10 or 15 degrees at the most. The pistol-grip handles on all of the carpentry saws I tried in this line are specially designed to allow for comfortable, efficient use in this position.

The blades in this series of saws are wider than some other pull saw blades. Their design is intended to provide more stability through the full depth of the cut. Even though the blade does the cutting on the pull stroke, some carpenters will still force the saw forward through the return stroke. For this reason, the handles on these saws are intentionally designed to maximize the contact area with the blade, making them as strong as possible. This design does not allow the handles to be reversible, but some of the handles are interchangeable, depending upon the model and the size of the saw. Straight handles are also available, both on the double-edged saws and on the Framing and Plate Saw, which is specially designed for cutting the bottom plate or for similar flush cuts. The pushbutton attachment of these handles makes them easy to remove for storage, but this design also results in a rattle. The rattle doesn't hurt perfor-



The Bear Saw is available in four different blade styles with interchangeable handles.

mance, but a loose handle does feel odd. The manufacturer tells me this problem is being addressed in current production.

A variety of sheaths are also available for these saws — and with teeth like these, I highly recommend them. Prices for carpentry saws range from \$21.99 to \$29.99, with replacement blades from \$15.49 to \$22.49. The manufacturer also offers seven traditional Japanese-style pull saws in the Takumi line, intended for fine woodworking by master craftsmen.

Contact: Takagi Tools, 337-A Figueroa St., Wilmington, CA 90744; 800/891-7855; www.sharkcorp.com.

Vaughan & Bushnell Bear Saw

The four pull-to-cut saws in this line can also be put together from four replaceable blades 8 to 13 inches long and four interchangeable plastic molded handles. You could buy one saw and three different replacement blades, or you could replace a curved handle with a straight handle for a single blade. Tooth patterns in this line of saws include 9 tpi for framing lumber, 14 tpi for general carpentry (including particleboard and plywood), 17 tpi for fine crosscuts or plastic pipe, and a double-



The Takagi Sharksaw cuts on the pull stroke, resulting in clean, straight cuts.

edged saw with one row of medium teeth for ripping and a row of extra-fine teeth for fine crosscuts.

Compared with the Sharksaw line, the Bear Saws have a flatter angle on the



The Stanley Short Cut Toolbox Saw comes with a tough 15-inch blade. A variety of tooth counts make short work of dimensional stock, PVC pipe, and other common materials.

handle, somewhat like a pruning saw. This will result in a different grip, so it's a matter of personal preference. I tried all four saws, and I also passed them around for other carpenters to try. The saws worked well at a variety of tasks, and nobody found any problems. The twist-lock handles are reversible, which makes some cutting tasks easier — like making cuts overhead in tight places or sawing through the bottom plate that's attached to the deck with no damage to the floor, the saw, or your hands.

The Bear Saw line has a lower overall profile than the Sharksaw line, and the handles have a comparatively smaller contact area with the blade. For example, the Sharksaw 10-tpi General Carpentry saw measures 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and .024 inch in blade thickness, while the 9-tpi Bear Saw measures 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height with a .035-inch thickness. This 45% greater thickness gives the Bear Saw blade more rigidity, which may or may not be desirable, but it also results in a noticeably wider kerf.

Again, this is a matter of personal preference — not everyone will use these saws the same way.

Suggested retail prices range from \$18.50 to \$26.50, with replacement blades from \$9.20 to \$17.60.

Contact: Vaughan & Bushnell Manufacturing, P.O. Box 390, Hebron, IL 60034; 815/648-2446; www.vaughanmfg.com.

Stanley Tool Box Saw

This 18-inch-long saw with a 15-inch blade is available in several versions with different handle and tooth pitch configurations. The first time I paid any attention to this saw was while watching a lumberyard worker use it to shorten a piece of framing lumber. I couldn't believe how fast he made the cut, so I had to try it out. This is one aggressive little saw. The Tool Box Saw is part of a larger line of Short Cut saws that I have not tested. Of the models I did test, my favorite was the Contractor Grade DynaGrip, which features 9 tpi and a comfortable wood and rubber handle.

By no means does the Tool Box Saw give you the quality of cut or accuracy of the pull saws reviewed above. But if you need a fast, durable utility handsaw for cutting wood, rigid foam, PVC, and just about anything else within reason, this saw is excellent. The short length and the aggressive tooth design mean you can make fast cuts in tight places or close to obstructions.

I recently passed out a few of these saws to several builders and carpenters, and they came to the same conclusion. One of them said, "You look at it and think, 'Naw, it couldn't be any good, especially at that price.' Then you try it and you can't believe it. I use it all the time now." Last time I looked, he was

happily hacking away at rigid insulation against a poured concrete stemwall. This got me wondering about how tough this saw really is. So out of curiosity, I took five cuts with the 12 tpi version of the Contractor Grade Tool Box Saw through a 2x4 that was resting on a concrete block, making sure that I dragged the Rc53 induction-hardened teeth across the concrete a few times after each cut. Despite this abuse, the saw still worked surprisingly well. Amazed (and amused) by these results, I deliberately took several good hard strokes against the concrete block. Incredibly, the teeth still had enough edge left on to crosscut through a 2x4 in six seconds.

At \$10 to \$15 for an all-around saw, it's a good deal; for a tool that you know you're going to beat to death and then throw away, it's a great deal. For another \$4 or \$5, you can also buy a molded plastic sheath, which the manufacturer calls a "saw protector." I don't think this saw needs any protecting, but everything else in your toolbox will, so it's a good idea.

Contact: The Stanley Works, 1000 Stanley Drive, New Britain, CT 06053; 800/782-6539; www.stanleyworks.com.

Bosch Pocket Saw

There are several saws of this type on the market, but this is the one that caught my attention. It's well made, easy to use, and it works great. This is not a folding saw, so you may want to remove the blade for storage. To make up for this minor inconvenience, you get a slimmer handle that's comfortable and takes up less room in your nail bag. Plus, the secure blade attachment can be set at two different angles for easy use in any position.

The 6-inch-long, high-impact plastic handle accepts all brands of reciprocating and jigsaw blades



The Bosch pocket saw handle accepts all brands of reciprocating and jigsaw blades

saw blades and reciprocating saw blades, and it has space for blade storage. The retail price of \$13.63 includes two Bosch blades, the #T113A jigsaw blade and #S644D reciprocating saw blade. If you've never seen the special-purpose #T113A blade, it's worth a look. The unusual profile goes through cardboard, composition rubber gasket material, and grout sponges unlike anything I've ever seen, and it looks like it would cut many other soft materials just as well.

Contact: Bosch Power Tools, 4300 West Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60646; 877/267-2499; www.boschtools.com. 

TOOL BITS

Live Wire

With the *AT-1000 Circuit Tracer*, you can trace phone lines, coaxial cable, alarm system wiring, and energized or de-energized circuits up to 300v AC/DC. You can also use this tool to locate shorts, identify breakers and fuses without powering down, and identify wires in a bundle. About \$345 retail.

Contact: Professional Equipment, 90 Plant Ave., Suite 3, Hauppauge, NY 11788; 800/334-9291; www.professionalequipment.com.



Level Clamp

The spring-loaded fingers on the *TayZac Level Clamp* let you attach your level to a variety of construction materials for a "hands-free" reading. You can also put the back side of the clamp against the material for a quick check, because it's parallel to the level. Retail price from the manufacturer is \$34.95 (dealer and distributor inquiries welcome).

Contact: TayZac Company, P.O. Box 434, New Palestine, IN 46163; 317/861-0308; www.tayzac.com.

One-Way Screw Remover

If you've ever wondered how to get one-way screws to go the other way without chiseling, drilling, or grinding, take a look at the *One Way Screw Remover/Installer*. Recommended for hand screwdrivers only, the tool's 1/4-inch hex shank will fit most bit holders. Available in six sizes from #6 to #18 in single or multiple-piece sets from \$9.99 to \$54.99.

Contact: Eazypower, 4006 W. Belden Ave., Chicago, IL 60639; 800/327-9769; www.eazypower.com.

