

Power Handsaw

by Derrell Day

Trimming door jambs or making flush cuts with a handsaw typically ends with scraped knuckles, dulled blades, and rough, wandering cuts. Flooring guys have circular jamb saws, but they're expensive, and the ones I've seen leave rough and splintered cuts. Hand-held jamb saws cut a little better, but when you're faced with multiple jambs with applied casing, the process gets slow and physically daunting.

When I first saw Bosch's new 1640 Power Handsaw at my local big box, I thought it might be the perfect tool for trimming jambs and other flush-cutting tasks. But it looked like a very job-specific tool, and I wondered whether it would be able to pay its way into my tool trailer. The model I tested (1640VSK) includes a carrying case and the optional miter-table attachment.

This tiny power saw uses an electric motor to power one of four fine-tooth reciprocating blades. It gives users the precision and safety of a dovetail or backsaw in a tool that's less tiring and faster to use. My first impression was that the 1640 is well designed and built, and it had a good, solid feel in my hand. It comes with four blades: fine-cut, medium- to coarse-cut, flush-cut, and metal-cutting. Blade mounting and changing are a snap with Bosch's simple click system. Once clicked into place, the blades felt securely connected, without any wobble or slop. All blades can be mounted left or right facing, which gives the saw great versatility.

Trimming Door Jambs

My first use of the saw was to trim $\frac{1}{4}$ inch off the bottom of some pre-hung, split-jamb doors that arrived at the job site with their casings a little short. I usually tackle this common task with a circular saw or a fine hand-saw, but it's always a chore that eats up time and requires a little finesse.

My sawhorses, I marked the length to be removed, and after snapping in the fine-cut blade, I cut the right jamb leg; I then flipped the blade and cut the left leg. It was quick, efficient, and clean. The saw seemed to melt through the jamb material.

My next task was to set the doors in the opening and trim the side jambs, so the head jamb would be level. Carpeted floors will hide a multitude of sins, but hardwood, linoleum, and tile floors require tighter tolerances. Here's where I really began to appreciate this little saw.

With the door temporarily secured, I shimmed the low leg until the head jamb was level. I then took the shim and held it against the other jamb as a guide and made the cut with the flush-cut blade. I also tried the general purpose blade and found it made perfectly acceptable cuts.

Miter Table Attachment

As a finish carpenter, I had my doubts about the tiny miter table that comes with the 1640VSK. The saw attaches to the aluminum table with a long thumbscrew, and the box itself includes small bar clamps for mounting it on a sawhorse or bench. A built-in dust port is included, as is a material hold-down clamp. Because the blade is reciprocating, getting fingers pulled in seems unlikely, but the hold-down clamp helps to hold the kind of small pieces the saw is designed to handle.



Faster than a handsaw and more precise than a circular saw, Bosch's 1640 reciprocating blade makes quick work of trimming door-jambs. The blade is reversible for flush cutting on either side of the jamb.



This miter table excels at cutting shoe mold and quarter round — small profiles that can be downright exciting to cut in my 12-inch miter saw. While building a fireplace mantle, I clamped the miter table to a sawhorse set up nearby and was impressed by the speed and time saved by cutting small pieces right at hand. I found the table's accuracy to be just fine.

I am thinking of building a small sawhorse, about 12 inches tall, for

Shim stock in a variety of thicknesses helps the author level the jambs on prehung doors. After the low side is shimmed, the piece is removed and held against the other jamb as a guide. The little saw is perfect for this job.



The miter table is accurate, easily portable, and it can cut moldings up to 3 1/2 inches wide. But the short fence means you have to cut baseboard with a plowed back with the front side against the fence.

mounting the miter table. The setup would be ideal for installing shoe mold and would save me countless trips to the garage or wherever my large miter bench is located.

I did have a little trouble with the release mechanism that allows the saw to swing through the different degrees of cut. It seemed to jam as I swung from one 45-degree angle to the other. It has stops (detents) at 15, 22.5, 30, and 45 degrees and can cut 46 degrees left or right. The angle indicator is adjustable, and a set screw can be engaged to lock the setting.

The Verdict

I have yet to use the metal-cutting blade, but the other blades performed well in hardwoods, softwoods, and MDF. The saw has a variable speed control that allows a user to select a speed compatible with the material and the job.

I began to use the saw for general purpose and freehand cutting during the workday and found it to be handy there as well. My only concern is blade life and availability. The 1640VS blades are Swiss-made, heat-set, steel blades, and they've held up well for the few weeks I've used them. But they're not available at my local big box, and I haven't found a source on the Internet for them.

The Bosch 1640VSK performed well in every situation I used it for and has certainly found a permanent home in my work trailer. With four different blades, a kit box, and the miter table attachment, it has a street price of \$160. With only two blades, it sells for \$110.

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LADDERS & SCAFFOLDING



Roof Ladder. Steep roofs can make otherwise simple tasks like installing a vent flashing or ridge cap into a huge project. Setting up the necessary roof jacks and dragging up planks can take more time than the actual job. A great solution is the *Chicken Ladder* from Lynn. The tubular steel ladder hooks over the ridge and rests on the roof. Because the roof provides support, the ladder's weight can be kept to a minimum. It's more comfortable to use than a standard ladder with a ridge hook because the rungs are spaced farther from the roof. The 6-foot hook section can be combined with other 6- or 14-foot bottom sections and joined with bolts and wing nuts. A 6-foot hook with a 14-foot bottom section weighs about 40 pounds and has a suggested price of \$350.

Lynn Ladder, 800/225-2510, www.lynnladder.com.

Featherweight Scaffold. Baker-type scaffolding, the kind favored by painters, drywall finishers, and maintenance personnel, has great capacity and excellent stability, but the weight of the steel sections can make them hard to move around, especially from one job site to the next. Lynn now offers the *AMP6 Aluma-Pro* aluminum maintenance scaffold. The 6-foot-long scaffold fits through a 30-inch door



and has a 500-pound load rating. It's adjustable in 2-inch increments from 3 to 6 feet tall. Best of all, the entire platform (without toe boards or rails) weighs only 80 pounds. It sells for \$345.

Lynn Ladder, 800/225-2510, www.lynnladder.com.

Boot Camp. Proper footwear makes construction safer and more efficient, and your stepladder should sport the right footgear as well. Louisville's *Brute 375* industrial stepladders are now wearing what the maker calls Da Boot. The non-marring boot surrounds the fiberglass rail for increased stability and rigidity. Da Boot's open back allows inspection of the fiberglass rail for cracks and splits. The type 1AA (375-pound duty rating) is available in sizes from 4 to 12 feet. A 6-footer retails for between \$79 and \$89.

Louisville Ladder, 800/666-2811, www.louisvilleladder.com.



Show Your Colors.

Enough of boring yellow and orange. Werner's new *FiberGraffix Series* industrial ladders come in a cool-looking, patriotic red, white, and blue scheme.

The new line is available in both step and extension styles. Type 1 (250-pound rating) stepladders are available in 6- and 7-foot sizes, and 1A stepladders (300-pound capacity) come in 6- and 8-foot heights. Both duty ratings feature tool trays, pinch-proof spreaders, and slip-resistant steps. The type 1A extension ladders come in 24- and 28-foot lengths and have reinforced slip-resistant rungs and adjustable footpads. Additional styles are planned for the near future. The type 1 6-foot stepladder has a street price of about \$60.

Werner, 724/588-8600, www.wernerco.com.



DRILL BITS & ACCESSORIES

Drilling With Jack Rabbit Speed. If you're looking for the slickest way to predrill and drive screws without two drills, the *Jack Rabbit* beats every other system I've seen. Like an ordinary quad driver, the tool drills a pilot hole and countersinks in one step. But unlike a quad driver, an adjustable brass stop prevents overdrilling, and the soft metal dissipates heat better, making it less likely to burn or mar delicate surfaces. Instead of hard-to-find taper bits or the flat-sided twist bits of other countersink systems, the Jack Rabbit uses ordinary twist bits. You might expect the bits to slip or spin without a flat side, but the tool's unique design holds them firm. After drilling, the outer sleeve removes easily, revealing a standard-size, hex-shaped driver bit. Unlike ordinary countersink and boring bits that require odd-sized plugs, the Jack Rabbit's countersink is designed for easy-to-find 3/8-inch plugs (the #12 size calls for 1/2-inch plugs). The kit even includes a removable, high-powered magnet for holding screws. The Deluxe Kit includes four bits that work with #6 to #12 screws. It's a great tool that's easily worth the \$60 price tag.

Jack Rabbit Tool Co., 800/445-5969, www.jackrabbittool.com.

Better Boring. Fast and inexpensive, spade bits are probably the best way to drill medium-sized holes. Bosch recently added a new twist to high-speed drilling. Its new *RapidFeed Spade Bits* use a self-feeding screw tip to make drilling faster with less effort. Six-inch bits are available in sizes from 1/4 inch to 1 1/2 inches. Sixteen-inch bits are available in 3/8-inch to 1-inch sizes. According to the manufacturer, the bits drill three times faster than standard spade bits. A 6-inch, six-piece set (3/8-inch to 1-inch) sells for \$16.

Bosch, 877/267-2499, www.boschtools.com.



Bit for Sawing. When I first saw this product in a Lee Valley catalog, it seemed too good to be true. In the past I've had little success enlarging holes by working a drill bit horizontally. But the *Saw Drill* does what it claims. After punching through the material, you can actually use the bit to cut. It doesn't cut as fast as a jig or spiral saw, but it works well for enlarging holes in plywood and paneling. According to the manufacturer, the bit's titanium coating makes it last longer and cut faster. You're not going to use it every day, but at \$7 it seems like a good thing to keep in the drill case.

Lee Valley Tools, 800/871-8158, www.leevalley.com.

SAFETY GEAR

Shock Stopper. About ten years ago, I bought a *Santronics AC Sensor* (part no. 3115), and I use it constantly. The pen-sized tool has earned a permanent spot in my toolbelt because it's fast, easy to use, and takes up a minimum of space. Instead of holding two probes on potentially dangerous bare conductors, you just touch the detector to the wire's insulation and the tool glows red if it's hot. The slim, tapered end also fits into receptacles and bulb sockets. Quite simply, it's a great tool. Not only does it make remodeling safer, it saves time. Two AAA batteries provide power, and, at \$20, it costs about half of what it did ten years ago.

Santronics, 800/628-1632,
www.santronicsinc.com.



Cool Cap. You don't usually think of hats keeping you cool, but according to its manufacturer, the *EvapCool Hat* from Gorgonz will keep your head comfortable during the hottest days of the year. After you douse the inside and top of the cap with water, the

rather ordinary-looking ballcap's special fabric evaporates the water to keep your head clear and cool. A watertight interior liner keeps the inside dry. It comes in navy blue and khaki and costs \$25.

Gorgonz, 410/534-6320,
www.gorgonz.com.



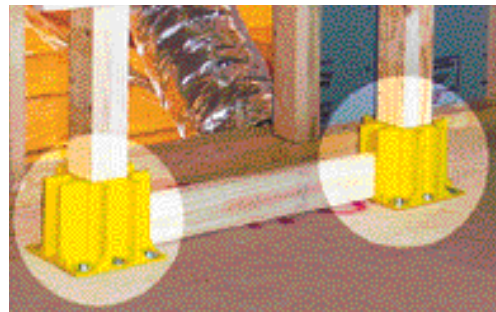
Even Footing. Although it looks more like an athletic shoe, the *Phoenix Oxford* from Dickies has all the makings of a good work shoe. Steel toes and shanks prevent injuries, and a padded collar and tongue make kneeling down more comfortable. As in the best running shoes, an air-filled chamber under the heel keeps a spring in your step even after eight hours. The shoes are available in three colors, in men's sizes from 7 to 13. They cost about \$66.

Dickies Footwear, 877/795-2410, www.dickiesfootwear.com.

Heavy-Duty Gloves.

I see more and more carpenters wearing work gloves all the time on the job site, and for good reason. The new generation of gloves offers excellent protection with a minimal sacrifice in dexterity. The latest offering comes from Milwaukee. The new gloves have an impact-absorbing foam to prevent fatigue when running high-vibration tools like recip saws and demo hammers. They also have silicone fingertips that help with grip. Ventilated backs make them comfortable in all weather. Maybe the best part, the simple black color with tasteful lettering doesn't look as silly as offerings from other makers. The retail price is about \$20 to \$24.

Milwaukee Electric Tool, 800/729-3878,
www.milwaukee tools.com.



Rail Supports. Temporary safety rails don't have to be a huge production. The *Safety Boot* is an easy-to-use temporary safety rail system meant to protect workers from falling down stair openings or off balconies. The plastic boots receive ordinary construction-grade 2x4s, and they can be screwed directly to the floor surface. According to the manufacturer, the Boots' high-impact polymer will last for years. They retail for about \$23 each.

Safety Maker, 800/804-4741, www.safetyboot.com.

