New 12-Inch Compound Miter Saw From Ridgid

by Daniel Prior

Working as a trim carpenter, finishing custom single-family homes and luxury condominiums in Stowe, Vt., I give my sliding compound miter saw a daily workout. The finish work I do includes elaborate trim and custom cabinetry, so the ability to make accurate compound cuts on wide material is a necessity for me.

The newer 12-inch compound slide saws will cut just about anything I need them to. I bought a DeWalt model DW 708 about three years ago, and I like it. Its belt-driven design allows greater bevel capacity, especially to the right, because the saw motor isn't in the way.

But when I got the finish carpentry contract for a high-end condo complex, I needed an additional saw. So I jumped at the opportunity to check out Ridgid's MS1290 12-inch sliding saw (800/474-3443, www.ridgidwoodworking.com), released in January.

The saw's design is similar to that of the DeWalt. A 15-amp motor, perched on top of the saw, transfers power to the blade with a V-belt. The extra clearance that comes with a belt-driven design permits 50-degree bevels in both directions. The saw is substantial. It weighs 60 pounds, and at 2 feet square, it has a footprint nearly twice that of the DeWalt. If you plan on using this saw with a miter stand, you'll want to make sure it fits first. The 1290 comes almost completely assembled right out of the box. After installing the dust bag and hold-down clamp, I had the tool up and running immediately.

Bevel Adjustment

This saw's bevel adjustment is located above the bevel pivot, making the adjustment lever visible from the front of the saw, unlike the knob or bolt located behind the pivot on most other compound miter saws. The improved location makes it easier to change settings, because you don't have to reach around to the back of the saw while holding the motor assembly. By releasing the lever with my left hand and steadying the motor and slide assembly with my right, I can change bevel settings on the MS1290 without changing my body position (see Figure 1). Setting common bevels is made easier by a pin-type lock with detents at 0, 22 1/2, and 45 degrees, but you can override the detents by simply rotating the pin 180 degrees to deactivate it.

Miter Adjustment

Using a lever-type control similar to the bevel lock, the miter adjustment has 11 presets for common angles and a slick override system activated by a thumbwheel on the locking lever (Figure 2). Unlike the typical spring-activated detents used on other saws, the thumbwheel will remain in the off position if you prefer. But remembering to reengage it after changing the miter can be a challenge. Both miter and bevel scales are etched into easy-to-see, high-contrast metal plates and include adjustable indicators. A nice touch is a chart on the miter scale showing miter and bevel

Figure 1. The MS1290's bevel lock (covered with sawdust in photo above) is located right up front, so you don't have to reach around the back of the saw to make adjustments.

Figure 2. Instead of a spring-loaded lever, a thumbwheel controls the stops for common miters, and a fast-adjusting lever locks the miter table. Raising the lever releases the table; pushing it down locks it securely.

settings for cutting crown with a common 38-degree spring angle on the flat (Figure 3).

Capacities

The single greatest advantage of sliding compound miter saws is their unsurpassed crosscut capacity, and the MS1290 is no exception. It has an impressive, 13-inch crosscut capacity at 90 degrees and almost 10 inches at 45 degrees. It miters to 60 degrees left and right and bevels to 50 degrees left and right. I was able to cut 5-inch crown in place against the fence, but cutting 5 1/4-inch speed base against the fence was a problem. The bolt and washer that secure the blade interfere with the cut, stopping it at the final 1/4 inch.

Other Features

The MS1290 has some features that are lacking on other saws I've used. It includes a cord wrap, so you don't trip over the cord when carrying the heavy saw. Its large and reasonably effective dust bag hangs on a metal frame, so it keeps its shape and holds more dust. Carrying handles are placed on top of the cutting head and on the front of the table. The two front handles are cast into the housing, almost guaranteeing that they'll never break.

The clear plastic guard retracts quickly and, since it doesn't hold a lot of dust, doesn't obscure the cut line. Another welcome feature is the massive table that prevents the saw from tipping and provides ample room for even the biggest stock. The rear fence has wings that adjust for bevels and handy white inserts for marking repeat cuts with a pencil; they're erasable with a swipe of your finger. The MS1290's manual is easy to understand, contains all the pertinent information, and effectively describes the adjustments for truing the saw.

The biggest surprise on the 1290 was the blade. I'm used to manufacturers putting the lowest-quality blades on their saws to keep the price down, but the 60-tooth carbide blade was quiet, didn't wobble, and cut a variety of materials surprisingly well for a standard crosscut blade.

Figure 3. Laser-etched numbers provide good contrast on the miter scale; indicators are adjustable to help maintain accuracy (left). Settings for cutting crown on the flat are included on the miter scale, but they only work for crown with a 38° spring angle (right).

Although most of the controls are excellent, the depth stop needs a little refinement. I found it clumsy to set and got inconsistent results when making multiple dado passes (Figure 4).

The Verdict

The MS1290 is surprisingly quiet and has some nice features. I especially liked the excellent bevel and miter controls. It has a larger crosscut capacity than my DeWalt, and it was accurate right out of the box. My initial concern that the massive 15-amp motor would trip breakers proved groundless — even when I tried to bog it down. My biggest complaint is with the saw's size and weight. Granted, a saw's capacity has a direct relation to its size, and a bigger saw will weigh more than a smaller one. But this saw is a bear to carry around. Although the front-mounted handles are meant to make it easier to carry, I bumped the saw housing against my legs with every step.

Nonetheless, it's clear that Ridgid did its homework designing this saw. With the exception of the depth stop, all of the adjustments and controls are improvements over previous designs. For my work, it's too big and heavy, but if you tend to work on big jobs for longer periods of time, or if you need a good miter saw for the shop, it would be an excellent choice. The Ridgid MS1290 sells for $600 and includes a lifetime warranty.

Figure 4. The depth stop, which also serves to lock the cutting head for transport, is the weak link in the MS1290's otherwise excellent set of controls. Rotating the cam stops the blade at the desired depth, but fine-tuning the setting is more difficult than with a typical threaded stop.

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