

Toolbox

Bosch RS20 Reciprocating Saw

by David Haines

When I got my hands on the new Bosch RS20 reciprocating saw a few months ago, the first thing I noticed was that the cord was missing. The folks at Bosch didn't forget the cord — they just got rid of it. The design resembles that of the 1677MD wormdrive circular

saw, which was the first power tool to use Bosch's Direct Connect system.

Since the weak link with power tools — as we all know — is the connection between the power cord and an extension, Bosch replaced the typical 8- or 9-foot cord with a male plug recessed into the tool housing. With the Direct Connect system, you plug an extension cord right into the tool, virtually eliminating disconnected cords and annoying snags on framing members. Three spring clips and a cord loop keep the extension secure, an arrangement that works very well. In fact, it never came loose or undone while I used the tool. You hardly ever use a power tool without an extension anyway, so I think the Direct Connect system makes a lot of sense.

More New Features

Another nice feature is the quick-change blade clamp. All you need to do is push in the blade, which engages the quarter-twist blade-holder, and the blade stays put. You don't have to loosen a clamp or engage a spring. Removing the blade is almost as easy: Rotate the blade-holder one-quarter turn and it ejects the blade. You don't even have to touch it, which is very convenient for occasions when it's smoking hot.

The saw has a comfortable housing with a folding rafter hook on top that allows you to hang the tool from framing members between cuts. It also has a three-position adjustable shoe, so you can get a little extra life from blades and prevent cutting too deep when you're doing precision demo.

The only new feature that I think needs some work is the headlight. Under the blade are two small LEDs that light up whenever the tool is plugged in. They make it easy to determine whether you have power to the tool, but they



Bosch RS20 Specs

Amps: 13

Weight: 8.5 pounds

Strokes per minute:
0-1,900; 0-2,800

Stroke: 1¼ inches

Adjustable shoe: three-position

Street price: \$150

Bosch
877/267-2499
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provide very little light. Even in a dark, unlit basement, they weren't very helpful. A headlight's a good idea, but it needs brighter lamps.

Performance

The RS20 has a smooth-running 13-amp motor with high (0–2,800 strokes per minute) and low (0–1,900 strokes per minute) speeds. It has a 1¼-inch stroke and a variable-speed trigger that offers good sensitivity for plunge cuts and smooth starts on slippery surfaces.

At 8½ pounds, the saw has the highest power-to-weight ratio in its class, according to Bosch. And indeed the tool sure felt to me as if it has plenty of power. For example, I used it to rip an 8-foot 4x6

pressure-treated post. This isn't the kind of task you're going to do every day — if ever — but it seemed like a good way to test the saw's power. I was surprised by how easily the tool made a long cut through such a difficult material.

At this point, I've been using the RS20 for six months, and I really like it. Its innovative features and smooth, ample power make it a good choice. With a case, it sells for about \$150.

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The three-position shoe on the RS20 adjusts with a red button on the front housing. Because it's stainless steel, it won't leave rust stains on finished surfaces.



Instead of a cord, the RS20 has a male plug on the housing, so users can connect an extension directly to the tool. A hook molded into the housing relieves strain on the extension cord.

A folding rafter hook above the motor allows users to hang up the tool when they finish a cut. It's oriented in such a way that the blade points down when the tool is hung from a sawhorse or floor joist.



Tight-Space Power Trowel. If you're hoping to spend less time finishing concrete slabs but don't want or need a monster-sized power trowel, take a look at the newest Whiteman model. At 24 inches, the *CA-4-4H* is well-suited to residential work. Powered by a 4-hp Honda engine, the four-blade trowel spins between 70 and 130 rpm and features a rotating guard that prevents damage to walls when you're working in tight spaces. It lists at about \$2,600.

Multiquip, 800/421-1244, www.multiquip.com.



High-Flying Groover. West Coast builders and concrete finishers may be familiar with airplane-style groovers, but they're a rarity up here in New England: When I saw the Marshalltown *4097* at the Hardware Show, I had to ask what it was. I was told that this tool's large wings increase stability and reduce finishing compared with conventional groovers. According to the manufacturer, this product is about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wider than the competition, which improves flotation and therefore the quality of finish. It sells for \$99.

Marshalltown, 800/888-0127, www.marshalltown.com.

Switch Fitter. Finding volunteers to make concrete and masonry cuts with a heavy, hard-to-start cutoff saw might be tough, but you could probably entice one of them with a brand-new version from Makita. The company has introduced four new gas-powered cutoff saws — two 12-inch and two 14-inch models. Makita says the new saws have improved air filtration and a computer-controlled electronic ignition for additional power. The coolest feature, though, is how you can install the blade on either side of the cutting arm — an extremely handy arrangement for such flush-cutting applications as cutting next to foundation walls. The saws each weigh about 22 pounds; prices start at \$700 for the 12-inch, 64-cc *DPC6410*.

Makita, 800/462-5482, www.makitatools.com.



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Batt Plan. I've used Hanson's *03020 Insulation Knife* and found that it makes cutting fiberglass insulation about as painless as possible. An extendable snap-off blade penetrates even the thickest batts, and a toothed wheel on the bottom of the housing compresses the fibers for easier cutting. Opposite the cutting end is a small steel fin for stuffing scraps around doors, windows, and other tight spaces. And, unlike another popular sword-shaped insulation knife, you can keep this one in your toolbelt. It sells for about \$13.

CH Hanson, 800/827-3398, www.chhanson.com.



Multi-Tool for Crunch Time. There's no question that any multi-tool can save time and trips to the truck, but most models I've seen are better suited to backpacking than to building. One exception is the *Crunch* from Leatherman. Designed around a pair of stainless-steel locking pliers, the Crunch features a Phillips and three straight screwdrivers, wire strippers, wire cutters, a hex-bit driver, a file, and a sturdy serrated knife. All the internal blades lock for safety, and the whole rig weighs only 6 ounces. It sells for about \$80.

Leatherman, 800/847-8665, www.leatherman.com.



Stay Sharp. Lenox's introduction of the *Gold Blade* may not be quite as exciting as previous company milestones — the company cut a jumbo jet and a railroad car in half with a recip saw to publicize other tool debuts — but this utility blade does have plenty to offer. It lasts five times longer than conventional utility knife blades, says Lenox; bi-metal construction reduces breakage and a titanium-nitride coating keeps the blade sharp for a long time. A five-pack sells for \$2.85 on the Web.

Lenox, 800/628-8810, www.lenoxsaw.com.

