

Toolbox

Fein MultiMaster and Accessories

by Dave Northup

Although the Fein MultiMaster has been around for 20-plus years, I just started using one last year. Long known for its abilities as a detail sander, this tool — with the right attachments — can also scrape, cut, and grind a variety of materials. It resembles a small angle grinder, but instead of spinning, the shaft turns back and forth a couple of degrees at speeds of up to 21,000 times per minute.

There are several models of the MultiMaster on the market. I own an older variable-speed corded version that came with a case and multiple accessories. Fein just introduced two new models, but there wasn't time to test them for this article. No matter: With this tool, it's the accessories that matter most, which is why I'll be concentrating primarily on them in this article.

Sanding

The MultiMaster is great for sanding hard-to-reach areas like inside corners — but for large areas it's no substitute for an orbital or random orbital sander. The tool offers several sanding options. The most familiar uses triangle-shaped pads that come in two types, PSA (peel-and-stick) and hook-and-loop. Fein also makes a longer, narrower pad — called a finger sanding pad — that slips into spaces the standard pad won't fit.

I have the hook-and-loop version of the triangular pad. It allows you to remove and reinstall the same piece of paper, which is convenient when you want to switch grits before the sandpaper is completely worn out. However, if you plan to do a lot of sanding without switching grits, you may want to go with the PSA pad

and paper; the pads on the hook-and-loop system seem to wear out pretty quickly. I've had loops peel off the pads while I was removing the paper.

Vacuum attachment. One of the first accessories I purchased for my MultiMaster was the vacuum attachment, which lets you sand virtually without dust but works only with the perforated triangular pad and perforated paper.

Profiles. Fein's profile sanding kit consists of a spring-loaded clamp and six different rubber profiles. To use it, you fasten the clamp to the MultiMaster's shaft, wrap sandpaper around a rubber profile, and then grasp the profile and paper with the clamp. It's an ingenious design that can sand a variety of shapes. My only gripe is that it doesn't work with the vacuum attachment.

Sawing

I bought this tool primarily because I often install flooring and needed a way to cut off



Fein Power Tools
800/441-9878
www.feinus.com

Toolbox | Fein MultiMaster and Accessories



The dust-collection attachment (\$95) is very effective but works only with perforated hook-and-loop sanding sheets.

the bottoms of jambs. (I've used specialized jamb saws but hate to spend money on a tool that does only one thing.) Fein makes blades for the MultiMaster that cut a variety of materials, including wood, drywall, plaster, plastic, and light-gauge metal.

Jambs. To cut jambs I use something called an E-Cut blade, a newer style of blade that cuts deeper than the round and



The profile sanding kit includes a clamp fitting and six interchangeable rubber profiles.

Toolbox | Fein MultiMaster and Accessories



Because the MultiMaster's blades are off-set from the arbor, it's possible to cut flush into corners. Here an E-Cut blade is used to trim the bottom of a jamb flush to the top of a piece of tile.



Since the oscillating action doesn't kick up a lot of dust, the author uses a vacuum hose held next to the blade to collect the little it does produce.

segmented blades traditionally used with this tool. Like the older-style blades, E-cut blades will cut flush into corners. With practice, I've gotten to where I can cut jambs almost as quickly with a MultiMaster as I could with a jamb saw.

The tool came in very handy on a couple of recent jobs where I had to replace flooring without disturbing the kitchen cabinets. I set the E-Cut blade at a 90-degree angle to the tool and cut the old flooring material flush to the face of the toekick — without damaging the cabinets or the kick.

Hardwood. The kit I bought came with a high-speed steel (HSS) segmented blade designed for cutting hardwood. I used this blade to cut hardwood flooring in place at

transitional areas and during board replacement. It's round with one flat edge, which makes it possible to cut through the flooring all the way up to the wall. Thanks to the tool's oscillating motion, the cuts are fairly smooth and the blade doesn't wander.

Unlike some of the other MultiMaster blades, which are bimetal, the HSS blades are easily damaged if they hit nails.

They're expensive, too — about \$50 apiece — so it pays to locate fasteners before cutting into floors.

Metal. On a couple of occasions I've used the MultiMaster's metal cutting blade to trim back the existing metal corner bead from windows wrapped with drywall so that I could tuck in a new wood stool. This approach makes for an easier and better-looking installation than scribing the stool to the bead.

Drywall. There are many ways to cut holes in drywall, but except for using a knife — which is slow — they all generate a lot of dust. When I want to minimize dust while cutting holes to pull wires or enlarging an opening for a new window, I use the MultiMaster. The oscillating blade doesn't throw dust all over the place, and I can catch most the dust it does produce by holding a shop vac's hose next to the blade.

Tile Accessories

Fein makes a number of accessories for doing tile work; most are for removing grout. Using them is easier than removing grout by hand and creates less dust than a rotary

Toolbox | Fein MultiMaster and Accessories



A scraper removes the stubborn remnants of particleboard underlayment. The MultiMaster's scraping blades can remove caulk, paint, vinyl flooring, and adhesives.



These tile accessories — a jamb-cutting blade, a triangular rasp, and three abrasive grout-cutting blades — have Fein's new star-shaped mounting holes.

tool. Since the MultiMaster is easy to control, there's little chance of damaging a tile.

The grout blades come in various thicknesses, including a $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch-wide one (carbide or diamond) for narrow joints. Fein also makes some scrapers and a rasp. I've used a scraper to remove old adhesive from substrates that had been covered by tile, carpet, or vinyl. The rasp works on a variety of masonry materials; I remove old thinset with it when replacing tiles.

Attachment System

The MultiMaster's accessories originally had circular mounting holes and were held in place by friction from the mounting washer and screw, a setup that sometimes allowed them to slip around the shaft. A few years back Fein began to remedy this problem by introducing accessories with star-shaped mounting holes. The star-mount accessories work best with the older tools if you use a star-mount adapter plate (\$9).

One of Fein's new models (FMM 250Q) has a rapid-change toolless clamp that takes accessories with round and star-shaped holes. Another (FMM 250) requires the use of a mounting bolt and key. Unlike previous models — which had 180-watt motors — the new MultiMasters have 250-watt motors.

Choosing a Kit

With a full complement of accessories, the MultiMaster can perform more functions than any other tool I own, but its versatility comes at a price. The least expensive MultiMaster kit (Start) retails for about \$200; it includes an FMM 250 tool and a few accessories, but no case. (With all the accessories I carry around, I can't imagine going without a case.) The next kit up (Select) costs about \$300; it includes an FMM 250Q tool and a few more accessories than the Start — but still no case.

If I were to buy a new MultiMaster, I'd go for the Top kit, which costs about \$400 and includes an FMM 250Q tool, more accessories than the other options — including a profile sander and a dust-extraction device — and a case.

That's a lot to spend on a single hand-held tool, but I think it's worth it: With the MultiMaster, I can do a better job faster — and I don't have to buy and keep track of all the specialized tools I'd otherwise need to perform the same functions.

Dave Northup is a contractor in Homer, Alaska.



Ride the Wave. According to Bosch, the wave-shaped ridge on the *SpeedWave* diamond blade's cutting surface reduces blade friction and improves dust clearing, while its built-in "Cooling Disc" cools the surface and dampens vibration. Both features are said to improve cutting and increase blade life. *SpeedWave* blades come in 4½-, 5-, 7-, and 9-inch diameters. Prices start at \$45 and go up to about \$90.

Bosch, 877/267-2499, www.boschtools.com. **Circle #13**

Cut to the Chase. With their patented hollow-ground tooth design, Hitachi's new VPR framing blades are among the fastest-cutting available, the company claims. They're sold in two 7¼-inch styles: the 725213 (\$11), a 24-tooth ATB model, and the 725215 (\$11), which has a design that Hitachi says effectively doubles the number of teeth without sacrificing cutting speed.

Hitachi, 800/706-7337, www.hitachipowertools.com. **Circle #14**



Hole-Saw Mandrel. DeWalt says its new quick-change mandrel is the only one on the market for small hole saws (9/16 inch to 13/16 inches) — and that it greatly simplifies swapping sizes and clearing plugs. The company makes a similar quick-change mandrel for larger saws (1¼ to 6 inches). Both mandrels are allegedly compatible with all brands of hole saws. A 14-piece Master Hole Saw Kit — containing saws from ¾ inch to 2½ inches plus the two mandrels — sells for about \$100.

DeWalt, 800/433-9258, www.dewalt.com. **Circle #15**



Laminate Specialist. I've never met anyone who regretted buying a Lamello biscuit joiner — despite a price tag at least double that of any other biscuit tool. The company's *Lamina E* laminate trimmer offers the same thoughtful design and a similarly jaw-dropping price. Turning the tool's 28,000-rpm motor adjusts the 30mm bladed cutter for both depth and chamfer width. The maker claims the unique design results in a cut so smooth no additional sanding is necessary. The trimmer costs about \$600.

Colonial Saw, 781/585-4364, www.csaw.com. Circle #16

Miter-Saw Hoodie. Controlling dust from a miter saw is no easy task, but the *ChopShop* saw hood looks like a promising effort. The adjustable fabric hood contains much of the dust generated by a conventional or sliding miter saw and doubles as a weather-resistant cover when the machine's set up outside. The manufacturer is offering a special price of \$99 until the end of September; after that the price climbs to \$150.

FastCap, 888/443-3748, www.fastcap.com. Circle #17



Flat Bottom. Unlike a traditional dado set, Forrest's *Finger Joint Set* cuts perfectly flat dados, rabbets, and box joints without scoring or chipping their bottoms. The 8-inch 24-tooth blades can be arranged to make 1/4- and 3/8-inch-thick cuts. According to the maker, the precision-sharpened carbide teeth stay sharp extra long and the hand-tuned blade blank boasts a maximum of ±1/1,000-inch runout. The set sells for \$129.

Forrest, 800/733-7111, www.forrestblades.com. Circle #18