

## Safer Job-Site Table Saw

4100DG  
Bosch  
877/267-2499  
www.boschtools.com  
Street price: \$679

by Greg Burnet

I've used many different models of job-site table saws in the 20 years I've been a carpenter. Early versions were lightweight, but not terribly accurate or powerful. Later saws packed power and accuracy into a larger bundle that resembled a scaled-down contractor's saw.

Both of these types, no matter the manufacturer, shared one trait: a blade guard that was as good as useless. I have never seen a portable table saw on a job site that had its original guard in place. The guards were so

cumbersome most carpenters never bothered to take them out of the boxes they came in, let alone install one on their new saw.

In response to this problem, Bosch designed a functional blade guard for its updated job-site saw. Better still, the guard features a riving knife. Riving knives are practically unknown on American saws, but have been used in Europe for decades.

A riving knife is essentially a splitter placed behind and slightly lower than the saw blade. It travels up and down with the blade, and tilts when the saw is set to bevel cut. Riving knives are the first and most important line of defense against kickback, but they can't be used when dadoing.

Kickback occurs when the kerf in a piece of wood closes up behind the blade during the cut. The wood pinches the blade, which throws the wood back at the operator, sometimes with tragic results. I've met carpenters who were missing fingers, and more often than not, a table saw was the culprit.

When ripping at the table saw, many of us use our left hand (where we should use a feather board) to press the edge of the stock tight to the fence as our right hand feeds the material through the blade. In this situation, if kickback occurs, the left hand can end up pushing against the spinning blade after the stock has shot back towards the operator.

*[Editor's note: When this exact scenario happened to me, I was lucky: It took only a few hundred stitches and a skin graft to mostly repair the damage.]*

While riving knives are important,

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so too are blade guards that don't obstruct your view of the blade or interfere with material being cut. This saw delivers here as well, though not as well as I'd hoped for.

The two-piece guard works well for most cuts. It's pretty easy to see through, but it's fairly wide and somewhat cumbersome to install. It's split down the center, allowing the user to lift up the right side when ripping narrow pieces. Even so, it interfered with the push stick I was using to guide narrow pieces through the blade.

The riving knife is independent of the guard, so it can be used even if the guard isn't in place. All the com-

I had the fence set to 6 inches while the DRO was on, then turned the DRO off and moved the fence to 4 inches, the DRO displayed 6 inches when turned back on. Only moving the fence back against the blade and zeroing the DRO solved this problem.

My final concern is the DRO uses a very fine wire mounted on the underside of the rip fence rail. While I had no problems with the setup in six weeks of use, I also tend to be very careful. I question the durability of such a fine exposed wire over the long haul or when subjected to harsher sites and handling. I love the idea of a DRO on a job-site saw, but this one isn't quite the answer.

### Riving knives are the first and most important line of defense against kickback.

ponents of the guard system store on the right side of the saw for transport, but getting them into their respective storage spots is a bit of a challenge.

The saw I tested also came with Bosch's new digital readout (DRO) rip fence. The DRO is a box that attaches to the fence and travels with it. While good in theory, the execution left a bit to be desired. The DRO consistently varied  $\frac{1}{32}$  inch to  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch from the rip fence pointer and the scale. Careful cuts and measurements revealed that the rip scale was right on and the DRO was off.

Another issue with the DRO is that it had to be zeroed out anytime it was turned off and then turned back on after moving the fence. For example, if

The "gravity rise" stand that's available with this saw is excellent. The stand makes moving the 60-pound saw (99 pounds with stand) a breeze.

Two large pneumatic tires allow for navigating tough terrain, as well as stairs. To unfold the stand, simply twist a handle while pushing the saw down (a process that's much harder to describe than to execute). The stand opens into position, placing the saw on a rock-solid base at a comfortable working height.

The tool is a solid performer. It handled all the cutting tasks I threw at it, from ripping plywood to cutting construction lumber and hardwood. It never labored under load and its soft-start motor is nice and smooth.

## TOOL KIT

The bevel and blade-height adjustments were a snap, thanks to the easily accessible and smoothly operating hand wheel (used for blade-height adjustments) and lever (for bevel adjustments). The bevel scale is crisp and easy to read, and is very accurate.

The rip fence also functioned well and locked squarely to the blade. The rip scale is well defined, easy to read and very accurate after initial setup.

Setting up the saw took me about two hours, a good portion of which was spent assembling the stand.

All in all, though, I couldn't help



thinking how much better this saw could have been. The riving knife is a wonderful feature, but too much fumbling is required to mount and

detach it for dados. The blade guard is my biggest issue with the saw. It's too large, doesn't store well, and gets in the way of too many cuts. And I wish the DRO worked better.

Gripes aside, Bosch is to be commended for producing an excellent saw and especially for taking the initiative of making the first portable table saw with a riving knife for the U.S. market. Here's hoping that other manufacturers are taking note.

*Greg Burnet is a remodeling contractor and deck builder in Berwyn, Ill.*

## Winter Woolies

**Work-Dry Thermal Underwear**  
**Carhartt**  
**800/833-3118**  
**[www.carhartt.com](http://www.carhartt.com)**  
**Street price: \$30**



**W**orn and tattered Carhartt outerwear is a badge of construction experience. I've known guys (gals may do this too — I've just never seen it) who brag that their tar-smeared, duct-tape-patched jacket is the oldest one on site. Walking onto a job site wearing new Carhartts is as likely to get you razzed for being a rookie as it is to get you congratulated on opening your wallet.

So it was with some relief that I realized my newest Carhartts weren't going to attract a lot of attention. That's because I rarely visit job sites without something over my underwear. I've been trying out Carhartt's line of mid-weight wicking thermal underwear, and it's all I could have hoped for.

The fabric is comfortable against the skin, and except at the cuffs, the fit is loose to allow movement. I particularly like the crew-neck shirt. Its zippered collar allows me to vent when needed or zip up and warm my neck against the cold. In the tall size, it hangs down well below my belt line (I'm 6 foot 2 inches).

You might wonder why you should lay out so much cash when you can get a set of cotton long johns at Wal-Mart for about \$10? It's all about wicking fabric. Mountaineers, who risk hypothermia in settings where warmth isn't readily found, have a saying: "Cotton kills." When cotton gets wet with sweat or rain, it loses its insulating value. Wicking fabric doesn't suffer from this demerit. Rather, it moves moisture away from your body, and is a key component in winter layering. — *Andy Engel*

## Better Batter Boards

**Batter Board System**  
**Rousseau Co.**  
**800/635-3416**  
**www.rousseauco.com**  
**Street price: \$60 for four**

by Rob Arnold



For years, I laid out my footings using wooden batter boards that I pieced together from scraps. I wasted a lot of time shifting, raising, and relocating them. But since the end of 2005, I've been using reusable and adjustable batter boards from Rousseau.

These steel boards are held in place with a couple of steel foundation stakes or pieces of rebar driven into the ground through their end tubes. If you need to move the batter boards, the stakes can be pulled up and easily driven into a new spot.



What I like best about Rousseau's batter boards is the adjustable sliding string holder. As long as you are within 27 inches of the footing locations, you can slide the string to the desired location and secure it with the locking knobs.

For uneven terrain, the heights of the batter boards can be adjusted with locking knobs that tighten into the stakes. This product pays for itself quickly and is a must-have for the deck builder's toolbox.

*Rob Arnold owns Efficient Exteriors in Coventry, R.I.*

## Tough Sawhorses

**Stablemate Sawhorse**  
**Fulton Corporation**  
**815/589-3211**  
**www.fultoncorp.com**  
**Street price: \$40**

I probably couldn't count just how many sets of sawhorses I have made or bought. Well-built wooden ones are sturdy, but they're hard to store and transport. Temporary sawhorses tend to be brittle and get thrown away at the end of the job. I've tried several foldable steel sawhorses, but I found they weren't sta-

ble and could be easily overloaded.

I bought a Stablemate sawhorse with the same low expectations I had for other foldable horses, but from the minute I unfolded the galvanized steel legs, I could tell I finally purchased a quality sawhorse.

As the legs unfold, they lock into place and create a rigid and stable platform that's either 42 inches or 36 inches high, depending on the model. I've loaded as many as 30 treated 2x10x12s on them — it would actually be a challenge to overload these sawhorses. — R. A.



## Cord Holder

**CordSnake**  
**Hartrich Enterprises**  
**888/830-8182**  
**www.cordsnake.com**  
**Street price: Three for \$8**

Perhaps the weakest link of a corded power tool is the connection (or all too often, the disconnection) between the tool's cable and the extension cable. There are myriad products on the market whose purpose is to keep the plug plugged, and I've tried a lot of them. Until recently though, I'd still been tying the two cables together with an overhand knot before joining them up.

The CordSnake might make me

give that approach up. A nylon cord on one end of the CordSnake loops around one plug and is tightened down with a constrictor piece. The CordSnake stays on that cable, be it the tool's cable or the extension cable. The other cable loops through a plastic keeper whose friction grip is surprisingly tenacious.

Don't try this at home, but I just had to hook up my Skil 77 circular saw (the old, heavy model that I blame for my tennis elbow) to an extension cable using the CordSnake. Then, standing atop a pair of horses for some elevation, I lifted the saw by pulling up on the extension cord. The CordSnake held. It's hard to imagine a heavier load in day-to-day use. — A.E. ♦

