

Versatility and Accuracy in One Package

DW718 Double-Bevel Sliding Compound Miter Saw
DeWalt
800/433-9258
www.dewalt.com
Street price: \$650

by Mark Clement

Deck building is commonly circular-saw territory, but a 12-inch slide compound miter saw is unbeatable for blasting out blocking, cutting 2x2s, plowing through 4-by stock, and doing a zillion other things. And for porches — think beaded ceiling material and crown — a miter saw is a must. I use a DeWalt DW718. DeWalt nailed this tool: Its power, accuracy, and multiple features combine to help deliver quality work quickly.

The DW718 has power — it muscled through

2x10, 2x12, and 4x6 TimberSil Wood, a treated lumber that's about the hardest material I've encountered when building decks. And cutting cedar and yellow pine is a cinch. The top-mounted belt-drive motor does hop some on start-up (all the belt-drive saws I've used hop), but the hop is so subtle I don't notice it anymore.

The blade brake on this saw is a great feature. The rapid slowdown in the blade rotation means I can draw the tool out of the work more safely and quickly. It cuts down on the ear-aching noise that a whirring blade and motor apparatus create while freewheeling after a cut. And because the blade slows itself, I don't have to take the extra step of pressing the waste piece into the blade plate to stop the blade — a common practice — which means I can be working, not fiddling with the saw.

Right out of the box, the saw cut square and true. It's easy to swing to any angle. The detents lock positively, but in spite of this feature, setting an angle just past a detent is a snap. The bevel detent system has both right and left detents at 33.9 degrees for cutting crown flat, and the adjustment lever is top drawer. The lines of site are great — I could see blade teeth hit the work through the louvered guard and by sighting along the blade.

Handle orientation is one of those Ford vs. Chevy things with

carpenters; but for my hands, the DeWalt's two-finger trigger has perfect spring tension and is the perfect size. There are no pinch points or infuriating trigger locks. The carry handle is smartly positioned on the top of the saw and is beefy enough to get a solid grip on, making this saw easier to lug between truck and site than other saws I've lugged. At 53 pounds, it's comparatively light.

As for capacity, the DW718 can handle most of the cuts a deck builder requires. It miters 2x10s at 45 degrees and cuts 4x6s either flat or on edge in a single pass. The 4⁵/₈-inch-tall adjustable fence enables me to cut tall crowns (up to 6⁵/₈ inches) nested without setting up a sacrificial fence.

Access to the blade is simple and intuitive — much better than most others I've used where you have to disassemble half the saw guard to access the blade bolt. And DeWalt includes an awesome blade wrench that stays in its on-board location. Once loosened, the blade comes off easily.

As good as it is, the saw could be better. The dust collection port is small, and it broke when a hunk of wood ejected into it — though it actually works a little better now. The included blade wasn't great, so I upgraded to a better one for trim and used a construction blade for framing, with more success. I also wish there were a grommet to hold the cord completely free of the slide rails. It can pinch in there sometimes.

Mark Clement is a deck builder and a remodeler in Ambler, Penn., and the author of The Carpenter's Notebook, A Novel.



Safer Chisels

Hardcap Safety Chisels

Baltimore Tools

800/752-5533

www.hardcap.com

Street price: \$16 to \$20,
depending on size

by Jim Kidd

Chisels are among the most basic tools, and upgrades are difficult to imagine. Nonetheless, Baltimore Tools has managed to improve this classic in a way that should help to protect users against injury.

Even at first glance, the red cap on a Hardcap Safety Chisel stands out. It's made of a reinforced DuPont polymer and offers an easy target; in fact, there's a black circular target on the top of the cap. There's also a

label stating the maximum safe hammer weight. The red cap offers a large striking surface, which reduces the risk of glancing blows that can be real knuckle busters. The cap also helps reduce vibrations to the hand holding the tool without noticeably reducing the cutting force, and the cap significantly reduces that ear-ringing ping that you can get from some other chisels.

The padded grip is easy on the hand and absorbs even more vibration. And the padding's tough — after weeks of dancing in the toolbox during my commutes, it's still like new.

Out of the box, the chisels weren't

the sharpest, but a date with a whetstone soon brought them around. They cut about the same as any other job-site chisels I own, but the cap sure makes for an easier target and should save some bruised knuckles.

These solid-steel chisels come in sizes between 1/2 inch and 1 1/2 inches. They are a bit more expensive than some imports, but they're American-made tools, and I think they're worth the extra bucks.

Jim Kidd is a carpenter and writer in Ghent, N.Y.



Better Chalk-Line Anchor

Rocket Anchor

Rocket Anchor Mfg.

904/797-2681

www.rocketanchor.com

Street price: \$20

by Robert Arnold

I love efficiency. Any tool that saves time or eliminates a second set of hands earns a place in my tool box. The Rocket Anchor is such a find — it saves a couple of minutes every time it's used, it displaces another tool from the pouch (you won't need an awl anymore), and it costs only \$20.

To use the Rocket Anchor, just affix it to the end of a chalk line's string; it stores in a sheath that's screwed to the chalk reel. Since I first saw this tool a

few years ago at the JLC Live show in Providence, R.I., one has been attached to every chalk line I've owned.

The Rocket Anchor functions as a plumb bob, but its chief benefit is that it replaces the second set of hands otherwise needed to hold the other end of the chalk line. Its high-carbon-steel pin accurately and securely fastens the line to whatever you want. My crew often pounds it into the side of a concrete foundation.

My own Rocket Anchor has taken 40-foot falls onto concrete and the only thing that has broken has been the chalk-line casing. The pin can be adjusted and sharpened with ease. Buying this tool is a no-brainer. In fact, I bought Rocket Anchors for the



whole crew — now no one has to ask for a hand when snapping a line.

Robert Arnold owns Efficient Exteriors Inc., in Hopkinton, R.I.

Get a Leg Up in Tough Pants

Field and Stream Upland Pant
Dick's Sporting Goods
www.dickssportinggoods.com
 Street price: \$30

Walk onto any job site and you will see the same basic pants everywhere. They're usually in some stage of being mangled, muddied, and torn, which isn't surprising when you consider the constant exposure to muddy footing holes, goopy caulks, and other hazards.

I found a different kind of pants, though — which are designed for hunters and sometimes referred to as “brush pants” — in my local Dick's Sporting Goods store. Called the Field and Stream Upland Canvas Pant, these bad boys are bombproof and good-looking.

We've all had the double-kneed cotton duck or jeans — and they work — but the Upland pants crank it up several notches. The entire cuff and front of the pants are doubled with tough 1000 denier nylon fabric: Good luck trying to rip these knees. And though it's not waterproof, the nylon doesn't sponge water in around your knees when you kneel in wet earth, as cotton does. The seat is double-layered cotton, which I was glad for when one layer ripped (don't ask). Standard pants would have been junk. But despite their toughness, the pants breathe while offering zero restriction to movement.

As the business owner, I want to look professional. Non-mud-caked pants help — and the fabric in these pants repels dirt. Also, I personally like the two-tone coloring: It's distinguished, if



one can say that about work pants.

The only flaw I found is the suspender buttons inside the waist. After wearing these pants on several jobs, I found that my tool belt was grinding the buttons into my pelvis. I cut the buttons off with a utility knife — problem solved.

The Field and Stream Upland Pants I wear are available only at selected Dick's Sporting Goods stores (not online, including Dick's own site; the site is operated by a vendor). The good news is Dick's is a national chain and its Web site has a helpful store locator. Good stuff, good price. — M.C. ♦