

8¼-Inch Saw Speeds Up Production by Mark Clement

**HD5860 8¼-Inch Wormdrive Saw
Skil**
877/754-5999
skiltools.com
Street price: \$190



I learned deck building from a production deck builder. While he could build decks quickly, he could have been even faster if he'd used more task-specific tools. For example, he cut 6x6 with a 7¼-inch sidewinder, then finished the cuts with a bone-jarring reciprocating saw. He should have used an 8¼-inch wormdrive like the Skil that rides shotgun with me.

Cutting 6x6 with an 8¼-inch saw is faster and easier than with a 7¼-inch saw. Because of the 8¼-inch blade's 2⅞-inch cut depth, it's one pass from each side and you're through. If you're creating saddles in a 6x6 to support your beams on, one pass with an 8¼-inch saw crosscuts a shoulder, whereas with a 7¼-inch tool, you need to finish the cut with a reciprocating saw or a handsaw. Plus, after making the remaining shoulder cuts with an 8¼-inch saw, the amount of material left in the center of the timber is negligible.

If you're a regular wormdriver, having an 8¼ on site won't be that big a boon to you cutting joists. But if

you're a sidewinder guy, a whole new world of efficiency will open up. Let the joists run wild over the cantilever beam, snap a line across their tops to mark the cuts, and square down. Because the Skil is in-line, you can see the cut line and drop the saw through the work without bending as far to make the cut as you would with a sidewinder. Granted, an 8¼-inch wormdrive is a little big for this, but it's still easier than using a sidewinder.

Another time I use the Skil is when I'm housing guardrail posts within the deck framing. Getting them plumb often requires shims, and with the 8¼-inch Skil I can cut full-width shims from the end of a scrap 4-by.

The Skil runs smooth, cleanly ejecting sawdust on every 6-by I've ripped or cut, even with the blade buried to the shoe. It's a basic, no-frills tool, but its stamped steel shoe is rugged, the guard rolls up when making thin cuts, and its power increases production.

Contributing editor Mark Clement builds decks around Ambler, Pa.

Hardwood Plug System by Rob Arnold

Smart-Bit Pro Plug System
Starborn Industries
800/596-7747
starbornindustries.com
Street price: Plug and Fastener
Kit (350 pieces), \$125
Pro Plug Tool, \$20

Plugging screw holes in hardwood parting boards and picture frames — which don't lend themselves to attachment with standard side-mount hidden fastener clips — used to cause my company a lot of trouble. Most countersink bits burned extremely hard woods like ipe or cumaru, and most plug cutters shredded ipe, leaving us with one good plug

for every five we attempted to cut. Adding to our frustration, when the plug cutter and countersink bits were sold separately, lumberyards would frequently send two bits that didn't work with each other. We started to tell homeowners that we would be face-screwing borders and picture-frame deck boards, just so we wouldn't have to attempt plugging.

TOOL KIT

Then I tried Starborn's Smart-Bit Pro Plug System. The components come packaged together in a kit that includes plugs, heavy-duty 2½-inch 305 stainless screws, a #2 square-drive bit, and an applicator cap for a bottle of glue (you have to provide your own

waterproof carpenter's glue). The Pro Plug Tool for drilling and counter-sinking is sold separately.

Within two minutes of using the Pro Plug System, I realized our problems were solved. Without any struggle, Starborn's bit drills the hole for the

screws and makes a perfect counter-sink for the plugs. The screws drive effortlessly through the material, the glue applicator doesn't make a mess, and the plugs fit perfectly. With every hardwood-deck order I make, I now have the lumberyard ship a Pro Plug kit. I recommend this product not only to deck builders, but also to interior finish carpenters, cabinet makers, and hardwood floor installers.

The kits come in three sizes, with 100, 350, or 1,050 plugs and an equal number of screws. Available woods are cambara, cumaru, garapa, ipe, jatoba, mahogany, massaranduba, meranti, and tigerwood. ♦

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

