

Festool CXS Subcompact Drill/Driver

by Bruce Greenlaw

Earlier this year, I tested seven subcompact drill/driver kits for *JLC* (“12-Volt Drill/Drivers,” 6/11). Each tool had a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch keyless chuck, and a high and a low speed range. The battery packs held three 3.6-volt lithium-ion cells to deliver a nominal 10.8 volts. My favorite models — the DeWalt DCD710S2, the Milwaukee 2410-22, and the Ridgid R92009 — easily bored about forty $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch holes through 2-by Douglas fir per charge and could bury 3-inch wood screws, yet were still small and light enough to carry in a pocket or toolbelt.

Festool has since unveiled the CXS 10.8-volt subcompact drill/driver, which features what the company calls the “FastFix chuck system” for extra versatility. The complete set (model 564274) includes two batteries, a charger, a Systainer case, a nonratcheting $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch keyless chuck, a Centrotec quick-change chuck and magnetic bit holder, a right-angle attachment, and a Phillips insert bit. I gave the kit a workout to see how it measures up.



For optimal clearance in a tight squeeze, you can install the right-angle attachment in your choice of 16 positions and slip an insert bit into its built-in magnetic bit holder (left). The attachment also pairs with the keyless chuck (right) and the Centrotec chuck.



The versatile CXS set includes a $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch keyless chuck, a Centrotec quick-change chuck, and a right-angle attachment.

Drilling and Driving Options

Even by subcompact standards, the core Festool CXS is small. While the other subcompacts weigh 2.1 to 2.6 pounds and measure $6\frac{5}{8}$ to $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long with their chuck jaws retracted, the Festool — with no FastFix accessories attached — weighs 2 pounds and is $6\frac{3}{16}$ inches long (not counting the handle, which extends back another $\frac{9}{16}$ inch). In this configuration, the magnetic output shaft itself holds standard $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hex-shank insert bits.

When you snap on the Centrotec chuck, the tool weighs 2.1 pounds and is 7 inches long. If you use the keyless chuck instead, the figures jump to 2.4 pounds and $7\frac{11}{16}$ inches. But length isn't a critical issue with this tool; for working in super-tight spaces, you can simply snap on the right-angle attachment in your choice of 16 different positions and either drive standard insert bits with the built-in magnetic bit holder or pair the attachment with

the Centrotec or keyless chuck for more drilling and driving options. At first, I had to do a lot of fiddling to get the attachment to seat fully on the tool. Then I discovered an easier way: Slide the attachment onto the output shaft close to the desired position, rotate its green release ring slightly if necessary to engage the shaft, then pull back the ring and finish seating it in the desired position.

The Centrotec quick-change chuck accepts only Centrotec drill, driver, and countersinking

Festool CXS Specs

Weight without chuck: 2 pounds

Weight with keyless chuck: 2.4 pounds

Rpm: 0-400/0-1,200

Maximum torque: 142 inch-pounds

Charge time: 30 minutes for 100%, 20 minutes for 80%

Price: \$275

Warranty: 3 years for tool, batteries, charger; 30-day money-back guarantee

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888/337-8600
festoolusa.com

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bits and bit holders, which have a different ball-detent hex shank than standard power bits do. Also, most Centrotec drill bits are metric. The Centrotec BH 60MM magnetic bit holder included with the kit drives standard 1/4-inch hex-shank insert bits. Given that the keyless chuck can handle standard drill bits, you can still alternate quickly between drilling and driving without investing in Centrotec bits.

Other Features

The CXS is the only subcompact with a D-handle, so you can't just drop it into a pocket or a crowded toolbelt. But the tool's slender 2⁷/₈-inch-long reversible belt hook is the best I've used; it quickly hooks to everything from a thick leather belt to a belt loop. Reversing it is a simple matter of removing the battery and moving the hook, with no tools required. You can grip the tool either conventionally or like a drywall screw gun, with your thumb and forefinger wrapped around the motor housing. Unless I was trying to counteract

high torque, I usually gripped the motor housing, because that made the tool feel as if it were an extension of my hand.

Like the competition, the CXS has a trigger-activated LED headlight, and it works well except that the right-angle attachment blocks it in some positions. When you release the trigger, the light instantly goes out; there's no convenient delay as there is with the Makita and Ridgid subcompacts. Below the headlight, two magnetic slots each store two insert bits or one power bit.

Except in some right-angle configurations, the tool can stand upright on its post-type battery. Too bad there's no on-board battery gauge (only the Bosch and Milwaukee subcompacts have one).

Runtime and Torque Tests

I tested the CXS the same way I tested the other subcompacts. To check runtime, I installed a new Irwin 3/4-inch Speedbor spade bit in the keyless chuck, then counted the number of holes I could drill through 2-by Douglas fir in high gear on a single charge. I tested both batteries included with the tool. The first battery drilled 26 holes, the second 23. That fell far below the top test score of 44 and 42 earned by Milwaukee's subcompact, but it beat Makita's 22 and 15. Though the motor got warm, the tool drilled the holes without bogging down or shutting itself off due to overloading or overheating. Its top speed is 1,200 rpm (versus 1,500 rpm for the fastest subcompacts), so it typically took a few seconds longer to drill each hole.

To gauge maximum torque, I drilled two 1/8-inch pilot holes 2 1/2 inches deep in Douglas fir and then drove two 1/4-inch-by-4 1/2-inch lag screws as deep as possible in low gear. The tool drove the first screw 2 13/16 inches deep and the second one 2 3/16 inches deep before shutting itself off, leaving 1 11/16 and



Like the typical drywall screw gun, the CXS can be gripped directly behind the chuck for better control. Except for when the right-angle attachment gets in the way, the LED headlight hits the target.

2 5/16 inches (respectively) standing proud. That's significantly less torque than the other subcompacts delivered before shutting off or stalling. But this is an extreme test designed to generate comparative values, and the results might simply mean that the Festool has more sensitive protective circuitry. In more practical terms, the CXS had enough power in low gear to sink a 4-inch-long #10 Woodex deck screw in Douglas fir without a pilot hole and could easily bury 3-inch-long #9 Woodex screws, just like the other subcompacts.

Would I Buy It?

The more I used this tool, the more I liked its inline grip, practical belt hook, well-placed headlight, and right-angle capabilities. I wish the Centrotec quick-change chuck would accept standard hex-shank power bits and that the tool had a battery gauge, but those aren't deal-breakers. If I did only finish carpentry, I would definitely consider buying the complete CXS set, for its ability to squeeze into the tightest spaces while delivering ample power and runtime. For general carpentry and remodeling, though, I'd opt for maximum power, speed, and runtime and buy the DeWalt, Milwaukee, or Ridgid, saving about \$135 to \$145 in the bargain.

Bruce Greenlaw is a JLC contributing editor.



The Centrotec quick-change chuck accepts Festool's Centrotec bits and bit holders. The Centrotec BH 60MM magnetic bit holder (shown here) is included with the kit, and drives standard hex-shank insert bits.

The front of the D-handle contains the battery post, a reversible belt hook and, up top, an LED headlight. It also has two magnetic slots that store spare driver bits. The tool's output shaft is a magnetic insert-bit holder.

