Toolbox

Makita LS1216L Sliding Compound Miter Saw

by Greg Burnet

The older I get, the more I tend to favor smaller and lighter power tools that are easy to move around the job site. That didn't stop me from buying Makita's big and heavy LS1216L sliding compound miter saw last year, though. I couldn't resist its cutting capacity: a full 15 inches wide at 3 5/8 inches deep, more than any other sliding compound miter saw I'm aware of. My crew and I don't always need this much capacity, so we don't use the LS1216L as our primary saw; but when we're trimming out a wide frieze or working on an unusually deep built-in, we don't mind lugging around a saw that measures almost 3 feet long and weighs close to 60 pounds — as long as it will do the job.

LS1216L Specs

Blade: 12 inches, 1-inch arbor
No-load speed: 3,200 rpm
Cutting capacity, 90°: 3 5/8" x 15"
Cutting capacity, 45° L/R: 3 5/8" x 10 1/2"
Miter cuts: 0° to 52° L; 0° to 60° R
Bevel cuts: 0° to 45° L and R
Crown molding capacity (nested): 8 inches
Baseboard capacity (vertical): 6 1/2 inches
Motor: 15 amps
Dimensions (LxWxH): 31 3/4" x 25 1/4" x 28 3/8"
Weight (by mfr.): 58.6 pounds
Price: $600 online

Makita
714/522-8088
makita.com

Performance

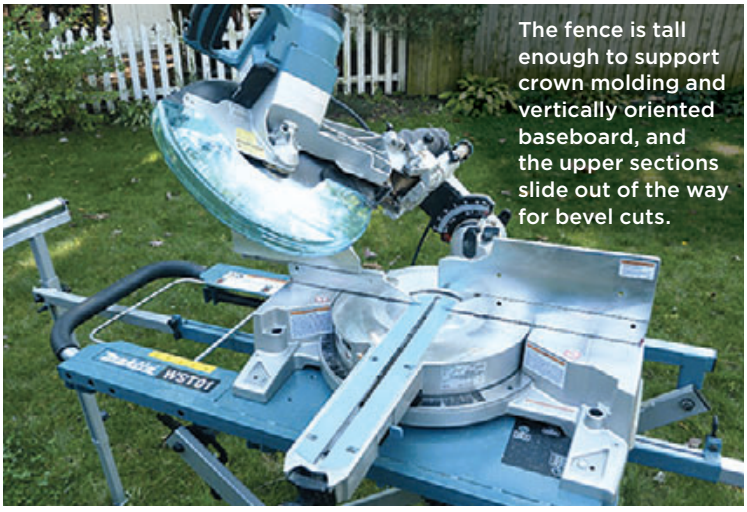
I've owned a couple of generations of Makita miter saws over the years and have always found them to be accurate and well-built. This model is no exception. Even though it's been bouncing around in a gang box for several months now, my LS1216L cuts as smoothly and accurately as the day I unpacked it. Crosscuts are dead-on, while vertical cuts are off by only about 1/32 inch over 3 1/2 inches — not enough to bother re-adjusting the stops, in my book.

Features

The saw shares many of the attributes and features of its (slightly) smaller brother, the 10-inch LS1016L: easy-to-read miter and bevel scales, dual rails, an angled gear-driven motor, and a laser (designated by the "L" after the model number). In fact, the two saws look nearly identical, the only noticeable difference being the 1216's larger blade and slightly larger footprint (about 4 inches longer and 2 inches wider than the 1016's). The 1216 is also heavier than the 1016, but only by about 5 pounds. It has an electric brake, soft start, and electronic speed control, and comes with a dust bag, a material hold-down clamp, and self-storing blade and adjustment wrenches — pretty standard fare.

Blade. One of the first things I do when putting a new miter saw into service is replace the stock blade with a better-quality one, often at a cost of $60 or more. With this saw, I didn't have to; after almost a year in service, the high-quality blade continues to deliver smooth, splinter-free cuts in materials ranging from hardwoods to plywood. We use the saw mostly for cutting siding and exterior trim, and would only change the blade if we had to cut more demanding material.

Fence. The 5 1/2-inch-tall sliding fence is a welcome departure from Makita's usual efforts in this area. As

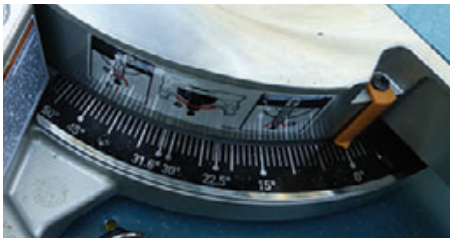

The fence is tall enough to support crown molding and vertically oriented baseboard, and the upper sections slide out of the way for bevel cuts.

The horizontally oriented D-handle is easy to grasp.

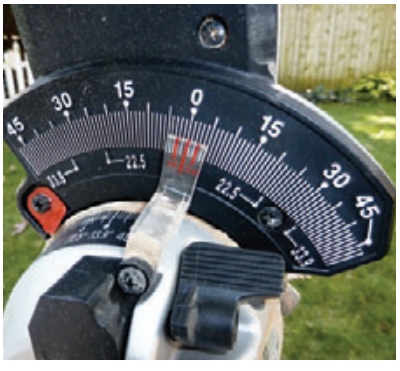
much as I've been a fan of the company's miter saws, I've always wished its fences were taller, since I prefer to cut most of my moldings standing up. In the past, I've just added taller wood subfences to support wider stock, but that decreases the crosscut capacity of the tool. The upper sections of this fence slide smoothly out of the way for miter or bevel cuts.

Handle. I also like the rubberized horizontal D-handle, a welcome improvement over the vertical handles found on previous Makita models. Vertical handles — particularly those with safety buttons — have always felt awkward to me. The 1216's cushioned handle does have a safety button that you have to depress to operate the tool, but the button is located in such a position that you can engage it while gripping the handle naturally — no uncomfortable wrist and thumb contortions required.

Laser. Unfortunately, the laser on the saw has been a disappointment. It worked intermittently for a few months and then quit altogether. For me a laser isn't a critical feature, but having to take the machine in for service so early was a hassle.



The saw has easy-to-read miter and bevel scales and can make miter cuts up to 52 degrees to the left of the blade and up to 60 degrees to the right.



Extras

Makita's accessory saw stand is heavy, awkward, and — at $350 — expensive. It doesn't provide continuous support of the material, and I found it too low to work with comfortably. If you need to be able to roll the saw around, this stand may be worth a look — but for the way we work, I found it easier to transport and store the saw without it.

Dust collection. The provided dust bag captures about 50 percent of the dust generated by the tool, depending on the type and size of material being cut. Makita offers an accessory "dust box" (part #1941756) that can be used in place of the dust bag. This box attaches to the saw's dust port, and an outlet port on top of it connects to a vacuum hose. The arrangement supposedly works like a cyclone separator: Dust is captured by the vac while heavier chips fall to the bottom of the box. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to track down the dust box through my usual suppliers, so I haven't tried it out and can't report on its effectiveness.

Conclusions

I continue to be impressed with this saw. Its capacity is practically unrivaled, its operation is smooth, and its size and weight are quite reasonable for such a capable tool. All in all, I consider it a real value.

Greg Burnet *owns Manor Services, a design-build firm specializing in finish carpentry and millwork in the Chicago area.*

Milwaukee Cordless Heated Jacket

by Andy Beasley

For folks who live in a northern climate, the hardest part of any winter workday is that gut-check moment when you turn off your truck's heater and trudge out into the cold. No matter how many layers you're wearing, you still wish you could bring some of that heat along. Now — thanks to Milwaukee's Cordless Heated Jacket — you can.

Battery-Powered Warmth

Sold as part of the company's 12-volt lithium-ion power-tool line, the jacket has heating elements sewn into its chest and back. They're powered by a battery that sits in a pocket at the jacket's waist. At first I worried that this sizeable lump would be annoying, but it rode comfortably above my toolbelt and remained well clear of my suspender harness. After a while I forgot it was there.

A push button sewn into the jacket's lapel switches the heat on and off and selects the temperature — high, medium, or low.

The jacket kit includes one battery and a 30-minute charger. I found that a fully charged battery provided heat for five hours and 50 minutes at the low setting, and two hours and 10 minutes at the high setting. To stay warm for an entire day, you'd need to bring along spare batteries.

Features. The jacket has a tough wind- and moisture-resistant polyester shell, comfortable fleece lining at the collar and cuffs, and four zippered pockets, including a cellphone-sized compartment at the chest. It comes in two colors — red and camouflage — and is not machine-washable; it has to be hand-washed and line-dried. Because of the integral heating elements, Milwaukee warns against wearing it when the polyester lining is wet.

Jacket Specs

Sizes: Medium through 2XL
Weight: Large is 2.6 pounds with battery
Kit (2331) includes: jacket, one 12-volt lithium-ion battery, 30-minute charger
Warranty: One year for jacket; two years for battery
Price: $185 for kit, $125 for jacket alone (2330)

Milwaukee
800/729-3878
milwaukeetool.com

Performance

I wore the jacket in a variety of conditions. The heating elements weren't quite powerful or extensive enough to render me impervious to subzero temperatures, but I felt warmer than I would have in my other jackets. In serious cold, I got the best results when I layered a couple of shirts underneath it and wore a big sweatshirt on top. The cuffs were a little loose and exposed my wrists to the cold, and the spring locks on the bottom hem cinch cord refused to stay locked.

And then there's the price. The $185 kit is significantly more expensive than a Carhartt. But if you've already bought into the M12 system (and have plenty of extra batteries) you can buy the jacket alone for $125 — which just might make sense if it makes your winters a little bit less bitter.

Andy Beasley is a veteran woodworker in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Power is supplied by a compact 12-volt lithium-ion battery pack tucked away in an unobtrusive side pocket.

The "M12" logo on the lapel doubles as the on/off button for the heating unit. It changes color — white, red, blue — to indicate the temperature setting.