

Skil MAG77LT Wormdrive Saw

by Terry Goodrich



MAG77LT Specs

Weight (including blade and cord): 13.2 pounds

Amps: 15

Rpm: 5,300

Maximum bevel cut: 53 degrees

Price: \$220 (\$230 for the MAG77LT-72 with twist-lock plug)

Skil

877/754-5999
skiltools.com

I've been an Oregon framing contractor for 30 years. I employ 12 to 20 carpenters, and together we frame about 75 to 200 single- and multi-family houses per year. Not only is that the ultimate torture test for our wormdrive saws, but it can also torture my veteran left arm — especially since I cut most of our roofs and stairs.

The 7¼-inch Skil MAG77 I usually use is a durable workaholic, has a quality lower blade guard that seldom snags even when cutting compound angles, and is 2 pounds lighter than Skil's standard model SHD77. But Skil just rolled out the MAG77LT, which weighs 2 pounds less than the MAG77 and is now the lightest 7¼-inch wormdrive or hypoid model on the market. When *JLC* asked if I'd like to field-test one, I couldn't wait to see if its reduced weight and other deluxe features would make a difference. After framing eight houses with it, I'm stoked.

Weight Loss

At first glance, the MAG77LT doesn't look radically different from other Skil worm-

drives. But Skil micromanaged the design inside and out to shed some weight while adding welcome features.

To subtract weight, Skil used magnesium for the blade guards and baseplate, reduced the length of the motor by $\frac{3}{8}$ inch, reshaped the motor housing so it's cylindrical and is attached with shorter screws, moved the spindle lock from the front to the side of the gearbox and combined it with the oil plug, and even refined the rafter-hook mount.

I appreciated the lighter weight as soon as I lifted the saw, and the benefit was multiplied after using the tool all day or cutting overhead, such as when trimming rafter tails from a ladder. In my opinion, that alone is a game-changer.

Skil increased the no-load cutting speed from 4,600 to 5,300 rpm, so the saw should cut a bit faster. I didn't drag-race this model against my other Skils, but after cutting just about everything framers will normally cut with it (including plenty of LVL), I can't tell the difference.

Other Upgrades

The saw I tried cut perfectly square at the 0-degree setting, but if it ever veers off, it can be corrected by adjusting a screw on the baseplate. It bevels to 53 degrees (compared with 51 degrees for the SHD77 and MAG77), and the bold new bevel scale has white markings against a black background for a much easier read. The "Cut-Ready" depth bracket has practical scales that make it faster and easier to set the correct depth for cutting lumber and sheet goods. The new soft-grip rear handle is also an improvement.

I especially like the tool's unique multi-function wrench, which lives on the base-



Sam Scott

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Toolbox

plate so it's always within reach. It's a blade wrench, plus it can pry the diamond knock-out out of a new saw blade, loosen an over-tightened bevel or depth lever, and remove and install the oil plug and brush caps.

The Bottom Line

When I first started using this saw, I was annoyed when I came up empty after instinctively reaching up front for the spindle lock. But once I got used to the new location on the side of the gearbox, I found

it to be more convenient. So much for my only complaint. I love the saw's light weight, it performs like my other Skilsaw, it has every feature I can imagine wanting, and I expect it to last for years — just like its proven predecessors. Would I spend \$220 for one when I can buy a new MAG77 for \$180? Absolutely. In fact, I think it's a bargain.

Terry Goodrich is a framing contractor and custom home builder in Scappoose, Ore.



Amenities include a multifunction wrench that stores in the base, a rafter hook, and a more-convenient spindle lock that's combined with the oil plug.



Orbital Recips

In his review of the DeWalt DWE357 reciprocating saw in our April *Toolbox*, Greg Burnet wrote: "... it doesn't have orbital blade action, a mode that allows a saw to make faster cuts in wood. Personally, I miss this feature."

I like that feature, too, but have often wondered what the actual difference is between orbital and nonorbital cutting action. So I ran that question by David Lincoln, Milwaukee's product manager for AC and DC saws. Here's his answer, which was verified by Milwaukee's engineering team: "When cutting in wood, orbital action can increase the speed of cut by up to 20 percent. However, the harder the user pushes, the less benefit orbit has for cut time." — *Bruce Greenlaw*



Dust-Free Adhesive Anchoring

Hilti just launched the innovative HIT-HY 200 adhesive anchoring system for anchor rods and rebar dowels, which is approved by ICC-ES for use in uncracked or cracked concrete in all seismic zones. The system offers two options that can eliminate the need to clean out your holes with compressed air and a wire brush before injecting the HIT-HY 200 adhesive: You can either hook Hilti's unique hollow SDS-max or SDS-plus drill bits to a Hilti vacuum to suck up the dust as you drill, or you can use Hilti's new HIT-Z anchor rods and eliminate hole cleaning altogether. Both methods are supposed to be up to 60% faster than the traditional installation method.

Sim Ayers, owner of SBE Builders in Discovery Bay, Calif., installs lots of adhesive anchors, so we

asked him for a quick opinion. After watching the video at us.hilti.com/HY200, he said the vacuum option really piqued his interest, not only because it promises to be much faster than the usual cleaning procedure, but because it doesn't blow clouds of dust everywhere or drop it by the holes — a huge consideration when working in occupied buildings. Ayers recently bid on a seismic retrofit in an occupied multistory building and says if he gets the job, he just might submit Hilti's ICC-ES report to the structural engineer and buy into the system.

You can buy the components separately, but at the moment Hilti is also offering four deluxe starter kits that cost \$2,600 or \$3,000 and include everything from a rotary hammer to a cordless dispenser, plus some adhesive. — *B.G.*



21-Gauge Nailers

Ever heard of 21-gauge brad and pin nailers? If not, you're in good company, judging by the recently resurrected "21 gauge nailer/pinner" thread in the *JLC* Finish Carpentry forum. But some contributors to the thread have said they use these tools a lot because the fasteners have significantly more holding power than 23-gauge pins but leave much smaller entry holes than 18-gauge brads. The major power-tool manufacturers don't offer 21-gauge nailers, but one high-quality option mentioned in the thread is the Cadex model CPB21.50 (cadextools.com). Since Cadex also makes 23- and 18-gauge nailers, we called the North American distributor for an opinion about the 21-gauge option. The short answer: "The 21 gauge ... can be the only finish nailer a finish carpenter needs. Throw away your 18-gauge and put the 23-gauge back in your toolbox until you are shooting pins of 35mm ($1\frac{3}{8}$ inches) or less." — B.G.

Pelican 2720 LED Headlamp

by Michael Davis

My first headlamp was clunky, with a big battery pack in the rear and an incandescent bulb in front. It made me feel like I should be headed off to the coal mines. But from the first time I used it, I was sold. Suddenly I had a light that shone where I needed it and left both hands free for work.

Today's headlamps are smaller and packed with features. One of the latest entries into the market is the Pelican 2720 LED Headlight. I've been using one for a couple of months, and I really like it.

The 2720 is powered by three AAA batteries. It's compact and lightweight, and the adjustable elastic headband holds the lamp firmly in place while you work. Included are two clips that quickly attach the headband to a hard hat, which is the way I normally wear mine. When I'm not using the light, I don't even notice it up there.

Flexible beams. The lamp produces a powerful beam that you can adjust from 80 lumens to five lumens by holding down the on/off button. Battery runtime ranges from eight hours to 175 hours depending on the output. You can also adjust the beam from spot to flood by moving the magnification control at the top of the LED lens, and the lamp can pivot downward from 0 to 90 degrees.

Two red LEDs below the main lamp allow you to see in low light without losing your night vision. That's not all that useful on job sites, but it's great for weekend camping trips. The red lights can also switch to an emergency mode that signals SOS, which you hope you never need.

Motion sensor. What really sets the 2720 apart is its "Gesture Activation Control." Adjust the light to fit your needs, then press the motion-sensor button, and the



Pelican Products
800/473-5422
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light can be turned on and off by passing your hand within a few inches of the lens. This feature can be invaluable. For example, on the job site when it's cold and I'm wearing gloves and I go into the dark tool trailer, I wave my hand and my lamp comes on; another wave when I come out and it's off. (This also has its drawbacks: If you're working in close quarters — say repairing a pipe under a kitchen sink — you can accidentally switch the light off if you move your head too near a pipe.)

The headlamp has an IPX4 rating, which means that water splashes have no harmful effects. Mine has been rained on and still works fine. It lists for \$50.95 but can be found online for around \$35. It's a great little light.

Michael Davis owns Framing Square in Conifer, Colo.