

DeWalt DWE357 Reciprocating Saw

by Greg Burnet

Someone once told me that if you see a finish carpenter with a recip saw in his hands, he's not making any money. This, I know from my own experience, isn't entirely true. My company does finish work, but because we focus primarily on window and door repairs and replacements, we use a recip saw almost every day, for everything from cutting out rotten components to freeing door jambs. While some carpenters favor big 15-amp, 10-pound recip saws for their raw power and aggressiveness, my crew gravitates toward tools with finesse and maneuverability. That's why I was eager to try out DeWalt's DWE357 reciprocating saw when it was introduced last year.

Compact Size

The new DeWalt saw doesn't look like most recip saws. In both shape and size, it resembles a drill. The motor sits at an angle relative to the blade, with the handle directly behind it, an arrangement that seems to maximize control and comfort. Also, at just 14½ inches in length, the DWE357 is a good 4½ inches shorter than our conventional recip saws. We found the compact size to be a big advantage in certain situations, allowing us to get into tight spaces that otherwise might have been inaccessible. The saw is unusually light, too, weighing in at around



DWE357 Specs

Amps: 10

Strokes per minute: 0-2,800
(variable speed)

Weight: 6.8 pounds

Length: 14.5 inches

Price: \$115 (includes kit bag, three-year limited warranty, and one-year free service contract)

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7 pounds (with the blade). The reduced weight means less fatigue, particularly when you're operating the saw with one hand (try that with a conventional recip saw!) or in an awkward position.

The DWE357 has a unique four-position blade holder that makes it even easier to make cuts in confined areas. Blades can be mounted with their teeth oriented up, down, left, or right, a feature that plumbers, electricians, and other tradespeople who have to make cuts in tight spots may find especially useful. It also has a lever-operated blade clamp, which makes blade changes a snap.

Cutting Performance

Compact as this tool is, it doesn't lack for power. Like many conventional recip saws, it has a 10-amp motor. But it doesn't have orbital blade action, a mode that allows a saw to make faster cuts in wood. Personally, I miss this feature. Since my crew members often cut metal (for which orbital mode would need to be disengaged anyway) and view this tool as more of a surgical instrument than a heavy demolition device, not having this benefit doesn't matter as much to them.

The blade has a 1⅞-inch stroke and cuts at 2,800 spm



Toolbox | DeWalt DWE357 Reciprocating Saw

— a good speed, though not overly aggressive. I found the variable-speed trigger, which lets you adjust the speed anywhere from 0 to the top end, a bit touchy.

Both the handle and the front area around the blade are covered with soft rubber, making the saw easy to grip, even when you're wearing gloves. Vibration was about average compared with our other recip saws. The DWE357's 8-foot power cord exits the tool just under the handle, which keeps it out of the way of most cuts.

Like many power-tool manufacturers, DeWalt provides a soft-sided carrying bag rather than a rigid case with the saw. I'm not a big fan of bags, as they often seem to provide limited room for accessories and are somewhat of a pain to store, so we gave the saw a new home in a hard-sided modular case.



The saw has a blade holder that allows the blade to be oriented in four different directions.

A Specialty Saw

Although I liked the DWE357, it's not for everyone, mostly because it cuts more slowly than saws with orbital action. However, when it comes to making cuts in tight spots, this tool has little competition. And since it's less tiresome to use

than a traditional recip saw, it's my first choice for cutting tasks where speed isn't the main goal.

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