

Keen Tacoma Work Boots

Tacoma 6-Inch Work Boots
Keen
866.676.5336
keenfootwear.com
Web price: \$120

by Mark Clement



For digging footing holes in August heat, building fences in freezing February, walking porch roofs, and visiting with clients, the best all-around footwear for me is a 6-inch hiker-style

boot. The shorter height breathes on hot days, and if I throw on another pair of socks, my feet stay warm (mostly) in the cold. Hikers—unlike taller, work-only boots—are nimble enough that I can walk fast or stand on a roof, yet they're still tough enough for jumping on a shovel, standing on extension-ladder rungs, and dealing with the rough conditions that come with building decks and working outside.

Unfortunately, most hikers aren't bombproof, they're far from cheap, and even if the maker claims that the boots are waterproof, they're usually not. So despite their advantages, I resent paying \$150 or more for boots that won't last a year on a jobsite and that allow my socks to get wet.

However, Keen has made a hiker-style boot that addresses my complaints. I've worked in Keen's 6-inch Tacomas in temperatures ranging from 3°F to 93°F and they're at home—and so are my feet—at either extreme. This is a shovel-ready

hiker, with a tread that provides some grip without being so deep it becomes impacted with mud. Beefier than typical hikers, they're stiff enough to push back when I jump on a shovel or kick a hunk of wood out of the way, but they're not so stiff that they don't flex. The breathable leather upper is stamped "waterproof" and so far, it has been.

What may be my favorite part, however, is the over-molded rubber toe. It's an awesome first line of defense against soaking socks, especially in combination with the waterproof uppers. Not quite a safety toe (which is usually far from comfortable), it's still a stiff toe box and is great if you're the kind of carpenter who uses his toe as a lever to plumb something up or to sneak under a sheet of plywood before lifting it.

Finally, the cost is in line with other high-end hikers, which makes both my feet and my wallet happy.

Contributing editor Mark Clement is a deck builder and writer in Ambler, Pa.

Gentle Impact Driver

by Robert Shaw

My company builds decks framed with light-gauge steel, and we drive about 5,000 self-tapping screws per month using Makita 18-volt brushless impact drivers to assemble the framing and secure the decking. My veteran carpenters can consistently sink these screws at full throttle and release the trigger at just the right time so they don't overdrive and break the screws. But my less-experienced carpenters don't always react in time, causing some screws to snap.

I recently learned that Makita's 18-volt

model LXDT06 brushless impact driver (makitools.com) includes a unique Quick-Shift Mode that combats overdriving by reducing the rotation and impact speeds after the screw tips punch through the steel. When we took the tool for a spin, the feature worked great.

Unfortunately, the driver costs \$190 for the bare tool and \$360 for the complete two-battery kit, or about \$30 to \$40 more than my equivalent impact drivers without the Quick-Shift Mode. At that price, I'll stick with my other drivers, live with some broken screws, and let practice make perfect. ♦



Robert Shaw owns Colorado Deck and Framing, in Colorado Springs, Colo. This article originally appeared in JLC The Journal of Light Construction (jlconline.com).