

Weigh In!

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EDITED BY BRUCE GREENLAW



Makita's Drywall-Installation Kit

BY MYRON FERGUSON

When Makita recently introduced the 18-volt XT255M 18V LXT combo kit for fastening and routing drywall, I couldn't wait to give it a test drive. I've used cordless drywall screw guns and routers before, but they weren't powered by lithium-ion batteries. The kit includes the model XSF03 screw gun and the XOC01 router, powered by 4-amp-hour batteries. Both tools have reinforced my opinion that going cordless can give drywallers a huge boost in productivity.

XSF03 DRYWALL SCREW GUN

Like conventional corded screw guns, the brushless XSF03 has an inline grip on the

motor housing, a two-finger trigger with a lock-on button, a magnetic insert-bit holder that prevents screws from falling off the bit, and a nosepiece that works as an adjustable depth stop and pulls off for extracting screws or driving in tight places.

The tool also has the usual spring-loaded clutch that isolates the bit holder from the motor until you push a screw tip against the drywall, allowing you to feed screws onto the bit with the trigger locked on. But the XSF03 adds a unique "Push Drive" mode. When you pull or lock-on the trigger in this mode, the motor doesn't even run until you push the screw tip against the drywall.

This makes your jobsites quieter and saves battery life.

The tool also has an LED headlight, which is nice for working in closets. You can turn it off if you don't need it. Like other screw guns, the tool has a belt hook up top, but it also comes with an extra hook that can mount to either side of the base, another feature that I really like.

The XSF03 is comfortable, well-balanced, and pretty quiet. According to Makita, in internal testing, it drove 1,800 screws through ½-inch drywall into 20-gauge steel studs on a single charge. I didn't test this claim, but I've installed drywall with the tool almost all day and haven't had to change batteries.

A fuel gauge on the base of the tool helps you avoid a sudden loss of power (see photo, page 82, top left). The batteries fully recharge in about 40 minutes. Thankfully, they're easy to swap. This might not seem important, but I've found that the batteries on some cordless tools can be difficult to remove after they've been exposed to drywall dust.

XOC01 DRYWALL ROUTER

I haven't used a cordless drywall router since I owned a Senco model years ago. When that died and the model was discontinued, I adjusted to using a corded model again. Until I started testing Makita's new XOC01, I hadn't realized how much I missed the cordless freedom when cutting outlet, door, and window openings.

The XOC01 spins drywall bits at the industry-standard 30,000 rpm, so it has plenty of speed. As for runtime, Makita claims that the tool can cut the openings for 100 single-gang outlets per charge. I didn't count, but that seems like a reasonable estimate. To install or remove a bit, you can simply remove the adjustable shoe and use it as a collet wrench (see photo, page 82, top



The screw gun has a handy fuel gauge. The “D” button turns the base-mounted LED light and the innovative “Push Drive” mode on or off.



The router's adjustable shoe doubles as a collet wrench.

right). That's really important to me, because when a bit breaks I want to be able to replace it quickly. A longer wrench is also included with the kit in case you need more leverage.

On the downside, the router, unlike the screw gun, doesn't have an LED light or a battery fuel gauge. I also wish it (and other drywall routers) had a belt hook so I could alternate between fastening and routing without having to set the tools down.

Makita sells an optional vacuum attachment (part number 193455-7) for this tool, but I haven't tried it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Both of these tools have the power and runtime I need to get the job done, along with some slick user-friendly features. But the tools are normally used together and waiting for one of the two batteries in the kit to recharge is not an option. If you buy the XT255M kit and plan to do big jobs,

you might want to buy an extra battery or two. The kit costs \$400 and also includes a charger, two Phillips insert bits, two drywall bits, the collet wrench, and a contractor bag. Makita provides a 3-year warranty for the tools and a 1-year warranty for the batteries. Both tools are also sold in their own separate kits and as bare tools.

Drywall Screw-Gun Specs

Motor type: brushless
Weight with battery: 3.8 pounds
RPM: 0 to 4,000

Drywall Router Specs

Motor type: brushed
Weight with battery: 3.7 pounds
RPM: 30,000

Myron Ferguson is a drywall contractor in Middle Grove, N.Y., and presents the Residential Drywall clinic at JLC Live.

BOSCH WET/DRY VACUUMS

Oregon contractor Paul Johnson gave the 38-pound, 14.5-gallon Bosch VAC140A vacuum a thumbs up in our August 2014 issue. The vacuum can be used with or without Bosch's disposable bags and accepts three types of filters, including a HEPA filter for compliance with the EPA's RRP lead-paint rule. A mechanism that reverses air flow in short bursts every 15 seconds helps keep the filter clean without interrupting suction. You can plug a power tool drawing up to 7.5 amps into the vacuum, and when you use the tool it will trigger the vacuum. And you can dial down the vacuum's amperage draw to reduce suction or prevent circuit overload. In a series of tests, it easily sucked up dry concrete mix, powdered drywall compound, and nails.

After using the vacuum for an additional six months, Johnson's opinion hasn't changed, except that when not using a bag, he has found that it can be pretty hard to lift the vacuum and empty it into a big dumpster. "If I were buying a vacuum now, I would probably choose Bosch's new 28-pound, 9.3-gallon model VAC090A," says Johnson. "It's a smaller version of the same vac, and I would just have to empty it more often." It costs \$600 versus \$670 for the VAC140A.

—Bruce Greenlaw





Milwaukee M12 Fuel Hackzall

BY STEPHEN KLUG

When my crew and I tested the 18-volt Milwaukee M18 Fuel Sawzall reciprocating saw for the May 2014 issue of *JLC*, it quickly bumped our deluxe 15-amp corded model right off our jobsites. We loved the new saw's cordless convenience, competitive cutting speed, and ample runtime. We also appreciated its lever-action blade clamp, pivoting hang hook, and other high-performance features.

When *JLC* followed up by asking us to field-test the Milwaukee M12 Fuel Hackzall, I thought this new mini recip might be an ideal lightweight and maneuverable companion to the heavy-duty M18 Fuel. Nine months later, the M12 Fuel holds a prestigious position on our work van.

QUICK TOUR

Several 12-volt recip saws are available, including the M12 Hackzall that Milwaukee introduced in 2008. Most of these veteran compacts can easily be used one-handed, which is great when you need to hold an off-cut, navigate tight spaces, or reach to make a cut. But the new M12 Fuel Hackzall is the first 12-volt recip with a brushless motor. It also has a class-leading stroke length of $\frac{5}{8}$ inch and, according to Milwaukee, the most effective counterbalance for reducing vibration. The kit we tested includes a 4-amp-hour battery for extended runtime, and there's a fuel gauge on the tool to monitor the charge.

Advanced electronics protect against overloading, overheating, and overdischarging.

Other features include a variable-speed trigger, a bright LED headlight with a 10-second afterglow, and a time-tested keyless Quik-Lok blade clamp that allows you to insert the blade upside down if necessary. Like other 12-volt recips, the saw has a fixed shoe rather than an adjustable one, which means you lose some control over the maximum cutting depth and can't expose fresh saw teeth to extend blade life. Also, these 12-volt recips don't have a belt hook. But you can park the M12 Fuel in your toolbelt if necessary, and it can conveniently stand upright on its battery when you set it down.

ON THE JOB

So far, we've used the M12 Fuel Hackzall a lot for demolishing plumbing, cutting chrome closet pole, and breaking down 1-by lumber and 2x4s at the lumberyard. We've also made plenty of quick cutoffs and plunge cuts with it on our remodeling jobs, switching to the M18 Fuel Sawzall only when we need to make demanding two-handed cuts. The grip is comfortable, and the low vibration is especially noticeable when we're making one-handed and plunge cuts.

According to Milwaukee, the saw cuts about 50% faster than the older M12 Hackzall, generates more power under load

than several 18-volt models to help prevent it from bogging down, and can consistently make up to 60 crosscuts per charge through 2x4 pine under optimal testing conditions when equipped with the 4-Ah battery and a Milwaukee thin-kerf wood blade. We haven't conducted our own speed and runtime tests, but we have no complaints about the saw's performance for the cuts we make. In one timed trial, however, it took 1 hour and 20 minutes to fully recharge the battery, which might be a problem if you only have the one battery included with the kit.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If I were to own just one recip saw, I would choose the powerful Milwaukee 18-volt M18 Fuel Sawzall that we tested earlier. Since we started testing the M12 Fuel Hackzall, though, we use a full-size recip only when we need all that muscle. Lightweight and compact, the new Hackzall is surprisingly powerful for a 12-volt tool, has excellent runtime, and is easy to use with one hand for maximum versatility. I would appreciate an adjustable shoe rather than a fixed one, and I wish the kit came with a plastic case rather than a contractor bag for easier storage in our work van. I also think Milwaukee should offer a kit with two batteries for those who have yet to buy into its M12 cordless platform. But this is an excellent complementary tool for us.

At homedepot.com, the bare tool (model 2520-20) currently costs \$140, while the kit we tested (model 2520-21XC) costs \$200. At the moment, that site is offering a free extra battery or an additional M12 tool with the kit, though that might change any time.

2520-21XC Specs

Motor type: brushless
Weight with battery: 4.1 pounds
Stroke length: $\frac{5}{8}$ inch
Strokes per minute: 0 to 3,000
Price: \$200
Included in kit: one 4-Ah battery, charger, blade, contractor bag
Warranty: 5 years tool, 3 years battery

Stephen Klug owns Fine Building & Finish, in Yarmouth Port, Mass.