



Cool Tools for 2015 Noteworthy products from the annual STAFDA show

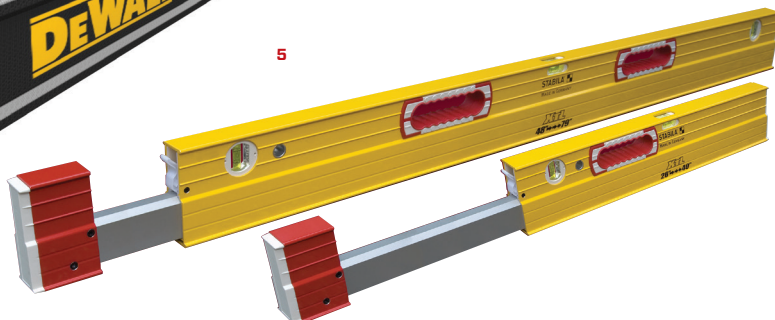
BY BRUCE GREENLAW

STAFDA—the Specialty Tools and Fasteners Distributors Association—held its 38th annual trade show this past November at the Charlotte Convention Center in North Carolina. Open to members only, the lively event allowed hundreds of manufacturers to show off truckloads of construction tools and hardware to distributors and retailers. Inspired by the NASCAR Hall of Fame next door, we sped up and down every aisle in the allotted 11 ½ hours to see what will be available over the coming year.

Here are some of the promising products we found—something useful for just about any builder.

1. SAWSQUATCH VERSUS BIG FOOT

Carpenters have been using the 10 ¼-inch Big Foot wormdrive saw for years for cutting 4-by or doubled 2-by lumber in one pass. Made by Big Foot Tools, it's actually a 7 ¼-inch Skilsaw wormdrive equipped with oversize upper and lower blade guards and a compatible base plate. The new 10 ¼-inch Skilsaw Sawsquatch wormdrive, on the other hand, is built from the inside out to handle these demanding cuts. Like other current Skilsaw models, the 16.5-pound saw is powered by a “Dual-Field” motor that promises to run cooler than competing ones. But the Sawsquatch motor is the biggest in the Skilsaw line, to deliver more power and torque.



Other welcome features include a magnesium upper guard, lower guard, base plate, and gear housing; a rafter hook; a side handle; a multi-function wrench that stores on the base plate; and a 40-tooth Diablo blade. The saw is already being sold through industrial channels and will be widely available in April. It costs about \$450 and comes with a comforting 180-day money-back guarantee. skilsaw.com

2. MULTIMASTER REINVENTED

The new Fein MultiMaster FMM 350 Q corded oscillating multi-tool has a 350-watt motor versus the 250-watt motor that powered its predecessor, and is supposed to cut up to 35% faster. Yet according to Fein, the new model generates up to 70% less vibration and up to 50% less noise than the old one. Both models weigh 3.1 pounds. In the Fein booth, I held the new model in one hand and the old model in the other and turned them both on—big difference! Two kits are available. The Start kit includes a few basic accessories and a nylon bag and costs \$200. The Top kit includes a wide assortment of accessories and a plastic case and costs \$350. feinus.com

3. QUIETER SUBFLOORS

Beck Fastener Group's new SubLoc Pro Scrail nail screws, which are distributed in the U.S. by Fasco America, might be the ultimate sub-floor fasteners. For starters, they come in 15-degree wire and plastic coils, 0-degree plastic coils, 33-degree strips, and 20-degree strips, so they can be driven with most full-head stick and coil framing nailers. Once installed, they can be adjusted with a drill/driver or an impact driver to eliminate squeaks. But the fasteners also have a new head design for improved pull-through resistance, aggressive top threads that grab the subfloor, and a spiral shank below that's dipped in a highly adhesive "Diamond Coating" for improved holding power. According to the maker, the fasteners resist withdrawal 41% better and head pull-through 10% better than ring-shank nails, and are in full compliance with applicable building codes. The fasteners come in lengths of 2¼ inches and longer. The 2¼-inchers cost about \$46 to \$51 per 1,000 fasteners. fascoamerica.com

4. CARBON-FIBER LEVELS

Carbon fiber has exceptional strength for its light weight, which is why it has appeared in everything from golf clubs to jetliners. I lifted one of DeWalt's new Carbon Fiber box-beam levels at the show, and it felt as light as a feather. According to DeWalt, it's also accurate to the industry standard of 0.0005 inch per inch. Slim but protective end caps allow you to carry your layouts into corners. The level is scheduled to hit the market in the second quarter of this year and will come in lengths of 48, 72, and 96 inches. Prices have yet to be determined, but I would expect to pay a premium. dewalt.com

5. EXTENDABLE LEVELS FOR WINDOWS AND DOORS

Stabila plate levels, which can extend from 6 to 10 feet or 7 to 12 feet depending on the model, have been around for awhile.

When two leading window and door manufacturers asked Stabila to develop similar levels for window and door installers, the company complied. Stabila's new XTL-26 expands from 26 to 40 inches while the XTL-48 expands from 48 to 79 inches, which means they can collectively handle most window and door sizes. The XTL-26 costs about \$140, and the XTL-48 costs about \$240. Stabila also introduced the GoPack case, which can hold both XTL levels plus a third level up to 48 inches long. In addition, the soft case has two roomy pockets that can carry related items, such as a pocket laser and a laser distance meter. It costs about \$50. stabila.com

6. HIGH-PERFORMANCE HOLE SAWS

Diablo's new hole-saw system is all about efficiency. It includes 32 hole saws with diameters ranging from ⅝ inch to 6 inches, all of which cut 2⅝ inches deep instead of the usual 1⅝ inches deep. One quick-change "Snap-Lock" mandrel fits all. You simply snap the hole saws onto the mandrel, and remove them by pulling the mandrel's collar and sliding them off. To eject plugs, you pull the saw off the mandrel and push it back on at an angle so the pilot bit forces the plug out. The hole saws cost about \$8 to \$41, and a mandrel with a pilot bit costs \$18. diablotools.com

Milwaukee's new Hole Dozer hole saws come in 56 diameters ranging from ⅝ inch to 6 inches. For added durability, their "Rip Guard" teeth have more steel behind the cutting edge than usual and contain 8% cobalt. In fact, if you break any of these teeth, Milwaukee will replace the hole saw. Two "Plug Jack" access slots allow you to pry out plugs with a screwdriver. Milwaukee quick-change mandrels are also available. Prices run about \$8 and up for the individual hole saws; there are also five kits, which cost from \$50 to \$270. milwaukeeetool.com

7. QUICK-CHARGE 5-AMP-HOUR BATTERY

The wave of 4-amp-hour and larger batteries that has been hitting the market lately has been great for extending the runtime of our cordless tools between charges. But the downside to their higher capacity is that they can take forever to charge. For instance, the 18-volt, 4-amp-hour batteries supplied with the Bosch model DDH181X-01L drill/driver kit that I reviewed in the October 2014 issue took a stunning one hour and 59 minutes to fully recharge. The 4-amp-hour batteries that powered the Milwaukee 18-volt, 7 ¼-inch M18 Fuel circular saw reviewed in the January 2015 issue took almost 1½ hours to recharge.

Makita's new 5-amp-hour 18V LXT batteries, on the other hand, promise to fully recharge in just 45 minutes when you use Makita's standard 18V LXT chargers. They're compatible with all the tools in Makita's 18V LXT and 18V Compact platform that are equipped with "Star Protection Computer Controls" to protect against overloading, overheating, and overdischarging. The batteries (model BL1850) are initially being included in three 18V LXT hammer-drill and impact-driver kits (models XPH07T, XT252T, and XT257T), but they can also be purchased separately for about \$125. makitatools.com



8. QUICK-MOUNT BED EXTENDER

Erickson's Big Bed load extender effectively adds 4 feet to the length of your pickup bed, is 48 ½ inches wide, has an adjustable mast for matching your bed height, and supports up to 400 pounds of distributed weight. It appears to be a godsend for hauling long materials and ladders. Drop a piece of plywood on it, and it can double as a portable workbench or cut station. To install it, you simply slide it into any standard 2-inch by 2-inch trailer-hitch receiver and secure it with a pin and a clip. The Big Bed weighs 35.13 pounds and measures 52 inches by 2 ½ inches by 7 inches when collapsed, for easy storage and transport. It costs \$200, complete with a clip-on red flag. ericksonmfg.com

9. COMPACT CORDLESS BRAD NAILER

Grex is still putting the finishing touches on its new C1850 cordless 2-inch, 18-gauge brad nailer, which is scheduled to hit the market in April or May. But a prototype was lined up in the Grex booth right next to competing models from Senco, DeWalt, and Paslode, and the Grex was significantly smaller. I learned that the tool will be powered by two AAA batteries and a disposable fuel cell, but Grex tells me that its fuel cell won't emit the usual unpleasant odor each time you fire and will have an unlimited shelf life. Early testing indicates that the tool will fire 10,000 or more nails per set of batteries and about 1,300 to 1,400 nails per fuel cell. Suggested retail will be about \$500. grexusa.com

10. MODULAR JOBSITE RADIO

Modular tool organizers—including DeWalt's heavy-duty ToughSystem boxes that can be ganged together or rolled around with a two-wheeled dolly called a DS Carrier—were reviewed in the September 2013 issue of *JLC*. In DeWalt's STAFDA booth, I was treated to a sneak preview of ToughSystem Music, which is tentatively scheduled to hit the market in June. It's an AM/FM radio that's shaped like a ToughSystem box so it can stack and ride with the other boxes, and it has Bluetooth connectivity and a 3.5-mm auxiliary input so it can stream audio content wirelessly or directly from smartphones and other mobile devices. It also charges DeWalt's 12V Max to 20V Max batteries and packs a USB charger. ToughSystem Music is still in the final stages of development, so we can only show a photo of ToughSystem components that it will complement, but DeWalt says it will be the best sounding jobsite music player on the market. I'm told that deluxe features will include 5 ¼-inch and 6 ½-inch subwoofers, a digital sound processor, and protection against dust and water jets. It will cost about \$230. dewalt.com

11. STICKY FINISH NAILERS

This March, Cadex is rolling out three intriguing new pneumatic nailers for trim carpenters: an 18-gauge model (V2/18.50) that will shoot ½-inch to 2-inch regular and slight-head brads, a 21-gauge model (V2.21.55) that will shoot ½-inch to 2 ¾-inch pins and slight-head brads, and a 23-gauge model (V2.23.55) that will shoot ½-inch to 2 ¾-inch pins and slight-head brads. All three

will feature anti-dry-fire lockout, an improved safety, no-mar rubber tips, a blowgun for clearing sawdust, a belt hook, and a swivel coupler. Also, like Festool power tools, each nailer will come with a modular Systainer case. But what really piqued my interest was the sticky, no-slip silicone paint that Cadex developed to finish these tools. It not only eliminated the need for a rubber grip, but it's also supposed to be cooler to the touch in the summer and warmer in the winter. According to Cadex, the V2/18.50 will cost about \$230, the V2/21.55 about \$350, and the V2/23.55 about \$330. cadextools.com

12. MINI LASER DISTANCE METER

I tested 13 laser distance meters for the January 2013 issue of *JLC* and have been closely following the field ever since. One important new trend is the appearance of the simple ultracompact. Bosch's new GLM 15, for instance, is only 1 ¾ inches wide by ¾ inch thick by 3 ¾ inches long. It has just one button, can typically measure lengths from about 6 inches to 50 feet, is accurate to ¼ inch, displays fractions down to ⅙ inch, can take a continuous reading when moving toward or away from a target, does not have a backlit display, and costs \$50.

That's admirable, but my new favorite is the Leica Disto E7100i displayed at the show. It costs \$150, but is almost as compact, has a typical measuring range of 6 inches to 200 feet, is accurate to ⅙ inch, displays fractions down to ½ inch, can take a continuous reading, and does have a backlit display, which is a blessing. It also calculates square feet, and pairs via Bluetooth Smart to compatible iOS and Android devices so you can use it with the free Leica Disto sketch app. A removable belt hook and a carrying case are included. leica-geosystems.us

13. POCKET BLOW GUN

I own a thumb-lever blow gun that I bought at a local hardware store, which makes it easy to use my compressor to blow sawdust off work areas, equipment, and myself when I need to clean up. At almost 6 inches long, though, it takes up too much space in my toolbox and toolbelt. The new pushbutton Coilhose Redi-Burst Pocket Blow Gun is a couple of inches shorter (once you install a male plug), so it tucks into smaller spaces. It's also comfortable in the hand. It includes an OSHA-compliant safety tip that handles most applications for contractors, plus a conical rubber tip that won't mar a finish and is supposed to be used at a maximum air pressure of 30 psi. The blower also accepts other tips. You provide your own ¼-inch NPT male plug at the air inlet. List price is about \$12. coilhose.com

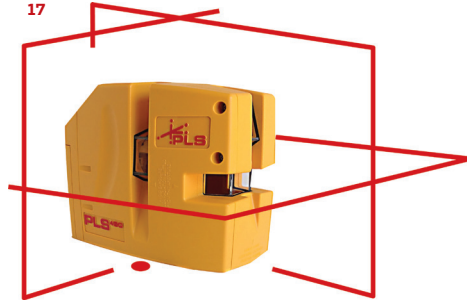
14. LIGHTED BACKPACK

A bunch of new jobsite backpacks appeared at the show, but the dual-compartment, 53-pocket CLC model L255 was the only one I saw that helps light your way. Joining CLC's Tech Gear tool-storage line, it features a built-in LED light at the top that offers three levels of brightness and is powered by two AAA batteries. You can aim the light at your work area or into the backpack. The backpack

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has top handles, padded shoulder straps, back padding, and large molded-PVC pads on the bottom. It costs \$110. goclc.com

15. FASTER CONCEALED DECK FASTENING

Hidden decking fasteners will only get more popular as they become faster and easier to install. The Camo Hidden Deck Fastening System features a choice of five jigs that collectively allow you to use a drill/driver or an impact driver to sink proprietary screws at the perfect angle and depth through the edges of any treated-lumber, hardwood, cedar, composite, or PVC decking. Thankfully, though, you can now quickly drive 2 3/8-inch Camo screws while standing up by using the new Camo Edge Pro collated autofeed screw gun. Propelled by a Milwaukee corded drill, it's designed primarily for installing treated-wood decking without gaps to allow for shrinkage, but can also be used with other types of decking along with spacers. It costs \$380. camofasteners.com

16. VERSATILE LED WORK LIGHT

The new Bosch 12V Max LED Flashlight (model FL12) is just one of many thoughtful work lights that have flooded the market lately. Sold as a bare tool, it can be powered by Bosch's 12V Max 1.5-Ah, 2-Ah, or 4-Ah batteries and delivers up to 330 lumens of illumination, which is enough to light up a work space. At the brightest level, the light runs for about six hours with the 2-Ah battery and 12 hours with the 4-Ah one. You can use the on/off button to dim the light and extend the runtime. The light pivots 200 degrees in

its stand and has a 3/4-inch tripod socket, two powerful magnets, a carabiner, and a nail hook so you can position it in a variety of ways. It costs \$59. boschtools.com

17. FOUNDATION-TO-FINISH LASER

Pacific Laser System's new PLS 480 laser projects one level and two vertical reference lines and can plumb up and down. It's designed to establish plumb, level, and square from foundation to finish. The Basic PLS 480 kit includes a floor base, wall bracket, and case, and costs about \$460. The PLS 480 system adds a beam detector and a new adapter that anchors the laser to a tripod or a batter board, and costs about \$600. plslaser.com

18. RAPID-FIRE ROOFING NAILER

Senco says its new 1 3/4-inch RoofPro 445XP coil roofing nailer can drive an outrageous 12 nails per second while consuming 5% less air than its predecessor, thanks to an innovative firing valve and feed system. The 5.2-pound nailer also has a bimetal driver blade for improved durability and allows you to access all wear parts from the top of the tool so you can do your own repairs on the fly. Other features include a depth-of-drive thumbwheel, a swivel plug, and an adjustable and removable shingle guide. The nailer costs about \$230. senco.com

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