Collomix Xo 4 Portable Power Mixer

Collomix 20417 Xo 4
Motor: 11.8 amps/1.7 hp
Speed: 0–470 rpm/0–640 rpm
Paddle diameter: 4 ¾ inch
collomix.us
Street price: $530

by John Carroll

While I have a large, towable mixer, it's not the most practical tool for many of the small jobs I do. Often, there's no place on the property to set it up, and even when there is, moving the mixer and setting it up is not worth the effort. Mixing mortar or concrete by hand in a wheelbarrow is always an option, but pushing a hoe through stiff, heavy mud gets old in a hurry. I once experimented with mixing mud with my ½-inch drill fitted with a paddle, but the drill was underpowered and hard to control, even with an auxiliary handle. Not only that, it ran too fast and threw mud all over the place.

A couple of years ago, I noticed the two-handled Collomix Xo 1 mixers that drywall finishers and tile setters were using, and wondered if this tool could be used for the larger and heavier batches of mortar and concrete that I routinely make up. When I checked out the manufacturer's website, I found that the company sold a more powerful (and expensive) version called the Collomix Xo 4, and while I had to fork over an extra $207 to buy it, it has turned out to be money well-spent.

My Xo 4 has plenty of power and turns at just the right speed to churn through even the stiffest mud with no apparent strain. With the two handles in just the right spot and a paddle that's engineered to mix mortar, it handles beautifully and it's quiet. It has two speeds, but I keep it at the lower one, which is fast enough to make the mud quickly. While it can make up to 17 gallons of mortar, it's also practical for tiny, 1 ½-gallon batches, such as those needed for grouting pavers.

The standard two-bladed universal paddle that comes with the mixer is configured to churn the materials from the bottom up, which blends them completely. A heavy-duty three-blade paddle for mixing concrete is also available, as are different paddles for other materials. The paddles connect to the mixer using a Hexafix quick-action toolless coupling, which makes them easy to clean. ❖

John Carroll is a mason and builder in Durham, N.C. Photos by Bill Phillips.

Connect and Protect Cords

by Chris Ermides

Some of the most practical tool inventions come straight from the jobsite by innovative contractors. Woodworker Brooks Lawrence is one such innovator. Frustrated by cord disconnects, wear-and-tear, and the occasional arc flash, and dissatisfied with taping or tying cords together, he devised an alternative.

Lawrence's system consists of three parts: a hardened plastic shell, a rubber cord stop that attaches to an extension cord, and a rubber stop that attaches to the tool's cord. The rubber stops are available in cord sizes #10 to #16. Once attached to the cord end, the stop stays there until the next use. With the tool plugged into an extension cord, the shell wraps around the stops, and Velcro straps lock everything together. The stops interlock with the shell so the cords can't be pulled apart. The shell also protects the junction and won't mar most finished surfaces. The system is compatible with after-market cord plug ends, as well. A set costs $25 (includes one #14 and one #16 stop); each additional stop is $7. industrialcordconnector.com ❖

Chris Ermides is a senior editor at Tools of the Trade *and at* JLC*, where this article first appeared.*