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Toolbox

BY ROBERT COURTNEY



Metabo's 18-Volt LiHD Impact Wrench

It is not often that a tool can meet the needs of multiple trades. Metabo's SSW18 LTX400BL 18V LTX 3.1 Ah LiHD Cordless ½-Inch Square Brushless Impact Wrench, however, is one of those unique tools. I have the privilege of owning two specialized businesses: one for building custom homes and the other restoring vintage cars and campers. While I have a variety of impact drivers in my building tool arsenal, the mechanical side has been limited to the standard air impact wrench.

One of our specialties in the custom-home building world is building timber-frame houses. Though a lot of what we do involves quite a bit of traditional joinery, more and more engineers are specifying large timber screws to meet more stringent building codes. Some of these fasteners are as long as 16 inches, with diameters up to 3/8 inch. The smaller impact drivers struggle when installing these fasteners, especially in hardwoods and over long periods of time.

When given the chance to try Metabo's SSW18, we were thrilled to put this beast to the test by assembling 6x6 timbers with timber screws. Not only did it have the power necessary to drive long screws through such

large timber, it had the stamina to back it up.

One of the tool's best features—other than its lightweight and balanced design—is that the battery pack has a built-in charge meter. Before you find yourself two stories up waiting for the crane to set an 8x16 timber truss cord, you can be sure you have enough battery life to finish the job. One quick push of the built-in LED meter and you know if you're good to go (or not). If not, swap out your pack with the included second battery and throw the spent one on the air-cooled charger that, Metabo claims, will charge the pack in 30% less time than its competitors. I didn't test the proposed charge time—all I can say is that it was fast enough for us on this job.

The driver performed very well for us in the construction world. The real test, however, came in the mechanical world. Any tool can be called a driver, but only the best can be considered a true impact wrench, which is what Metabo calls this model. The SSW18 packs a wallop of 295 foot-pounds (3,050 inch-pounds) of torque. I will say that it struggled with some very seized-up large-diameter bolts that gave even my trusty air impact a run for its money.

Photos: Chris Ermides

Where it struggled in brawn, it made up for in brains, though. The Metabo features slow-start technology. While the air impact will strip or break lug nuts without hesitation, the SSW18 works up to speed and strength with 12 torque and speed settings. One of the other neat features is the twin LED head lamps that light up as soon as you pick up the tool.

I frequently take a freshly restored vehicle for an extended test drive, and having the Metabo SSW18 in the tool bag will give me great comfort for any field repairs that may pop up. Nothing says freedom like cutting the cord. Overall, I give it two thumbs up.

SSW18 LTX400BL 2X 3.1AH LIHD IMPACT WRENCH SPECS

Voltage: 18V LiHD

No-load SPM: 0 to 2,150

Maximum torque: 295 foot pounds

Bit retainer: Male square 1/2 inch

Weight: (w/battery pack) 3.7 pounds

COO: Germany

Warranty: 3 year on battery

Price: kit, \$330; bare tool, \$220

metabo.com

Robert Courtney is a custom home builder, trim carpenter, and mechanic specializing in building and restoring expedition vehicles.



Photos: bottom left, Chris Ermides; top right, Myron Ferguson

Wizard Handle Offers More Control When Taping

BY MYRON FERGUSON

When I coat seams on drywall, I use a box (also called a “flat box”) equipped with an adjustable pole-style handle that I extend when coating seams on ceilings. I also have a 32-inch pole-style handle that I have been using when I am taping walls with only horizontal seams.

The typical pole-style handle has a brake that’s engaged by pressing a lever at the far end of the handle. The brake holds the box in the desired position over a wall or ceiling seam. You need to keep the brake engaged as you lift the box off the drywall surface and until you reposition the box over the next seam, and then you need to release the brake when applying the compound to the seam.

The box is filled with joint compound and once it’s positioned over a seam, the user applies pressure through the pole-style handle, which is attached to a hinged cover on the back of the box. With most boxes, a lot of pressure is required to force the joint compound out of the box mouth in a consistent flow and to smooth the compound out

at the same time. So coating seams on walls is a little awkward and physically difficult when you are working with a tool that has a long pole-style handle.

Enter the Wizard handle from Ames (see photos, above). It’s a short handle that offers better control over the box when you’re coating horizontal seams. When I used it for that purpose, I was able to maintain consistent pressure throughout the joint, and I was able to maneuver the box more easily near corners. In addition, I really liked being able to coat all the seams in closets with the box, instead of by hand as I had been doing.

Attaching the handle to a box (see inset, above) is fast and easy, so changing it out for a longer handle for coating ceiling seams is very simple. There’s also likely to be less of a learning curve compared with using a box equipped with the long pole-style handle and brake.

Myron Ferguson, also known as “That Drywall Guy,” is a drywall contractor in Galway, N.Y.