

Festool HKC Circular Saw

by Tim Uhler

A few months ago, Festool introduced its reinvented version of the circular saw. I tested the cordless version (HKC), which has a brushless motor that spins a 6¼-inch blade and is available as a bare tool (\$375) and in two kits. Both kits come with two 5.2-Ah Li-ion batteries, an 18-tooth blade, and a Sys 4 Systainer and charger; one of the kits comes with a short FSK rail (\$690), and the other comes without the rail (\$570).

A corded version (HK 55) has all of the same features as the HKC except that it is also equipped with a speed adjustment knob. With more control over the motor, you have more options for cutting various materials like metal, PVC, or laminates; material-specific blades are available as well. I used an 18-tooth framing blade.

The HKC is a blade-left saw that bevels up to 50 degrees. The depth adjustment differs depending on whether you're using it with the track or without, and it is very accurate, with clear markings. The tool can also be turned into a plunge saw and used with other Festool guide rails.

The dust port, which can be hooked to either a bag or a vacuum, features a new design that works with a new locking hose and fits on all Festool dust extractor connections. Dust collection is, of course, very good.

FSK Guide Rails

The FSK guide rails are different from the FS rails for Festool's TS track saws that you may be familiar with. The FSK rails hook to the saw to become a unit, and they're self-retracting. Even better, they can be set to an angle up to 60 degrees, making it easy to achieve shop-quality repetitive miters. These rails come in three lengths: 9.84 inches (FSK 250), 16.53 inches (FSK 420), and 26.38 inches (FSK 670). All the guide rails include an integral splinter guard.

On the underside of the guide rail are a plastic pivot and an adjustable "stop" (see photo, below right). You simply put the track on the piece of lumber and rotate the saw and rail until both the pivot and stop are up against the material to set the cut angle. You can adjust

the angle to register to either the left or the right relative to the material.

A Perfect Saw for Stairs

One of the tasks I used the saw for was cutting out the stringers and ripping the risers and treads (using a longer FS track) for a set of stairs. The saw had plenty of power for cutting through dry 2x12 Douglas fir. The depth was easy to set, and the guard was easy to retract using a convenient lever just to the left of the blade. You can also set this saw into a plunge mode that retracts the blade completely up; when you're cutting in this mode, it is nice to be able to raise the guard with the lever.

The FSK rail works very well. The splinter guard aligns precisely on the cut line just as with the FS rail. I didn't set the angle to cut the riser and tread lines on my stringers; I could have, but I found that it was easy enough and fast to set the track on the line and cut. Like the FS rail, the FSK rail has rubber strips along the bottom, which help it to stay on the material without slipping.



TIM UHLER; OPPOSITE PAGE, MARK CLEMENT

Leave the Miter and Table Saws Back in the Shop

I absolutely loved using this saw for cutting stair stringers. The set of stairs I built with it look very clean. Using it to cut repetitive blocks without pulling out my square was also clean and fast. And we had a number of walls to frame up to rafters on the house we were working on, and they all had either 30- or 40-degree miters. I liked not pulling out a square to mark the angles.

As a rough framer, I initially thought: I really don't need this saw, and most framers don't need it either. However, after using the saw, the rail it came with, and a 118-inch FS track, it occurred to me that I will never need my table saw and stand or my 12-inch sliding compound miter saw and stand on site again. I also tend to rip faster using this saw and guide, because I'm not watching the line.

When I add the convenience of taking my saw to the material instead of the material to the saw and consider the fact that I get shop-quality cuts on a rough jobsite, then I absolutely recommend this tool. Another advantage is that everything but the track fits in the Systainer box, which is easy to roll out and put away and doesn't clutter the van. I suggest that you invest in one or two more batteries, though, or consider the corded version. Even with a good blade, cutting through 2x6 up to 2x12 wears out the batteries faster than they recharge.

If you've been waiting to take the plunge into buying a Festool, I think this is the place to start.

Tim Uhler is a lead carpenter for Pioneer Builders in Port Orchard, Wash. He is a regular contributor to JLC and Tools of the Trade, where this review originally appeared.

Hitachi Triple Hammer Impact Driver

by Mark Clement



Hitachi's new Triple Hammer impact driver is smaller and lighter than most comparable impact drivers—which isn't necessarily a bad thing. The WH 18DBDL2 kit I tried last fall ships with two slim-pack 18-volt, 3.0-Ah batteries in what I think is one of the best kit boxes I've ever seen. The driver is comfortable to hold, and the position of the forward/reverse button made it easy to reach and engage. It has a 2-step bit holder, so instead of simply slotting the bit into the unit, you have to pull the collar forward first. One feature I particularly liked is the belt hook; it's wide enough to slot over a pocket on my tool pouch, without being too big.

Electronics. There are four settings for rotation—delicate, power, more power (which I usually use), and self-tapping. And there are three settings for the built-in work light: on (with a two-minute shut-off); off; and trigger-activated. It's not exactly intuitive (I had to read the directions), but I liked having these options. For example, when I'm working under a deck to attach a hose bib, the constant-on is great for a general work light and a task light.

The box. I was thankful for the diagram that shows how everything should be organized. I don't think that the box itself will break, but the latches came off easily. However, this small gripe is more than made up for by the lid's second tier—ideal for the scores of nut-drivers, bit holders, and drives (#2 Robertson, Uni-Drive, star, Phillips, and so on) that are needed for the many different fasteners found on a jobsite.

Performance. From jobsites to a week-long blitz-build of my deck and pergola setup at DeckExpo last fall, I bombed in everything from 2-inch screws for gate hardware to 6-inch structural screws to scores of 3-inch #10 deck screws. The Hitachi dug in on every task, leaving no question it has abundant power, despite its small (brushless) size, to manage any deck-building task. The kit costs about \$400 online. ❖

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