

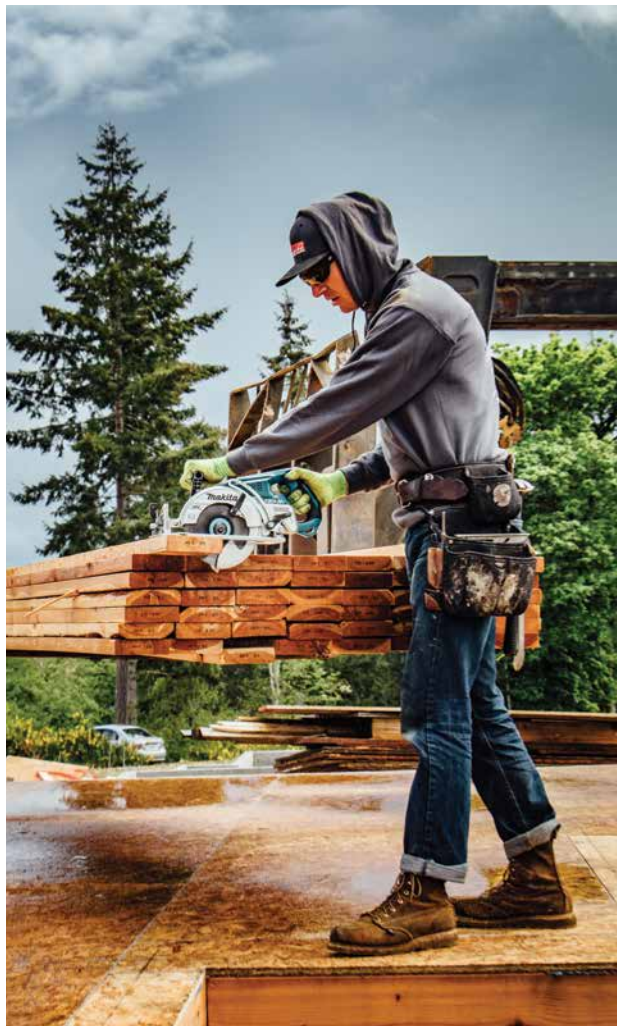
## Weigh In!

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# Toolbox

BY TIM UHLER



Photos by Tim Uhler

**Pros of cordless on a wet site.** According to Makita, its “Extreme Protection Technology (XPT)” improves dust and water resistance in harsh conditions by channeling water and dust away from the internal components. It seems to be working; using this tool in a way-above-average wet spring didn’t present any difficulties for the author. And no cord means no tripped power.

## Cordless In-Line Circular Saw

**In January, Makita created a huge buzz** at the World of Concrete show, in Las Vegas, by demonstrating its new cordless in-line circular saw. Until then, it seemed that a powerful blade-left cordless saw for framers wasn’t in the cards. But the Makita XSR01PT looks a lot like the Skilsaw worm drives many of us grew up using, and everything I was seeing on social media suggested it had power comparable to or even better than a corded saw. I found myself wondering: Was this the saw I’d been dreaming about?

### FEATURES

The Makita XSR01PT saw is nearly identical in layout to all the other blade-left in-line and hypoid saws we’ve reviewed over the years. Its rear-handle design is more comfortable to use than a top-handle configuration because you push the saw; top-handle saws involve more pulling and at an odd angle, and they have less reach for cutting rafter tails and sheet goods.

This Makita saw runs off two Makita 5.0-Ah batteries that are stored directly behind the brushless motor and under the top handle. This layout allows for the handle to be placed behind the motor, like on the saws we love out here in the West.

The saw bevels to 53 degrees, with positive stops at 22.5, 45, and 53 degrees. It’s designed to use a 7¼-inch blade and has a cutting depth of 2⅞ inches (our Skilsaw cuts 2⅜ inches). The extra ⅜ means we can use it to cut 2½-inch flanged I-joists; this is a big deal for us because the Makita is much easier on the arm than our Big Foot. And on some jobs, the engineer requires us to use 3-by mudsill or 3-by blocking for straps; with the Makita, we don’t need to roll out another tool to make the cuts.

The brushless motor on this saw is crazy small, but it spins the blade at 5,100 rpm, a tad bit slower than the Skil at 5,300 rpm. I haven’t noticed the difference in use though. One feature of this motor is that it adjusts torque and cutting speed automatically. Apparently, this helps performance. If I pull the trigger with no load, I can hear the motor adjust speed when it enters the material.

I can get this saw to bog down and trigger the overload protection, but I have to push the saw hard to do it. I was taught that if a saw needs to be pushed, the blade isn’t sharp enough, so I try to never push a saw. Doing so wears the saw out, warps blades, and can be unsafe. So the overload protection hasn’t been a nuisance for us.

One feature we’ve come to love is the electronic brake and the relatively soft start, for safety. Unlike a wormdrive saw that will

twist when the trigger is pulled, this saw doesn't move. I've gotten used to the "kick" on my Skilsaw. The lack of kick, though, on the Makita means I can use it one-handed when I need to trim a rafter tail or even trim a wall plate. The electric brake and lack of kick on startup also make this a safe saw to train new framers with.

The rafter hook is almost 3½ inches, and we can hang it off I-joists and anywhere else we need to. It almost fits over the top plate of a 2x4 wall, but I don't recommend that.

This saw is balanced just like a corded in-line saw. It weighs about a pound more than the Skil but doesn't feel heavy. The batteries are located roughly center, keeping the weight right in front of the handle.

The rubber grip is comfortable to use and allows plenty of room for the user to wear gloves and pull the trigger. In order to activate the trigger, you have to press a button with your thumb—a safety feature on all cordless circular saws. I have gotten so used to the button that when I use other saws without one, I still try to press the button even though it doesn't exist. The depth of cut and bevel have nice large handles, as well, so they're easy to adjust and manage.

### PERFORMANCE

Can this saw replace a corded saw for framers and concrete formers who need power to cut dense materials? The answer is, absolutely yes! I can't count the number of times one of us has yelled in joy when making cuts in LVL or dry Doug fir 2x12. We started joking on the jobsite that the attention this saw was getting was going to make our wives jealous.

We haven't found a situation where the Makita made us wish we had a corded saw rolled out; it has as much power as my four-year-old Skilsaw. I've ripped 3-foot pieces of 1¾-inch LVL to try and overheat it, to no avail. Ripping three layers of 7/16-inch OSB for roof sheathing didn't present any problems either. I can get the saw to stop if the material starts binding, but I can also do that to every corded saw I've reviewed.

We loved this saw so much that we immediately bought a second kit. We have six batteries (we had two from a drill/driver kit) and have not yet had both saws down charging. The dual-port chargers claim to charge 5.0-Ah batteries in 45 minutes or less, and that seems about right. Going cordless meant learning some new habits, however; I always put every battery—regardless of charge—on a charger during lunch.

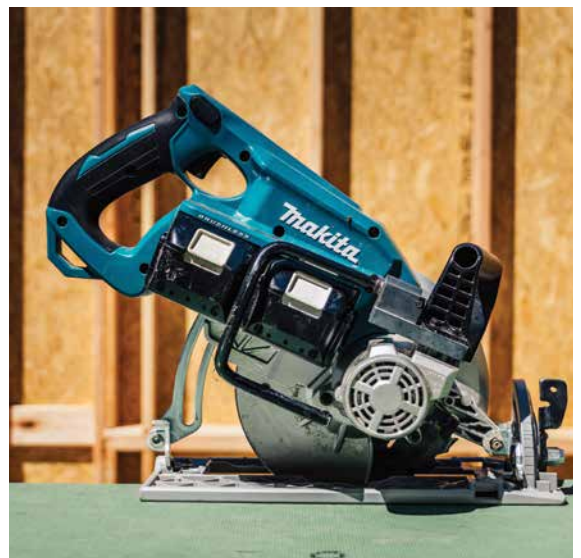
The kit with charger, two batteries, saw, and bag can be found online for about \$360. That is about \$100 more than the Skilsaw Lightweight Magnesium at \$200 plus a 100-foot 12/3 extension cord at \$50. But I also factor in the following variables in favor of the Makita: no trip hazard, convenience of being cordless, safety, and no downtime due to cut or nicked extension cords being taken out of service.

I highly recommend this kit. It has plenty of power, is comfortable to use, and makes it possible to go cordless for cutting on a framing site.

*Tim Uhler is a lead carpenter for Pioneer Builders in Port Orchard, Wash.*



**Rear handle means more reach.** Like other rear-handle in-line saws, this cordless version allows for great reach while pushing through a cut. Because there's no cord to nick, it also means a safer and more productive jobsite.



**Small, brushless, and powerful.** Dual 18V batteries sit just behind the motor; a built-in gauge shows their charge level. Despite its size, the motor yields plenty of power to compete with worm drives. A large rafter hook tucks out of the way when not in use.