



Both chain saws have the power to slice through framing lumber (top). The DeWalt gets it from one 60-volt battery; the Makita, from two 18-volt batteries.

Cordless, Brushless Chain Saws

BY TIM UHLER

As a framer, I often rely on specialty tools that help me save time without sacrificing quality. Chain saws are one such tool. You may not think of a chain saw as a typical framing tool, but since I was a teenager, we have had a gas-powered chain saw on site. We used it—and continue to use it—to cut large beams or gang-cut materials like joists and rafters.

Last year, DeWalt and Makita introduced battery-powered brushless chain saws. I liked the idea of a cordless chain saw; for me, having a lighter-weight tool and not having to deal with fuel mix and the stink of gas balanced any potential power loss. Plus, cordless tools tend to be quieter, and, for safety reasons, I liked that I could set the saw down between cuts without its running continuously.

The big questions for me were whether these saws would have enough power for what we do and whether the runtime would be good enough to maintain our productivity. I knew they wouldn't compare with our big Stihl gas-powered saws, but we don't usually need a lot of power from a chain saw on a framing site.

MAKITA XCU03PT1 18V X2 (36V) LXT 14-INCH CHAIN SAW

I reviewed—and fell in love with—the Makita in-line cordless saw last year. Makita's cordless chain saw has a similar design approach in that it uses two 5-Ah batteries to provide 36 volts to power the chain. It also has a brushless motor, which is said to improve runtime, efficiency, and longevity of the tool.

The trigger is variable speed, just like on every chain saw I've ever used, and the saw has a toolless chain adjustment that works well. On top of the tool is a large LED on/off switch that you must press before you squeeze the trigger and start the saw, which is a safety feature. As with any chain saw, this saw has a front hand guard that locks the blade or that will protect your hand and act as a chain brake if the saw kicks back while in use.

As I put this saw together, it didn't feel cheap, and it is compact and lightweight. In use, it is easy to control, and since it is battery operated, it never floods or takes multiple pulls to start. As long as the batteries are charged and seated properly, it starts right up.

The saw has an electric brake, and though the chain doesn't stop immediately after use, it does decelerate quickly to a full stop. This is a great safety feature; with a gas-powered saw, I have to leave the motor running with the chain locked between cuts, which wastes fuel and is noisy and potentially dangerous.

It is easy to check the level of bar oil using the "view window." Under the top handle is a battery meter showing the battery charge.

Photos by Tim Uhler

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The batteries take about 45 minutes to charge on the dual charger. The kit sells for \$390 and includes a charger, two batteries, the chain saw, and, as a promotion, either another pair of batteries or a grinder as well. A similar version of the chain saw with a 16-inch bar is also available. makitatools.com

DEWALT DCCS670 FLEXVOLT 60V MAX BRUSHLESS CHAIN SAW

The DeWalt saw is longer tip-to-tail than the Makita, in part because it uses a 16-inch Oregon bar. The chain tensioner is also tool-free and seems to work well. The hand guard functions like that on the Makita and other chain saws.

This saw functions just like a regular chain saw; there is no safety switch, as on the Makita, that you need to press before you can turn the saw on, which I prefer. A great safety feature on this saw is that nearly as soon as you let go of the trigger, the chain stops; I love saw brakes and chain brakes for the safety they provide.

I received the review model as a tool-only, and then received a 6-Ah and a 9-Ah battery separately; both had plenty of runtime for the way we use these saws. I mention this only because the current kits sell with a 3-Ah battery, which I was not able to test. (As an aside, we also tried using both chain saws for cutting firewood, and found that none of the batteries lasted very long. That's fine with me because I don't want to cut firewood for too long anyway.)

There is a level indicator on the front of the saw for the bar oil, which makes it easy to see. The kit comes with the saw, one 3-Ah battery, and a charger, and it costs about \$350. dewalt.com

WHICH TO BUY?

This is a tough call. Based solely on the chain saws themselves, I would buy the DeWalt as long as I could purchase it with a 9-Ah battery. Three of us used this saw, and we all found it cut faster (just a little) and straighter than the Makita. One of the reviewers grew up in a logging town and worked in a chain-saw repair shop. He found the DeWalt easier to control but loved both saws.

Chain saw makers like Husqvarna and Stihl make a cordless chain saw too, and our local saw shop sells both. Interestingly, their product info shows someone using the saw to cut lumber. The shop mechanic told me he put away his old Skil worm drive and now uses a cordless chain saw for cutting lumber.

While I feel the DeWalt slightly edges out the Makita, we didn't care which saw we grabbed when we were on a jobsite. Being able to go out to the lumber stack and cut glulams without dragging a cord around is so convenient. We don't use our beam saws as often now; we reserve them for exposed beam work that requires a cleaner finish cut. We cut all headers, timbers, and beams with a chain saw. With a sharp chain and good technique, the cuts are square and clean—completely acceptable for framing work. Both saws do their job well and have plenty of power and runtime for what we do on a framing site.

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The Makita XCU03PT1 18V X2 LXT 14-inch chain saw (above left) and DeWalt DCCS670 60V Max 16-inch chain saw (above right) both feature chain tensioning and bar tightening knobs for toolless chain adjustment. The Makita saw weighs 11.5 pounds (with two 18-volt batteries), while the DeWalt saw weighs 9.4 pounds (with a single 60-volt battery).