

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at tools@hanleywood.com.



TOOLS

OF THE TRADE

Cordless Concrete Mixer

BY JOHN CARROLL

Recently, I gave DeWalt's DCD130 60V Max cordless mixer/drill a tough workout while building a brick stairway, the kind of job that involves mixing up a lot of concrete and mortar. While it doesn't replace my favorite mixing tool (the Collomix Xo 4), I found it to be a stout cordless drill that can be used for drilling holes and driving screws in addition to mixing up mud for a variety of jobs. Powered by a 60-volt battery, it's geared low and runs at the right speed for mixing. If the bit binds up, the drill will stop turning thanks to its E-Clutch, a nice safety feature for a tool with this much torque.

DeWalt says that the tool can mix up to nineteen premixed 4.5-gallon buckets of drywall mud, seventeen 5-gallon buckets of tile mortar, or nine 5-gallon buckets of concrete on a single charge, a claim that my testing confirmed. I was able to mix eleven 80-pound bags of concrete on a single charge. I also was able to mix mud for an entire day of somewhat slow brick masonry work, recharging the battery once at lunchtime.

At first, the keyed chuck was a source of frustration because the mixing paddle frequently came loose as I mixed mud. My theory is that forcing the paddle through the dry mixture as I mixed it with

water while moving the paddle up and down to reach the bottom of the tub applied too much stress. So I tried to be careful about how much mud I mixed up at once, and with how I combined the materials. Instead of adding water to a dry mix, I measured the water and poured most of it in the bucket at the beginning, then mixed in half the sand and all the dry masonry cement to make a soupy slurry. Finally, I put in the balance of the sand, which seemed to produce a good, workable mix without straining the machine. I also cranked the chuck as tight as I possibly could (using both hands) to make sure the mixing paddle stayed put, and that annoying problem was put to rest.

The DCD130 won't keep a masonry crew in mud or mix up more than a dozen bags of concrete, and it doesn't have enough power to mix up drypack for a tile floor. It will, however, supply all the mud a small drywall or tile crew needs, and if you also do plumbing or electrical work, it will power hole saws and self-feed bits through lumber with ease. Price is \$350 (kit); \$220 (bare tool). dewalt.com

John Carroll, author of Working Alone, is a builder who lives and works in Durham, N.C.



Photo: John Carroll

The DeWalt DCD130 60V Max mixer/drill is a high-torque, low-speed tool capable of churning out nine 5-gallon buckets of concrete on a single charge. Equipped with an electronic clutch to protect wrists and hands in case of bind-up, the tool can also be used for drilling big holes in framing for drain and vent pipe or for driving large-diameter structural screws.

Finely-Evolved ‘Whiskey Stick’

BY MARK CLEMENT

I adore the term ‘whiskey stick’ and the association it has with guys hand-nailing the houses that we, with our modern power tools and need for speed, now envy the craftsmanship of. (I’m told that the term refers to the clear vials in old spirit levels that were filled with colored alcohol to keep them from freezing.) But we probably wouldn’t want their old, easy-to-knock-out-of-true levels.

Enter the dialed-in and detailed-looking new Kapro 905 Condor series of contractor box levels. Like the rest of the spirit levels in the Kapro lineup, the Condor line has the kinds of features that I look for—and rarely find—in a level.

Obviously, I want the level to stay true, and this box level is fitted with solid-acrylic shockproof vertical and horizontal vials that look like they meet industry standards for this class of level. The company says that its horizontal Optivision Red vial is easier to read accurately than the standard vials on other levels, thanks to its highly visible red bubble edges, high contrast ratio between the bubble and vial liquid, and tilted angle, which offers a direct line of sight.

The company’s Plumb Site Dual-View vertical vials provide both a front view of the actual vial and a unique reflected view that the company says provides a true plumb reading without parallax error. This is a welcome feature, as I know I’ve misread vials before when looking at them from an angle. Kapro claims that the vials are accurate to 0.5mm per meter, or 0.0005 inches per inch.

Another feature I look for in a spirit level is the ability to use the edge of the level to mark into a corner, say, for laying out shelves in a linen closet (I’ve never understood the value of an inset end-stop). Kapro’s shock-absorbing bi-material end caps and built-in bridge at the horizontal vial provide a continuous marking edge all the way to the end of the level. And the beams have crisp, square edges, rather than beveled ones, which keeps my pencil from straying off course. Perhaps best of all, I found the non-magnetic 72-inch version of the Condor for less than \$60 on Amazon (24-inch and 48-inch magnetic and non-magnetic versions are also available). kapro.com

Mark Clement is a JLC contributing editor.



Kapro’s 905 Condor box levels have easy-to-read vertical and horizontal vials and shock-absorbing end caps.



Klein-Kurve wire strippers have comfy handles, shear-cutting knives for cutting wire and cable, and a large, knurled plier head for pulling and twisting wire.

Feature-Rich Wire Strippers

The Klein-Kurve heavy-duty wire stripper from Klein Tools features shear-cutting knives that the company says make it easier to cut copper wire and all sizes of larger type NM sheathed cable. The manufacturer says the tool is made from a proprietary U.S.-made steel blend that is four times stronger than that used for traditional Klein wire strippers, with a hot-riveted joint to prevent wobble and separation of the blades over time.

The tool has six stripping holes for use on 8 to 18 AWG solid wire and 10 to 20 AWG stranded wire, a large, knurled plier head to pull and twist wire, a wire looping hole, and holes for shearing 6-32 and 8-32 screws. The spring-loaded Klein-Kurve comfort grip handles have textured grips for reduced hand fatigue and integrated hang holes for easy all-day carrying. They’re forged and heavy-duty, the company says, so they’ll be hard to break. Just don’t cut the hot with them.

They cost about \$30. kleintools.com —M.C.

Biodegradable Work Gloves

BY STEVE MAXWELL

I'd been searching for biodegradable work gloves and finally found some that I really like. Made for people who do dirty jobs outside, Green Monkey 4-mil nitrile gloves are thin enough to let you grip well, but thick enough to stand up to abrasion. In addition to being among the nicest disposable gloves I've used, they're designed to biodegrade in 10 years in landfills, compared with the 200 years it takes ordinary disposable gloves to disappear. That's an environmental benefit that you can play up with your clients, and because they're made of hypo-allergenic nitrile, not latex, they don't present an allergy risk. A box of 100 gloves costs \$20 on Amazon; buy size XXL if you want to be able to remove the gloves and reuse them without turning them inside out. watsongloves.com

Steve Maxwell has been building decks and more on Manitoulin Island, Canada, since 1985. He's the technical editor of Canadian Contractor.



Green Monkey's 4-mil hypo-allergenic nitrile work gloves are tough enough for the jobsite but are engineered to biodegrade in less than 10 years after they've been disposed of in a landfill.

Trim Demo Bar

The Dalluge 24-inch trim demo bar is one of those tools that just feels right. I saw it at the National Hardware Show in May, and it seemed well-designed for all types of activity—from demo to shim-ming to levering to pulling fasteners to scraping and wedging.

The tool—called Da Bar—is nice and light and has a chrome finish. While the website clearly states that the tool is “forged and tempered for strength,” I had to stick a magnet to it to confirm it was steel rather than titanium like other Dalluge items.

The bar has both flat and claw-type prying surfaces that are 2 1/4 inches wide, extra width that I'm sure will be easier on drywall

than a typical bar when removing trim; I still wouldn't try to pry the trim too far from a stud, though. The nail-puller slot looks like it'd be great for prying broken screws out on a deck re-skin.

The bar's length provides decent reach and leverage without the tool being too long to manage. While Vaughan told me it was a good tool for removing deck boards, it is made with three pieces rather than from a single forged piece. Just how that construction will affect its durability remains to be seen.

According to the website, vaughanmfg.com, the tool was created in Japan to Dalluge standards. It costs \$35. —M.C.



Inspired by Japanese carpentry tools, Dalluge's forged and tempered 24-inch Da Bar 4420 has a pair of 2 1/4-inch-wide prying surfaces.

Photo, top right: Steve Maxwell