

TOOLS



New Tools From STAFDA

Eye catchers and innovators from the all-tool, all-pro show

BY MARK CLEMENT

The Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association (STAFDA) show is all tools, all the time. At the most recent show (this past November), I walked every aisle, checked every booth, and came away with a list of tools that are novel, new, news, or just plain cool—and that might be helpful on your jobsite to save you time and money. Here are the top 15 that grabbed my attention.

1. VERSATILE WORKBENCH

Disston, which has been around since the Industrial Revolution, is synonymous with items that might be on our business cards but are rarely in our hands: handsaws. But its 4-in-1 Omnitable

looks outstanding. Folded down, it's a roughly 24-by-36-inch panel with four wheels (two that pivot) underneath that can be used as a creeper or—better—mover of things. Any number of items could be placed on this and moved around a jobsite: cabinets, for one. It also could be a cool way to keep tiles or flooring or other materials nearby rather than walking back and forth to retrieve them from a stack elsewhere. The wheels are small, so this isn't for off-road. With the legs extended half-way, it's basically a drywaller's bench. All the way out and, boom, it's a table. It has a 500-pound capacity and three on-board plugs. Collapsed, it carries like a briefcase by its integrated handle. At about \$120, it's all around awesome. disstontools.com



2. FRIENDLIER CARBON FOOTPRINT

Walking by the booth of the Italian company Cofra, I spotted a sneaker-style work shoe—named Indiana I/C EH PR—with an aluminum toe cap. It turns out that Cofra sells all the types of boots we wear, like hunters (Ottawa: 8-inch upper, highly insulated), hikers (Montpelier and women's Wanda: 6-inch uppers), and slip-ons (Roughneck). The company is big into using recycled materials: polyurethane for the soles and inserts, yarns for the laces, and paper for the packaging. Plus, Cofra says, the Indiana—the reason I stopped in the first place—is comfortable. If you're serious about your carbon footprint, walk a mile in these shoes. If you can find them. They cost \$110. cofra.us/en

3. REDESIGNED TOOLBELT

I know of few, if any, more tuned-in, more forward-thinking, and less “corporate” companies than your friendly neighborhood toolbelt store, Diamondback. In its redesigned Denali, Diamondback has combined and refined the best features of the Standard and XL

versions in the form of main compartments that don't sag but still hold all the stuff we need held; lower pockets with better rims and resizing that keep them higher up the body; relocated tool holders; repositioned flat-bar/nail-pick sleeve; and more (I hasten to add, it has the best buckle on Planet Earth). While I was at the booth, I also learned that Diamondback is working on a real—not pink and cute—women's belt. Finally, though describing the features of its products is important, so is pointing out the company's evolving mission: to build a toolbelt system that'll last you—and change with you—for 20 years. Price: \$440. toolbelts.com

4. FASTER SELF-FEED BITS

For drilling big holes for plumbing pipe or electrical conduit, Diablo's SpeedDemon self-feed bits are wood-gobblers extraordinaire. Their refined design—think tooth geometry with a unique hook angle that nets them speeds up to twice those of a typical bit, according to Diablo (and my eyes; I saw them work)—not only makes SPF corn flakes super-fast, but in doing so, proves the “time

is money” adage. Diablo says the SpeedDemons are designed for (what else) cordless tools and put a much lower strain on the batteries while doubling holes per charge. The brand also says it has redesigned the feed screw with a pull-out stop design that prevents it from slipping out when the bit is removed from the material. It has an aggressive low thread count, and there’s no pitch build up. The company even amped up how it’s made: While many bits are die cast, SpeedDemons are heat forged, resulting in better performance and longer life. Anything that takes some of the pain out of repetitive-motion wrestling matches to free up brain bandwidth for harder-to-solve problems feeds production. The bits are available in nine sizes, from 1 1/8 inches to 3 5/8 inches. They start at about \$40. diablotools.com

5. SNAP BACK CHALK REEL

It was CE Tools’ (CE = “Contractor Engineered”) Red Edge Side View box beam levels that caught my eye. And they are cool, with a red tint to the vial fluid that makes the bubble more visible in bright light. They’re also slim, and compared with other levels, easy to manipulate without a loss in durability. They have a periscope view, of sorts, enabling you to see the top vial from off-angles, which sounds like a seconds-saver plumbing posts or walls. But what made me gasp was the self-releasing Snap Back Chalk Reel. Contractor-invented, the Snap Back chalk reel itself is strikingly well-designed. Big, it holds lots of chalk. But it’s not too big. It’s a useful plumb bob. The line is high quality. And, it has a belt clip, yes! But the killer app is the self-releasing hook. After hooking the Snap Back and walking across a sheet of plywood—or roof or sidewall or deck—and snapping the line, giving the string a sideways tug releases the hook from whatever edge it’s hooked over. Pop—the line is free to be reeled in without your having to walk back and unhook it. A 4.4-1 planetary gear makes for fast rewinds; the “pinch to open” reservoir is easy to open for refills but difficult to open by accident. And, CE sells the Snap Back accessory separately from its reel. The reel costs \$25. cetoolsinc.com

6. TOP “PICK”

Where I work—and where WorkSafe products are made, coincidentally—“staging planks” are called “picks.” Whatever you may call them, WorkSafe’s Fall Protection Guardrail Safety System is designed to integrate with either pump jacks or ladder jacks to improve safety and efficiency. Components include brackets that secure ladder rails to the building to prevent kick-out (\$21.50), an aluminum rail (\$235) equipped with a rolling fall-protection harness (\$290) that keeps you top-side, and some sweet tool hooks (\$12) that slot inside





7

a ladder rung and look awesome for everything from siding to service work. WorkSafe says that most fall fatalities are from 6 feet and lower; one factor, it says, is that there's no time for a worker to react. Maybe being proactive is a good call instead. The total fall protection system shown costs \$750. worksafecompany.com

7. PORTABLE AIR FILTRATION

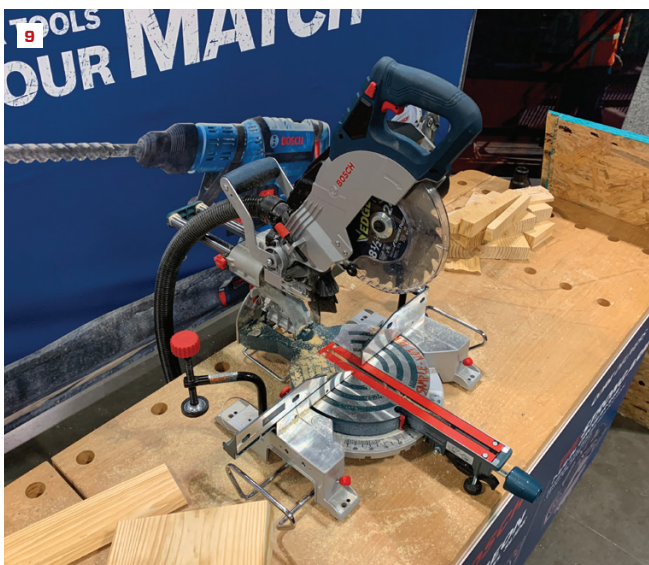
Powermatic's PM 1250 air filtration system looks gold-standard-good. Built on the "box fan with AC filter" model, the PM 1250 looks like the Millennium Falcon of box fans. An impeller behind the filter draws dust-filled air in, and the filter removes and scrubs it down to 0.1 micron from a 680-square-foot space (think two-car garage). The easy-to-vac filter recycles air five times per hour and has a 3,000-hour rating. Its base, which is fine sitting on the floor, can be wall-mounted or suspended, getting it out of the way on a busy jobsite or crowded wood shop. And it's as quiet as a conversation, according to Powermatic. Price: \$700. powermatic.com

8



8. LARGE-CAPACITY TILE SAW

The Delta Machinery Cruiser 96-110 tile saw has the largest cutting capacity in the industry, according to Delta. It also has some obvious creature comforts, like a large, grippy rubber table. Its dual water jets can be focused for optimum spray location and volume of water dispensed, which Delta says extends blade life. The unit comes with a nice-looking miter gauge that you'll probably use because you can now handle those 24-inch tiles on the diagonal without flipping them or propping them up over the edge of the table. Its pump is fully submersible, and its plunging motor head can cut full-size pavers. Price: \$800. deltamachinery.com



9

9. CORDLESS SLIDER

At 30 pounds with a sweet carry handle and detents that lock in like safe doors at Fort Knox, Bosch's new 18-volt, single-battery, single-bevel 8 1/2-inch slider looks like an easy grab for pick-up work, flooring, trim, and any number of other jobs that do or don't require benches and all-day set-up. Its 24-tooth blade left a surprisingly crisp cut in southern yellow pine 2x10 and crown, and also crosscut 2x10 at 90 degrees and 2x8 at 45 degrees. With a 2 7/8-inch depth of cut, it doesn't quite make it through a 4x4, but deck builders who are tired of lugging big saws around houses may want to take a second look. Price: \$600 (kit). boschtools.com

10. COOL NEW CORDLESS TOOLS

We all know the two faces of Skil: the one of Mag 77 might and the other of \$20 big box tools. Well, Face 2 has been in the gym. Juiced by a new approach to

battery performance it calls PWRCore, Skil looks like the cordless tool version of a dragster smoking the tires. There are sub features of the PWRCore that are premium, too: “Assist” puts a USB into the battery. Of course, the motors are brushless. “Jump” gives a dead battery enough oomph to drive 100 drywall screws with a five-minute charge. The batteries—2 or 5 amp hour, depending on the tool—are said to run 25% longer than other batteries and stay cooler longer. While the brand seems to have a full suite of tools, the 2.0-amp-hour 20-volt rotary hammer caught my eye: It’s light and well-balanced and looks terrific for small anchors. There’s a 5.0-amp-hour hammer that drills and chips. Both are SDS Plus. The oscillating tool had zero vibration, and the impact driver’s fit and finish was not the Skil of old by any stretch. There’s an old new cowboy in town. The rotary hammer kit costs about \$110. skil.com

11. SUPER CIRC SAW ACCESSORY

You know the rip guide do-hickey included with your circ saw? SkatePlate takes that design and turns it into a completely new accessory—and maybe turns your average circ saw into a completely new tool. Rather than relying on friction from the saw’s shoe (and guide, if you use yours), SkatePlate rolls on polyurethane rollers. While you can use it in what seems like limitless rip and cross cuts in wood, including sizing full sheets with the extension arm, the company also makes a GFCI-protected hydro attachment that turns a typical circ saw into a full-blown concrete cutter. This testimonial on a 30-year framer’s website rings true: “I just did an 85-foot-long concrete cut on a freshly poured driveway ... and [SkatePlate] was ridiculously accurate and easy.” The SkatePlate and SkateGuide Combo sells for \$80; the SkatePlate H2O, for \$90. skateplate.com

12. A BETTER GARDEN HOSE

Just about every time I scrape the skin off my knuckles or need to find a wrench to thread a garden hose off a fitting that is too close to a house, I find a new reason to rue those valves’ hideous design. It appears Flexzilla has too. Its jobsite-tough but also flexible polyurethane-PVC-hybrid garden hose looks boss. The blend erases the “memory” and weight of rubber hoses. But the real -zilla might be in the hose-to-house fitting. The collar is fist-sized so you can get enough purchase on it to install it or remove it. In addition, the seventeen bearings inside it mean you don’t have to pretwist the hose to travel along the threads with a modicum of ease. It comes in 3-, 10-, 25-, 50-, 75-, and 100-foot lengths. There’s nothing wrong with the six-pattern, trigger-activated adjustable nozzle either. A 50-foot hose runs \$45. flexzilla.com





13. TOUGH TOOL TOTES

Looking for lighter weight, tough, and mobile gang-box-style tool storage? Take a look at Toter Box. Basically a plastic version of the job-box-style tool container, it has beefy sides and a double-walled lid. It works like a job box but is lighter and has more features. It has a secure metal latch, so you're not relying on padlocks, unless you want to—it also has padlock locations in each corner of the lid. It has steel carry handles on each side and a 400-pound load rating, yet it weighs roughly half as much as steel boxes. There are three versions: a plain box (60 pounds); a box with receivers for forks and—this is cool—a receiver to mount on a receiver hitch (95 pounds); and a box with the features above with plus rolling casters (110 pounds). Load up. Prices start at around \$500. toter.com



14. FEATURE-PACKED LASER

Green lasers aren't new, nor are cross-line lasers or magnets. But Stabila's LAX 50 G green cross-line laser has a handy blend of features. It is also serviceable. Other manufacturers' units, according to Stabila, are not serviceable, which helps hit a price point, but if you break the laser, well, good luck. The other subtlety is the lens. To hit a price point, some manufacturers use plastic lenses where Stabila uses glass: more breakable, perhaps, but it allows for a clearer beam. I can't measure this, but when we shot it inside the convention center, the beam was highly visible 50 to 75 feet away. Surely it'll hold up in a kitchen reno and even for ledgers and other outdoor jobs like decks or small foundations. The kit has a telescoping pole that clamps floor to ceiling; the unit is positionable anywhere along it via a smart squeeze mechanism. Price: \$230. stabila.com



15. COMPACT CORDLESS CHAIN SAW

Makita's XCU08 top-handle chain saw is surprisingly powerful, compact, and agile. Because every chain saw I've owned is pretty much just like the previous one I owned, seeing some extra thought put into this design is refreshing. The 14-inch bar is big without being too big. At 36 volts (two 18-volt batteries), it quietly plowed through a 10-inch hickory log. If you feel like there's not enough oil making it to the chain, the feed is adjustable—great for high-heat applications like cutting a stump. The nut for the bar-and-chain housing is designed such that it releases the cowl but cannot fall off. Great detail. The see-through bar-oil reservoir is terrific. And if you do need to tow it up a tree, it has a loop for tying it off. The kit costs \$450. makitatools.com

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