

18v Cordless Multitools

Modern batteries make this problem-solving tool even more useful

BY STEVE SMITH

As a remodeler, I use my oscillating multitool to cut, sand, and scrape in places where no other power tool can go. In recent years, modern high-capacity batteries have come to multitools, making them even more useful than the corded versions. Now you can set up quicker and can cut, sand, and scrape while working on ladders and in awkward spaces without having to drag a cord around.

Fine Homebuilding recently asked me to test 10 18v cordless multitools from all the major manufacturers. I used them in a variety of real-world settings: plunge cutting in hardwood, plywood, and melamine; scraping glue, silicone, and mastic; removing grout; and light sanding. I also tested their relative power by timing how long it took them to flush-cut 10 8d galvanized nails. To level the playing field, I used Imperial Titanium Storm blades on all the tools except the Fein and the Bosch, which only accept Starlock blades. On these two, I used Bosch StarlockPlus carbide blades. Both manufacturers' blades cut fast and lasted a long time.

Three tools stood out: the Fein, the Bosch, and the DeWalt, but Bosch's and Fein's proprietary blade-mounting system knocked them out of top billing because I don't like not being able to easily find blades that fit the tool. The DeWalt, which accepts blades from most manufacturers, performed at or near the top in every category, from ergonomics and power to quality of cut and ease of blade changes. It's also a good deal. For less than \$200, you get a full kit with plenty of extras, which also makes it my best-value pick. □

Steve Smith is a remodeler in Seattle. Photos by Patrick McCombe.





DeWALT DCS355



PRICE \$129; kit, \$179 (DCS355D1)
WEIGHT 3 lb. 2 oz. LENGTH 12 in.

With precise and powerful cuts, fast blade changes, and great ergonomics, the DeWalt is a contractor's dream. Its LED lighting clearly illuminates the cut and stays on for 20 seconds after activation. Its oversize variable-speed trigger allows precise control no matter what your hand position. The kit version includes a depth stop, multiple blades, and twice as many sanding sheets as the nearest competitor.



BLADE MOUNT

DeWalt's pinch-grip blade clamp accepts C-style blades. The DeWalt and the Porter-Cable are the only tools tested that allow you to remove and install blades with only one hand on the tool. The tool also accepts conventional (Fein-style) blades with an adapter.



BOSCH MXH180BL

PRICE \$215; battery and charger, \$99 **WEIGHT** 4 lb. 2 oz. **LENGTH** 13 in.

This tool is a stellar performer. It has good LED illumination, intelligent controls, fast and efficient blade changes, and decent ergonomics. It's one of the slower cutting tools in the group, although it was faster than the Fein, which uses the same blade-mounting system. Having to use Bosch's or Fein's new blades will be a frustration for many, as the conventional blades made by aftermarket manufacturers won't fit.



BLADE MOUNT

Bosch and Fein partnered to create new blade-mounting systems: Starlock and StarlockPlus. A bottle-cap-looking mold on the blade mates with a socket on the tool head. Its ease and speed is matched only by the DeWalt's. The new blades also fit older Fein-style blade mounts.



FEIN AFMM18

PRICE kit, \$349 (71292261090) **WEIGHT** 3 lb. 14 oz. **LENGTH** 13 in.

The only tool with a vibration-dampening housing, the Fein is quiet and comfortable to use. Unfortunately, it was the slowest in cutting through galvanized nails, although this sluggish pace was less noticeable when cutting wood. The tool's lack of a light was frustrating in low-light settings. Paired with Fein's rigid scraper, it excelled at scraping mastic off of plywood subflooring without damaging the surface.



BLADE MOUNT

Fein's Starlock and StarlockPlus blade mount (also found on the Bosch) is very sturdy. When a blade is snapped in, it is truly locked to the tool; there is no play whatsoever. The two tools only accept Bosch and Fein blades, but pricing seems consistent with other brands.

HITACHI CV18DBLP4

PRICE \$192; battery and charger, \$112

WEIGHT 4 lb. 5 oz. **LENGTH** 12 in.

With its brushless motor and electronic circuitry, the Hitachi provides smooth cutting and ample power. It has an LED, which provides a good view of the cut in low lighting, but it turns off immediately when you stop the motor. The Hitachi is the only tool with an auto mode that boosts power as cutting resistance slows the motor. The feature works well, but Hitachi's toolless blade-mount mechanism is a little frustrating.



BLADE MOUNT

Designed for conventional and C-style blades, the Hitachi has a unique two-step locking system. The mount holds securely, but the process is more tedious than other systems.



MAKITA XMT03

PRICE \$119; kit, \$251 (XMT025) WEIGHT 5 lb. 2 oz. LENGTH 14 in.

The Makita is a heavy tool and is solidly built. It provides vibration-free, accurate, and relatively powerful cuts. Its batteries charge the fastest (30 minutes for a 4-Ah pack) of the tools tested. Along with the Hitachi, it is the largest tool in circumference, and this made comfort and control of cuts in tight settings (e.g., inside cabinets) below par. Its lack of an LED and its threaded-spindle blade-changing mechanism were disappointments in a kit priced at \$300.



BLADE MOUNT

The Makita accepts conventional and C-style blades. The release lever on the front of the housing locks open for easy blade changes and angle adjustments, but the spindle can be lost.



MILWAUKEE 2626-20

PRICE \$99; kit, \$300 (2626-22) WEIGHT 4 lb. 6 oz. LENGTH 14 in.

The Milwaukee makes precise cuts and has ample power. Its conical-shaped handle is the most comfortable of the larger-diameter tools, but its housing is the longest. Its light illuminates the cutting area well and stays on for about five seconds after the motor stops. The spindle-style blade mount is an improvement over hex-key systems, but the loose spindle can still be lost, and switching blades is not especially fast.



BLADE MOUNT

Milwaukee's spindle-style blade mount allows you to use conventional and C-style blades. You don't need to fully remove the threaded spindle when mounting C-style blades, so it's less likely to be lost. The blade-release lever locks open for easier changes and blade-angle adjustments.



PORTER-CABLE PCC710

PRICE \$65; kit, \$149 (PCC710LA) WEIGHT 2 lb. 10 oz. LENGTH 11 in.

The Porter-Cable has the same blade-mounting system as the DeWalt, but its kit costs \$30 less than DeWalt's similar kit. Short and light, it is great in tight spaces. Given its size, the Porter-Cable is surprisingly powerful, cutting as fast as the heavier tools. Unfortunately, it is loud and transfers vibration directly back to the user. Its LED provides good visibility but turns off when you stop the motor.



BLADE MOUNT

As with the blade clamp found on the DeWalt, you squeeze the lever with one hand, freeing your other hand to remove or insert C-style blades. This style is the fastest, most trouble-free blade-mounting system of those tested. The tool accepts conventional blades with an adapter plate and machine screw.



RIDGID R862004

PRICE \$99; battery and charger, \$140 **WEIGHT** 3 lb. 14 oz. **LENGTH** 15 in.

In addition to an oscillating-multitool head, the Ridgid's body also accepts a compact reciprocating saw and a right-angle impact driver, both sold separately. As a multitool, it's powerful and precise, but it's also loud and vibrates more than most of the other tools. I appreciate the LED, but it casts a shadow that partially obscures the cutting path. Variable speed is controlled by the trigger only.



BLADE MOUNT

The Ridgid accepts conventional and C-style blades. Notably, both types are mounted without needing to remove a threaded spindle. A pair of magnets holds the blade while the clamp is tightened. After the DeWalt, the Porter-Cable, and the Starlock-equipped tools, this is the best toolless blade change.



ROCKWELL RK2863K

PRICE kit with one battery, \$99 **WEIGHT** 3 lb. 2 oz. **LENGTH** 12 in.

Rockwell's Sonicrafter is small and light, but it provides decent power and a comfortable housing. The downsides are that it vibrates more than most of the others and the motor housing gets unusually hot with heavy cutting. This was especially apparent during the nail-cutting test. The twin LEDs provide a good line of sight for cutting. This was the least expensive kit in the test.



BLADE MOUNT

While not especially fast, the Rockwell's blade-change system minimizes the likelihood of a dropped spindle. The rotating lever on the top of the housing provides plenty of leverage and cinches down effectively on the blade. It accepts both conventional and C-style blades.

RYOBI P340

PRICE \$69; battery and charger, \$59 **WEIGHT** 3 lb. 11 oz. **LENGTH** 14 in.

The Ryobi is priced for the contractor who rarely uses an oscillating multitool. It offers relatively precise cuts but has noticeable issues with power and vibration. It especially struggled during the nail test. The tool body is configured much like the Ridgid's and even accepts Ridgid's mini reciprocating-saw head and right-angle impact driver. (Both brands are owned by the same parent company.)



BLADE MOUNT

This is the only tool in the test that still requires a hex wrench for blade changes. The mount accepts both conventional and C-style blades. This tool has the slowest and least user-friendly of the clamping systems—not surprising, since this is the least expensive tool in the test.

