

Cool Tools From STAFDA

by Patrick McCombe

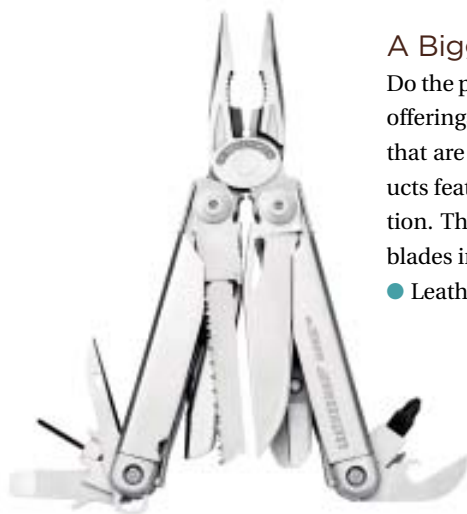
The most innovative new products at the tool dealers' trade show

With the National Hardware Show's gradual transition from pro-duty power and hand tools to DIY and consumer goods, the Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association's annual convention and trade show has emerged as the best place to see new tools designed for pro users. The 2006 show was held in November at the Las Vegas Convention Center and featured hundreds of exhibitors.

The big news at this year's show? Lithium ion. By now, every major power-tool manufacturer has rolled out at least a couple of lithium ion cordless tools, and one company was exhibiting more than 30 at the show.

Another interesting development was the surprising number of Asian manufacturers who outsource private-label nail guns and electric power tools. Some of the products were clearly not meant for professional use, but many looked well-made and exhibited a fit and finish comparable to those of the major brands. Odds are you'll start seeing tool distributors and chain lumberyards with their own branded power tools in the next few years.

On the following pages you'll find a collection of some of the most innovative tools introduced at this year's show. If you decide to give any of them a try, let us know what you think.



A Bigger Multitool

Do the pliers and tools on your multitool feel a little wimpy? Two of Leatherman's newest offerings — the 4½-inch *Surge* (shown, \$80) and the *Core* (\$60) — pack pliers and blades that are about 10 percent bigger than the original 4-inch Leatherman tools. Both products feature locking blades and tools mounted with bronze bushings for smooth operation. The *Surge* sports the “blade exchanger,” which accepts standard T-shank jigsaw blades in addition to the saw blade and two-sided file included with the tool.

● Leatherman, 800/847-8665, www.leatherman.com



Gable Guide

Siding a gable end can lead to all kinds of improvised ways to reproduce the roof slope at the saw table, but now there's a tool made for the job. It's a lot bigger than a T-bevel, too, so it's more accurate. PacTool's *Gable Scribe* adjusts from 0 to 90 degrees and is made from aluminum, so it won't rust. It looks handy for other tasks as well, such as laying out tiles diagonally. It costs \$69.

● PacTool, 800/297-7487, www.pactool.us

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Standouts in the Field

Despite its rather silly product names, Dude Tools offers tradespeople some of the most innovative heavy-duty tools and accessories available. All are American-made, and blinding orange so you won't lose them. Among my favorites are the *Dude Duster* (\$20; top), an add-on cut-line dust blower for Bosch and Skil 77-series saws; the *Nut Buster* (\$53 to \$71; bottom), a heavy-duty impact socket for tightening anchor bolts, hold-downs, and shear walls; and the *Long Dude Screw Buster* (\$27; far right) a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch, $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-drive impact socket for fastening the tops and sides of Hardy shear panels.

● Dude Tools, 909/989-9530, www.dudetools.com



Four in One

Of all the cordless lithium ion products Makita exhibited at the show — and there were quite a few — my favorite was the *BTP140*. The company touts this 18-volt combination hammer drill and impact driver as four tools — a drill, hammer drill, impact driver, and conventional driver with 16 clutch positions — in one. It sells for about \$420 with two 3.0 amp-hour batteries and a case.

● Makita, 800/462-5482, www.makita.com



Better Placement

Getting concrete from a conventional wheelbarrow into a Sonotube with any accuracy has always required either a shovel or a mix so soupy the concrete's strength is severely compromised. Not anymore: Take a look at Brentwood Industries' *Pour Spout Wheelbarrow*. Available with one or two wheels, the 6-cubic-foot contractor-grade wheelbarrow has an extended front lip to make accurate placement of concrete, gravel, and sand much easier. Options include steel handles and flat-free tires. Suggested retail prices start at \$215.

● Brentwood Industries, 610/376-1900, www.brentwoodindustries.com



The Finger

You may not use the *Turn Pro Magnetic Finger* very often on the job site, but if you do any mechanical or automotive work at all, this doohickey could be very useful on those occasions when you don't have enough room to hold a nut or start a fastener. It also looks handy for retrieving parts from otherwise inaccessible locations. The magnet is powerful for its size, and the "glove" is stretchy and comfortable. It costs about \$10.

● TurnPro, 866/774-0055, www.magneticfinger.com



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Rain Gear

CLC's new waterproof gear bags look a lot like the dry bags used by whitewater guides, and that's no coincidence: They're designed to protect tools sitting in uncovered pickup beds and other wet places. Constructed of durable tarpaulin fabric, the containers sport waterproof zippers and come in various sizes. Shown here are the #1213 *Climate Gear Soft Bucket Tool Bag* (\$56; far left) and the #1258 *14-inch Climate Gear Tool Bag* (\$58; left).

● CLC, 800/325-0455, www.clccustomleathercraft.com



Private Eye

Having a piece of heavy equipment or a job box stolen is enough to send any contractor into a rage. But now, instead of getting mad, you can take steps to minimize the likelihood of it happening again — and maybe even get your stuff back if it does. DeWalt's *Mobilelock* contacts a central monitoring station whenever someone removes the system's small black box or moves the equipment it's attached to. The station then calls whatever phone numbers you'd previously requested be notified. By logging on to the Internet, you can watch as the device is tracked by GPS. However, rather than playing *Dirty Harry*, I'd suggest you just call the cops. Packages start at \$500; monthly monitoring starts at \$20.

● DeWalt, 877/433-9258, www.dewalt.com



Hip Work Duds

Just because you get dirty at work doesn't mean you shouldn't look your best. Blaklader Workwear is stylish, high-quality clothing made for professional tradespeople. The *Ultimate Worker Pants* (\$80; far left) boast removable kneepads, numerous pockets, and Cordura reinforcement. The windproof *Functional Fleece Jacket* (\$95; top) and *Vest* (\$70; not shown) contain extra pockets for tools and gear. And the *Heavy-Duty Winter Jacket* (\$100; bottom), which comes both lined and unlined, looks way hipper than a barn coat.

● Blaklader, 866/248-5452, www.blaklader.com

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Small-Framed Slider

Tired of lugging around your 50- or 60-pound slide-miter saw? Check out this sweet little slider from Makita. The 28-pound *LS0714* uses a 7½-inch blade and will cut a 2x12 at 90 degrees and a 2x8 at 45 degrees. It also has a very small footprint (26½ by 17 inches), thanks to a two-stage sliding system. My one beef? It bevels only 5 degrees to the right. You can find it on the Web for less than \$450.

● Makita, 800/462-5482, www.makita.com



Air-Free Cap Stapler

For my money, the show's coolest new tool was the *Stinger CH38* cap stapler, which requires no air and makes using plastic caps for housewrap and felt as easy as swinging a hammer tacker. A small lever on the bottom of the tool advances the cap; after that the tool is used just like a conventional hammer stapler. It seems well-made and the feed system proved quite reliable during my brief trial. The best part? It sells for only \$45. Staple packs (2016 count) with 1-inch caps and ⅜-inch staples cost about \$30.

● National Nail, 800/746-5659, www.nationalnail.com



Tile Bits for Porcelain

Drilling holes in porcelain tile for a bathroom's worth of accessories normally consumes several hours and a fistful of conventional tile bits — but Hitachi's new *diamond tile bits* promise to make the job faster and easier. Since the bits require a steady supply of water for cooling, Hitachi designed a companion water dispenser that allows you to use them in vertical applications. The plastic reservoir — which sticks to the wall with suction cups — dispenses a steady drip of water that is channeled by the bit's left-handed flutes into the hole. I got a chance to try the setup at the show; it worked great. The bits come in ⅜-, ¼-, 9/32-, 5/16- and 3/8-inch sizes. Individual bits cost between \$11 and \$14.

● Hitachi, 800/706-7337, www.hitachipowertools.com



Classy Joints

At first glance, Festool's *Domino Joiner* looks like an ordinary biscuit joiner, but it's way cooler than that. The device — which could more accurately be described as a handheld mortiser — works with a manufactured oblong-shaped Domino tenon to make joints that the maker claims are stronger than those made with conventional dowels and biscuits. The tenons come in five different sizes, for joining everything from stiles and rails on doors and face frames to casing miters and butcher-block tops. The tool will be available in the U.S. in April and is expected to cost about \$700.

● Festool, 888/337-8600, www.festoolusa.com



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Primo Pinner

Okay, I admit it: I have a weakness for nail guns. Still, the *Cadex CPB 23.50 Pin and Brad Nailer* is the nicest one I've seen in a long time. It accepts both brads and headless pins from $\frac{5}{8}$ to 2 inches (the longest pin available). The magazine holds 120 fasteners and includes a sight window, so you know when you're running low. Other thoughtful features include a belt hook, a swivel air fitting, rear exhaust, and a built-in dust blower. The nailer sells for about \$350 online.

● Cadex, 604/876-9909, www.cadextools.com



Demo-Hammer Dust Port

Using a breaker hammer on an indoor slab is a surefire way to stir up a lot of lung-clogging dust. However, with the *EnviroBoot*, you can cut the amount of dust produced by 80 percent, says the manufacturer. The easy-to-install rubber boot fits on the bottom of most 90-pound electric-breaker hammers and includes a 2-inch port for connection to a dust-collecting vacuum. The company is planning similar products for smaller hammers; they should be available by March. The EnviroBoot sells for \$120.

● Environmental Safety Solutions, 212/922-9001, www.enviroboot.com



Choice of Battery

At this point, everyone knows the advantages of lithium ion rechargeable batteries: They're lighter and have longer runtimes than both nicad and niMH batteries. Bosch has taken a unique approach to the new technology. The company's new 36-volt lithium ion tools work with two different battery packs. The *FatPack*, the larger option, offers a longer runtime for demanding applications; the *SlimPack* weighs about the same as a 14.4-volt nicad pack, for greater portability and less user fatigue. The companion drill, *Model 38636-01*, provides up to 600 inch-pounds of torque and features a metal ratcheting chuck and a 15-position clutch. You can find it on the Web with two SlimPack batteries and a case for \$400. An optional FatPack battery costs about \$160.



● Bosch Tools, 877/267-2499, www.boschtools.com