

Toolbox

DeWalt DW304PK Recip Saw

by Scott Dornbusch

Some time ago, *JLC* sent me a DeWalt DW304PK recip-saw kit to test. I had it for a couple of months and used it for general demolition and cutting rebar on new construction and remodeling jobs.

In most ways, the DW304PK is like any other recip saw. It has a 10-amp motor, a 1¹/₈-inch stroke, and a variable-speed trigger that allows you to cut anywhere from 0 to 2,800 strokes per minute. And like other saws from DeWalt, it's equipped with a large spring-loaded release lever that makes it especially easy to install and remove blades.

Unusual Blade Clamp

What's really different about this model is that the blade can be installed in four different positions.

The saw's four-position blade clamps allow you to install blades facing up, down, left, or right. Here, the blade is in the sideways position (right), but the slot for the vertical position is clearly visible. Cutting flush is easier when the blade is in the side position (far right).



DeWalt DW304PK Specs

Amps: 10
Strokes per minute: 0-2,800
Stroke length: 1¹/₈ inches
Length: 17¹/₂ inches
Weight: 7.0 pounds
Street price (includes plastic case): \$100

DeWalt Industrial Tool Co.
800/433-9258
www.dewalt.com



Usually you have only two choices: teeth facing up or down, with the blade parallel to the grip. The DW304PK, however, has an extra slot that allows you to install the blade sideways — that is, perpendicular to the grip (see photos, below).

At first, this feature struck me as just a gimmick, but it proved to be quite handy in certain situations. For instance, because the blade is only 1/2 inch away



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from the top of the saw in the sideways position, you can cut flush to the floor without bowing the blade quite as much as you would otherwise have to. A good example of this kind of flush cutting would be moving or removing a stud wall by cutting the nails that hold the bottom plate to the floor. With the DeWalt recip saw, this task is somewhat easier.

The extra blade slot also makes it possible to vary your grip position, because you're not locked into cutting parallel to the handle.

Performance

The DW304PK is a good but not a stellar performer. It has ample power for common cutting tasks. At 7.0 pounds, it's

a little lighter than the saws I normally use. A lighter saw is good for overhead work and in tight spots like crawlspaces, but it has been my experience that heavier saws absorb more vibration. This saw vibrates a lot — so much, in fact, that it's uncomfortable to use.

Unlike some other models, the DW304PK does not have an orbital cutting function — but this was not a negative for us. It cut with plenty of speed, and I'm not sure that orbital cutting really helps anyway.

The tool comes in a plastic case with metal latches. You can stow the saw with a 6-inch blade installed, but only if the blade's in the regular slot.

There is one feature I wish the saw had: an adjustable pivoting front shoe. Since

the shoe on this saw is fixed, you can't work different parts of the blade, and it's hard to control the depth of penetration while plunge-cutting.

A pivoting shoe would also make it easier to maintain full contact with the work.

The Upshot

If you're looking for a light compact saw that gets only occasional use, the DW304PK is worth considering. But if you want a heavy-duty saw to use every day, I'd recommend buying a heavier model that vibrates less and has an adjustable shoe.

Scott Dornbusch is a remodeler in North Branch, Minn.

Toolbox | Planes & Rasps

Spiral-Cut Cordless. A power planer makes fine-tuning an extension jamb or taking the hump out of a framing member fast and easy. Cordless models can speed things still further. The Ridgid R848 3¹/₄-inch cordless power plane has a spiral-cut blade that the maker claims offers less resistance (for longer runtimes) and produces smoother, faster cuts. The tool comes with an 18-volt battery, a charger, a chip-collection bag, and an edge guide — but the coolest feature is a little kickstand on the tail end that allows you to set the plane down with the blade still turning. The R848 sells for about \$100.

Ridgid, 866/539-1710, www.ridgid.com.



Lightweight Block Plane. As far as I'm concerned, a high-quality low-angle block plane is indispensable for stain-grade finish work. Carrying the standard-size version around on your tool belt all day, however, can be a real drag. Fortunately, there's a lightweight alternative: the *Veritas Apron Plane*. Weighing in at 14 ounces — about half the weight of an ordinary block plane — the tool performs just as well as its heavier counterparts, according to several finish carpenters I spoke with. It comes with either a high-carbon steel blade (\$69) or an A2 blade (\$79). The company also offers a split leather holster (\$14.50).

Lee Valley, 800/871-8158, www.leevalley.com.

Revolutionary Rasp. Although just about every carpenter I know has a four-way rasp, nobody seems to be very happy with the tool's performance. A better version, the *Shinto Wood Rasp*, hails from Japan. Not only does this tool have both coarse and fine cutting blades, but the cutting surfaces go all the way to the edge, allowing the user to get into corners — not a possibility with standard four-way files. The Shinto wood rasp is available online from Japan Woodworker for about \$30.

Japan Woodworker, 800/537-7820, www.japanwoodworker.com. **Circle #20**



Toolbox | Painting Tools

Premier Painter's Pole.

There's nothing worse when you're trying to paint a ceiling or a tall wall than a wiggly, wobbly extension pole. Purdy claims its *Professional Grade Extension Poles* are flex-free and have the tightest, most secure push-button locking system available. The fiberglass-covered aluminum poles extend in 6-inch increments and come in five sizes from 2 feet to 16 feet. Prices range from about \$20 to about \$47.

Purdy, 800/547-0780, www.purdycorp.com.



Frustration-Free Caulk Gun.

You wouldn't think designing a functional caulking gun would be that tough, but the ones I've used fall into two categories: bad and worse. The notable exception is Tajima's *Convoy Lite*. This lightweight caulking gun has a fiberglass-reinforced plastic frame that won't rust or bend, and unlike every other so-called dripless model I've tried, its unique plunger actually stops dispensing caulk when you release the handle. Despite one drawback — tube changes require two hands, which poses a real challenge when you're on an extension ladder — the Convoy Lite is without question the best caulking gun I've ever used. The 1/10-gallon model sells for \$17; a one-quart model doesn't exist, unfortunately.

Tajima, 888/482-5462, www.tajimatool.com.



Big Gulp.

For fast coverage and a great finish, many pro painters suggest painting doors and other large trim areas with a roller and then back-brushing. While a conventional-size roller and pan will work for this task, the ideal tools are a 3-inch roller and a handheld paint pail like Wooster's *Pelican*. The polypropylene cup incorporates a deeply ribbed 5 1/2-inch-wide by 4 1/2-inch-long roll-off area and a built-in rare-earth magnet that holds your brush. According to the maker, the strap — which adjusts automatically — provides a comfortable fit for most hands. The Pelican costs about \$15; a three-pack of liners costs \$3.50.

Wooster Brush, 800/392-7246, www.woosterbrush.com.

Toolbox

Cordpro

by Roberto Ramirez

It's frustrating and dangerous to work with air hoses and electrical cords tangled underfoot. On my jobs, I avoid this hazard by using Cordpros (BurkTek, 800/700-6784, www.cordpro.com). Each of these handy donut-shaped storage accessories — essentially giant reels — holds one cord or hose.

To use a Cordpro, you pry the flexible-plastic top and bottom halves apart and feed your cord through a hole in the flat plastic divider inside. Next, you wind the cord around the device's perimeter; it slips inside like string into a yo-yo. You can store the entire cord or merely "shorten" it, letting the ends hang out. I leave

out as little hose or cord as necessary to do the work, and keep the rest stored neatly out of the way. As a result, my job sites are a lot less cluttered than they used to be.

The CP-100 model holds up to 50 feet of 12-3 cord — more if the cord is thinner. The container measures about 13 inches in diameter and has a grommet for hanging on a nail.



The super-size model, the CP-XL, holds 150 feet of 12-3 cord or 50 feet of 1/2-inch air hose. It's about 16 inches in diameter, and in addition to a hanging grommet, it has a carrying handle.

I've seen Cordpros at a couple of different woodworking trade shows and have purchased a few of the devices at each one. They are also available for purchase on the manufacturer's Web site.

The CP-100 costs \$13 plus \$9 for shipping, and the CP-XL costs \$24 plus \$9 shipping. Since larger orders require only a slight increase in shipping charges, it makes sense to buy more than one if you opt to mail-order.

Roberto Ramirez is a remodeler in Moraga, Calif.



The author stows an air hose by wrapping it around the perimeter of the largest Cordpro, the CP-XL (left). The sides of the Cordpro spring open, allowing a hose or cord to slip inside (right).

Ridgid R82233 Right-Angle Impact Driver

With its small, light housing and incredible amount of torque, a cordless impact driver is the ideal tool for driving lags and deck and drywall screws and for tightening bolts.

But even though a cordless impact driver has a smaller housing than a cordless drill, there are still lots of places it simply won't fit, which is why Ridgid has introduced a 12-volt right-angle version, model R82233. I've been using this tool for about three months now and have discovered that there's a lot to like about it.

Power and Control

Powered by a 12-volt nicad battery, the R82233 generates about 700 inch-pounds of torque. That isn't as much as a conventional cordless impact driver's 1,000-plus inch-pounds, but it still easily tops the 200 produced by a 12-volt right-angle drill. I found that the tool had plenty of power, easily



A large lever-type trigger makes the R82233 impact driver easy to operate in almost any hand position, which is important when you can't see exactly what you're doing.



Ridgid R82233 Specs

Weight: 5 pounds
Rpm: 0-2,200 variable speed
Torque: 700 inch-pounds
Length: 15 inches
Width: 4 inches
Street price: \$170

Ridge Tool Co.
866/539-1710
www.ridgid.com

driving $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch lag screws. It accepts $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hex-shank bits and keeps them secure by means of a locking collar.

A paddle-type switch controls the 2,200-rpm variable-speed motor. I really liked the large switch because it made it easy to operate the tool in just about any hand position. A sliding reverse switch is located right below the trigger.

Problem-Solver

This is the kind of tool that, once you have it available, you find useful for all kinds of projects. For example, I was recently installing a closet system in a Cape-style house. The hanging track was being placed at the top of the wall beneath a sloping ceiling in a space only about 4 inches deep. Ordinarily, a tight space like this would mean using hex-head fasteners with a conventional ratchet, but the R82233 was perfect for the job. I'm sure it spared me at least an hour of turning screws by hand.

As with other impact drivers, the R82233's impact

Toolbox | Ridgid R82233

action doesn't start until the clutch detects sufficient resistance to make it necessary. That means you can use this tool for occasional drilling, provided you have a hex-shank bit and don't apply too much forward pressure. When you push too hard, the tool starts impacting, which slows drilling considerably. I used it to make a few holes during a bath remodel because the tool was within reach, but it won't replace a right-angle drill.

The Verdict

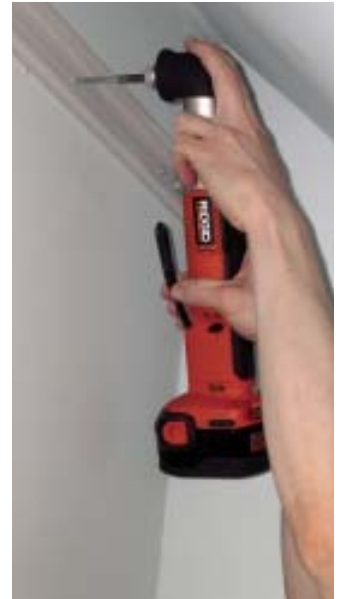
This is a well-made power tool and works exactly as advertised. The only drawback I found was that you really need two hands to use it — one to hold on to the housing and one to apply forward pressure to the driver bit. Unfortunately, you don't always have two hands available, so the only alternative is to

start the screw one-handed and then switch to a two-handed grip to finish it off.

The R82233 is a specialized tool, and it's one you could probably survive without. Nevertheless, having one to turn to when you find yourself in tight situations definitely trumps wasting time with improvised solutions. Do-it-all remodelers and the mechanical trades should find the tool especially valuable — it would be a godsend for installing ductwork.

If I could have only one cordless impact driver, I'd buy a more conventional T-handled model. But if I could afford more than one, I'd certainly consider getting an R82233 for those inevitable situations where space is at a premium.

With one battery and a case, the R82233 costs about \$170. — *Patrick McCombe*



Designed for tight spaces, the tool needs only about 3 1/2 inches of clearance, making it great for joining cabinets and working in narrow stud cavities.