

Toolbox

Ridgid 18-Volt Combo Kit

by Gary Godbersen

I recently had the chance to check out Ridgid's new 18-volt four-piece cordless combo kit, model #R922. The kit includes a cordless drill with hammer function, 6¹/₂-inch circular saw, reciprocating saw, flashlight, two-bay battery charger, and two batteries, all packed in a heavy-duty nylon bag. While the Ridgid name has been around plumbing circles longer than copper tubing, the manufacturer is new to the cordless power tool industry, so I was interested to test these.

Heart of the System

The charger is beefy, measuring 9 by 7 inches by 5 inches high. It allows you to charge two batteries simultaneously and has self-diagnostic electronics that test the charger and pack every charging cycle. Compared to the single-hole, one-light charger included with my other cordless drill, it struck me as big and cumbersome. The manufacturer claims that it provides faster, more complete charging and prolongs battery life.

The literature indicates that it takes about 30 minutes for a battery to charge, but I found that most recharge times tended to take from 15 to 20 minutes. The charger has a cooling fan that comes on whenever a battery is charging. The fan continues to run even after the pack is fully charged, so my coworkers ribbed me about carting around a hair dryer.

Drill

Once I got the green light from the charger, I grabbed the cordless drill and went to work. Like most carpenters, I consider my cordless drill the one battery-powered tool that's indispensable, and I used the Ridgid drill nearly every day for about two months.

The drill has plenty of power for



Because fast charging generates a lot of heat, the Ridgid two-bay charger uses a fan to cool the packs. Mesh-covered holes in the pack allow air to reach the individual cells.

screwing and drilling, and the reversing/neutral switch is conveniently placed above the trigger. Switching between the two speeds is smooth, and 24 clutch positions prevent breaking or overdriving a screw.

The comfortable T-handle grip is complemented by an easily adjusted auxiliary handle that includes a depth rod for drilling concrete or counter boring. I checked out the hammer function when I needed to attach some sleepers to a concrete floor. While it works for occasional drilling, I'd save the heavy-duty stuff for your rotary hammer.

My only complaint with the drill is that the knurled locking ring on the



The 18-volt drill has a two-speed transmission with 24 clutch positions housed in an aluminum gear case. The auxiliary handle adjusts easily and removes without anything having to be taken apart.



While some newer drills have a transmission lock that holds the chuck stationary for one-handed bit changes, the 18-volt Ridgid does not — bit changes require two hands. The author found the small knurls on the chuck less comfortable than other designs.



A small lever unlocks the blade clamp for easy changes. Blades can be installed upside down and even when the clamp is at the top of its stroke.

chuck is not as comfortable as others I've used. At 7 pounds 3 ounces, it's also a little heavy, though comparable to 18-volt drills from other manufacturers.

Reciprocating Saw

The reciprocating saw feels heavy and solid and has a nice blade-change mechanism. The flip-up lever is a vast improvement over the old-fashioned pinch bolt on my corded recip saw. Unfortunately, the shoe adjustment doesn't work as well: Two bolts hold it in place, and it requires a hex wrench.

A variable-speed trigger controls the speed from 0 to 2,500 strokes per minute, but it doesn't have a dial or lock to keep the speed constant. Although the saw vibrated more than the corded saws I've used, it has excellent power, easily cutting plywood sheathing, rough framing, 1/8-inch metal bar stock, and PVC drainpipe.

Starting with a fresh battery, I made a series of crosscuts in a 2x3 stud to test run time. I managed 53 cuts before the battery was dead. Even though I let the saw stop between cuts, it essentially

ran continuously for about 12 minutes. My only complaints with this tool are the antiquated shoe adjustment and the safety lock above the trigger. While I'm sure the safety switch is a good idea, it requires too much contortion to start the saw.

Circular Saw

I've never owned a cordless circular saw, so at first I was a little skeptical about its capabilities, but I was surprised at how well it performs. It won't replace your corded saw, but it's handy for small jobs or where power is tough to come by. The 6 1/2-inch blade bevels to 50 degrees and has a 2 1/8-inch depth of cut. It crosscuts 2x framing material well, although it tends to bog down or stop if it's pushed too hard when ripping. I also tried crosscutting some rough 8/4 Douglas fir and 4/4 maple. The saw cut those materials easily.

To test run time, I made continuous crosscuts in a kiln-dried spruce 2x3 using a freshly charged battery. I was able to do 55 cuts, but the saw slowed noticeably after about 40. With a fresh charge, I was able to rip another



The cordless circular saw has a scale on the back of the blade guard that shows the depth of cut at a glance. The 6 1/2-inch blade can cut through 2x framing material at a 50-degree bevel. White markings on a black background make depth and bevel settings easy to see.



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2x3 about 20 feet before the battery gave out.

At 12 inches long, the heavy-duty aluminum shoe is stable, and bevel settings are easy to read. The circular saw, like the reciprocating saw, has a safety switch above the trigger that must be depressed before starting the saw.

Flashlight

The flashlight that rounds out the kit has a lantern-style handle and an easy-to-use trigger-type switch. It's well bal-

anced, and the xenon bulb is bright and effective. I was pleasantly surprised to find that a fully charged pack would keep it burning for about 3¹/₂ hours.

The Verdict

Overall, my impression of this kit was positive. I don't think either the recip saw or the circ saw will replace your corded ones for production cutting, but they are useful and plenty strong for particular tasks. At a street price of \$480, this combo kit is priced

about the same as the other pro-duty kits and deserves consideration if you're in the market for a cordless kit.

Gary Godbersen is a carpenter and woodworker in northern Vermont.

Cleanup Goes Cordless

by Patrick McCombe

Admittedly, I'm a bit of a neat freak, but I think DeWalt's newest cordless tool, the DC500 shop vac, is one of the best ideas to hit the job site in a long time. The two-gallon vacuum runs on any of DeWalt's standard battery packs from 12 to 18 volts. For bigger jobs or when batteries are in short supply, you can plug it in and it automatically switches to AC power.

Features

Aside from running cordless, the DC500 has a number of features that make it significantly better than many compact vacuums. It's capable of both wet and dry pickup, and you don't have to change or remove the filter when sucking up liquids. The pleated-fabric filter works well at capturing small particles, and it cleans up easily. It even held on to a bottle's worth of blue chalk that I spilled during a remodeling project, without blowing it all over the place.

The tool's housing is made of impact-resistant ABS plastic. I especially liked the high-quality latches that clamp the tank to the motor housing. They hold securely and latch easily. A flexible, real-rubber hose locks into the tank



DeWalt's DC500 will run on any DeWalt standard battery pack from 12 to 18 volts. The battery compartment is behind a gasketed door that prevents dirt particles from escaping the housing. With an 18-volt pack, it runs about 13 minutes, plenty of time for a quick cleanup.

and stores in a special holster along with a crevice tool and a 6-inch nozzle. A threaded drain makes emptying liquids easier.

In an informal test, I plugged in a new 18-volt battery and let the vac run. It ran for about 13 minutes, which seems like plenty of time for most cleanup tasks. The tool has enough power for what it's intended for, quick cleanups of sawdust and remodeling dirt, but the tank is too small for bigger jobs.

A lot of builders and remodelers are bothered by noisy vacs, and this one definitely makes a racket — the high-pitched blower is especially loud in tight spaces. But because the tool isn't meant



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The DC500's pleated-fabric filter captures small particles effectively and removes with a quarter turn so you can bang off the dirt. This dirty filter (right) was still providing good suction before cleaning, a testament to the excellent fabric.



A threaded drain plug makes emptying a tank filled with water easy. A rubber gasket prevents leaks, and large knurls make the tool easy to grip, even with gloves on.



for extended cleaning or dust collection, I don't think it's a big problem.

The Verdict

While it won't replace your full-sized shop vac, the DC500 is great for small messes. The cordless convenience makes it easy to clean up a pile of dirt or sawdust before it can get tracked around the house or job site. The little vac also makes it easy to keep your truck clean — you could give it the once-over while you wait for an inspector or subcontractor to show up.

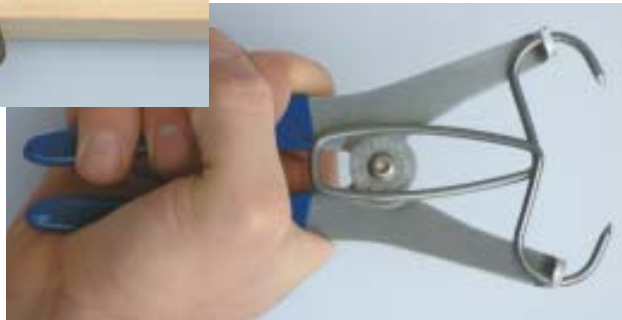
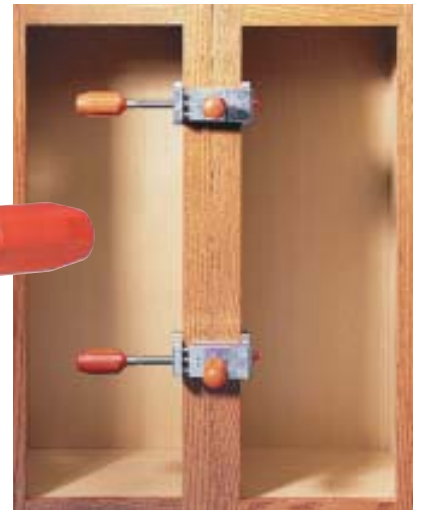
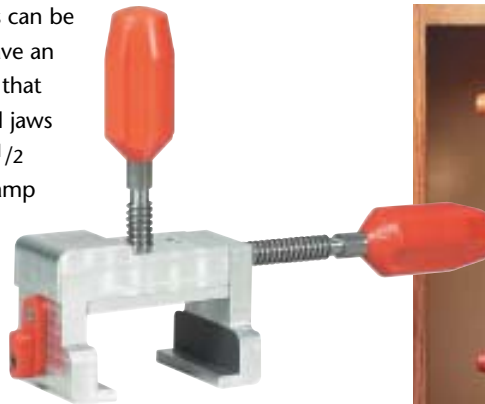
I have only one complaint: In keeping with its super-portable nature, it should have a shoulder strap so you can carry it while your hands are full of other stuff.

The DC500 costs \$100, which seems like a fair price. But that doesn't include a battery pack or charger, so if you don't have any other DeWalt cordless tools, that will add at least another \$100.

JIGS & CLAMPS

Not Just a Pretty Face? While many clamps can be used for joining cabinets, *Cabinet Claws* from Pony have an additional screw for aligning the face and drill guides that ensure straight and accurate screw holes. The padded jaws have a 4-inch capacity and work with frames up to 1 1/2 inches thick. The maker also offers a version of the clamp for European-style frame-less cabinets. Both varieties sell for about \$60 a pair.

Adjustable Clamp Company, 312/666-0640, www.adjustableclamp.com.



Good Grip. Getting tight outside corners and preassembling coffers and other elaborate trim are a lot easier with these cool *Miter Clamps* from Collins. These spring-loaded clamps have sharp points that grip firmly without slipping, and the tiny holes are a lot easier to fix than the bigger ones left by competitive products. While you don't necessarily need them, *Miter Clamp Pliers* make placement and opening the clamps to their maximum 2-inch spread easier. If you're a finish carpenter doing high-end work, you'll wonder how you lived without them — really. A dozen clamps sell for \$30, and the pliers sell for \$15.

Collins Tool Company, 888/838-8988, www.collinstool.com.



On the Fence. A good featherboard can improve efficiency, quality, and safety, but the time-consuming setup is frequently more trouble than it's worth. However, *Grip-Tite Magnetic Feather Boards* set up faster than traditional featherboards because the magnetic base holds them firmly to cast-iron table saws and steel fences without clamps. The manufacturer sells a steel plate that bolts to aluminum stock fences. According to the manufacturer, the Grip-Tite is strong enough to hold a sheet of plywood tight to the table without any out-feed support. Grip-Tite featherboards sell for \$40 each; fence plates start at \$25.

Mesa Vista Design, 800/475-0293, www.grip-tite.com.