

Makita 36-Volt Cordless Chain Saw

Chain Saw Models HCU02ZX2 / HCU02C1

Makita

800.462.5482

makitatools.com

Web price: \$360 / \$540

by Michael Springer

Makita HCU02ZX2 / HCU02C1 Specs

Bar length: 12 inches

Chain: 3/8-inch pitch (low profile), 0.043-inch gauge, 46 drive links

Chain speed (no load): 27.5 feet per second

Batteries: Two 18-volt, 3.0-Ah / one 36-volt, 2.6-Ah

Weight: 11.2 pounds / 10 pounds

Accessories: 36-volt battery (BL3626), \$350; two-pack of 18-volt batteries and charger, \$200

Outdoor power equipment that runs on large, 36-volt battery packs is the norm in much of Europe and Scandinavia. But Makita's new 36-volt cordless chain saw has a novel feature that no other brand has—it can be used with either one 36-volt battery or two 18-volt batteries. So if you already own Makita tools that run on 18-volt lithium-ion batteries, you can buy the chain saw without having to buy into a 36-volt battery and charger system. As such, the saw is sold as two different models: the HCU02ZX2, which includes the tool and a two-battery adapter (with no batteries or charger); and the HCU02C1, which includes the tool along with a 36-volt battery and charger. I tested the saw in both configurations.

Features

This lightweight saw has a 12-inch sprocket nose bar that fits the 3/8-inch low-profile chain commonly found on electric and small gas chain saws. The adjusters for tensioning the chain and tightening the bar can both be operated without any tools, and as a bonus, with gloved hands.

An active chain brake mechanically stops the chain and shuts off power to the motor when triggered—a necessary safety feature on an electric chain saw in the event of accidental kickback and for safe handling in general. I click the brake lever on before carrying the saw around, checking the chain tension, or making any adjustments. I also activate the brake lever whenever I set down the saw, so that I can't accidentally start it the next time I pick it up.

Another handy feature is an adjustable oil pump that provides control over the flow of oil. When you're cutting thinner wood, this helps prevent excess oil from staining the work. The oil filler hole is on the small side, but access to it is unimpeded by the saw body.

Additional features include an easy-to-read oil-level window; battery fuel gauges on both slots of the dual-battery adapter and on the 36-volt battery itself; and a sturdy, retractable hanging hook, recessed into the bottom of the saw.

Ergonomics

The trigger handle features a generous amount of rubber grip surface, front and rear. The top-handle design may be preferable for arborists who cut while in a tree or in the bucket of a boom truck, but for general cutting, it requires more effort than a rear-handle chain saw. I often found myself gripping the side support of the front handle to add more twisting force—which took my hand out of position to trip the brake lever in the event of a kickback.

With both handles placed on the left side of the saw rather than being positioned inline with the bar, the saw tended to twist sideways during a cut. Over time, this can lead to fatigue, especially in your right hand. The low, unobtrusive





The saw can be used with either a pair of 18-volt batteries or a single 36-volt battery (shown above). The single-battery configuration offers less runtime, but better balance.

The flap covering the bar adjustment knob can be flipped out and rotated to adjust chain tension (right).



placement of the left handle looks sleek, but it would work much better if it were placed front and center.

Power and runtime

I tested the saw's capabilities in aggressive cutting trials, using new chains and freshly charged batteries for each test. In a debarked green tree limb 6 inches in diameter, I was able to make 35 cuts in an average of 7.7 seconds per cut when using dual 18-volt battery packs. Switching to 8-inch-diameter dry pine barn poles, I made 19½ cuts at 14.7 seconds each. With the 36-volt battery, the same test in dry pine netted only 12½ cuts at a time of 16.4 seconds each.

The results showed that dual 18-volt batteries do significantly more work than a single 36-volt pack; even so, there

is less than 5 minutes of runtime when the saw is really pushed. This may not seem like much, but to put it in perspective, that amount of cutting is equal to crosscutting 28 6-inch landscape timbers—which may be more than most guys cut before lunch, when they would have a chance to charge the batteries back up.

One battery or two?

A tool like this probably won't see daily use, so I think the dual-18-volt platform makes the most sense. Besides the cost savings, two 3.0 amp-hour 18-volt batteries store more energy than the 2.6 amp-hour 36-volt battery, demonstrated by having 56% more runtime during my high-demand cutting tests through thick timbers. Since the batteries are connected in series, however, a weak bat-

tery will degrade the tool's performance.

Using two 18-volt batteries and the battery adapter on this saw adds 1.2 pounds to the weight of the tool and alters its balance. With the single battery, the saw hangs in a flat, neutral position; with the adapter and two batteries, the saw is rear-heavy, which makes the bar pivot up toward the user. For general use on the ground, either battery option works fine. It's only when I take the saw up in a tree that the superior balance and sleeker shape of the 36-volt battery make it a necessity.

Michael Springer spent many years as a tool-magazine editor and is now a leading tool tester, industry journalist, and consultant based in Boulder County, Colo.