

A Prime Cordless 12-Inch Miter Saw

BY MARK CLEMENT

My work runs the gamut from trim, decks, and light framing to maintenance and service work, and a miter saw is usually at the center of my operations. My measure of a “good” saw is one that can stand tall all over the place, whether I’m setting up a cutting station for trimming out a room or lugging the saw into a backyard for a quick service call setup. Milwaukee’s new M18 Fuel dual bevel 12-inch sliding compound miter saw fits that definition, and then some.

I’ve been using this big saw for a couple of months on all kinds of jobs, giving me an opportunity to become familiar with the saw’s bevel adjustments, blade guard and LED blade light, and battery exchange. I looked at dust collection; I checked the saw’s accuracy; I changed blades, not only to see how well the saw cuts with different blades, but to see how easy—or hard—the blade-change operation is.

OUT OF THE BOX

After pulling the saw out of the box (I tested the kit version, or



The Milwaukee M18 Fuel 12-inch sliding compound miter saw, available in kit form (with multi-voltage charger and 12-Ah battery) or as a bare tool, has a compact footprint and weighs about 50 pounds (with battery).

2739-21HD, which includes a battery, charger, bag, and blade) and cutting away the packaging (no assembly required), I found that it wasn’t just accurate; it was sublimely accurate. And while I didn’t cut crown on the flat, the bevel detent tabs are dead-on and easily deployed. I’ve had saws that required launching an investigation to tune them up—and even then they were finicky. Milwaukee’s screws and tabs are easy to see and operate, and intuitive to tune up, if needed.

This kit comes with the M18 Redlithium high-output HD12.0-Ah battery and M18/M12 multi-voltage charger—sweet if you’re not on the system and sweet if you are because the battery charge lasts so long. It also includes a high-quality 60-tooth blade—easily a hundred bucks at retail and miles better than your average “included blade.”

The adjustments are excellent. Detents are solid and positive; handles don’t stick; and overriding a detent is a snap. The pointers are big, keenly visible, and sharp. They point; they don’t suggest.

TRIM AND TALL STOCK

I’ve been in the 10-inch-miter-saw universe a few years, all the while ruing the day I let my previous 12-inch saw go. The Milwaukee’s 12-inch size alone was refreshing enough simply cutting 5 1/2-inch ogee base nested. But the fact that the blade housing is notched to cut up to 6 3/4-inch vertical stock (7 1/2-inch nested crown) is gold-standard good. Mickey, the legendary trainer in the movie “Rocky,” says (yells) something about something that “weakens legs.” Tipping a 10-inch SCMS and cutting basic trim flat “slows cutting” just as dramatically, in my opinion.

Whether cutting southern yellow pine PT decking, 2-by framing, or finger-jointed and primed trim, the blade delivered little to no tear-out and glass-smooth end grain. The saw started smoothly and ran with a pleasant hum. After the cut, the electric brake eased the blade to a safe, smooth stop, a nice feature in a big saw like this.

POWER

A miter saw is central to my setups, where I turn to it over and over again to cut 2-bys for framing and blocking, 4x4 posts, decking and trim, and even small parts. In all cases, the Milwaukee delivered. I really looked for a difference—some kind of bog-down, resistance ... anything—where I could call the saw out as cordless and cool, but not quite ready for prime time. I couldn’t. This saw is definitely ready for prime time.

I don’t use any saw “all day,” so I can’t claim it can cut framing or 4x4s all day on a single charge, though it probably could get darn close (Milwaukee says to expect “up to 330 cuts per charge”). On the

Photos by Mark Clement

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Precise cuts are easy, thanks to the visibility offered by the louvered blade guard (left) and fine-tuneable 22.5-degree and 33.9-degree bevel detents (above).

other hand, I would know if I were constantly changing batteries. In trim mode, I went days before I was at two bars and needed a lunch-break recharge. In rough carpentry mode, the duress is greater, but a lunchtime charge (or spare battery, which I have from my Milwaukee string trimmer; also awesome) makes running out of lithium-ion magic unlikely, except *maybe* on a high-production site.

OTHER FEATURES, WELL DONE

Dust. Unless hooked up to dust collection, all miter saws let the powdery stuff past the bag. The Milwaukee channels the big stuff into its ample, formed dust bag really well. On exterior sites, it ejects dust in an impressive rooster tail.

Blade change. The guard rolls up high on the blade housing, exposing the arbor for easy blade changes. The saw has an easily-accessible push-in spindle lock and a hex wrench for tightening and loosening the blade bolt.

Mobility. The 2739-21HD is the same shape and has the same footprint as a corded model, but it's noticeably lighter (Milwaukee says 15%). It comes with a pair of screw-on side handles, but I find its built-in top handle offers a nice balance point for holding onto the saw during transport. I still use two hands: one on the handle, and one under the saw.

Guard and blade light. The guard is clear plastic and—thank you—louvered. It took a little practice to locate the louvers, but they're there and they're great for sighting the blade precisely at the cut line. Additionally, the Shadow Cut Line LED light is both terrific and accurate, though I used the saw for a week before figuring out there's also a switch to turn it on without engaging the blade.

Whether you're a dedicated trimmer, someone who mainly uses miter saws to cut blocking for framing, or a deck builder looking for one saw that will do a little bit of everything without being tied to AC power, this saw is a winner from frame to finish, and at all stops in between. \$850 (kit). milwaukeeetool.com

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The blade guard rolls up and out of the way for access to the arbor during blade changes (top). There's a push-button spindle lock on the right-hand side of the blade (above).