

Easily Adjustable Toolbelt

9855 Adjust-to-Fit FatLip Tool Bag System
Occidental Leather
707/824-2560
bestbelt.com
Street price: \$225

A toolbelt is a lot like a spouse: If you choose one in haste, odds are you'll regret it. Most of us can't manage more than one of either at a time. And it's smart to focus on compatibility and longevity, because when you find the right one, the rela-

tionship is 'til death do you part.

With that thinking in mind, I recently traded up to a new nylon-leather-hybrid belt from Occidental Leather. My familiar nylon belt (circa 1985) just hadn't kept up with my personal growth — up 20 pounds in the winter, down 19 in the summer; you do the math. That girth, combined with the fact that outside work in New England requires layering on the winter woolies, was leaving me feeling strangled when I strapped on the old belt.

A lot of toolbelts are difficult to adjust for seasonal fluctuations in waist size. Nylon belts with click-to-lock buckles are meant to be set at one size and left that way. Belts with traditional buckles work great until you get too fat for that particular belt. The Adjust-to-Fit belt combines both approaches, allowing for gross seasonal adjustments to be made with a nylon portion of the belt while day-to-day waist size variations due to changes in clothing are handled with a traditional leather belt and buckle. Occidental says the belt adjusts between 32 and 40 inches. I'll admit to a 38-inch waist, and I'm sure I could pass 40 inches before outgrowing the belt.

In terms of compatibility, this belt does it for me. It's got two big 10-inch-deep pouches that are somehow built so they stay open, easing access with a gloved hand. The one on the left is bare internally

— leaving plenty of room for fasteners — with slots on the outside for nail sets and cat's paws and combination squares. There's a spot for a layout square (I'd say the slot was for a Speed Square, but Swanson Tool Co. sends a legal notice when their trademarked name is used generically) between the large pouch and a smaller one — which has a compartment that would fit a chalkline — and then there's a third, small pouch higher up, just where I'd reach for my tape.

The big pouch on the right has a number of slots for pencils, chisels, pliers, and the like. Also on the right is a leather hammer loop — which makes less noise than a steel loop when I walk — one smaller nail pouch, and a cellphone pouch that snaps closed. As to durability, I've been using the belt only a few weeks. But Occidental has been making belts (in the USA) for as long as I've been wearing them, so I've got high expectations.

One downside to the belt is that because of its adjustable configuration, the pouches are always on the sides of my hips, making me wider in the beam. I've always preferred to position the pouches over my butt. But having the pouches to the side does make it easier to look in them for a misplaced tool. And for deck builders, being a little broader isn't as big a deal as for, say, trim carpenters, who have to fit through doorways without beating up the jambs.

Also, although it's not a problem for me, this belt is definitely aimed at right-handers. Occidental configures some of its belts for lefties, but this model isn't one of them. — *Andy Engel*



One-Handed Reciprocating Saw

**R3030 One-Handed Fuego
Reciprocating Saw**
Ridgid
800/474-3443
ridgid.com
Street price: \$69

by Mark Clement

The more I use the Ridgid R3030 one-handed reciprocating saw, the more I like it — and the more this little fireball is becoming my go-to recip saw for the periodic demo work that's part and parcel of deck and porch building.

I've used the R3030 to cut framing, nail-embedded wood (including rock-hard, bone-dry century-old Douglas fir), and old molding. Despite its diminutive size — 4 pounds, 4 amps — it delivers big power, for not very much money.

I cut 1-by and 2-by, and I also cut through framing nails — which is usually the best way to separate boards from each other. Of course, that means getting the blade in between the two boards to get at the nails, so there's plenty of resistance. But if the motor ever slowed down, or the 1/2-inch blade-stroke stuttered,

I couldn't tell. And there have been times I've leaned on the tool so much, I've felt it in my forearms by the end of a long day.

This saw is the best tool for tight-quarters cutting I've used. Designed for one-handed operation, the R3030 literally fits in my palm. Nevertheless, I almost always find myself using two hands to slowly rock the tool back and forth (this helps the blade clear sawdust from the cut, especially for wide boards). The back end of the tool near the cord boot provides a decent space for your hand and some needed extra leverage.

Here are some quick takes: The cord is long and supple; that's good. The wire frame around the blade and blade holder keeps your hand from getting in there, but I still feel close to the blade, where I want to be. The wire frame also delivers excel-

lent sight lines to the work. Blade change is a twist-and-release deal, and it works okay. The plug is lighted, so you can find it in a tangle of cords. The integral work light comes in handy. This tool is tough to beat, and the price rocks. ❖

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