

SawStop Portable Jobsite Saw

SawStop JSS-MCA
503.570.3200
sawstop.com
Price: \$1,300

by Andrew Wormer

I've done plenty of dumb things on the jobsite and gotten away with most of them. But one day, back when I worked full-time as a carpenter, the odds caught up with me, and a short length of 2-by blocking that I had just ripped on a portable table saw kicked back and hit me in the mouth. That blow broke a few teeth and my jaw and taught me a few lessons about the limitations of workers' comp and health insurance.

A blade guard would have prevented that accident, but it won't prevent a finger from making accidental contact with a spinning blade. Neither will the flesh-sensing technology in SawStop's new portable jobsite saw, which I've been trying out. But what it will do is stop the blade almost instantly if a finger does touch it—in less than 5 milliseconds, before any major damage can occur, according to the manufacturer.

By now, most PDB readers are probably familiar with SawStop. The company

introduced its well-regarded cabinet saw almost a decade ago and recently introduced a contractor's saw, but neither of those saws is portable nor practical on most jobsites. The JSS-MCA is, however, thanks to a compact design and an integral wheeled stand to tote around its 80-pound weight.

I've seen enough of SawStop's famous hot-dog demonstrations to be convinced that its safety mechanism works. So in this quick review, I'll focus on the saw's other features. (To see a video of it in action, including a demonstration of the blade braking mechanism, go to "Tested SawStop Jobsite Table Saw," at toolsofthetrade.net.)

The first thing I noticed is that the saw is a little more complicated to operate than just flipping on the paddle switch. Since the safety mechanism can be triggered by conductive material—such as wet wood—as well as by skin, you can check a material's capacitance to see if it is conductive enough to activate the system. To do this, you put the saw in "bypass" mode and make a few test cuts. Indicator lights on the saw will tell you whether it's okay to exit bypass mode and activate the safety system (flashing green), or whether the material is too con-

ductive and must be cut with the saw in bypass mode (flashing green and red). This is important, because triggering the system will consume the \$69 safety cartridge and at least damage (if not destroy) the blade.

The saw has great on-board storage for the fence, push stick (included), wrenches, and other accessories (see photo, below right). The table extends for a full 25 1/2-inch rip capacity, and the blade and removable guard raise and lower easily with a single turn of the wheel. Tilting the blade is just as quick, and there's a micro-adjust for dialing the angle in precisely. In use, it's not as quiet as a cabinet saw, but the 1 1/2-hp motor and standard blade cut cleanly through 2-by framing and some sturdy 5/4 yellow birch I had lying around. The fence worked smoothly and locked in place securely, and the scale and indicator were accurate (though I couldn't figure out if the indicator was adjustable).

To test the saw's dust-collecting ability, I hooked it up to a wet/dry vac and ripped a bunch of MDF. A port in the back accepts a standard 2-inch-diameter hose, and this simple system did a good job of sucking up most of that fine dust.

Andrew Wormer is the editor of PDB.



Deck Groove Cleaner

Deck Groove Cleaner
925.900.8612
deckgroovecleaner.com
Price: \$50

To properly maintain wood decking and prevent rot, the leaves, moss, dirt, and other moisture-collecting debris that accumulates in the gaps between the boards must be periodically removed. If you only need to do this once or twice a year, you're probably OK with getting down on your hands and knees with a putty knife or old Sawzall blade and digging it out, or setting up a pressure washer. But California deck-builder Richard Houghton—who has cleaned thousands of decks over his 14-year career—decided that there had to be a better way and developed what he calls the Deck Groove Cleaner.

The tool features a sturdy fiberglass handle fitted with a stainless steel head, which is corrosion-resistant, of course. Houghton tells me that he spent a lot of time fine-tuning the head design, experimenting with the profile and different metal thicknesses, before he was satisfied with the final product, which is assembled in the U.S. You can order one from him at his website. —A.W. ♦



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