

Festool Planex Sander and Cleantec Dust Extractor

BY MYRON FERGUSON

When you're doing drywall work, dust happens; it's part of the process. Nobody likes the dust, and other subs dread sanding day. It's important to be professional and try to reduce the amount of airborne dust by capturing as much of it as possible and then thoroughly cleaning the jobsite when you're done. That also needs to happen quickly for the job to progress. Using a power sander to help speed up the sanding process and capture the dust as you go can help, but the tool must be easy to use. If it's cumbersome, heavy, hard to use, or too aggressive, or it leaves too rough of a finish, it will cause more problems than it solves.

When I received the Planex sander (LHS 2-M 225 EG) and the CleanTec vacuum (CT36 E AC) from Festool, I was hoping for something with significant improvements, as I've been using the Festool sanders for years. I have been happy with those sanders, but I was hoping for a chance to report on an even better one. So, I was pleased with this new version. The dust extraction was exceptional, and I found myself sanding without even wearing a dusk mask—although I still recommend wearing one. I also liked that it's lightweight and that the weight is even reduced because of the superior suction to the wall (the suction is adjustable).

If I were to compare power sanders with pole sanders, I might be concerned with the additional weight of a power sander. But that isn't an issue, because all I'm doing is moving the tool from one place to the next—the tool is doing the sanding work. When using a traditional pole sander, you must apply continuous pressure as you're moving it along the surface, which I have always considered good exercise, but enough is enough and time is money. I found using power sanders is as much as 30% faster than pole sanding.

This new sander design has a lot more holes in the sanding head, so you can't use the old papers on the sander, or, at least, you shouldn't—so that it works at its best. Those numerous and smaller holes help collect more dust compared with older models. Another feature of this model is that instead of using just a rotating head, it has a random orbit sanding motion, which helps reduce any scratches that you might cause with a typical power sander. One thing to keep in mind is most of us are using lightweight compounds for the final coat, so be sure you're not using too coarse of a sanding grit. I usually go with a 220-grit sandpaper.

At first, I wasn't too sure what I thought of the handle having a T-grip on the end, but it turned out to be handy. It is necessary to



The CT36 dust extractor comes with a removable cradle for holding the sander when not in use. The top of the extractor will also fit the Festool Sustainer boxes (1). While the T-handle may feel odd at first, its position makes sanding overhead much more comfortable (2).

Photos by Myron Ferguson

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at jlc_tools@zondahome.com.

use the attachment that holds the hose and power cord away from your hand. I didn't attach this at first, and it seemed like the hose and cord were always getting wrapped around my arm, so that's a feature you're going to want to take advantage of.

The number one concern I have when using any power sander is how much dust control it has and, here, the Planex exceeded my expectations. Also, I used the unit with a Cleantec dust extractor vacuum, which does an excellent job. It has an auto-clean system that cleans the filter as you work to maintain suction. This was the first time I used the plastic bags that fit inside the Cleantec to capture dust; all you need to do is unhook the bag and throw it out when it's full. While I think it's good feature, when I run out of the bags, I probably won't replace them. I just dump the dust into the garbage from the vacuum. You have your sanding tool, you have your dust extractor, and then you can use the cleaning kit for the vacuum to clean the floors, electrical boxes, and around windows and door cutouts. I liked using the complete system.

If I'm going to have a complaint, the hose and cord for the sander are too short for my taste. I always attach an extra cord, and I buy an extra hose and connect it to the one that comes with the tool so I have twice the length. I don't want to be dragging the dust extractor along with me; I want to put it in the center or corner of the room and sand that whole room without having to pull it along. I believe Festool makes an attachment sleeve for attaching two hoses together. I didn't have one of those, so I just taped the hoses together—that has worked fine over the years for me.

Another concern is whether the new Planex with the smaller holes will work for popcorn ceiling removal, like my older sanders do. That I will have to test; for now, I will be using this new sander just for drywall sanding.

The Planex is high-quality tool with an overall length of 55 inches, which is fine for me reaching an 8-foot ceiling. I know if I'm sanding a 9-foot ceiling, I might not be happy with the reach. So, I may end up getting on my stilts when I'm working the higher ceilings.

Sanding day is typically the last day of the drywall job, which makes the sanding a little more rewarding because hopefully the following day, we're going to be starting a fresh job. I used to say that drywall dust is like money in my pocket, and I guess I meant that we're finishing up the job, and it's time to get paid. Nobody likes the dust, dust in the air, dust on everything ... this tool helps make managing it a lot easier.

As an afterthought, I want to add that I like the lighter duty electrical cord on the Cleantec. On my older units, the cord is too heavy.

The Planex LHS 2-M 225 EQ sander sells for \$1,000; the Cleantec CT36 E AC dust extractor, \$990. festool.com

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PRO TIPS FOR DRYWALL SANDERS

JLC asked Myron to give us his pointers for using a powered drywall sander. This is what he suggests:

- **Don't run the tool at full speed and full suction.**

Medium speed is less likely to cause oversanding, while too slow a speed will not work well at all. If you have too much suction, it will be hard to move the sander around as it sticks to the surface.

- **Keep the sander moving, always.**

If you hold still on a section, you will oversand. Steady, sweeping movements are best for both finish and speed of work.

- **Start the sander near the compound and move to it.**

If you start directly on the compound, you can cause swirls and gouges as the tool starts up. As you finish an area, pull off away from the seam or compound.

- **Have good lighting.**

While this advice is not just for a power sander, it's best practice to have the area well lit. If you can't see your work, you will miss something. The sander has a built-in light, which is great but not a substitute for good overall lighting.

- **Don't go deep into the corners.**

Getting too close to the edges of the ceiling or walls will cause you to dig into the other surface, meaning more touch-ups.

- **Know your surface.**

Check the compound before you start. If it is soft, then be sure to start with a softer grit and begin in a less obvious area to test. Being too eager will create more work later.

- **It's not a magic wand.**

The tool may not get everything, so a light pass with a pole sander will probably be necessary. This also gives you a chance to check your work to see if it needs more sanding or mud.

Cordless Microwave Oven

BY JAMES BURGESS

The new Makita microwave (MW001GZ 40-volt Max XGT) is one of the more unique cordless tools out there; none of the other tool brands out there seem to sell one.

As a microwave, it works great. With one 40-volt battery, you get about eight minutes at its full 500-watt capacity. Or you can use two 40-volt batteries and get about double that. Though its max power is about half that of a conventional microwave, it's still plenty of power to warm up last night's stew; it'll just take a bit longer to get hot. Other than leftovers, the one thing tradespeople are interested in heating up is their cup of coffee. For that, you are going to need a regular-size microwaveable cup to fit in the unit.

For what seems like a large enough appliance, it has a small oven: 10 by 9 1/2 by 4 inches. That's just big enough for a frozen microwaveable meal and short containers.

Features include a USB port for charging other devices; a low-battery alert; a sensor to turn off the microwave if it tips; a simple-to-clean interior; and an LCD display with easy-to-use controls. The fold-flat carry handle makes the microwave easy to move around; it weighs about 20 pounds without batteries.

Having the unit on site certainly got a lot of attention. Everyone who saw it had questions and wanted to give it a try. For around \$800, it's a pricey conversation starter. For me, it doesn't solve a problem that I couldn't fix with a cheap, second-hand microwave. While it is innovative and was fun to try, I can't justify putting it on my wish list.

However, if you are running the 40-volt line of batteries and are on the road or not near a plug, this microwave could be a nice benefit for your crew. A hot meal from home



Makita's microwave runs on batteries.

on a cold day always feels like luxury on site. And, as with the rest of Makita's lifestyle line, it could also be handy for camping or another off-grid activity.

James Burgess is a carpenter and cabinetmaker in Ottawa. Follow him at @jbcwoodwork.

Work Pants That Work

BY MARK CLEMENT

During my tenure with JLC, my primary influence was Don Dunkley, author of many JLC articles and a progenitor of JLC Live. If there is one word to say about Dunk, it could be efficiency. As a framer, he was ruthless in rooting out wasted motion or time. That brings me to the Brunt Martin work pants that I've been wearing—and trying to wear out (see photo, right).

They embody Dunk.

The pants have no flaps, velcro, "cargo" pockets, loops, or pen holders—not a lick of wasted motion. All storage points are easily accessible, front and back. The belt loops make sense. The thigh pockets are awesome for wallet, keys, and phone. They have a hidden, double knee layer. The pants fit and move when I move in all kinds of weather.

During my testing of the pants, I demoed a bathroom, built a few decks, and dry-stacked a stone wall. On one particu-

larly low deck that had what I call "critter countermeasures," I spent several days on my knees trenching around the bases of two 16-by-18-foot platforms and integrating chicken wire with the deck structure. The Martins show no signs of wear.

I also wore the Martins (with a base layer) while doing snow removal on my tractor in 20°F weather. In all cases, the durable water repellent (DWR) finish provided a protective layer that prevented me from getting soaked. I didn't know these pants even had the DWR when I was wearing them, but it made a noticeable difference in my comfort level.

For everything from crouching to shoveling snow off a stoop to picking up another scoop of shattered tile from a bathroom floor to sitting in the truck while running from home center to client meeting back to the current job, they're comfortable. They



bend, they flex, they breathe—and they don't cost a million dollars. No motion wasted in delivering maximum motion. Dunk approved. The pants sell for \$80. bruntworkwear.com

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Photos: top, Marc Forger; bottom, courtesy @MyFixitupLife