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DeWalt Cordless Framing Nailer

by **ROB CORBO**

In tight urban spaces, where I do a lot of work, compressors and hoses for pneumatic tools can be difficult to maneuver and even hazardous. So, I was excited to test the DeWalt DCN920 cordless framing nailer, a 20-volt, brushless, 21-degree gun weighing 10 pounds (with battery) that drives plastic collated stick nails from 2 to 3½ inches. Our kit contained the gun, a 5-Ah battery, charger, belt hook, no-mar tip, and kit bag (it's also available gun only). We loved that the battery and charger are interchangeable with our other DeWalt 20-volt tools. DeWalt also offers the DCN930, a 30-degree, paper-tape cordless unit.

A month after receiving the nailer, we started a renovation on a four-story attached home in a high-density city neighborhood. The project included an addition off the back that required a variety of framing tasks, including walls, joists, rafters, roof decking, and subfloors—a perfect trial for the gun. The crew was used to pneumatics, but the DeWalt scored points right out of our truck: Grabbing one bag versus grabbing a gun, compressor, and hose was a pleasure in a town where parking spots in front of the job are rare.

Of course, the real test was using the gun. We ran a pneumatic nailer and the DeWalt cordless side by side. Our familiar pneumatics—which we've used for decades—felt better balanced and more productive from the start. But the DeWalt was picked up more frequently as the job progressed and we negotiated tight spaces and locations the compressor couldn't reach without being moved, as well as subfloors and scaffold,

where a hose would get under foot, and the roof, where locating a compressor, hose, and gun for nailing down decking would have been a drag. Will the DeWalt replace our pneumatics? No. Does it complement them? Absolutely.

The DCN920 has plenty of power to drive nails to required depth in both sequential (single fire) and bump (rapid fire) modes, regardless of the material—natural or engineered. Both modes have impressive recovery times thanks to improvements to the flywheel design over previous models; the faster flywheel speed produces a no-wait nailing sequence that increases efficiency and performance. Framing performance can be improved further by removing the no-mar tip cover used for finer materials and uncovering a claw tip that minimizes slippage when toenailing.

We had only two gun jams in a month of use. A trigger lock-off button that prevents the gun from firing should be used when the user is making adjustments or when the unit is not being used.

The gun's magazine holds one strip of nails (36 nails), which doesn't take long to exhaust. In addition, since a dry-fire lockout restricts the gun from firing when five to eight nails remain, an extended magazine (sold separately) that holds a second strip is an attractive upgrade. So, figure an additional \$90 into your budget. The nailer retails as a stand-alone tool for approximately \$375 and as a kit for \$475. dewalt.com

Rob Corbo is a building contractor based in Elizabeth, N.J., specializing in high-quality renovations.



The author found the DCN920 ideal for situations where hoses and compressors would be a nuisance **(1, 2)**.



Makita Cordless Tile Saw

by JOHN CARROLL

Handheld grinders have served as tough, little workhorses on my jobs for decades. I keep two 4½-inch grinders on hand and, to save time, I leave one set up with a metal cutting blade and the other with a diamond masonry blade. With the work I do, my masonry grinder gets the most use. It works great to cut tile, bricks, blocks, stone, concrete, and mortar, but there are two persistent problems. The first is dust. The diamond blade doesn't cut; it grinds. That produces a cloud of pulverized minerals that makes an unholy mess, presents a long-term health hazard, and creates miserable conditions to work in. The second problem is that controlling the depth of the cut is difficult. Unlike circular saws, standard handheld grinders don't have a table. Without one, users can't lock in the depth of the blade and must regulate it by eye.

The Makita XCC01Z 18v LXT Cordless Masonry Saw solves both of

those problems. To keep dust down, it has two systems for running water over the spinning blade. The first is a simple gravity system that employs a small, 12-ounce tank attached to the top of the blade guard (1). Water flows from the tank into a tube and over the edge of the blade. By rotating a lever on the blade guard, you can control the rate of flow or cut it off completely between cuts. This system works well, with only one drawback: The tank must be refilled frequently. So, Makita provides an optional hose that can be attached in place of the tank and connected to a garden hose or, with an adapter (not included), to a sink faucet.

To regulate the depth of cut, the tool is configured like a standard circular saw with a table that can be locked in place or tilted for beveled cuts (2). A built-in LED makes the cut line easier to see. The saw has a 5-inch diamond blade and a maximum depth of cut of

1¾ inches at 90 degrees. The saw can cut right through granite slabs, brick, and concrete pavers. It goes through batteries quickly, however, so it's best to have at least two batteries and a charger handy.

The only limitation I found is that the cutter can't be used on vertical surfaces. Makita makes this clear in the instruction manual in all capital letters: CAUTION: THIS TOOL SHOULD ONLY BE USED ON HORIZONTAL SURFACES. This restriction makes the Makita cordless cutter a poor choice for surgical demolition on a tile wall or grinding out the mortar joints in a brick wall for tuck pointing. But, if you need to cut almost any masonry material on a workbench, it's a great tool to have. The bare tool costs \$255. makitatools.com

John Carroll, author of Working Alone, is a builder who lives and works in Durham, N.C.



A 12-ounce bottle provides adjustable water flow to keep down dust (1). For constant water feed, a hose attachment can be used instead. Depth of cut on the compact, 6.6-pound Makita XCC01Z can be set with its adjustable baseplate (2).

PHOTOS: MATT NANEY

Mafell Crosscutting System

by NATHANIEL CARLSEN

Having repeatedly hauled a miter saw and table saw in and out of a van, I wanted one saw that could make 90% of the cuts I need on a remodeling job. That's a lot to ask, but after using Mafell's KSS40 saw, I think I found it.

If ordered as a kit (\$1,715), the KSS40 comes in a Systainer with a crosscut track, batteries, charger, dust bag, rip fence, and a rolled-up Flexi-Guide—a flexible, spring-steel guide rail that unfurls to 55 inches long. I used the saw on the Flexi-Guide and on my Bosch tracks; both work, though the Flexi-Guide is needed for bevel rips, and the cut quality, at least on veneer ply, seemed better with the Bosch tracks. I ripped extension jambs, diced up $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood, and trimmed doors; at no point did the saw lack power. The dust collection is excellent with the dust bag, and when we made long rips with the saw hooked up to a vacuum, the collection exceeded that of other track saws I've used.

The saw also plunge cuts, but rather than hinging the entire saw down,

you lower it down two rails with a lever. This setup gave me additional control; I cut the head stock of jack miters with ease, plunging the saw until my cut line ended right where I wanted it.

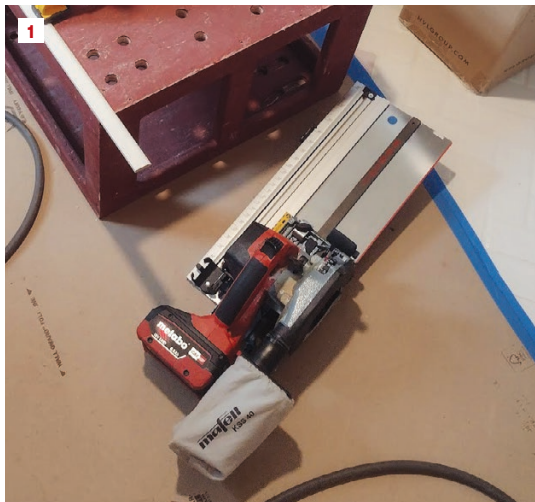
For straight crosscuts less than 13 inches, the KSS40 clips onto a self-retracting shorter guide rail. A knob on the rail's left side adjusts to any angle from 0 to 60 degrees to the left and 0 to 45 degrees to the right. With the saw at the cut's starting point, I pivot the saw and track until the adjusted angle stop contacts the edge of the workpiece, then I make the cut. Maximum depth of cut is $1\frac{1}{16}$ inches at 90 degrees and $1\frac{1}{16}$ inches at a 45-degree bevel, allowing the saw to handle most tasks despite its $4\frac{1}{16}$ -inch blade. I mitered casing, cut scribe molding, and cut 2-by PT stringers and, in every case, the saw was up to the task. In fact, the saw is more precise with unknown angles than my miter saw. Mark an unknown angle on a workpiece and slide the KSS40's adjustment knob along until the splinter guard follows the mark, with micro

adjustments of 0.25 degree. My only gripe is that the retraction from the cut is spotty, but this hasn't been a significant hindrance.

The KSS40 has become my go-to for many tasks, and while not a replacement for a miter saw on a big trim job due to its limited ability to handle small pieces and profiled trim, it makes an excellent companion. With it, I can square off the ends of lumber in the pile with minimal lifting, slide along the floor to cut baseboard as I install it, or take it 20 feet up in a lift to cut exterior trim.

On the down side, the KSS40 has a limited cutting depth and a proprietary blade, and it's expensive. Still, the saw was worth the cost for one primary reason: its size. The KSS40 is nimble and controllable, more suited to detail work than any other circular saw I've used. The Mafell KSS 40 (bare tool) costs \$1,115 at timberwolftools.com.

Nathaniel Carlsen is a carpenter with TDS Custom Construction in Madison, Wis.



Attached to its crosscut track, the Mafell KSS40 is still light and portable (1). When used with Mafell's 55-inch flexible track, the saw can break down sheet goods or scribe fillers (2).

PHOTOS: NATHANIEL CARLSEN