

Tools of the Trade

ISOTunes Free Aware Earbuds

by MIKE WHALEN

As someone who has been working in construction and remodeling for 30-plus years, I use loud power tools almost every day. These include chipping hammers, reciprocating saws, chop saws, nail guns, fans, and vacuums, just to name a few. Every tool has its own decibel rating. Many subject the user to more than the 70-85 decibels (or dba) in an 8-hour period that's considered safe for an adult.

To prevent hearing damage, I always try to use ear protection. Whether on the job or mowing the yard at home, I've used plenty of the orange foam disposable ear plugs and the full over-the-ear " earmuff " hearing protectors. The biggest challenge I have had with these is the need to remove them to have a conversation with anyone on the jobsite.

In my search for alternatives, I started researching online to see if there were any " noise canceling " earbuds out there for the construction work site. To my surprise, I came across ISOTunes " Free Aware " earbuds. They let me listen to music or make phone calls while also protecting

my ears from potentially dangerous noise levels.

I demoed the ISOTunes " Free Aware " earbuds on the job for two weeks and was very impressed. I could adjust the environmental sound control in order to hear what else was going on around me. At the same time, louder noises are canceled out—like when a power tool starts putting out more than 85 decibels. (The buds are ANSI-certified 25 dB noise-reduction-compliant.)

The Free Aware earbuds also include the features typical with other styles of earbuds, such as the Bluetooth connection with your phone that allows you to listen to music or podcasts and make or receive phone calls. And they are controlled by tapping them to take a call, adjust volume, or play or pause music. If you have used other earbuds, then these features are much the same.

These earbuds also come with multiple sizes of ear tips, which allow for a more customizable fit. So far, I have had no issues with them falling out while I've been working on site and they've been comfortable to wear for the day. The charge on the buds lasted me for a full work day (the website claims 13 hours of use), even with constant music or nonstop calls.

In addition, the battery in the charging case has two full charges for the buds before you need to plug the case into a USB port for recharging. (A cord is included.) That's one more plus for these earbuds that allow you to use your phone and listen to music while protecting your hearing on the jobsite. Find out more at isotunes.com. Cost is \$199.99.

Mike Whalen is a project manager at DBS Remodel, a design-build residential remodeling company based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Check out Mike's new residential-construction-themed podcast, "Beyond the Belt," on Spotify.

PHOTOS BY MIKE WHALEN



The ISOTunes Free Aware Earbuds in use and the protective charging case (above).

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

Dewalt 2100PSI Electric Jobsite Pressure Washer

by MARK CLEMENT

Here's a detailed accounting of how often I deploy a pressure washer: Not often.

I'm a remodeling contractor who has found a market strata building wood decks. I've heard from a lot of deck builders "I only use composite; get your customers to raise their budgets."

And I suppose there's a conversation to be had here, but my first two cents will be that if I only used composite because wood was beneath me, I'd be saying goodbye to somewhere around 50% of my annual revenue. Maybe I'm just bad at business. The point is, we also coat some of those decks and, as a result, I've used and destroyed numerous pressure washers: gasoline-powered units, cordless, and corded. They all share the same cluster of annoying attributes: They're too big and they take up way more space than they deserve in the shop or on the truck.

The Test

With wood decks a focus of the business model, I use a wood/metal hybrid rail system, not 2x2; this takes out 75% of the future maintenance. Being able to say "Yes, we'll clean and stain your deck" puts thousands of dollars in the till that otherwise wouldn't be there. And, as generalists, our willingness to do this type of work keeps us in front of the customer who might be thinking about a new kitchen or basement next year. That's a long way of saying: I don't need my pressure washer until I do. Then I need it to not annoy me to death. DeWalt's innovatively designed pressure washer does just that. The DWPW2100 PSI 1.2 GPM electric washer is easily the most elegantly designed, effective pressure washer I have ever used.

We used the tool to prep several wood decks we built for stain. This washing opens the wood grain, much like sanding, to better accept the treatment. I also used it to blast cobwebs and 25 years of dog hair from a deck we re-planked. I cleaned a mung-encrusted sidewalk at my home (always good for the mood) and I used it for cleaning impacted clay from around the workings of my tractor. Pretty sure I washed a few trucks with it, too.

Hero Function

This unit's hero function—and this is a first—is how it behaves when I'm not using it. Unlike every other pressure washer I have ever owned, I can put it away.

The unit has wheels and a telescoping handle like a roll-a-board suitcase and is roughly the same size. I don't see any reason for the wheels and handles on this light, easy-to-carry unit, but I love that everything but the hose is contained inside the unit's roll cage.

The wand breaks down like a Jack Reacher (Tom Cruise

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The Dewalt DWPW2100 keeps things simple and compact. The author finds it highly portable and very easy to store when not in use.

PHOTO BY MARK CLEMENT

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version) sniper rifle and is stored in the body of the tool. Nozzles are secured in this compartment, too. Make sure you know which nozzle does what.

In Action

This unit is gloriously corded. In an enterprise like pressure washing, I need full-tilt-boogie all day. Batteries and chargers that will both deplete and get wet? No, thank you.

The cord is amply long and wraps up easily. Unlike gasoline-powered units that are loud, heavy, and require all the gasoline maintenance interactions, the DeWalt is also “draggable.” I can yank the hose to finish that last little bit (can’t do that with a heavier beast that would also be prone to tipping), rather than stop, move the unit and hose, and re-set.

2100 PSI. Pressure washing most stuff a remodeling contractor has to pressure wash doesn’t really require a whole lot of pressure. In most cases the chemicals/detergent do the heavy lifting of grime separation from the substrate and pressure washing is really enhanced rinsing.

I’ve had plenty of luck at the very bottom end of the PSI range in the past, around 1,500. It’s a light truck versus a one-ton, but I’m just hauling mulch, not plowing a Target parking lot so to speak.

For the 600-PSI jump on the DeWalt, I have a welcome and a warning. The increased output is awesome and delivered measurable results in everything I did with it. But, if you’re not careful, it’s going to blow up wood fiber if you get the wand too close to the wood.

Front, back, switches. DeWalt uses what appears to be the same gasketed, threaded hose-to-unit connection with the same thread climb as every other unit I’ve used. DeWalt’s industrial design, *unlike* every other unit I’ve used, makes this fitting accessible and gives plenty of room for your hand. I still have to fight to get the threads started, but it is a vast improvement over other units.

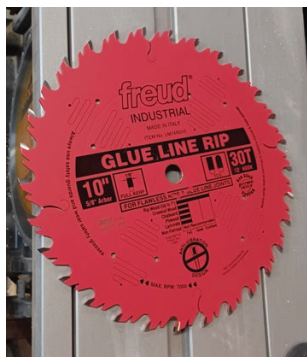
If I used this tool every day, I’d have a protocol for this, but I don’t. The tool is a cube. The cord comes out of one corner, the hose out of another. And there’s an on-off switch someplace else. Nice and simple.

The DeWalt unit is about three times easier to manage than any other pressure washer I have ever used. See more at dewalt.com. Cost is \$330.

Mark Clement is a deck builder and remodeler in Ambley, Pa. Find him on Instagram @myfixituplife and on YouTube at My Fix It Up Life.

Freud Industrial Glue-Line Ripping Blade

by CLAYTON DEKORNE



While working with Brian Campbell recently on an article, he turned me on to Freud Industrial’s 30-tooth LM74R010 Glue-Line Ripping Blade. This is not the thin-kerf model, but the full-kerf ($\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-thick) version that retails for around \$80. Brian mentioned using it to rip oak and other hardwood boards for a finished edge on stain-grade work without hav-

ing to run the edges through a jointer. On his recommendation, I bought one in February and have been using it to rip oak stair treads and maple banding for shelves. Without hesitation, I can say I am blown away by the results.

For starters, this blade has transformed my crappy table saw (one I regret buying to replace a beloved Bosch model that was stolen) into a half-way decent tool. I think a lot of that comes from the heavy plate, which is laser cut with squiggly expansion slots that noticeably reduce vibration and sideways movement. The teeth have a triple-chip grind (TCG)—alternating trapezoidal teeth that rough out the cut and flat-top teeth that finish the cut. The 12-degree hook is not as aggressive as some blades designed for fast cutting, but it’s in the positive range needed for a ripping blade. And certainly, the feed rate allowed by this tooth design and the full-kerf blade is noticeably slower than many table saw blades I’ve used, even ones with many more teeth. But going slow and steady, the resulting edge came out very smooth. It was completely acceptable to install with only a quick touch with a sander, but that was mostly just to knock the corners down to avoid splinters. Gone were the usual circular saw marks that otherwise only go away with a jointer or power plane, or with way more sanding than I ever care to do.

Some folks on woodworkers’ forums have noted that a glue-line ripping blade is not necessary if you have a well-tuned table saw. But the whole point of my experience is that you can get amazing results on an ordinary or even a cheapo job-site saw. Yes, a well-tuned shop saw with a thin-kerf rip blade might give you similar results and possibly allow you to cut faster. But for site work, compared to the extra step of jointing (assuming you even have a jointer onsite) or sanding saw marks off the edges of boards, this blade will more than make up for its price and slower feed rate.

PHOTO BY CLAYTON DEKORNE