

## Cut Above the Rest

BY JAKE LEWANDOWSKI

In my company, **Great Lakes Builders**, we were early adopters of the SawStop safety system and bought one of JSS Job Site Saws as soon as they became available. Like most small businesses, we strive to make our workplace as safe as we can. Having a safe table saw—one that shuts down the instant the blade comes in contact with skin—certainly helps lower the risk of injuries.

Frequently, however, we work in areas with tight access, and my crew had been after me to buy a compact table saw. A smaller saw unquestionably has a place on the jobsite; being light and easy enough for one person to maneuver offers a clear advantage. I had dragged my feet on this request, but when SawStop recently released the CTS Compact Table Saw, I jumped at buying it.

The SawStop CTS is a premium offering with a price to match: \$900 at the time of publication. The safety advantage alone is worth this high price tag to us, but I was pleased to find the build quality to be quite good compared with other compact models on the market.

### PROS

Here are some of the quality features on the CTS that we like a lot:

- The saw runs a 10-inch blade, compared with the 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch blades found on many other compact saws.

- A rack-and-pinion mechanism holds the fence square to the blade. This has proved reliable and looks like it will stay that way for the life of the saw.

- The fence has what SawStop calls a “high and low face,” which means the fence includes a “low face” spacer that separates the material you are cutting from the “high face” (main body) of the fence, allowing for more room for your hand or a push stick between the blade and the fence. This also helps reduce the chances of material binding between the blade and the fence.

- SawStop offers a well-thought-out folding stand for the CTS. This retails for an additional \$130, and I would recommend buying one. The simple quick-release connectors (one at the front, one at the back) that secure the saw housing to this stand make for an especially easy setup and breakdown.

- Dust collection appears to be better than on any other compact saw we have run in the past. The port pulls air and dust from directly below the blade—a vast improvement over a port coming out the back of the housing.

- The motor easily handled cutting 2-by SPF and Doug-fir stock, along with ripping <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch CDX and OSB sheet material. Run-out from the direct-drive motor seems to be nonexistent.



While SawStop's CTS (1) is more expensive than any other compact table saw, the blade-stopping safety advantage is worth the high price tag, says the author. He likes the fence's rack-and-pinion mechanism (2), which, he reports, reliably holds the fence square to the blade. Deactivating the brake cartridge is required when cutting wet material, such as pressure-treated lumber. But to do this requires turning the bypass switch (below the red button to the right of the main power switch) while pulling the red paddle button out (3). The author would prefer a simple on-off switch for the safety system.

Photos: Jake Lewandowski

**LIMITATIONS**

Other than the obvious limitations that come with using a compact table saw, regardless of brand, these are a few things to consider:

- The CTS currently only comes with a cord, which isn't an issue if you're like me and regularly run a vacuum on your tools. We have to run an extension cord for the vac anyway and can simply plug the saw into the automatic-on switch on the vac.

- The CTS is not designed to run a dado blade. This isn't a huge deal but is worth a mention. For us, the JSS model does allow for an 8-inch stacked dado blade, so for the few times we might need this, we're covered.

- The saw has a side handle and is designed to be carried like a briefcase (with a safe way to lock the fence in position under the table for storage). We tried transporting the saw this way, but getting the saw in and out of the truck and on and off the stand was awkward. We found it much more natural to lift it from the tabletop. This is not so much a limitation as it is a comment on a feature that isn't of much help.

- The CTS uses a new version of the SawStop brake cartridge (TSBC-10R3). If you're already part of the SawStop family, this cartridge is compatible with the rest of the table saws in the SawStop lineup. However, any older cartridges you might have on hand may not fit.

**CONS**

Only one minor thing bugged me: You need to deactivate the SawStop safety brake to cut wet lumber. That in itself is not the problem; it's that putting the saw in this bypass mode requires two hands (see photo 3, facing page). As an employer, I found this problematic because the guys were putting the wood on the ground to deactivate the safety system. Or even worse, they were deactivating the saw and then walking away from the saw while it was running to grab the material they needed to cut.

I would prefer a simple on-off switch. The onboard warning lights on the saw make it clear that the brake system is deactivated, so you're not likely to forget you turned it off. And when the saw is switched off, it automatically returns with the brake system activated.

One accessory I would like to see in the future is an outfeed table that can be clipped to the back of the saw table. This is needed on any compact table saw, because with a limited table area for holding material, large stock can fall out of balance and bind the blade, causing a kickback. For a saw like the CTS, which is designed to improve user safety, a smart outfeed system would be a natural improvement.

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Photos: Martin Gutierrez

## Milwaukee M18 Fuel Cordless Wet/Dry Vacuum

BY IAN SCHWANDT

**Like many medium-sized remodeling companies,** TDS Custom Construction performs varied scopes of work that require our tradespeople to be organized and nimble and—above all—to keep a clean jobsite. That makes vacuums and their filter assemblies an important part of our work, but not just for keeping our client's homes clean; when used with HEPA filtration under our state's Lead Safe guidelines, they also keep occupants and workers safe. We recently added the Milwaukee M18 Fuel 12-gallon cordless wet/dry vacuum to our stable as an option to help our M18-battery-powered



The Milwaukee M18 Fuel cordless wet/dry vacuum is powered by a dual-battery motor head that can be fitted to a 12-gallon tank (1) or to smaller and more portable 6-gallon (2) or 9-gallon tanks. The 0930-22HD kit includes the 12-gallon tank and matching cart with a handle, along with a hose, extension tubes, a filter, and other accessories.



## Tools of the Trade

carpenters maximize their existing tool kit and improve efficiency.

The 0930-22HD kit, which retails for \$800, came with a dual-battery motor head, two 12-Ah M18 batteries (\$500 retail value by themselves), a dual-bay rapid charger, a high-efficiency filter, the premium 12-gallon vacuum tank and matching cart with handle, and 9 feet of hose with two extensions, a crevice tool, and a floor utility nozzle. The motor head is powered by a brushless motor and produces 109 cfm and 77 inches of suction. It's part of a modular system that includes 6- and 9-gallon canisters, as well as the 12-gallon canister fitted to our cart. Other components in the system include the company's HEPA, high-efficiency, and wet-use filter cartridges. We also tested several of Milwaukee's optional attachments, such as the Air-Tip dust collector, low-profile pivoting brush, and flexible crevice and magnet utility nozzles.

**Power.** The Milwaukee 0930-22HD is a true shop vacuum in that it is not specifically designed for attachment to power tools for use as a dust extractor. Compared with the other corded shop vacuums that we own, the Milwaukee performs well in terms of suction, though we noticed some loss of power when attempting to vacuum larger debris as the battery charge dropped. Milwaukee advertises the runtime for two 12-Ah batteries as 49 minutes for light debris and 34 minutes for heavy debris. For our typical remodeling work and our start-of-the-year shop cleanup, the vacuum performed closer to the 49-minute advertised runtime.

We also tested the dual-battery motor head on the smaller, 6-gallon tank, which, when used without the cart, reduces the vacuum to a portable unit that lends itself well to punch-list work.

Milwaukee also offers a single-battery M18 motor head, which we didn't test, and says that it plans to release a 120-volt AC motor head that will work with all parts of this system.

**Dust collection.** The large, 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-inch-diameter hose performed well without clogging in post-demo cleanup, and the Air-Tip dust collector attachment was a favorite among our team. This attachment uses the suction created by the vacuum to stick to a wall underneath the work area where dust is being created. Whether used for dust collection for cutting plaster with a multi-tool or drilling pilot holes for handrail brackets, this attachment has proven to be valuable in keeping finished interiors clean.

We found the filter cartridges to be easy to remove and clean out using either an air hose or the tried-and-true method of banging the filter on the side of a dumpster. Milwaukee does offer removable bags in sizes that match the tanks, but we have yet to source them locally.

At \$800 for the kit, this vacuum is not targeted toward everyone; rather, this offering from Milwaukee seems to be targeted toward the professional remodeler who is already heavily invested in Milwaukee's M18 ecosystem and values getting two 12-Ah batteries with a tool. If this sounds like you or one of your tradespeople, then this vacuum deserves a look based on its versatility and the wide range of accessories and options that Milwaukee has built into its wet/dry vacuum system.

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Crew members used several optional Air-Tip vacuum accessories that are available from Milwaukee, including a magnetic utility nozzle and a corner brush (3). When making cuts or drilling holes in walls, they found that the Air-Tip dust-collector attachment (4) was effective at scooping up debris.



Photos: Martin Gutierrez