

Bosch and Rockwell Multi-Tools

by Dave Northup

It used to be that if you wanted a multi-tool — an oscillating sander/cutter — you had to buy one of Fein's MultiMasters. That changed late last year when Bosch and Rockwell introduced (respectively) the PS50-2B and the SoniCrafter.

Having owned a MultiMaster for several years, I was curious to see if these new, less expensive versions were worth the money. The issue goes beyond the cost of the tool itself; with the MultiMaster, buying and replacing attachments can get pricey (see "Fein MultiMaster and

Accessories," *Toolbox*, 9/07). For this article I tested both companies' top-of-the-line kits. Here's what I learned during the several months I used them on job sites.

Bosch PS50-2B

In addition to the PS50 cordless multi-tool, the PS50-2B 12V Max Multi-X Carpenter kit contains a 30-minute charger, two batteries, some blades and sanding accessories, and a case. The tool itself is based on Bosch's new 12-volt lithium-ion battery platform, and it's significantly lighter than corded models. Its weight and slim grip make it very comfortable to use.

Fully charged, the PS50 felt as powerful as the other tool I tested, the Rockwell — but not as powerful as my older Fein. A woodworker friend of mine timed how long it took to drain the PS50's batteries while sanding hardwood. He got about 16 minutes of continuous sanding per charge. That's pretty good, though I'm sure the number would be less for cutting and scraping.

I mostly used the PS50 for intermittent tasks — which is what cordless tools are best for. I found it useful for trimming jambs, cutting holes in drywall, and other light-duty cutting chores. Used this way, the Bosch can go all day on a single charge. For heavy cutting and continuous-duty tasks, though, I much prefer a corded model. (Incidentally, the PS50 is not the only cordless multi-tool around. Fein makes one too, but it costs close to \$400 — more than I can see spending simply to get rid of the cord.)

With early multi-tools, blades had a tendency to slip because they were held in place by friction. Fein solved this problem by switching to a star-shaped hole that mates with a raised area on the mounting plate. Bosch did something similar: It surrounded the hole for the attachment bolt with a series of smaller holes. The small holes fit over indexing pins on the tool so when the bolt is tightened down the blade can't slip. It's a nice system and works very well.



Bosch PS50-2B

Weight (by mfr.): 2.2 pounds

Power: 12-volt lithium-ion batteries; variable speed

Street price*: \$220

Includes tool, two batteries, charger, case, and eight blades and sanding pads

* least expensive kit costs \$185

Bosch Tools
877/267-2499
boschtools.com

SoniCrafter

Weight (by mfr.): 2.8 pounds

Power: 2.3 amps; variable speed

Street price*: \$180

Includes tool, plastic case, 60 sheets of sandpaper, and 12 blades and sanding pads

* least expensive kit costs \$120

Rockwell
866/514-7625
sonicrafter.com

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Multi-tools can be used for tasks such as cutting out drywall (far left), removing grout and excess thinset (left), and trimming door jambs (above).

Bosch's blades last almost as long as similar blades from Fein and cost about the same. The company makes a good but limited selection of blades for the multi-tool. Unfortunately, few retailers stock them, so you need to plan ahead and order them by mail.

The kit that I tested includes an adapter that allows Fein blades to be installed on Bosch tools. However, it's not quite a one-for-one swap, as the adaptor relies on friction to keep the blade from slipping. Fein's grout blades and rasps should not be used on the Bosch. Although they fit, the adapter wears into their soft aluminum plates to the point where they slip so badly they no longer work.

Rockwell SoniCrafter

If the Rockwell name sounds familiar, it's because long ago Porter-Cable was called Rockwell. Several years back Porter-Cable sold the name and the company is now owned by Positec, a Chinese manufacturer that also makes Worx brand tools.

The first SoniCrafter I received had a nonfunctioning switch, but the replacement the company sent worked fine. The tool is heavier and bigger around than the Bosch, so it's not as comfortable to hold onto. And though it has good power, it doesn't feel as powerful as a MultiMaster. The blades have a 12-sided hole that fits over a six-sided post on the tool. As with the Bosch, an Allen wrench is required for tightening the bolt that retains the blade.

A major selling point of this tool is all the accessories that come with it. The kit I tested had 72 — 60 of which were

sheets of sandpaper. Rockwell makes a good assortment of accessories but I found their quality mixed. The carbide-grit grout blades and rasps work very well, but the sawing blades get dull much faster than Bosch's or Fein's.

Bosch and Fein blades will not fit on the SoniCrafter, but you can get aftermarket blades for the tool from multiblades.com. The SoniCrafter blades can be used on current-model MultiMasters and older models with the Fein adapter — but I can't imagine wanting to do this, because the Fein blades are so much better.

The Bottom Line

The PS50 offers the convenience of cordless operation and is a good tool for intermittent use. It's a true professional-grade model — but I still prefer corded models.

The SoniCrafter is a pretty good tool, too, but it's not as powerful as a MultiMaster and its blades are nowhere near as good. It would be a reasonable choice for someone on a tight budget who doesn't plan to use it all the time.

Personally, however, I'd hold out until I could afford a MultiMaster.

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Bosch prevents slippage by keying its blades to a series of pins on the mounting plate (above left). If an adapter (above right) is placed over the pins, Fein's blades can be used on this tool. The 12-sided hole in a Rockwell blade fits over a six-sided post on the tool (right).