

18v Recip Saws

These tools combine **corded performance** with **cordless convenience**



BY DAVID FRANE

The advantages of cordless reciprocating saws are obvious. Cordless saws allow you to make cuts with less setup, and they free you from the weight and hassle of extension cords. It's been a while since I bought a new cordless recip saw, so I was eager to test eight of the most popular 18v Li-ion models.

Although some of the saws I tested are available in kits that include a battery and a charger, many are sold only as bare tools. For the sake of testing, I asked each manufacturer to provide the highest amp-hour battery it currently offers. Before each test, I put fully charged batteries and new blades into the tools: Lenox Gold Power Arc blades for wood and Diablo Steel Demon carbide-tipped blades for metal.

Top picks

The Milwaukee saw is my choice for best overall. It's comfortable to use, cuts faster, and has a longer run-time than every other model. The Ridgid is nearly as comfortable and came in a close second in cutting speed. At about \$60 less than the Milwaukee (bare tool), it's an easy pick for best value.

David Frane is a carpenter and freelance writer in Alamo, Calif. Photos by the author.



MILWAUKEE M18 FUEL SAWZALL 2720

\$179 (bare tool); \$299 with one 4.0-Ah battery and a charger; \$129 for one 5.0-Ah battery

This saw cuts about as fast as corded models and faster than the other tools tested—in most cases, by a significant margin. The only tool with a brushless motor, this saw made more cuts per charge with a 5.0-Ah battery than saws equipped with higher-rated batteries, and it made more cuts per amp hour than any other saw tested. Features include an LED light and a handy folding rafter hook. The blade clamp and adjustable shoe are both controlled by levers. The only bad thing I can say about this saw is that it's the heaviest tool in the test (9.1 lb.). It's available as a bare tool and in a kit with one or two 4.0-Ah batteries.



RIDGID GEN5X R8642

\$119 (bare tool); \$499 for a five-tool combo kit with two 4.0-Ah batteries and a charger; \$119 for a 5.0-Ah battery

The Gen5X recip saw was surprisingly fast, cutting 2x12s and black pipe faster than all but the Milwaukee. The run-time was average, but the saw cut smoothly and with minimal vibration. Features include a ring-style blade clamp, an adjustable shoe, and an LED activated by the trigger or a separate switch below. It's the only model with two cutting modes: straight and orbital. I wouldn't let this sway my decision; orbital action greatly increases vibration. Most companies dropped this feature long ago, when wood-cutting blades designed to mimic orbital action rendered it unnecessary. This is a very nice saw; perhaps the only downside is the limited number of tools in Ridgid's cordless system.

SPECS VS. REAL-WORLD PERFORMANCE

Most saws have a 1 1/8-in. stroke and produce around 3000 strokes per minute, so their performance should be nearly equal. Yet testing reveals that their cutting speeds vary greatly.

SPEED TEST

With the material mounted in a sturdy stand and a weight hung from the front of each saw (10 lb. for metal; 20 lb. for wood), I made 12 cuts in a

Douglas-fir 2x12 and in 3/4-in. black pipe to test cutting speed. After throwing out the two fastest and the two slowest times, I averaged the remaining eight times.

RUN-TIME TEST

To determine run-time for each saw, I used the same test rig to make as many cuts in a Douglas-fir 2x12 as possible. To prevent overheating, I switched blades after

every five cuts. Because batteries vary, I divided the number of cuts by the respective battery's amp-hour rating. All of these saws are 18v except for the Hilti, which is 21.6v.

Manufacturer	SPEED TEST (in seconds)		RUN-TIME TEST		
	2x12 Douglas fir	3/4-in. black pipe	Total cuts	Ah of battery	Cuts per Ah
Bosch CRS180	12.8	8.6	29	6	4.8
DeWalt DCS380	11.9	7.5	27	5	5.4
Hilti WSR 18-A	14.4	17.2	36	5.2	6.9
Hitachi CR18DGLP4	15.7	10.3	13	3	4.3
Makita XRJ03	14.5	9.6	18	5	3.6
Metabo ASE 18 LTX	13.4	12.4	28	5.5	5.1
Milwaukee M18 Fuel 2720	8.8	5.3	38	5	7.6
Ridgid Gen5X R8642	10.4	6.7	27	5	5.4



BOSCH CRS180



\$119 (bare tool); \$177 with one 4.0-Ah battery and a charger; \$129 for one 6.0-Ah battery

Lighter than average, this saw has good power but vibrates during heavy cutting. The housing tapers heavily in front and is easy to grip, and a lever above the handle locks the trigger and selects either high or low speed. The blade clamp is better than average; spent blades are ejected with the twist of a ring, and the clamp remains open until a new blade is inserted. The saw is available in combo kits, as a one-battery (4.0 Ah) kit in a bag, or as a bare tool with or without a carrying case.

HILTI WSR 18-A



\$209 (bare tool); \$489 with two 5.2-Ah batteries and a charger

Hilti's battery packs contain two extra cells, boosting their power to 21.6v. Despite its higher voltage batteries, this tool is a slower-than-average cutter and tends to vibrate during heavy cutting. It has an AVR (Active Vibration Reduction) shoe that allows it to flex in and out while the saw is cutting. I found that it actually increased vibration to the point where the saw was unpleasant to use, especially for cutting metal. The tool is available bare and in a two-battery kit.

MAKITA XRJ03



\$119 (bare tool); \$129 for one 5.0-Ah battery; \$99 for charger

The Makita's shoe adjusts with the push of a button, and the saw has a superior blade clamp that ejects hot blades and remains open until a fresh blade is loaded. Weight and cutting speed are about average. Run-time per amp hour is the lowest of the saws tested, though this could be offset by Makita's charging time (45 min. for a 5-Ah pack). The tool cuts smoothly and is comfortable to use. The XRJ03 is Makita's lightest full-size recip saw and is available as a bare tool and in combo kits.

www.finehomebuilding.com

DEWALT DCS380



\$119 (bare tool); \$259 with one 3.0-Ah battery and a charger

The best thing about this saw is how little it weighs (6.6 lb.). The worst thing is that it vibrates at all speeds. The saw is fine for intermittent use, but it's uncomfortable for long bouts of heavy cutting. Features include a shoe that adjusts with the push of a button, a lever-activated blade clamp, and a unique four-way blade holder that allows you to install blades with the teeth facing up, down, left, or right. The saw is available in combo kits, as a bare tool, and in a kit with a 3.0-Ah battery.

HITACHI CR18DGLP4



\$89 (bare tool); \$97 for two 3.0-Ah batteries; \$97 for one 5.0-Ah battery; \$39 for charger

This saw was tested with 3.0-Ah batteries because the anticipated 5.0-Ah packs were not yet available. Smaller and lighter than most other saws, the Hitachi is pleasant to handle because it vibrates less than expected for a tool of its weight. However, it cuts about half as fast as the Milwaukee and employs an aggravating safety switch that requires you to hit a button before every cut. I much prefer the sliding on/off lock found on most other saws. The Hitachi is sold as a bare tool only.

METABO ASE 18 LTX



\$210 (bare tool); \$95 for one 5.5-Ah battery; \$169 for one 6.2-Ah battery; \$57 for charger

Sold as a bare tool only, the Metabo is the second-heaviest saw tested. It cuts smoothly and with little vibration. Features include a lever-activated clamp and an adjustable shoe that requires a hex wrench, which stores in the handle. The biggest downside is the automatic safety on the trigger, which requires you to shift your grip to hit the button before every cut. Cutting speed is about average in wood and slower than average in metal. Run-time is about average.