

I've been using Festool's new 18v cordless 6¼-in. circular saw and its companion guide rail for the past month. Unlike the Festool track saws most carpenters are familiar with, the HKC 55 looks and operates like a regular sidewinder circular saw. This tool's ample power and pair of quick-charging batteries let me cut 2xs and sheathing all day. This is the first cordless saw that I think can replace my corded saws for 85% of the work I do.

The saw directs almost all of the dust it produces through a swiveling discharge port rather than spewing chips all over. And when connected to a dust bag or vacuum, the saw makes practically no mess. The depth-of-cut adjustment is a simple squeeze lever at the rear, and the indexing scale is precise. When the saw is located directly over a cut, you just start the motor and plunge the saw into the workpiece, where it stops and locks at the chosen depth setting. Festool also has simplified retracting the blade guard with a front-mounted lever that makes starting bevel cuts easier.

The HKC 55 works with the Festool guide rails that you may already have, but it also works with a new style of track, the FSK, which comes in three lengths that provide up to 10 in., 16 in., and 27 in. of 90° crosscut capacity. Unlike with previous Festool track saws, the FSK guides interlock with the bottom of the HKC 55, joining saw and track as one unit. An elastic cord retracts the guide to its original position when you finish your cut and lift the saw off the workpiece, readying the tool for another cut.

TRACK-GUIDED SIDEWINDER

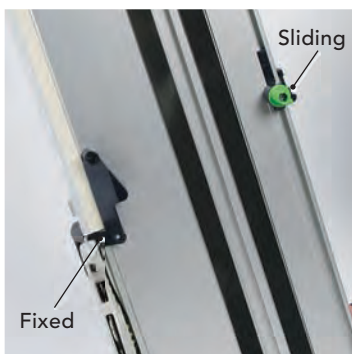


I used the saw and new guide rail to cut rafters, including valley jacks and hip rafters, with clean results. It cut composite exterior trim as accurately as my sliding compound-miter saw but was actually more efficient. Instead of moving heavy 16-ft. 1x12 trim pieces onto a miter-saw stand, I just cut right off the stack. One limitation is the cutting depth, which falls just shy of being able to cut through 2x stock at a 45° bevel when using a Festool track or FSK guide. I hope Festool introduces a similar saw with a bigger blade for cutting rafters and I-joists.

The HKC 55 with two batteries and a charger sells for \$570. The guides sell for between \$150 and \$200 each, depending on length. There's also a corded version of the saw with all the same features (the HK 55), which sells for \$560 with the 16-in. track.

Mike Guertin, editorial adviser

Adjustable stop aligns the track Large scale sets angles



One fixed pivot and one adjustable stop (held in position with the green thumbscrew) work together to allow the track to set at angles from 0° to 60°.



An easy-to-read scale on the left side of the track shows the angle setting for miters. The notches cut into the track are detents for common cuts.

Track guides the saw



With the fixed pivot and adjustable stop tight to the stock, the aluminum track guides the saw.

Angles are easy



By adjusting the sliding pivot, the saw can make left and right angled cuts. The track's plastic edge lines up with the blade for accurate alignment and less splintering.