

By Tom O'Brien  
Photos by David Sharpe

# AHEAD OF THE CURVE

The cordless jigsaw category is open for business. We compared five models for power, performance, and convenience.

Eight years ago, I tested one of the first cordless jigsaws to hit the market, and it was awful! It had the power of a dull handsaw and the maneuverability of a concrete block. Needless to say, I kept my faithful old jigsaw—cord and all—on the job for cutting curves, scribing lines, or knocking out a sink hole.

But times and tools have changed a lot since then, and after testing this latest group of cordless jigsaws, I seem to have misplaced my old-school corded curve-cutter.

#### TEST CRITERIA

I tested five 18-volt cordless jigsaws: the Bosch 52318, DeWalt DW933K, Makita 4334DWD, Ridgid R843, and Ryobi P520. To establish as level a playing field as possible, I cycled all the

batteries through several charges and outfitted all the tools with identical blades before going to work. I used 10 teeth-per-inch (tpi) blades for most applications, but switched to 6-tpi blades for fast cuts in treated 2-by.

In the field, I put all the saws through their paces in common uses to get a general sense of feel and jobsite performance before taking them back to the shop for more careful observations. Back there I used each tool as I would in the field for the various cuts I commonly complete with a jigsaw:

- Plunge-cuts in 3/4-inch MDF
- Tight radius turns in 3/4-inch MDF
- Scribe cuts along a line on a 15-degree bevel in hardwood
- Long scroll cuts in 2x10 PT
- Splinter-free cuts in 3/4-inch AC plywood

# TOOL TEST

## CORDLESS JIGSAWS



**Bosch  
52318**



**DeWalt  
DW933K**



**Makita  
4334DWD**



**Ridgid  
R843**

**STROKES PER MINUTE**

<b>STROKES PER MINUTE</b>	0-2,000	0-2,000	500-2,800	2,200
<b>TOOL-FREE SHOE ADJUSTMENT</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>ORBITAL CUTTING ACTION</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>VARIABLE SPEED</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>STROKE LENGTH</b>	1 inch	1 inch	1 inch	1 inch
<b>DUST BLOWER</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>STREET PRICE</b>	\$239	\$259	\$319	\$199
<b>COMMENTS</b>	This is the single best saw in the group. Smooth operation in rough-cutting applications, great power, excellent blade change, and an effective chip blower combine to make this a cordless tool on par with corded models. The narrow overshoe and kit bag are excellent accessories, too. <i>Circle #205.</i>	This is a nice tool that produces smooth cuts in demanding work. I liked this tool's handle the best. It plunge-cut effectively and produced very little sway-out. It has a blower, but it was a little off aim. It ships with an overshoe for scratch-free cutting on delicate material. The shoe's bevel adjustment could use some work and I wish it had a wire blade guard. <i>Circle #206.</i>	This saw worked well. It provided abundant power with square cuts in all but the most demanding applications. It has an older-style tool-free blade change, but that worked well. The shoe adjustment was perfect and it's the only tool equipped for on-site dust collection. It has a screw-on scratch-free overshoe. <i>Circle #207.</i>	I like this saw. It worked well in all cutting applications and has good adjustments. I like the wire blade guard and think the removable clear plastic guard is better for cuts in metal. The blade change was slick and easy to use. <i>Circle #208.</i>

SPECS ARE PROVIDED BY EACH MANUFACTURER AND ARE NOT VERIFIED BY TOOLS OF THE TRADE.

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**877-267-2499**  
[www.boschtools.com](http://www.boschtools.com)

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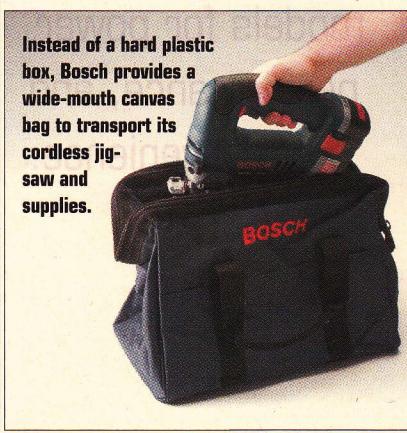
### OUT OF THE BOX

Except for the Ryobi, all of these tools arrived with a carrying case. The DeWalt, Makita, and Ridgid models were packed in the standard-issue hard plastic case that includes room for a few blades as well as the charger and a spare battery. The Bosch came with a heavy-duty canvas bag with side pockets, which I preferred because I didn't have to arrange all the pieces just-so in order to close the case. None of the kits include a spare battery. And because so

many Ryobi tools are sold as kits, the Ryobi saw tested here also does not ship with a battery charger as standard equipment.

### POWER & PERFORMANCE

To set a reasonable baseline for power and cut speed, I completed every cutting task first with my corded jigsaw. It didn't take long cutting in hardwood, treated 2-by, or MDF to realize that the cordless Bosch, DeWalt, Makita, and Ridgid pack so much power and



Instead of a hard plastic box, Bosch provides a wide-mouth canvas bag to transport its cordless jigsaw and supplies.



Ryobi  
P520

2,100

Yes

Yes

Yes

1 inch

No

\$49

This saw has some good features, like onboard blade storage and a shoe that adjusts fore and aft to help with tear-out in fragile materials, but it was underpowered and clearly taxed in demanding cutting work. The price is the lowest in the group, but it does not ship with a battery charger as standard equipment. *Circle #209.*

Ryobi  
800-525-2579  
[www.ryobitools.com](http://www.ryobitools.com)

endurance that they felt just like the corded tool did in action. In fact, I cut more with each saw during this test period than I ever cut on any given day—and the batteries still had plenty of gas left in them. This means that the “missing” second battery was never a problem.

**Cutting Ability.** In terms of raw power and speed, which I tested scrolling and cross-cutting in ACQ 2x10, the Bosch, Makita, and Ridgid were very close to one another in performance.

The DeWalt was a step behind, but only a small step. The Ryobi, on the other hand, was significantly less powerful than the others, often taking more than twice as long to complete a task like cutting to a scribe-line in red oak.

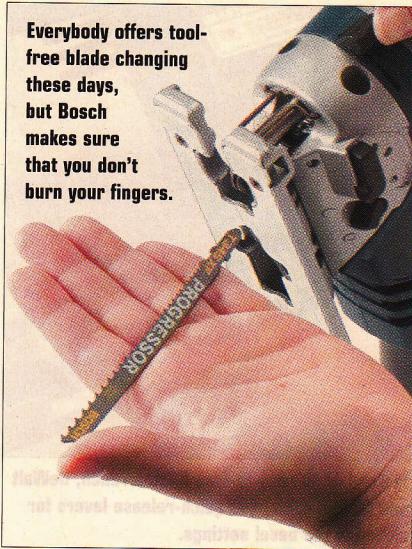
Plunge cuts were no sweat for any of these tools. At full orbit, and without making any shoe adjustments, all of the saws plunged easily into MDF.

Throughout the test, most of the cuts were remarkably square. “Sway-out” only became a problem when I was turning a tight radius. In these instances, no tool was noticeably better or worse than the others. As long as I was careful to turn the corner gradually and not force the tool, even these challenging cuts were usually no more than 1/16 inch out of square.

**Orbital Action.** Using the orbital action to cut trim surfaces like oak, I found I had to experiment with each tool’s orbital setting to cut quickly without causing tear-out, but in most cases that setting was only one click down from full orbit, and all the tools responded well. In demanding cutting applications like cutting a radius in 2x10 framing, Bosch had the best orbital action of the bunch. It always remained smooth and steady while the DeWalt, Makita, and Ridgid were fluid but somewhat harder to control. Ryobi’s orbital action did not add much to its cutting performance in 2-by. (A note on blades: I used 10-tpi blades for finer work and 6-tpi blades for rougher cutting. While I expected the less-aggressive blade to be slower in the thicker stock, it wasn’t. And, there was less tear-out, so now I’ll just buy the higher tooth count when I resupply.)

**Dust Blower.** Jigsaws often let dust pile up where the blade exits the kerf, which obscures the cut line. The best corded models feature a blower that clears away the sawdust, a feature that is slowly making its way to the cordless world. The Bosch and DeWalt models both have blowers, which really makes

**Everybody offers tool-free blade changing these days, but Bosch makes sure that you don't burn your fingers.**



working to a line with them easier. Bosch’s was particularly effective because I never had to manually blow off the dust. DeWalt’s blower was less effective, because the blower seemed misdirected. Dust accumulated on the cut line, but if I backed the saw off some, the air would then hit the dust and remove it. The Makita, Ridgid, and Ryobi do not have dust blowers, which meant leaning over and blowing the dust away every couple of inches.

## FEATURES

**Blade Change.** All of these jigsaws feature a tool-free blade change. DeWalt and Makita stick with the old-school approach: a knob on the top of the tool that must be rotated three or four turns to remove or install a blade. With the Ryobi, Ridgid, and Bosch models you simply depress a lever to remove the blade. Of these, Bosch’s lever is not only the easiest to use, but it actually spits the blade out. This means you don’t even have to touch it and you’ll never again get burned fingers from removing a hot blade.

**Bevel Adjustment.** Here the tables are turned: Bosch, Ridgid, and Ryobi require the traditional Allen wrench to loosen the shoe for bevel cuts, like I do to get a nice sharp edge on a cabinet filler or built-in part. Each adjustment provides a secure mounting spot on the

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## CORDLESS JIGSAWS



Instead of an easy-to-lose Allen wrench, DeWalt and Makita each have quick-release levers for changing the bevel settings.

shoe, which works fine. Of course, I will immediately lose the wrench.

The DeWalt and Makita jigsaws each have a lever on the back of the shoe that you flip—like a quick-release lever on a bicycle wheel—to unlock the shoe and change the bevel. DeWalt's lever must be adjusted with a screwdriver to get just the right tension and I had to fiddle with it a lot. Makita's lever requires no such adjustment and worked flawlessly every time.

The Ridgid and Ryobi base plates include a series of notches that provide positive stops in 15-degree increments, which is nice. The other tools have stops at 0 and 45 degrees, but must be adjusted manually in between.

**Ergonomics.** Because of the batteries, these tools are heftier than their corded counterparts, but in all but the most unique applications, that doesn't matter because the tool "rides" the work surface. All of the tools were well-balanced and easy to control with one hand. The DeWalt had the most comfortable handle (for my hands). The Makita's handle was too small in diameter for me and Bosch's was just a smidge too large. But for the limited amount of time that I typically spend operating a jigsaw, all were acceptable.

**Variable-Speed Control.** Except for the Makita, all of the saws have trigger-operated variable speed, which I like.

The Makita has a separate speed-adjusting dial that's mounted on the side of the tool body. The drawback to this setup is that if you want to start a cut slowly, then speed up, you need to use two hands.

**Safety Features.** Except for the DeWalt, all of the saws shield the exposed blade by means of a stout loop of wire. I liked this a lot. They're almost invisible, but I was glad to know that should my finger ever stray too close to the blade, something might stop it. To add another layer of protection, Makita and Ridgid encircle the wire guard within a plastic chip shield. I might appreciate these devices if I were cutting a lot of sheet metal, but for woodworking they quickly got covered with sawdust, making it more difficult to follow the cut line.

**Triggers.** All of the saws include a trigger lockout to prevent accidentally starting the saw. Makita, Ridgid, and Ryobi have a trigger release button that must be depressed at the same time as the trigger. Bosch and DeWalt have a manually operated trigger lock. They all work fine.

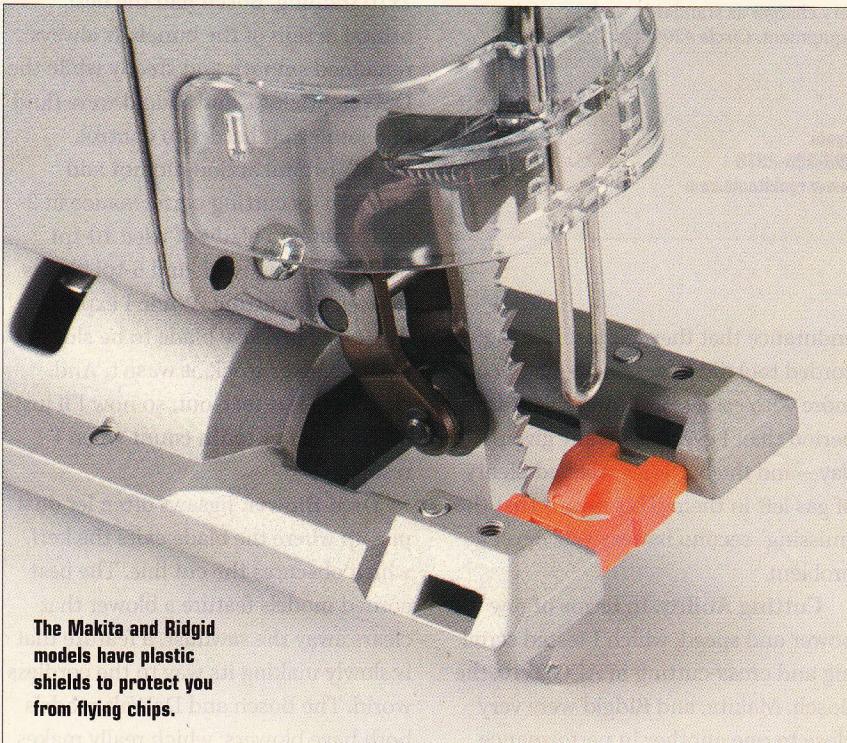
### EXTRA FEATURES

**Splinter-Free Cutting.** The Makita, Bosch, and Ridgid models provide zero-clearance plastic inserts to prevent tear-out when cutting vulnerable surfaces such as plywood. The Ryobi has a notch in the base that serves a similar function when the base is slid forward. As a class, the plastic inserts were more effective than the Ryobi model's design, but they were something of a hassle to install, and very easy to lose.

#### Replaceable Non-Marring Shoe.

To prevent scratching vulnerable surfaces, such as laminate countertops, Bosch and DeWalt include a snap-on plastic overshoe, which is handy. Makita's unit is equipped with a plastic insert that replaces the standard metal base plate, but you have to remove four screws to make the switch. Neither Ridgid nor Ryobi offer any such accessory, but covering the surface with masking tape still works.

**Dust Collection.** Makita is the only saw in the group that can be attached to a vacuum to collect dust at the source, which would be nice for some interior cutting projects. You



The Makita and Ridgid models have plastic shields to protect you from flying chips.

# TOOL TEST

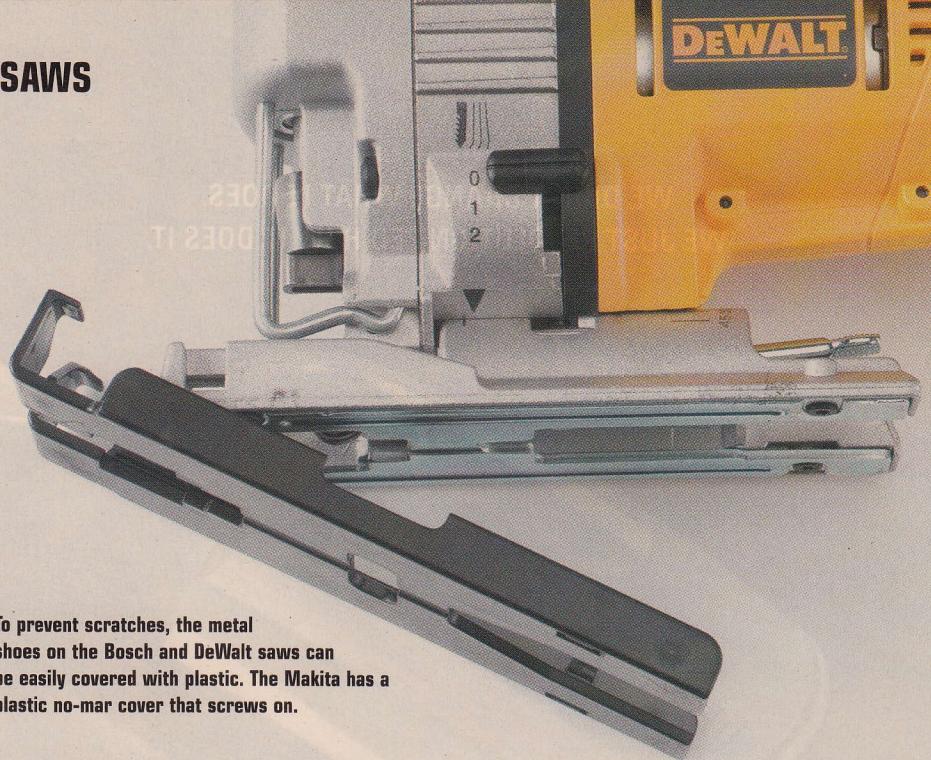
## CORDLESS JIGSAWS

need to purchase an adapter to attach it to the vac.

**Blade Storage.** Ryobi has a smart onboard blade storage compartment. The other tools have no storage other than the box.

### WINNERS

The DeWalt, Makita, and Ridgid are all capable performers very much on par with each other. If, like most builders, your jigsaw needs are modest—a little bit of scribing, an occasional sink cutout, or some work in MDF—then any of these three saws would be a fine choice. And, if you already own an 18-volt tool from one of these manufacturers, buying that brand means you'll be able to share batteries and chargers with other tools without compromising quality. But if you want the best—a cordless jigsaw that can hold its own with the finest corded models—the clear choice is Bosch's 52318. Although



To prevent scratches, the metal shoes on the Bosch and DeWalt saws can be easily covered with plastic. The Makita has a plastic no-mar cover that screws on.

not significantly more powerful than its competitors, it cuts smoother, has an effective chip blower, and the "burn-free" blade ejector is great.

Despite plenty of well-designed features—including handy blade storage

in the tool body—the Ryobi model was severely underpowered compared to the other contenders.

*Tom O'Brien is a carpenter and writer in New Milford, Conn.*



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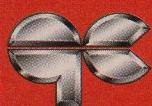
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