

Shop-to-Go

Portable 8-in-1 workshop handy for small jobs and compact for easy stowage.

It probably comes as no surprise to our readers that *Practical Sailor* editors are serious gadget junkies. Our jobs feed our habits with a steady supply of gear to play with, disassemble, and subject to mild abuse. The latest product to evoke the “kid in the candy store” reaction from our staff was the Power8workshop Delux. Powertools, in particular, hold a special place in our hearts, and this was a whole box of cordless powertools, neatly kitted in a plastic and stainless carrying case, promising workshop capability anywhere with space enough to put the 23-by-12-by-16-inch setup.

The UK-designed, China-made Power8workshop runs off 18-volt power and includes three cordless handtools—a two-speed drill, adjustable circular saw (with rip fence and protractor), and a metal- and wood-cutting jigsaw—that transform into three cordless benchtop tools—a drill press, table saw, and scroll saw. Two handles/battery packs are interchangeable with all of the tools and can be charged via an AC outlet and the benchtop. The kit also includes a host of drill bits, saw blades, sockets, and fasteners; a push stick (which doubles as the drill press arm); and a swivel-head halogen flashlight that can be mounted for overhead lighting. All of this is stored in a canvas tote bag that fits into the hard case (which doubles as the bench top) for easy transportation from project to project. Fully loaded, the case weighs just over 32 pounds.

It's obvious that much engineering went into the design. As DIYers at home and aboard, we found it quite appealing to be able to tote all of the tools needed for small jobs in one box rather than loading the car (or boat lockers) with numerous boxes of powertools.

Some features testers were impressed with included the portable, cordless drill press and table and scroll saws, re-



The versatile Power8workshop includes an assortment of dual-purpose tools.

ticulating flashlight, and dual batteries (power handles), which mean no down time as one can be charging while the other is in use. Battery life will depend on usage: Harder woods and metals will eat up a battery faster than soft woods. The bag-in-a-box storage was also a plus as the canvas tote keeps tools from rattling underway and helps keep salt air and dust off them.

While the workshop-to-go is a great concept, the reality has its limitations. The Power8workshop is still fairly new to the market and understandably still has some kinks to sort out. The model we tested couldn't handle cutting woods any larger than about 1.3 inches thick. According to Power8, newer models have been upgraded to handle up to 2 x 4s. Our test model had another kink: A pivoting screw in the table fence was not sunk in far enough, allowing for considerable play in the wood.

Testers questioned the ability of the circular saw (which hooks into the benchtop to become a table saw) and jigsaw (which doubles as a scroll saw) to hold up to regular use cutting hard woods like teak. Power8 assured us the blades were capable. We tested the table saw and scroll saw on teak, maple, and plywood. The tools performed equally well on all woods, but we're curious to see whether they maintain the same level of performance over time.

Testers also noted that the fence attachment could use improvement.

While small rulers on the table sides help to line up the fence, we'd prefer an attachment method that made squaring it and the wood easier and ensured straight cuts. Another very minor drawback, in our opinion, was that the unit does not have a straight-AC plug, and instead always runs on battery power. According to the maker, including an internal DC-AC converter was prohibitive given the unit's space, weight, and relative low cost.

BOTTOM LINE

For the home handyman and dockside DIYer, the Power8workshop is a good all-in-one kit for small projects. Buying the tools separately would run well over the \$342 that the kit retails for. Its compactness makes it stowable for those unexpected repairs at sea and its light weight means hassle-free transporting.

While we found the price a little high and one-year warranty a little short, a search for comparable products turned up only the Ryobi four-piece 18-volt kit (P841), which includes a cordless drill, and circular and reciprocating saws, but no benchtop tools or interchangeable handles. It retails for \$160 and comes with a two-year warranty. ▲

CONTACT

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Shorepower Cop

Marinco's heavy-duty GalvanAlert offers a visual check for AC problems.

Billed as “the world’s only shorepower corrosion detector with reverse polarity indicator” by West Marine, Marinco’s new GalvanAlert attaches to your existing 30-amp shorepower inlet and power cord and monitors galvanic and stray current corrosion flowing through the green ground wire ground of your shorepower system.

CONSTRUCTION

Appearance-wise, the GalvanAlert is similar to a miniature Marinco power cord. It is well constructed and utilizes the same plugs, connectors, and locking rings that are familiar to most every boater with an AC shorepower cord. The GalvanAlert has four LED indicators—a green LED to indicate power, a red LED indicating reverse polarity, and two other LEDs to show “medium” (green) and “high” (red) galvanic corrosion activity.

The GalvanAlert can be used in a couple of ways. Plug it into the marina shorepower pedestal for a quick reverse polarity check. (Most vessels with 30-amp service already have a polarity indicator, however it’s typically located belowdecks.) You can also get a plug-in polarity checker for about \$10 at most home-improvement stores. As the name implies however, the GalvanAlert’s primary function is to alert boat owners to the potential for galvanic corrosion of underwater metals. Galvanic corrosion occurs when two dissimilar and electrically connected metals are immersed in electrolyte, forming a galvanic cell. In such cases, the least noble metal gives up electrons and corrodes. While stray DC current is the most insidious destroyer of underwater metal, AC current can also cause problems. For more on this topic, see “The Green Wire Controversy” (www.practical-sailor.com/marine/greenwire.pdf) in the Tools and Techniques section of our website.

When inserted in line with the power cord (either at the pedestal or vessel power inlet), the GalvanAlert will indicate when there are corrosion-causing faults in the shorepower supply. Product literature states that the GalvanAlert “fends off corrosion caused by stray currents that occur when boats come in contact with poorly insulated shorepower supplies or faulty wiring;” however, it’s important to note that this “fending” is in the form of a visual indication only. The GalvanAlert indicates a potential problem exists, it doesn’t correct it or provide any protection.

Galvanic isolators (which also attach to the green grounding wire) can actually limit galvanic current flow up to about 1.2 volts. However, galvanic isolators don’t block corrosion currents driven by higher voltages, a situation the GalvanAlert could at least warn you about.

West Marine (the exclusive distributor) states that once in place, the GalvanAlert allows you to “constantly monitor unsafe corrosion activity.” That may be true, but we’d be pretty leery of leaving a \$150-plus piece of test equipment within easy reach of the dock, particularly if no one’s around to constantly monitor the unit anyway. If moored at a public marina or facility, a better approach may be to simply plug the unit in, check the readings, then remove and stow the unit aboard in a safe place until ready to check again.

If you are serious about protecting your boat from AC power problems, isolation transformers offer a very good solution. These, although they’re still expensive, have come down in price in recent years.



The GalvanAlert's four lights warn of problems in the shorepower system.

CONCLUSION

While the GalvanAlert tells you something is wrong, you’ll still have to determine where the problem lies. The West Marine video (www.westmarine.com) states that a green light indicates a “healthy” shorepower system. That’s not totally correct, as a system with an “open ground” wire will give the same indication, a situation that is not healthy for equipment and is potentially lethal to nearby swimmers.

Although it isn’t cheap, the GalvanAlert should serve well as a simple, easy to use tool for basic checking and monitoring of a vessel’s AC power system—as long as buyers understand exactly what the unit is (and isn’t) telling them. For more serious protection from the problems associated with AC power supplies, consider an isolation transformer. ▲

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