

Ask Jon Eakes

Screw Drivers & wrenches -- a constantly changing assortment.

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PICQUIC - the best multiple head storage & screw driver.

Picquic has been around for a long time and besides a decent screwdriver and a great stubby driver, it is especially a very useful storage solution for screw bits. I probably use the bits from this as much in my drill as in this hand driver. The bits are about the best steel available. One of the things I like is you can build your own custom set so I have colour coded my Robertson / Philips set separate from my hex driver set. It also means you can eliminate those slotted drivers that you hardly ever use in Canada.

One caution is if you want to apply extreme torque to it, use a wrench with the hex portion of the shaft specifically made for that. If not, you can twist the base right off of the shaft. www.PicQuic.com

HUSKY RETRACT-A-BIT - the surprisingly good one handed instant change multiple head screwdriver.

When this one showed up in my mailbox my first reaction was that this was probably one of those gadgets that won't last nor really be that practical. This works a bit like a Stiletto switch blade -- slide one of the buttons forward and the bit pops out the front. The pressure required to bring back the bits seemed a bit hard at first. But then I started using it.

First of all -- congratulations on just the right bit mix, two flat, two Philips and two Robertson bits and all easily identified right on the activation buttons. But what I came to realize as I started using it was this was the first screwdriver I ever had where I could instantly change bits with one hand! Working with things like electrical outlets requires two or three bits during one installation. Nothing was ever so easy as with the Husky. It seems to be stronger than I anticipated and the size is very comfortable. This one has become my driver of choice for any hand driving jobs that fit those standard bits. www.Retract-A-Bit.com

SKIL POWER DRIVER - the tiny but long lasting cordless driver.

One gets a bit dizzy trying to keep up with all the small cordless screw drivers but I have to give a thumbs up to Skil for their tiny iX02 palm sized screwdriver. It is not extremely powerful but makes up for that with a good locking mechanism that allows you to use the full force of your hand by simply twisting when the motor won't do any more. In fact by keeping the power on while twisting, it works like a ratchet in that the motor will rotate with you as you swing back to the beginning of your twist.

What is most surprising is the how long it will operate on a single charge. With Lithium-Ion batteries this tiny little thing just seems to go and go, and then it charges quickly if you set it back in its convenient cradle. The charge even holds for several months and can be left in its charging cradle without damage to the battery -- so it is always ready to use. The chuck is a standard 1/4 inch hex shaft, so it fits all your driver bits. If you need power, look at the Makita Gear Shift below -- but for light driving demands, this little pocket sized machine is the the tool of choice. www.SkilTools.com

MAKITA GEAR SHIFT - the cordless power driver: impact driver, hammer drill, clutch screw driver and two torque variable speed drill.

I receive a lot of tools to test out and sometimes they are just minor competitive changes to standard tools and sometimes they really break ground. Mikita hit a home run with some relatively simple additions to an old stand-by -- the Impact Wrench.

They call it their Gear Shift Impact Wrench. It takes standard 1/4 in. hex shafts for what we have come to love in a light weight impact wrench which allows us to drive lag bolts with ease. But take a closer look at the gear shift mechanism. On the left are two speed drill settings -- then the impact wrench setting -- then a hammer drill setting -- then a screw driver setting with the upper collar kicking in to give 16 screw torque settings. If the screw is too big and tough for the screw driving section, slide over and use the impact.

But finally you are not limited to using drills that have a 1/4 inch hex shaft. They sell a standard three jaw chuck designed for abuse that is mounted on that 1/4 inch hex shaft, instantly extending the range of bits you can put to work with this machine. This is the ultimate fastener machine, not to mention the glow in the dark nose and a built in light to find the screw or bolt or nut or whatever. BTP140 list price \$499 www.Makita.ca.

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