

I well remember my first orbital sander, an attachment that fitted onto an electric drill.

Fortunately things have changed and finishing sanders are now serious tools, but the emphasis in recent years has been on random orbit sanders for their sheer versatility. Now orbitals are back...

Bosch GSS 230/280 AVE orbital sanders



You can't beat a conventional orbital sander for really fine finishing, and Bosch have recently introduced two new models into their professional range for just this purpose. The GSS 230 and GSS 280 AVE models are conventional looking third- and half-sheet sanders, but they incorporate some unique features that set them worlds apart from my old drill accessory.

Good vibrations

For a start, Bosch has addressed the inherent problem of vibration with this type of sander. These two are claimed to have the lowest vibration levels for tools in their class, and not just by a fraction, so you can sand all day without the need for a break as required by current EU Health and Safety regulations – very important if you are working in a trade situation.

This has been achieved by de-coupling the handle section from the main housing. In addition, the handles and motor top are covered with a soft-grip material, which makes the tools even more comfortable to use.

I've always used an orbital sander with one hand on the top, but a removable front handle is provided on the GSS models to provide a more positive grip. Just unscrew it if you need to get into a tight corner and it's getting in the way.

Different bases

There's quite a significant difference in base area between third- and half-sheet sizes, and this is reflected in the motor fitted. Both have plenty of power, even under load, and are available in either 240V or 110V versions. However, I'm not sure why there are two sizes of machine; third-sheet sanders were never particularly popular, and I would always go for the half-sheet model, mainly because the abrasive sheets are more readily available.

Variable speeds

If you're working on delicate materials, a variable speed option allows you to vary the stroke rate from 16,000 to 22,000rpm. It's the smaller orbital rotation compared to a random orbit sander that makes these tools better for fine finishing. On the GSS models the



There's quite a difference in size of the sanding plates between the two models



You need to buy a punch if you want to perforate your own abrasive sheets



Depress the large rear clamp to load the first end of the abrasive sheet



TESTED BY ALAN HOLTHAM

oscillating diameter is 2.4mm, which is probably about half that of a random orbit sander (ros). This means that the stock removal rate is slower but is more controllable, so you can safely work on delicate surfaces like veneer. You can also work into corners, which you can't do with an ros.

Dust extraction

Another big improvement with these tools is their dust extraction. The translucent micro filter dust box just pushes onto the outlet, and contains an internal paper cartridge that's easy to remove and clean. I've used this system before on other Bosch tools and found it to be extremely efficient, though on these sanders it's quite hard to get the box fitted properly unless you push really hard. It may loosen up a bit with regular use.

Although the dust box is remarkably efficient, you may prefer to use external extraction. This is easy as the hose just pushes on; you don't need any special adaptors.

Hand-cut abrasives

The bases are punched to aid extraction through the paper, which is fine if you buy pre-punched abrasive sheets. However, for economy, many trade users will prefer to buy their abrasive in rolls and cut it to suit, but in this case you will then have to buy a punch as an extra. This anomaly is not unique to Bosch; many other manufacturers insist on making you buy something I think should be supplied free.

Fitting the paper is another greatly improved feature on the GSS models. It always used to be a struggle on older sanders with fiddly little springs that rarely gripped properly, meaning you wasted a lot of abrasive. On these sanders a large rear clamp makes it easy to load the first end of the paper, and then the front clamp grips firmly and at the same time tensions the paper.

Bonus points

What I also like about Bosch professional tools is that they are supplied with a decent length of flex – 4m in this case – so you shouldn't have to mess about with extension leads. Both models also come in a sturdy stacking box that you can build into a modular system for transport or storage in the workshop.

Summing up

These two sanders offer low vibration levels and soft-grip bodies that make them a real pleasure to use, even for long periods, and the dust collection is particularly impressive. They're not cheap tools but you do get what you pay for – except the sheet punch, of course!

SPECIFICATION

	GSS 230 AVE	GSS 280 AVE
MOTOR	300W	350W
SANDING PLATE	182 x 92mm	226 x 114mm
WEIGHT	2.45kg	2.75kg
NO-LOAD SPEED	8,000-11,000rpm	
OSCILLATION RATE	16,000-22,000rpm	
ORBIT DIAMETER	2.4mm	

VERDICT

These are excellent tools aimed squarely at the professional user who needs a tool every day for fine finishing work.

- PROS**
- Vibration-free operation
 - Efficient dust extraction
 - Neat paper holding system

- CONS**
- Stiff dust box attachment
 - No paper punch as standard

VALUE FOR MONEY 

PERFORMANCE 

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Bosch
- 01895 838743
- www.boschpowertools.co.uk



The lack of vibration and the soft grips mean you can sand in comfort all day



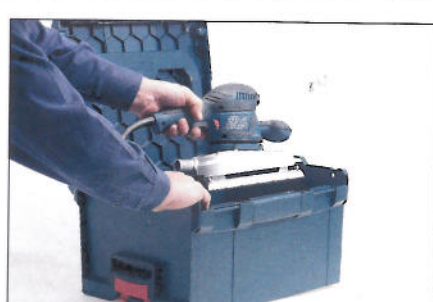
One advantage of traditional orbital sanders over random orbitals is that you can work right into corners



Then operate the front clamp to grip – and at the same time to tension – the sheet



The clip-on dust box contains a paper filter that's easy to remove and clean



Both models come in a sturdy stacking box for easy transport or storage