

Ever ready battery

It was more than a year ago that Bosch got us terribly excited about electric toothbrush-style battery charging, and now it's here, initially used on a drill. **Mark Cass** powers up



The G5B 18Vii is a tried and tested combi drill, now enhanced with wireless charging technology

We're all familiar with this scenario: or to drill an important hole, the cordless drill slows and stops. On a muttered curse, we down tools and toddle off to find a replacement battery and to put the flat one back on charge. Mildly irritating at

best, these are the times when you wish you were better prepared or at least, a bit luckier than present. Well, all that can now be a thing of the past, as wireless charging technology is poised to become widely available, courtesy of giant German manufacturer and innovator Robert Bosch.

Improvements

Since the advent of lithium ion technology, batteries can now be topped up at any point in the charge/discharge cycle, something that wasn't possible with the earliest NiCad (nickel cadmium) and NiMH (nickel metal hydride) types. As all of us woodworkers know, things have greatly improved in this field and we can now charge anytime – and for any length of time – without fear of harming the expensive cells within.

Following thousands of person hours of research – not to mention a stack of patent applications – Bosch has found a way of utilising induction technology to improve the battery charging systems which power our tools. Anyone who did the relevant science at school – physics class anybody? – may recall those experiments with magnetic flux patterns and the diagrams which resulted. They were usually created in iron filings by a current flowing in a conductor and nicely illustrated the fundamentals of electro magnetism.

Although the principles behind the technology are well known, and similar to those which govern electrical transformers and the domestic induction cooker hob, never before have they been harnessed to recharge an exhausted battery of any size. It's a big first step towards the ultimate cordless tool.

Space

The charging unit is the size of a regular charger, and so won't impinge on valuable bench space, especially with its low profile. In operation you have two choices: either put



Batteries have a button-operated charge indicator



A green light shows that the battery is in the charging zone, however haphazard its placement

Wirelessly charged Bosch 18V combi



If the battery goes too far out of range the red warning light comes on

The toughened docking frame both contains and protects the charger...

...as well as helping to ensure the battery is in its optimum charging position

The vehicle: Bosch 18V combi

Bosch has chosen – wisely in my opinion – to launch the wireless charging system with one of its most popular drills, the 18V combi. This top-quality tool features all of the most recent advances that have been made in this field. Thanks to strategic use of the now familiar rubberised plastic, it's a rugged cordless tool, well protected and entirely suited to a working environment. This firm but yielding outer layer also makes it very comfortable to hold.

Controls are exactly how one would expect, the now familiar cordless drill layout has settled into a default standard of sorts, and it would be a brave or foolish firm who would change it. A progressive trigger action, thumb-operated rotational control – with helpful arrow! – and a rear top-mounted speed switch make up the most important stuff.

The standard torque control ring is firmly present and correct, and joined by another which determines hammer action or not. Combi drills are much better in their percussive powers than they used to be, and the Bosch is no exception. Obviously though, they do have their limits, and if you're contemplating that reinforced concrete lintel, then you may want to think twice about it and maybe track down an SDS drill instead.

Like nearly every power tool these days, there is a super-bright LED work light on board, a useful work aid it has to be said, but I found that the positioning of this one meant temporary dazzlement when I changed between drill bits. Mind you, it's nothing that a piece of gaffer tape couldn't fix if it continued to be an irritant.

Conclusion

Overall, I found the Bosch G5B18V drill to be very user friendly, and it did all that I asked of it. It could be considered a slightly heavy drill – and has the potential to be heavier still if you go for a larger battery alternative – but this is partly due to the all-metal gears and top-quality 4-pole high-performance motor inside. If you feel the need for a smaller tool, then the 10.8V range will have something for you there, but not the wireless charging system just yet. I'm told it will be coming, but upgrading an entire range, while still keeping it backwards compatible with existing kit – something Bosch is very rightly proud of – is hardly the work of a moment.

a flat battery on charge as usual – it's just a 'place and go' – or you can stick with an ongoing intermittent charge by just putting your power tool straight down onto the charger. This is slightly recessed to ensure basic alignment, but don't worry though, you don't have to achieve perfect mathematical accuracy. As long as the battery is in 'the zone', it doesn't matter which way it's aligned. I tried it in as many different ways as possible and discovered that it will cope with being slightly out of its recess; a red light will warn you of any positional errors you may have made.

The same red LED warning light will also point out the proximity of any foreign bodies, and also inform the user whether or not their battery has gone beyond its optimum working temperature.

Good!
+ Great build quality, enhanced by wireless charging; fully compatible with all Bosch 18V batteries
– Slightly heavy; LED worklight position

Framed
Although the charger is happy enough just sitting on the benchtop, Bosch has included a tough ABS plastic docking frame in which to house it and help attain best alignment. This frame can also be fixed to the benchtop and thus assist in bringing order to the workplace.

Rating ★★★★★
Price: from £176.00
Voltage: 18V
Speed: 500-1700rpm
Chuck: 1.5-13mm
Max torque: 60
Weight: 1.6kg
Web: www.bosch-professional.com/gb/en



A super-bright LED worklight is set into the upper base

For the really go-ahead woodworker though, it's entirely possible to sink the charger into the benchtop and cover it with clear acrylic sheet to provide a flush and good-looking solution. This is something I've yet to do, but I can really see the attraction and usefulness of such a scheme.

The Woodworking Verdict