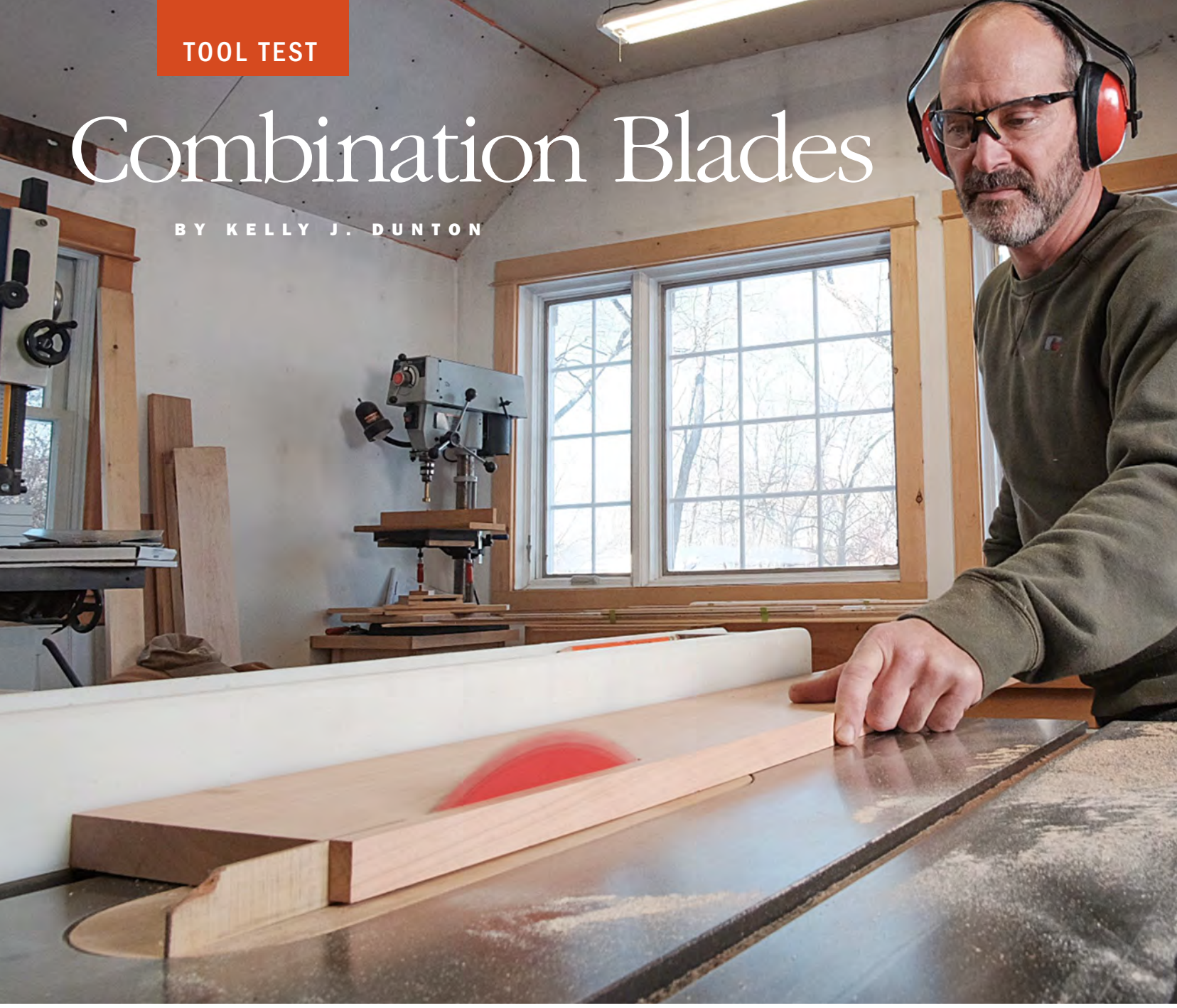
TOOL TEST

Combination Blades

BY KELLY J. DUNTON



Yes, one blade really can make clean rips and crosscuts

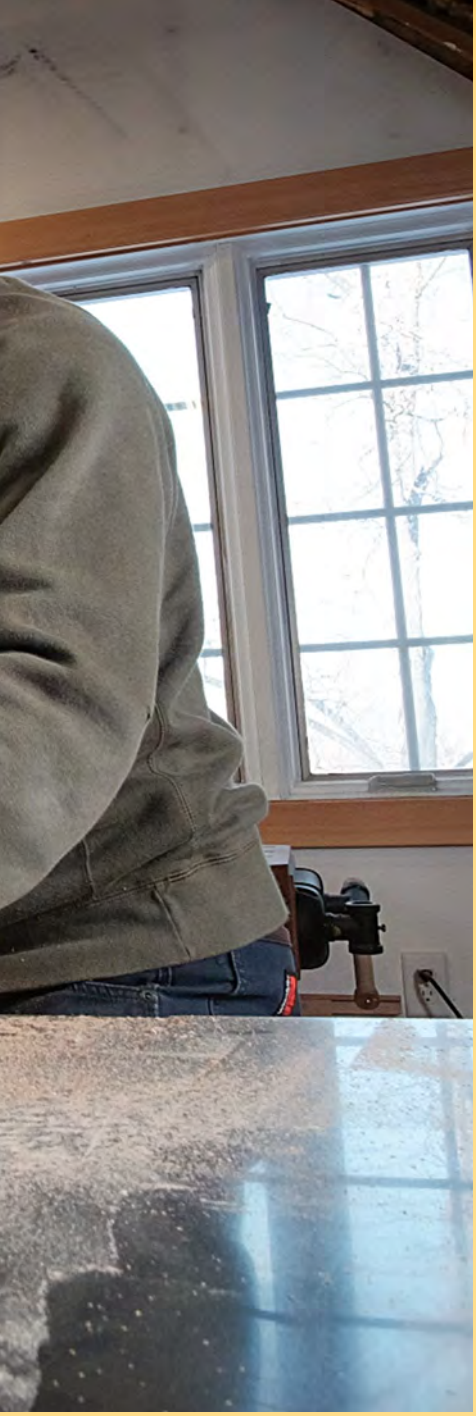
In a perfect shop, you'd switch between rip and crosscut tablesaw blades so that you were always using one optimized for the cut being made. Of course, there are no perfect shops, and many woodworkers prefer to keep one blade in the saw for both types of cuts. This is why combination blades are so popular, and because of their popularity there are nearly a gazillion available at home centers, hardware and woodworking stores, and online. It's also why the editors at *Fine Woodworking* asked me to test them and determine which ones make the smoothest cuts.

To make sense of the overstuffed field—and so that I wouldn't spend all year in the shop testing sawblades—we decided to narrow the test to 40-tooth combination blades with ⅛-in. (standard) kerfs, because 40 teeth strike a balance between ripping and crosscutting. Nine blades met these criteria. I used them to make crosscuts and rips in pine, cherry, and plywood to determine how smoothly and cleanly they cut. I also ripped 8/4 hard maple to discover how they managed challenging ripcuts.

In the end, the Freud Premier Fusion blade produced the best cut quality for both rips and crosscuts, but it did not rip thick, hard maple quickly. If you're looking for a faster ripcut and don't mind minor imperfections in the cut, then go with the Forrest Woodworker II or Ridge Carbide TS2000.

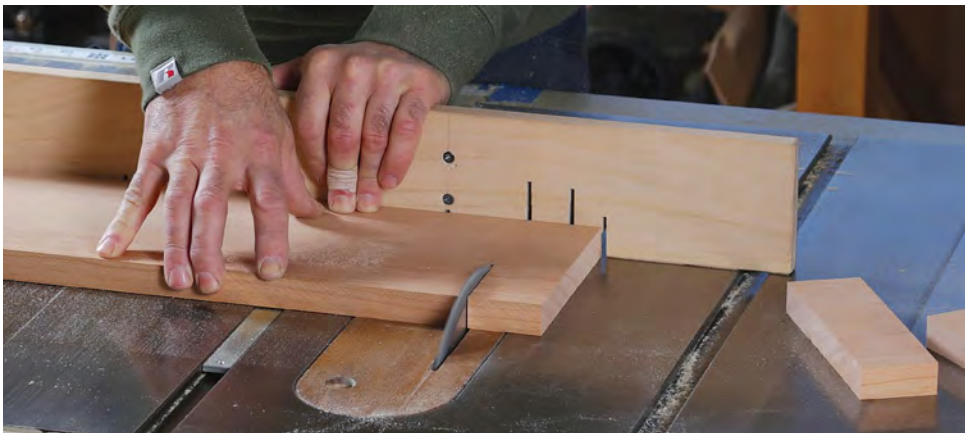
Kelly J. Dunton is a professional furniture maker in Terryville, Conn.

Photos, except where noted: Matt Kenney; blade photos: John Tetreault



GREAT FOR CROSSCUTS

With 40 teeth and a tooth grind designed to sever wood fibers, combination blades should leave a smooth surface on end grain.



Clean crosscuts. *Because inferior crosscuts require extra work to clean up, Dunton tested the blades' ability to crosscut without chipping out grain or creating whiskers on the bottom of the cut.*

Least scoring wins. *You want a clean surface on the end grain. The Infinity Super General left a surface that was smooth to the touch (left). The SawStop Titanium Series scored the end grain, creating arcing ridges. (above.)*

GOOD FOR RIPS

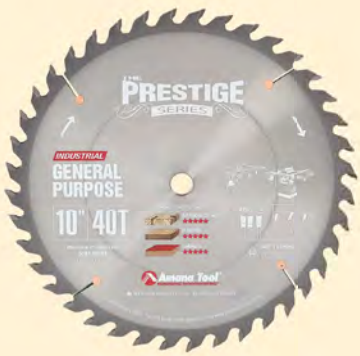
Cutting with the grain is more challenging for a combination blade, but the ones that rip best leave almost imperceptible machine marks. A single light pass with a handplane should remove them.

Smooth cuts with the grain. *The surface left by a ripcut with the Forrest Woodworker II had minor imperfections (left), but the Amana Prestige left visible machine marks (above).*

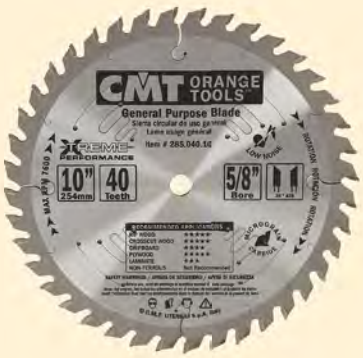
Combination sawblades

WHAT MATTERS MORE: SMOOTHNESS OR SPEED?

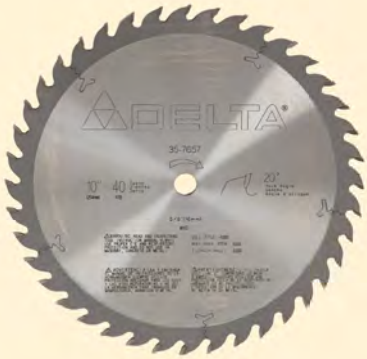
Because of their geometry, teeth ground to cut cleanly and smoothly do not rip quickly. So, when picking a combination blade, you must decide what you prefer: super-clean cuts or faster ripping. The Freud Premier Fusion left excellent surfaces. It's the Best Overall in that regard. At just $88, it's also the Best Value. The Forrest Woodworker II and Ridge Carbide TS2000 have teeth that rip more quickly, and they are Best Overall blades for ripcuts. The tradeoff for that speed, however, is a cut that's not quite as smooth or clean.



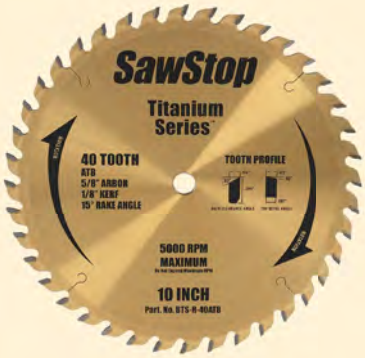
AMANA PRESTIGE PR1040



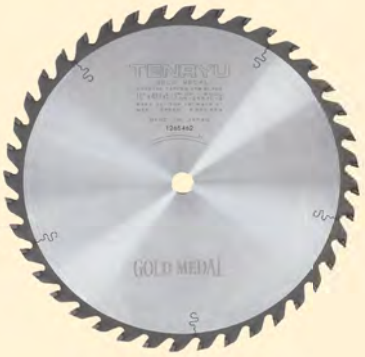
CMT 285.040.10



DELTA 25-7657



SAWSTOP TITANIUM SERIES

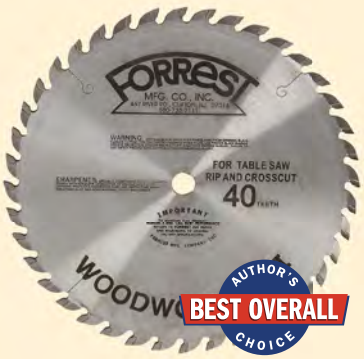


TENRYU GM-25540

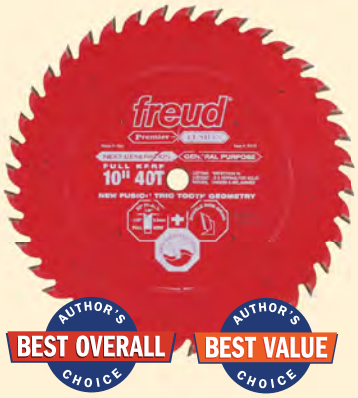
BLADE	PRICE	CROSSCUT QUALITY		
		Pine	Cherry	Plywood
Amana Prestige PR1040	$62	Good	Very good	Good
CMT 285.040.10	$59	Good	Very good	Very good
Delta 25-7657	$22	Good	Fair	Fair
Forrest Woodworker II (Author's Choice: Best Overall)	$150	Very good	Excellent	Very good
Freud Premier Fusion P410 (Author's Choice: Best Overall; Author's Choice: Best Value)	$88	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Infinity Super General	$100	Excellent	Excellent	Very good
Ridge Carbide TS2000 (Author's Choice: Best Overall)	$105	Very good	Excellent	Good
SawStop Titanium Series	$66	Fair	Fair	Fair
Tenryu GM-25540	$95	Very good	Excellent	Good

Online Extra

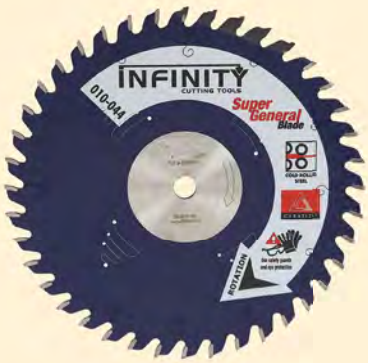
For info on sawblade sharpening, go to **FineWoodworking.com/267.**



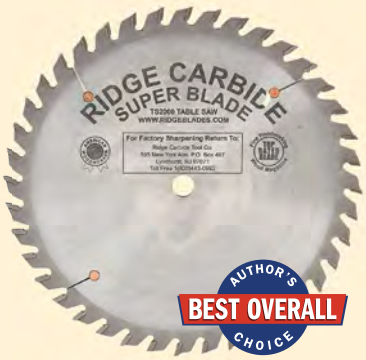
FORREST WOODWORKER II



FREUD PREMIER FUSION P410



INFINITY SUPER GENERAL



RIDGE CARBIDE TS2000

RIP QUALITY		RIP SPEED	NOTES
Pine	Cherry	8/4 Maple	
Fair	Good	Good	Rip speeds were average. Crosscuts produced chipout on the bottom edge in cherry and pine. There was considerable blade scoring in soft- and hardwood ripcuts.
Good	Good	Good	Rip speeds were average. Plywood and hardwood crosscuts were clean, but there was scoring in the pine crosscuts. Ripcuts scored the edge in both cherry and pine.
Good	Good	Excellent	Rip speeds were very fast, but there was considerable chipout in cherry and plywood crosscuts, and some scoring on all ripcuts.
Very good	Excellent	Very good	Crosscuts and rips in pine and cherry were smooth and clean, with some chipout on the bottom edge of plywood crosscuts, and light scoring in pine after rips. Rip speed was above average.
Excellent	Excellent	Good	This blade made the smoothest and cleanest rips and crosscuts, and left just a tiny bit of fuzz on the bottom of plywood crosscuts. This quality, however, comes at the cost of somewhat slower rip speed.
Good	Very good	Good	Crosscuts in pine and cherry were great, but there was some fuzziness and chipout on the bottom of plywood crosscuts. Rip speed was average, with some scoring in pine, but very little in cherry.
Very good	Excellent	Very good	This blade produced very clean crosscuts in pine and cherry with some fuzziness on the bottom of plywood crosscuts. It ripped quickly and left a clean surface, although there was light scoring in softwood rips.
Good	Good	Excellent	This blade made the second fastest ripcuts, but with some scoring on the cut. There was some chipout when crosscutting pine and cherry, and considerably more chipout when crosscutting plywood.
Good	Good	Excellent	This blade made the fastest ripcuts, but there was scoring on the cuts. Crosscuts in hardwood were great, and in softwood nearly as good, but there was chipout and fuzziness on the bottom of plywood crosscuts.