

» New Products

METABO Core bits

Metabo, of West Chester, Pa., introduces its 1-piece Rotary Hammer Core Bits, which increase the efficiency of drilling into hard, solid materials such as concrete, block and brick. The core bit makes the rotary hammer accessory faster at drilling and more effective than the modular system. The carbide tipped bits come in diameters from 1-1/2 inches to 6 inches and lengths of 12 inches and 22 inches. The 1-piece core bit is available with an SDS-Max or Spline drive shank for individual applications. For more information, visit www.metabousa.com or call (800) 638-2264.



STARRETT Protractor

Starrett, of Athol, Mass., announces its ProSite CP505A-12 Combination Protractor, which offers readings for miter cuts, single cuts, compound cuts, exact angle/supplemental angles and roof pitch references. It has a protractor on the reverse side for simultaneously reading angles and supplemental angles. The protractor is made of precision-machined, rugged, 1/4-inch lightweight aluminum. The tool's 12-inch scissor-action legs feature a Teflon "O" ring, and the dial scales are laser-engraved for accuracy. For more information, visit www.starrett.com or call (800) 541-8887.



On the bubble

Level technology creates advantageous playing field

BY BILL ADDISON

The standard, or spirit, level has been around since approximately 1640, when it was invented by French scientist Melchisedech Thevenot. The design was modernized in the 1920s, and since then not much has changed to the basic principal.

Still, today's crop of level tools shows that progress marches on. In a market that offers everything from bubbles to lasers to digital readouts, consumers are reading more and

demanding more from their tools.

To meet the increasing demand of consumers — and sometimes create it — manufacturers are beginning to offer products that are stronger, more durable, more accurate and offer a variety of proprietary innovations.

According to the Home Improvement Research Institute (HIRI), 3.8 percent of homeowners reported buying levels in 2005, just ahead of hammers at 3.3 percent and behind toolboxes at 4.0 percent. HIRI also reported that sales of spirit (or bubble) levels increased from 43 percent to 53 percent of levels purchased between 2003 and 2005, while laser levels dropped from 48 percent to 38 percent during the same time period.

Stanley's response to level demand is its latest FatMax line of levels. For the New Britain, Conn., tool maker, the decision to stay with the spirit level was simple.

"We've done a lot of research with a lot of pros — they always go back to the standard level," said

Ryan Blair, Stanley's global product line manager for layout tools.

Blair said that people expect more from manufacturers today. "The consumer's getting a little more savvy, they want more quality for the price. They don't want a disposable tool — they want something they can hang on to, something they can trust," he said.

The latest addition to Stanley's FatMax line features all the key elements of the new level equation. "We beefed up the product," said Blair. "We made it thicker and taller."

Part of the strength equation for Stanley was to build up the product's endcaps, making them stronger and able to absorb greater impact.

Add that stronger construction to the FatMax's accented dual side vials and center MaxEdge vial, a bridged center vial to allow for a continuous marking edge, and the readability of the level increases. The FatMax level is accurate within .0005 inches.

The folks at Stanley had a few other additions to the level. After talking to professionals and conducting numerous bench

MARKETING ANGLES (Top to bottom) Stanley (FatMax Magnetic 24-inch level), Montgomery Level (32-inch Montgomery Slope Level) and Kapro (48-inch Zeus 990 Level) offer consumers modern touches, including advanced vial technology, durability and better accuracy.



tests, there was one theme the company kept hearing over and over again. "People wanted a real nice big hand grip," said Blair. Stanley added two. They also added a magnetic version to the level, building real earth magnets into it.

For leading level company Kapro, one of the latest innovations involves durability. The company introduced the Zeus 990, which is described by the Lake Mills, Wis.-based company as "the toughest level in the world."

"It's three to six times stronger than the average level currently on the market," said Tom Kaczor, national sales manager for Kapro Tools.

According to Kaczor, the Zeus can withstand an inordinate amount of damage — the kind that comes from getting thrown around a job site — while still staying true to its factory calibration.

"On the spirit levels, they are demanding higher and higher accuracy on the vials," said Kaczor, who pointed out

(Continued on page 30)

(Continued from page 29)
that their vials also meet the .0005 mm/meter accuracy rating, which Kaczor equated to half the thickness of a dime per 6 feet.

In the readability category, Kapro has added multiple features to its latest creation to make reading a level line easier than ever before. It started with the plumb site dual view vials, which allows the user to easily gain a vertical level view while looking straight on at the level, which Kapro says increases accurate reading and eliminates neck and eye strain. The company moved on to a magnified center vial and finished it off with an illumination feature (available on the 990 vision).

Kapro also added cushioned hand grips to the Zeus. In addition, the level is coated with

“We’ve done a lot of research with a lot of pros — they always go back to the standard level.”

— RYAN BLAIR,
global product line manager
for layout tools, Stanley

“Keflon,” a non-stick material that Kapro hopes will attract concrete workers, who typically use wooden levels to which concrete won’t stick.

Montgomery Level from North Charleston, S.C., is a relatively new player, founded four years ago. But company president Matt Montgomery is confident his level can hold its own

against the big level companies.

“It’s definitely obvious that the level industry is coming up with new and inventive ways to make the level more interesting,” said Montgomery.

The Montgomery level is no exception, offering its customers an unusual long, curved vial in the center of the tool, in addition to traditional vials. The curved vial serves to measure slope and pitch.

Montgomery, who was a roofing contractor prior to starting the company, wanted a tool to make measuring the pitch and slope of a roof easier and more accurate than the standard rise-over-run method.

“This is extremely accurate,” said Montgomery. “You put it on there, and it will tell you right away what the pitch and slope are.”

Montgomery also points to

another market-

ing feature: green vial fluid, literally and figuratively, utilizing a water-based fluid in its vials, as opposed to the more common alcohol- or petroleum-based vials.

Montgomery admits there is one drawback to the water-based fluid. “With my fluid, the freezing point is minus 20 [degrees],” he said. “But in my opinion you really don’t need to be out there working in minus 20 degree weather.”



KEEPING IT LEVEL Kapro’s Zeus 990 features the Plumb Site Dual-View vial system that offers a side and front view.

ONE SOURCE. ONE ORDER. ONE SHIPMENT.

Making your business **simple** with matching home package collections for the WholeHouse™. Everything a builder needs from lights to locks and fans to faucets - all from one source. Contact our exceptional customer service team to find out how WholeHouse™ can increase your sales!

DESIGNHOUSE

Home Decor Made Simple

www.todaysdesignhouse.com — www.wholehouse.com — 800.558.8700

visit us at the **International Builders' Show** BOOTH #S12801