

Festool's First Tools

Building a brand that's worth the wait

by **Connie Bastyr**

Vital Statistics

Company: **Festool**

Year founded: **1925**

First product: **Transportable chain saw**

City originated: **Esslingen, Germany**

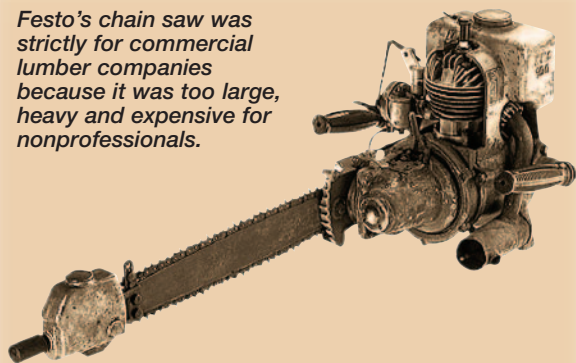
Parent company: **Tooltechnic Systems LLC**

North American headquarters: **Goleta, California**

Web site: **www.festool-usa.com**

Picture yourself traveling several hours to a tool factory to buy a power sander. You pay a deposit just to get on a waiting list. Then after four to six weeks, you repeat the journey to pick up your sander. Oh, and you're traveling by bicycle. In the 1950s many German craftsmen pedaled for hours and waited for weeks to own a Festo orbital sander. To those cabinetmakers and woodworkers, a reliable power sander was worth the time, cost and effort.

Festo's chain saw was strictly for commercial lumber companies because it was too large, heavy and expensive for nonprofessionals.



The company that commanded such respect was founded in 1925 in a small workshop in southern Germany. Originally named Festo for its two founders, Albert Fezer and Gottlieb Stoll, its goal was to make tools that were efficient and designed to meet the particular needs of professional woodworkers. Within a few years, the progressive manufacturer produced the first transportable chain saw. (For the first time, the "mill" would come to the lumber rather than the lumber's going to the mill.)

Though Fezer left the business in the 1930s, master mechanic Stoll continued to develop ideas and products, primarily large wood-working machinery for cabinet shops. In time, Stoll's customers were mainly professional woodworkers, flooring installers and cabinetmakers. So during the 1940s, he stopped making chain saws and focused on shop machinery and portable power tools. In 1951 he introduced the

world's first handheld orbital sander, and demand grew so high that even without an outside sales force, the company could not maintain an inventory.

During the 1950s, Festo expanded its market to Switzerland and Austria, where there was no language barrier. Eventually craftsmen in Italy and then the rest of Europe began buying Festo tools. The business remained primarily in Europe until the 1990s and — apart from an attempt to market large machinery in the United States during the 1960s — its products did not appear widely in North America until the late '90s.

To better identify its specialty, the company incorporated the word *tool* in its new name, Festool, in 2000. Today the brand is most familiar to professional tradesmen who require tools with excellent endurance and precision. The company's mission is to make products for the expert user — tools that are the benchmark for all others. With design and efficiency as priorities, Festool requires its tools to pass endurance testing or undergo a complete redesign.

Festool no longer makes stationary machines, which it dropped from the product line during the 1980s to focus on handheld power tools. Today the brand is the No. 1 professional choice in Europe for cabinetmakers, woodworkers, boat builders, solid-surface fabricators and flooring installers. In North America, sales of Festool products have doubled every year for the last three years. Throughout the world, craftsmen who use power tools every day appreciate the tools' design and efficiency. For them, the tools' qualities translate into precise control and less hand fatigue — features that make the longest bicycle trek seem worthwhile. ♦



The world's first orbital sander, made by Festo in 1951, was a revolutionary tool that shaved hours off of a tedious job.



Festool's modern version of the orbital sander is lightweight (4 pounds), and it meets today's safety standards with a built-in dust extraction system.