

GMC 860w Flooring Laminate Saw

Independent Review by
Peter Brett



I like wooden floors, and when I was househunting a few months ago, the house I eventually purchased boasted a few wooden laminate floors in key rooms like the entrance lobby and the kitchen.

Unfortunately, I also rejected at least a dozen perfectly liveable houses with laminate floors. I was amazed at the different standards of the floors and the way in which they had been laid. It was clear that some vendors thought that it was enough simply to lay any old laminate floor in any old room in any old way. My experience of it was that this method is a surefire way of losing a potential purchaser.

With a bit of care and the right gear, even a cheap laminate floor can be made to look better, sit better on the substrate and not creak or shift when you walk on it. In other words, perhaps if they had hired a professional or invested in a decent saw to do the job, the laminate floor would have been a plus rather than a minus.

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I have used a variety of cut-off saws when laying floors, and even a giant guillotine-like cutter, which was a bit scary. What these machines do well is cut to length and some of them are also able to cut to length with an angled end to fit an oddly shaped wall. What they mostly can't do is cut to width, so the fitter is obliged to use a handsaw to do the job. Professionals are used to this and will generally cut straight and true, but from the evidence of my househunting, the average DIY floor layer relies on a nice thick skirting board or trim to cover their lack of cutting skill.

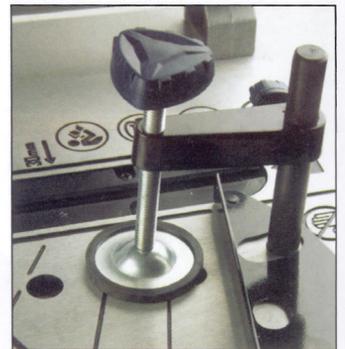
But with the new GMC laminate flooring saw the flooring cavalry may be coming to the rescue - and not before time either.

Unpacking the saw from its box it was clear that it was light enough to be carried and moved easily and that it was compact enough to be used in the room where the floor was being laid. So far all pluses.

Closer examination showed that the base of the saw was a light alloy casting, which explained the light weight. But the base is also very strong as the casting is heavily ribbed underneath which keeps it rigid and therefore accurate. I was able to lean my weight on it (not recommended in general use!) and it still stayed rigid.

All that the user needs to do to get the saw running is to mount the rubber/plastic feet on the base and attach the carry/operating handle for the motor. This takes about 10 minutes at the most and involves the use of a pozi screwdriver.

Supplied with the saw are two pressed steel fences and a hold down. The first fence is effectively a rip fence that allows the user to cut flooring to width.



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The width setting is adjusted by unscrewing a plastic knob and using the width markers cast into the base to set it.

The second fence can be set at 90 degrees to the sawblade for straight cuts or at four other convenient angles of 15, 20, 30 or 45 degrees.

At the 90 degree position, the fence can be adjusted 10 degrees either way for those walls in British houses that aren't quite right angles.....

The small 150mm diameter, small toothed TCT blade is housed in a clear plastic casing for 100% visibility and finger safety. If one follows the simple instructions to the letter this is a very safe machine to use.

The whole motor housing is moved up and down a pair of rigid chromed rails, rather like an old radial arm saw, for doing cross cuts. For ripping cuts the motor is held in place with a push stop into the lower rail, and the material is fed through it. GMC have even supplied a very nice little plastic push stick that can be stored on the side of the base. The use of the push stick means that fingers never need to be near the blade at any time.

It is always a pain to have to clear up dust inside a house, but it is a real hassle if dust gets under the flooring that is being laid. In order to minimise dust, a zipped dust bag is attached to the end of the motor housing. In my experience, this collected the vast majority of the dust, and was easy to empty. Since MDF dust is nasty stuff, any of it that can be collected at source is a good idea. The dust outlet is a standard size, so canny users could easily connect a vacuum to it, thereby almost obviating any potential dust problem.

I had the opportunity of using the GMC Flooring saw in a real life situation as I needed to lay an engineered wood laminate floor over the abominated chipboard floor in my spare room. Once I had cleared the room and laid the backing layer I proceeded in the usual manner, working from the middle to the edges.

In this phase it is mostly crosscutting to length needed, and I found the angle settings very useful because the room is deliberately built not square to fit an unusual plot of land. Working outwards to the sides also goes quite quickly, until you get to an edge. With engineered wood or with MDF base laminates, it is possible to work with a minimal gap to the wall, as the laminate will not expand across its width like a real wood floor.

Using the ripping mode set-up on the saw I was able to cut the planks accurately enough to fit almost completely to the edge. I had a tricky wall that angled inwards, but I was able to rip accurately enough by marking the planks with a water-based felt tip marker and feeding them through freehand. It takes a bit of skill and care, but its possible.

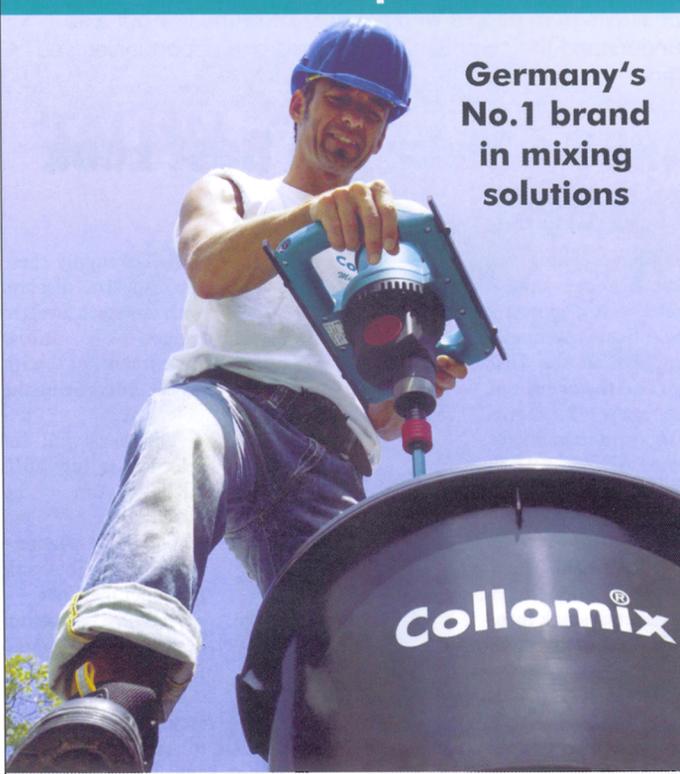
The motor, although small, is powerful enough for laminates up to about 12 to 15mm thick. There is no point in hurrying the saw because it will give you a rougher edge. A smooth, slow feed rate

gives a lovely neat edge that will easily slot into place against the wall.

All in all I was impressed with this little machine. It is a handy gadget that will probably even impress professionals who specialise in doing domestic flooring. I liked the fact that it is possible to lift it with just one hand, that it was stable in use, and that it was possible to stand it on an edge when it is not in use. It takes up a lot less space in the van (and workshop) this way. It is easy to use and it should improve the appearance of laminate flooring for DIYers up and down the country.

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