

TEST

PROFESSIONALISM



STUART LAWSON

Stuart Lawson weighs up the long-awaited Professional Router Table from Trend

I receive as many letters requesting advice about router tables as I do routers. Whereas many readers are prepared to part with a fairly significant sum of money for a decent router, they often buy the cheapest table available. They recognise the importance of the table but regard shelling out several hundred pounds for an above average model as a rather painful expense. Painful it may be, but it would be folly to think that the quality of the table matters less than the router.

This is the first table I have tested for the magazine, partly because the vast majority of my workshop life was spent using spindle moulders and Wadkin overhead routers rather than a router table. However, Trend's Professional Router Table (more commonly referred to as the PRT) looked so promising that I knew I would have to test it myself to find out its real value to the average router-user.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUY LAWRENCE

COMPLETE PACKAGE

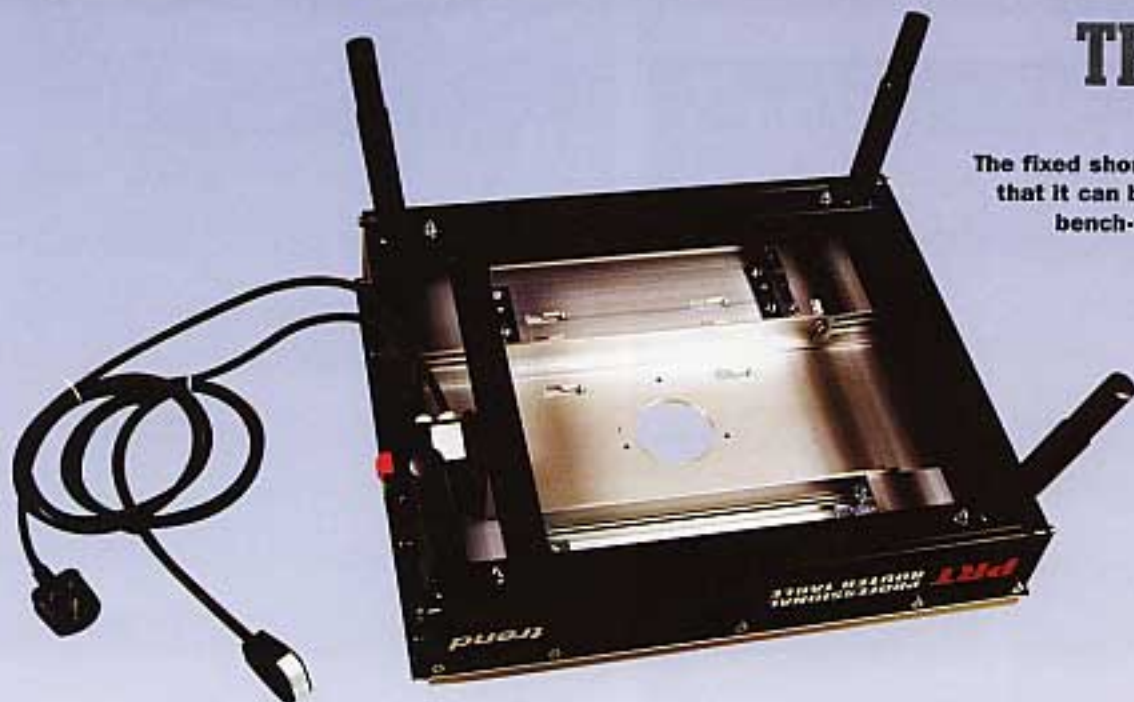
With the exception of the legs, that need to be fitted to the table (unless of course you intend to use it as a bench-top table), and the fence, that needs connecting to the main body, there is no other assembly work. The bed and insert plate are made from very substantial aluminium extrusions (8mm) which bed tidily into a pressed and welded steel frame, the combination of which produce the most 'solid feeling' extruded table I have ever come across. The legs are very rigid in their housings so the amount of 'walk' caused by a twisting frame is negligible.

FENCE AND GUARD ASSEMBLY

On low-cost router table set-ups the fence and guard assembly is usually substandard through restricted adjustment possibilities or simple difficulties in making fine positional changes. Not so the PRT which has a substantial cast-aluminium extraction/fence block and extruded aluminium fences (there isn't a piece of MDF in sight), giving the whole assembly a genuine professional feel.

The guard assembly and the vertical pressure finger comb slide neatly and cleverly into a rectangular section tube on the top of the 'block'. This then pivots up to reveal the cutter. I was slightly suspicious of the fact that this assembly fixes indirectly to the block via one central threaded fixing which I presumed would pivot rather than lock. However, since it is possible to secure the guard assembly so firmly, there is nothing to worry about when machining.

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The fixed short legs mean that it can be used as a bench-top machine

FENCE

It would have been useful to have independently adjustable parts of the fence to account for fully profiled edges, although I guess that some double-sided sticky tape and some thin sheet material would do the job.

HOLD-DOWNS

The horizontal pressure fingers slide into the profiled top with about 70mm of adjustment in each position. These work as well as any I have experienced and in combination with the particularly smooth anodised table, make for an easy ride.

POLYCARBONATE GUARD

The vertical adjustment of this guard is independent from that of the vertical pressure fingers but despite relying on the same fixing handle, neither really obstructs the other. The whole design of this guard and hold-down is

just about perfect and works a treat, being both safe and easy to use. I imagine that professional users may even keep the guard on (!) which would be most unusual.

The thickness of the guard's polycarbonate and the fact that it's not just a moulded styrene or acrylic means that it really will do the job for which it was intended – protecting the user. One word of advice is to take as good care of this plastic guard as you would a spectacle lens. It will scratch very easily and be more likely to hinder the user if not cared for properly.

MITRE FENCE

The mitre fence slides into the table top profile in the usual manner and is very smooth running. As a base for attaching jigs etc it is perfectly adequate (it would be advantageous to add a home-made fence extension and board support to the sliding carriage in order to machine

larger workpieces). As with the fence-measuring scales, the angle scale on the mitre fence is fully adjustable. A locking pin will then give a true 90° every time.

ADJUSTMENTS

The fence block has four fixing positions and approximately 60mm of travel within each setting. The quick-release lobe knobs mean that changeover is quick and easy and fine adjustments within each position are the same.

Don't forget to also order a fine height-adjuster since this doesn't come as standard and will annoy the hell out of anyone who after spending all that money gets home to find out they haven't got one.

FITTING A ROUTER

Unusually the router insert plate is actually the whole middle section of the table. This is a little ungainly when you



The guard, insert rings, mitre fence and lead-on pin



The guard plus the vertical and horizontal pressure fingers in place



The guard assembly lifted by the pivoting rectangular section tube

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The measuring scales are fully adjustable

have a 6.5kg Bosch fixed to it but once in place it all makes perfect sense. Four large locking screws require a quick half-turn to lock the plate into position.

By connecting the router cable to the supplied NVR circuit, switching on and off is made easy and safe. If you don't have a Trend router you will need to drill some holes in the insert plate and acquire some screws. Check with Trend's technical department as to what you will need for your machine.

Whatever you have to do you can be guaranteed that it will be straightforward and it certainly shouldn't deter anyone from buying this or any other router table.

USING FREEHAND

Template routing is possible with the attachment of a lead-on guide pin (which is supplied) but there is also the option of using the copy follower accessory. It costs a further £40 but for safety's sake I would seriously consider buying one if you are planning on using templates. I will try to get hold of one and test it in next issue's 'Stuff' section.

THE VERDICT

Although not that cheap, in my opinion the PRT offers professional and amateur router-users a great deal for their money. You could spend more and get a slightly better table but the only thing the PRT really lacks is a router raising device. As this would 'up' the cost significantly, many users would consider it an unnecessary luxury.

Trend has got this table just right both in terms of quality and price. It is manufactured to an extremely high standard and functions very well indeed, so much so that apart from the lack of fence adjustment I could not fault it in any meaningful way. £440* is a lot of money but the only alternative way to get all this for less is to make your own table.

I will certainly feel bereft when it is time to send it back to Watford.

SPECIFICATIONS

Table size	650 x 550mm
Bench height	350mm
Height with legs	830mm
Router cutter aperture	90mm dia.
Insert ring sizes	20, 35, 54 and 68mm dia.
Back Fence Height	110mm
Dust Spout Aperture	57mm dia
Price	£440.63 (inc VAT) (Special offer until 31/12/03 = £349.00)

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Profiling using the pressure fingers

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Using the mitre fence

INCLUDED ACCESSORIES

Insert rings
NVR switch
Mitre fence
Finger pressures
Lead-on pin
Push stick

CONTACT DETAILS

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