

Tested

Trend CDJ300 and CDJ600 dovetail jigs

Trend have recently launched a brace of new router dovetail jigs, the CDJ300 and the CDJ600, essentially the same but with different capacities. As suggested by the model names, the CDJ300 will accommodate work up to 300mm wide and the CDJ600 up to 600mm. In both cases the timber can vary from 12mm to 25mm thick, so there's plenty of scope no matter what type of dovetailing you need to do.

The same jig can be used to form a variety of joints, lapped or through dovetails, comb joints and dowel joints, though some of these will need the addition of optional templates and cutters. As supplied, the jig will produce $\frac{1}{2}$ " lapped dovetails and rebated lapped dovetails. The pins and tails are regularly spaced, and there's no facility to vary them. (If you want to simulate the appearance of hand-cut dovetails then jigs are available but at a much greater cost than these.)

Putting it together

When you take it out of the box, the jig is actually in knock-down form which initially appears rather daunting but in fact it all goes together very quickly with

the minimum of frustration. The supplied handbook is just about OK but could be made a lot clearer for some of the setting operations. Phrases like "decrease depth adjustment of the cutter" are rather ambiguous and I'm sure I made some adjustments the wrong way as a result.

Location stops

The main difference between the two jigs is in the timber location stops which are fixed on the 300 but adjustable with a fine setting scale on the 600. The advantage of this is that you can centre the workpiece on the 600 to give a symmetrical joint. There are also middle clamp bar knobs on the 600 which you need to use for narrower workpieces but which can quickly be removed for anything wide. The work has to be clamped securely under these bars, tight up against the offset stops, and the supplied knobs are rather fiddly and awkward for prolonged use — a bigger, more ergonomic knob or even a lever would have speeded up the setting operation a lot.

Templates

Each template requires a different guide bush and cutter depending on the type of joint you're trying to cut. The bush obviously mounts into the base of the router, and as the settings are critical it's also vital to have a fine height adjuster on the router as well, as you can't get the required precision with the standard plunge mechanism.

The templates are adjustable for height and lateral position, and this is one factor that determines the tightness of the joint. Again, rather fiddly and with no point of reference, these adjustments seem rather hit and miss, but despite this you soon get the hang of it. You should always make a trial cut in a piece of scrap timber anyway before you start on the real job. All the settings are trial and error and it will take you several attempts to get it just right so cut plenty of spare material.

It's important that the pieces are all marked clearly and orientated in the jig



Sliding stops are only fitted on the CDJ600.



The timber must be firmly located against stop before any cuts are made.



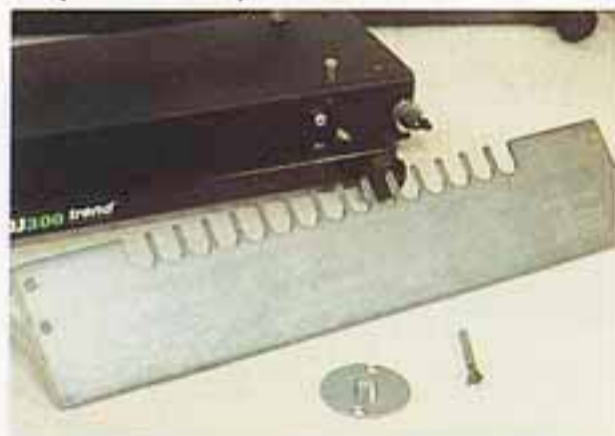
To use the jig, a guide bush needs to be mounted into the router base.



Spring-loaded adjustable clamps hold the work in place.



Interchangeable combs determine the pattern of the joint.



A complete lap dovetail joint is cut in one pass.





For through dovetails, cut each part of the joint separately: pins are cut with a straight cutter using one side of the comb...



...while tails are cut with a dovetail bit on the other side of the comb.

the correct way; the handbook shows all this, and you'll need to use both ends of the jig for opposite corners of the box.

Lap dovetails

For lap dovetails, both halves of the joint are cut at once so the alignment of the timber in the jig is critical; it's very easy to lock it in at a slight angle which has a dramatic effect on the quality of the joint. You do have to spend some time getting this alignment right.

The method of working is just the same whether the work is wide or narrow, the clamping bars being surprisingly effective even on large pieces. You just have to remember to mount it in the jig at the right end. The templates are very solid steel affairs so try not to catch them with the cutter!

Through dovetails

For through dovetails the pins and tails are cut separately using different templates and cutters, and you need to cut through into a piece of waste to minimise breakout. The pins are cut with a straight cutter so you can make several passes to get the required depth.

The tails however have to be cut in one go with a dovetail cutter, so on big sizes this may make the router strain a bit. Steady feeding is the only answer but you'll need a powerful machine for the $\frac{1}{4}$ " cuts.

The jig can even be used for rebated lapped dovetails for the likes of drawer fronts, though there's a bit more work involved in the initial preparation of the timber.

Tested by
Alan Holtham



VERDICT

At the price, these jigs are good value for money, though I'd recommend the 600 for the adjustable stops alone even if not for the extra capacity. A bit time consuming to set up, they're not for the one-off joint. However they really come into their own for batches of joints. The jigs are well made, and my only criticism is the inadequate clamping knobs and the rather poor instructions. However, that said, I shall certainly be using the 600 again!

Prices (+ VAT): CDJ300, £69.95;
CDJ600, £119.95

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visit www.trendmachinery.co.uk/cdj

RATING ★★☆☆☆