

Guiding the way

Alan Goodsell is guided by the Pro Track

RIGHT: The Pro Track and its three accessories: the end stop block, router base plate and saw base plate

HOW MANY of us have juggled with a straight edge and a couple of G-clamps, to set up for routing a housing, or to run a circular saw against when cutting either solid wood or sheet material? This is an awkward exercise that produces results with a random amount of accuracy. In use, it only takes a momentary lapse in concentration or an odd machining stance to pull the power tool away from the straight edge and completely ruin the workpiece. What is required is a device that will eliminate this unwanted deviation and hold the power tool firmly on the required line of cut.

Trend have taken their successful Clamp Guide design and added wide, aluminium extrusion guide rails either side, and called it the Pro Track. This will take one of two sliding base plates that routers or hand circular saws can be attached to – and an end stop is also available.

Clamp guide Pro Track
The clamping mechanism of the Pro Track is a simple but effective system. A steel rod runs through the length of its aluminium extrusion, onto which clamping jaws are attached. A tail jaw slides on the rod, and a series of small metal plates contained in its body, lock together when pressure is applied through the workpiece from the head

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jaw. This pressure is applied via a cam lever that has three positions – open, tight and tightest. The tightest setting is required if heavy duty work is to be carried out, but for light use, the tight setting is more than adequate.

To operate, the clamp is placed in position on the workpiece, with the head jaw butting against its edge. The tail jaw then slides tight to the

other side of the workpiece, and the lever on the head jaw is moved to the required clamping position.

Saw base plate

The first base plate I looked at was the one for a saw, which is a 355 by 240mm (14 by 9½in) piece of 20mm (¾in) thick, high density polythene, machined along one edge to fit into the Pro Track.

RIGHT: The router plate and end stop work well

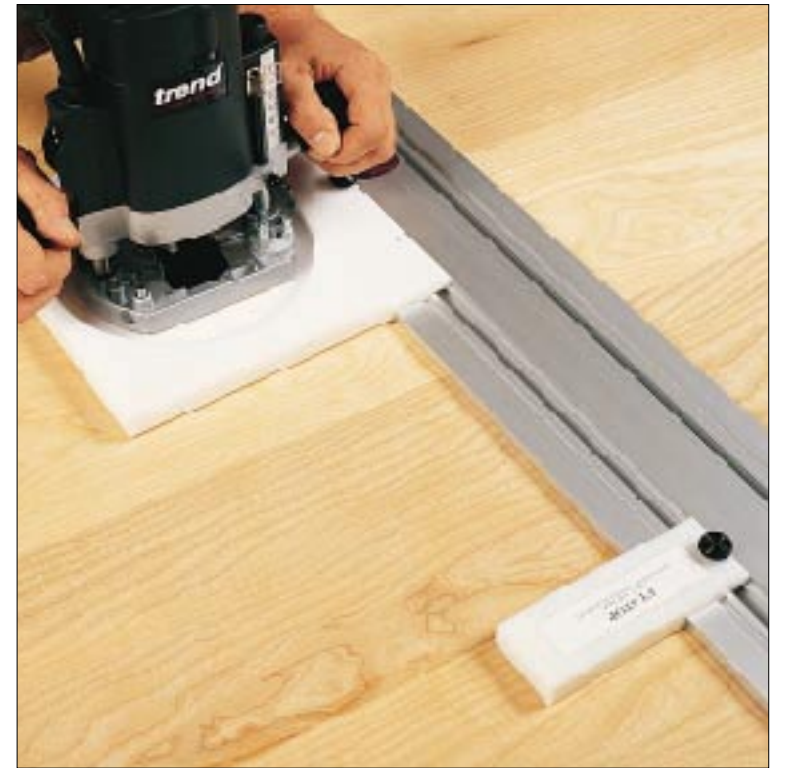
There were no instructions supplied with the saw plate, so, to attach my circular saw, I decided to rout a thin slot, a little wider than the blade, along the length of the plate, just longer than the diameter of the blade, and parallel with the long side.

The saw then needs to be attached to the polythene plate, which caused me some anguish – I couldn't decide whether to drill its baseplate and bolt it on, or try and think of another method. As I couldn't think of an easier way, I eventually decided to get the electric drill out and make holes in both my circular saw and the Trend baseplate, remembering to bore a larger recess in the underside of the plate for the bolt heads.

The holes in the saw base plate were drilled oversize to allow some movement prior to tightening – it is critical that the sawblade is exactly parallel with the edge of the Pro Track to ensure a clean cut. Once the saw is mounted and the guide clamped in place on a workpiece, it was easy to line the blade up to make a cut.

From the required line of cut, you make another mark, the same measurement as the distance from the blade, whichever side of the blade is required to make the cut, to the edge of the polythene plate. Line the edge of the plate up with the marked line, and the sawblade will just follow the guide cutting in exactly the right place.

BELOW: Attaching a hand circular saw involved a bit of head scratching



Router base plate

Attaching a router to its polythene base plate is a much simpler task. The plate has a 30mm hole bored in the centre, into which fits a 30mm guide bush that is attached to a router. The polythene plate has a thinner recess machined in its centre, large enough to fit the baseplate of any router, so that the router's plunging distance is compromised as little as possible. To secure the router firmly, drill holes in the polythene plate to line up with the ones on the router's baseplate, and bolt them together.

The same trick, as on the saw plate, can be used for lining up a cut and the router's movement is restricted to one that exactly follows the Pro Track instead of wandering off, spoiling the cut.

End stop block

The end stop block is a narrow strip of polythene that mounts on to the

Pro Track, which can be used in conjunction with either the saw or router base plates. Its function is to simply limit their travel – it is useful to invest in two of these for router work, where they can be set up to accurately stop a cut at both ends of the polythene plate's travel.

Conclusion

The Pro Track guides are available in three sizes: 610mm (2ft), 1220mm (4ft) and 2440mm (8ft), which is the actual clamping capacity, not just the length of the clamp. Setting up the saw base plate would benefit from some instructions, but the router base plate and the end stops worked well, requiring little thought to operate.

Trend should do well with this product and I'm sure we will soon see some development work going into producing new attachments for the Pro Track. ■



The underside of the Pro Track shows the clamping mechanism



The clamping mechanism has three positions: up to release, in the middle to tighten, and down for extra tight



PRICES

CG/PRO2 610mm (2ft)	£82.19
CG/PRO4 1220mm (4ft)	£105.69
CG/PRO8 2440mm (8ft)	£140.94
End stop block	£16.39
Router base plate	£35.19
Saw base plate	£38.71

All prices include VAT

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