

Trend DC400 dovetail centre



Despite successfully using several makes and varieties of jig, I've always been left with the feeling that the finished job immediately betrays the use of machine-cut dovetails, as there's a common uniformity of size and spacing. The new DC400 jig from Trend promises to overcome these shortcomings; they actually call it a dovetail machining centre such is their belief that it really does offer that much more.

The key difference with this jig is that it allows you to cut variable-spaced, lapped or through dovetails and requires no adjustment to get the matching halves to join properly. In other words, you can get the look of hand-cut joints, but with a simplicity that's hard to convey. All this is brought about by means of clever clip-in guide fingers that can be changed instantly.

The jig is supplied in standard form with all the necessary cutters and guide fingers to produce quite a range of

joints, and the first thing you'll notice is just how robust it all is. The jig body is much heavier than it looks and gives the feeling that it's sturdy enough for trade use.

Guide pins

There are three types of guide pin in a variety of angles to produce the range of joints possible with this set up. All the pins click into the rear guide rail, engaging in special serrations at 2.5mm spacings. This means that you can relocate or restore the position of a guide with absolute accuracy.

Clamping of the workpiece is also far better than any other jig I've used. A single, large handwheel controls parallel clamping bars so you only need one hand to operate it. This means you're then free to position the work with the other hand — a great improvement on other 'three-handed' jigs!

Simple setup

To make a simple drawer with both through and lapped dovetails you need three different types of guide fingers and two cutters, one angled and one straight.

With one of the workpieces in place in the jig, all you do is space out the fingers to whatever you fancy — it's as simple as that, and they don't even have to be regularly spaced. However, you do need to mark the position of the fingers on the guide rail, as different ones have to be interchanged later and they must go in the same place.

In common with all the jigs, this one is guided by a guide bush that mounts in the base of the router, and a fine height adjuster is also essential. However, the two support rails on this jig means that there's much better support for the router base, so you don't have to worry about it tipping off the front like you do with a standard comb arrangement.

The pins click into the rear guide rail, engaging in special serrations at 2.5mm spacings.



A single handwheel controls parallel clamping bars so you only need one hand to operate it.



This is what you need to make a simple drawer with both through and lapped dovetails.



The position of the fingers on the guide rail need to be marked.



As with all dovetailing jigs, the cutter is directed by a guide bush mounted into the router base.





There's nothing to stop you cutting round the fingers as well as between them...



... but you can buy spacers that can be cut to fit between fingers on widely spaced dovetails.



In use, the clear plastic window soon fills up with dust and blocks your view.



If you slide the window out you get covered in a blast of dust off the cutter, so you need to buy the optional dust collection kit.



With adjustable stops you get repeatability every time.



Cutting through dovetails is a breeze.

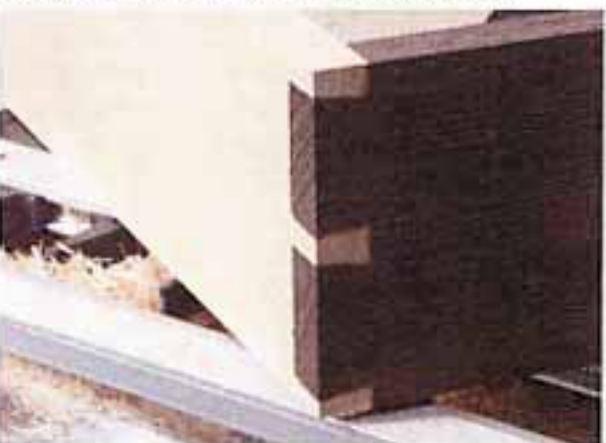
Minor problems

In use there's a slight difficulty in that there's nothing to stop you cutting round the fingers as well as between them as you're meant to. I made several excursions into parts I shouldn't have until I got the hang of it, but if this is a real problem you can buy spacer material that can be cut to fit between the fingers on wide spaced dovetails.

The other slight problem is with visibility. A moveable clear plastic window below the guide bar is supposed to allow you to see what's happening, but in practice this soon fills up with dust and blocks your view. If you slide the window out you get covered in the blast of dust off the cutter. So in reality you need to buy the optional dust collection kit which efficiently removes almost all of the mess.

There are a lot of nice touches that you can build into this jig, like getting the right amount of overhang when you're cutting through pins on lapped dovetails. You can try and set the overhang by eye against one of the workpieces. This is a bit haphazard, but

You end up with a very realistic joint that would pass for hand-made if it wasn't so perfect!



replace one of the end tail pin stops with an adjustable one and you get repeatability every time.

Confusing handbook

One thing that I was very disappointed with was the handbook. Until you grasp the principle of this jig the book is very confusing and sparse on detail. For instance, I couldn't work out how to cut one half of the through dovetail until I eventually fathomed that you need to work either side of the clamping bar. I couldn't find any reference to such a fundamental point anywhere in the manual; it isn't good enough for a machine of this quality.

Once you've sussed it though, through dovetails are a breeze, and you end up with a very good joint that would pass for handmade if it wasn't so perfect!

Accessories

To get the most out of this jig you do really need to add a few extras, many of which are available in a single accessory kit, as well as individually. Whilst this kit contains the extraction bits and a good

To get the most out of this jig, a range of accessories are available.



variety of pin guides amongst other things, the price tag seems steep, although bearing in mind that this includes a seven-piece cutter set that alone retails for about £100, it doesn't seem quite so bad.

Tested by
Alan Holtham



VERDICT

I've only scratched the surface of what you can do with this jig; you can even cut box joints on it, and it's all very simple. I suspect that it'll take me several more weeks of playing about to realise its full potential. However all this comes at a price. Over £300 at list price will probably limit its appeal to the more dedicated home woodworker, but it would be a sound buy for a commercial woodworker. The handbook though is very poor at this level of cost, and Trend could do better or perhaps give the instructional video with it.

Prices (inc. VAT): DC400, £352;
Accessory kit, £222.

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RATING ★★★★★