

TREND NOVA

While ago, I inadvertently damaged the edge of one of my TCT router cutters. Unfortunately, it was too severely chipped to repair cost-effectively, and had to be replaced. This stuck in my craw somewhat, so I was intrigued to find out exactly how practical Trend's new system of interchangeable solid carbide router cutters really is.

The idea of router cutters with replaceable blades is certainly not a new one. They are used extensively for industrial CNC applications, where frequent use is common.

The blades can be manufactured from a harder grade of carbide, with the intention of providing long life and accuracy. You may also have come across sets of cutters with flat, replaceable HSS blades, but these are only intended for very light-duty tasks and are aimed solely at the DIY market. Trend's Nova system is, however, based on the former industrial principle, and employs two types of cutter body with which to undertake a variety of panel or bearing-guided cutting applications.

The more complex of the two cutters is the bearing-guided version, which is devised for creating moulded edges on straight and shaped work. It comprises a body, which has either a quarter-inch, 8mm or a half-inch shank, a pair of 'cages,' a 3/4in diameter bearing, split washer and locking nut. The really clever feature is the cages, as it is these that secure a pair of two-ended interchangeable blades (providing four cutting edges) to the body. Two designs of cage are supplied, one for convex profiles and a second for concave profiles.

Blade changing

Of course, the main psychological stumbling block to purchasing interchangeable cutters, rather than the regular type, is blade changing. If it takes half an hour of frustration and expletives to change a set, they will not prove cost-



effective or useful and will inevitably be relegated to the back of your tool cupboard.

Fortunately, and in no small part thanks to their excellent design and build quality, changing the Nova's blades is very straightforward and took me only a couple of minutes. Each blade is located over a pin in a slot machined into the cutter body. The correct type of cage is fitted over them (conveniently, each blade has the correct cage profile etched into it), and this carries four lugs that locate into

reciprocating body slots. The bearing, washer and locking nut are then fitted and secured in place with the little spanner thoughtfully supplied.

Blade changing may be undertaken with the cutter body still fitted in the router's chuck, providing the spindle is locked and the machine's plug removed from the power source. Alternatively, the cutter body's flat faces can be secured in a soft-jawed vice – of the two methods I found the latter one to be the most practical.



Clockwise from top: Locking nut spanner; cage for concave blades; pair of round-over blades; pair of cove blades; assembled cutter (with chamfer blades fitted)

The panel cutter body is of a much simpler design, and blade changing is facilitated by using an allen key on a couple of grub screws. Many types of blade are available for both cutter body models, enabling a wide variety of profiles to be produced.

Performance

In use, the bearing-guided cutter I was supplied with performed superbly. On first impressions, I thought it would be best suited to using in conjunction with a router secured to a table, but it worked admirably fitted to a hand-held router. I did, however, set the machine's speed down a notch from top gear, and found this produced a nicely profiled edge.

Prices

The Nova system is competitively priced at £27.95 for a bearing-guided body, £19.95 for the panel-cutter body and £11.95 for a pair of blades. Various sets are available, housed in strong cardboard boxes and priced from £47.95. As you can see, their prices compare very favourably with other quality regular router cutters. The replaceable blades appear to be very good value, and a comprehensive range of profiles may be amassed for a relatively good price ■

TWVERDICT

The Nova Multi-Profile Cutter System appears to be a very good idea indeed. Sound design and excellent manufacturing should provide the purchaser with a clever alternative to purchasing regular router cutters – and may help also keep some more of their pennies in their piggy bank! ■

INFO

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