PICTURE THIS

John Everett takes a look at the Routasketch from Trend

PHOTOGRAPH BY GMC/ANTHONY BAILEY

the Router

To be honest, when I first saw this novel jig from Trend I thought it was a bit of a gimmick. Having tested it however I can happily say that it does exactly what it says it will on the box and what's more, does it well. When the rather large package arrived I keenly unpacked it and was far from happy when I saw what resembled a construction kit staring me in the face. Feeling rather frustrated, imagine my surprise when I found out that the manual that accompanies the kit is actually readable, and what is more, understandable! I think we all know just what some manuals are like, hence my initial shock. The kit of parts went together quickly without any difficulties. The manual contains many references to a large number of routers which can successfully be used with the Routasketch, including my little Bosch POF 500A.

SETTING UP & STARTING OUT

Fitting the router in place is a quick and simple procedure. A table in the instruction manual provides details of the different router types and the respective mounting instructions. This involves a couple of mounting screws (which are supplied) and a set of lining up items, namely a line-up bush which screws temporarily onto the underside of the router plate and a bush (both an 8mm and ¼in collet are provided). The bush is screwed in place under the router plate and the guide bush is located finger-tight in the collet of your router. The router can then easily be centred in its location (check the router spindle for ease of turning) and the fixing screws tightened. The bush and guide pin are then removed and retained for future use.

The system was set up in accordance with the instructions provided and the drawing table part was clamped to the workbench. The stylus, which is used to follow the lines on the drawing to be copied with the router, is then lowered to the 'just touching' position with the adjuster provided on the router base. In order to test the system, I first prepared a thin sheet of iroko and sanded it so it was ready for use. A heraldic eagle design was placed in the drawing holder with the intention of using it as a decoration to the wood.

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The manual makes clear that when using small workpieces, it is best for the surrounding area to be made up to the same height as the workpiece. This way the router base can slide easily and not tip over. No problems were encountered with the workpiece used for the test and the iroko sheet was left in its full size for cutting out in the shield shape after the engraving was finished.

The workpiece needs to be positioned accurately before you try and begin routing to ensure that all parts of the design will actually fit exactly where you want them. You now need to line up the drawing stand so it aligns with the workpiece. This way the design will be square to the blank. The book recommends using either a clamp or double-sided tape to hold the workpiece in

place and I used a quick-release clamp for the test and encountered no problems whatsoever. To avoid bumping into the clamp, the router base can be angled quite easily.

ON TEST

To begin routing your design it is necessary to align the stylus on the drawing with a convenient place to start the cut. This may sound obvious but unless you want to spend a lot of time plunging, releasing and relocating your router, it is worthwhile studying the design for the best route to take before actually beginning.

With a 'V' bit in the router, set your depth to give the thickness of cut line you require and release, ready to begin. The stylus is located at the chosen start point and the router is plunged down and locked. Using both hands carefully follow the drawing line with the stylus. Don't try to rush things as you will need to concentrate in order to follow the drawing lines smoothly and accurately. The router becomes part of the assembly to which the stylus is attached and so follows its position exactly, transferring the design to the wood with no bother at all.

It is not a good idea to rush things as this will more than likely have a detrimental effect on precision. Practice does indeed make perfect although with this test I simply didn't have the time and therefore required a design that would work straight away. It says a lot for the Routasketch that I was able to rout a fairly complex small design into iroko, especially when you consider that I had never seen the device before, nor tried it out on even a scrap piece of wood.

It is worthwhile making sure that the plunge mechanism on your router is working freely before using it in the Routasketch or you may find yourself drifting away from the chosen starting point as the router starts up and plunges into the workpiece. I felt that the base of the Routasketch could have had a more 'filled in' underside to allow it to run more smoothly over the workpiece as anything other than a smooth surface would produce a progressively more 'jerky' sliding action with potentially disastrous consequences. On a well-sanded surface of course, there is no problem at all providing one keeps good control when the router is running.

This device could well find a use in even the smallest of workshops (mine is only half a single garage) and is capable of routing decorative relief and incised work with minimum effort but almost perfect accuracy. It should be an ideal set-up for making wood blocks for printing and I intend finding out in the near future. I was particularly impressed by the way it all went together with no problems and it worked very well the first time out. The necessary weight to keep everything steady is mainly provided by the router itself as the rest of the assembly is mostly plastic and has little weight of its own.

I had one concern. The manual states that a working area of 800 x 600mm (32 x 24in) is needed to use the machine. Perhaps a little more would be comfortable and bearing in mind the height of the assembled device, a table top fitted into a Workmate would provide a good user height as the average workbench would mean almost having to peer over the top of the drawing plate to follow the lines of the drawing.

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TEST CLOSE-UP

Fitting the router to the plate

Checking the first element of the design routed into an iroko sheet with the Routasketch

As the cable entry on the little Bosch router exits at the top of the motor housing, a cable tie keeps the mains lead from fouling the underside of the drawing table

The completed design ready for cutting out and finishing

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

THE VERDICT

If you need to do any decorative routing, I can recommend the Trend Routasketch as a worthwhile purchase. It's light enough for accurate cutting yet strong enough to perform most tasks with relatively little effort, making it a good all round machine. Check it out.

SPECIFICATIONS

Working area required	800 x 600mm
Sheet size	297 x 210mm (A4)
Height	420mm
Price (rrp)	£29.95 (inc VAT)
Contact	Trend on 0800 487 363