

Trend T3EK

Ron Fox examines the latest small router offering from Trend

In the last issue the Editor commented that it appears there's no end to the number of budget priced routers coming onto the market. Here is yet another. This time it comes from Trend, who have been expanding in all directions over the last year or two. This little router arrived too late to be included in the group test of small routers in issue 45, but readers will note the marked similarity to my preferred model from that group.

Presentation and equipment

The T3EK comes in a smart fitted plastic carry case where, for a change, it is fairly obvious which bit goes where when you come to put it back. The router with its standard kit is shown in the main, while photo 2 shows it neatly packed in its carry case.

The T3 is a 550W variable-speed router with speeds ranging from 8,000 to 32,000rpm. Whether variable speed is useful with light-duty routers is a matter of opinion. I find that even with 800W variable-speed models I rarely use anything other than the top speed, but perhaps I might slow this one down from its 32,000 maximum for most work. The T3 comes well

equipped with 6mm, $\frac{1}{4}$ in and 8mm collets, a 16mm guide bush, a fairly basic side fence, and a clear plastic dust spout. Best of all it has an Elu/Trend standard base with 6mm fixing holes and a Trend standard guide bush recess which takes the normal Trend guide bushes. The big disappointment is that the guide bush holes are plain instead of tapped, which makes fitting and changing guide bushes a nut-and-bolt job instead of the familiar 5mm countersunk machine screws. I would expect better from a firm which has been in the forefront of guide bush development over the years. Photo 3 shows the router base with its standard 6mm fixing holes and the 16mm guide bush installed.

Removable body

The router is of the demountable type, which enables it to be fitted in a drill stand or used freehand for light-duty shaping and sharpening. The collar diameter is quoted as 43mm, the standard drill stand dimension, but the actual diameter

measured 42mm like the similar model in the group test. It therefore requires the same remedy - shimming with cooking foil - to mount it in a drill stand.

With the collet tightened on

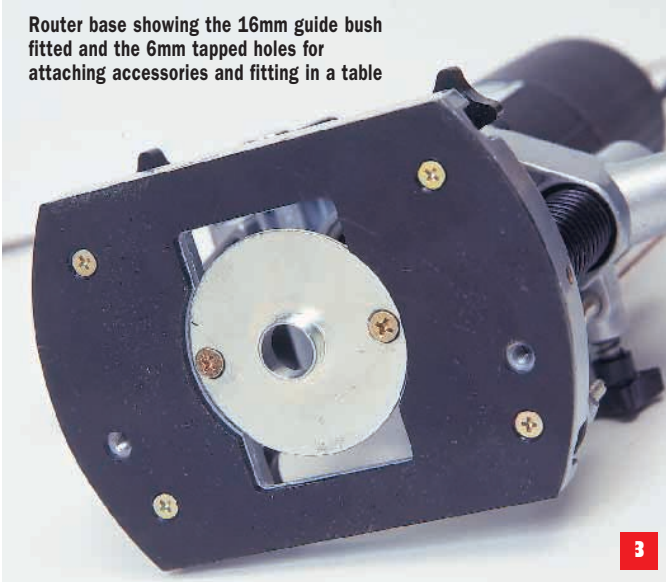
the cutter shank (a two-spanner job) we plunged the router fully and found a plunge value of -6mm, i.e. the collet stops 6mm short of the bench top. We have noticed a variation in this measurement among different versions of this router and attribute it to manufacturing



The router packed away in its case

On Test

Router base showing the 16mm guide bush fitted and the 6mm tapped holes for attaching accessories and fitting in a table



tolerance arising mainly from the springs used on the plunge legs. A plunge of -6mm is not the worst we have come across but is a long way from being the best. The collets themselves are of the simple cone type, sitting on a spring in the motor spindle, to aid cutter removal.

Side fence

The side fence is a basic thin steel pressing with removable, but non-adjustable plastic cheeks. It has a 'U'-shaped cut-out on the outer flange for which no explanation is given, but which looks as if somebody remembers the old Elu 96 fence with its fine

adjuster. No fine fence-adjuster is available for the T3 however.

Photo 4 shows the T3 with side fence fitted, being used to groove a board. Note that the router is being pulled but the cut is in the correct 'against the rotation' direction.

Dust extraction

A clear plastic dust spout is provided, with a 34mm diameter take-off point to take the Trend extractor hose. In order to fit the spout the router motor has to be removed from the base

assembly. The spout is attached by two 5mm machine screws - no nuts required - which screw into two threaded bushes set in the plastic. This also enables the guide bush to be fitted without nuts, but I wouldn't bother. Putting the guide bush between the dust spout and the workpiece effectively shuts off the path of the dust. When fitted, the dust spout reduces collet plunge by about 6mm.

A removable plastic disc which reduces the aperture to 25mm improves extraction when using narrow cutters.

The T3 with side fence fitted being used to groove a board



Accessories

As might be expected from Trend, a range of accessories is shown in the catalogue, including 12 more guide bushes, a beam trammel bar, extra-long fence rods and a fine height adjuster. This last item is a very useful accessory and is, in fact, the same adjuster that fits on the Trend T5 and several non-Trend routers. Photo 7 shows the fine height adjuster fitted in place of the stop bar. Apart from a range of accessories, the Trend routing catalogue shows a good range of spare parts, including replacement collets, brushes, switch, handles and plastic sole plate.

Other features

The switch is a simple 'on/off' slider mounted near the bottom of the motor housing. I found it a bit of a stretch for my small hands. Plunge lock is by means of a plastic lever mounted on the base assembly. Photo 5 shows its position. It falls readily to the right hand if you hold the router with the switch facing you. Also seen in photo 5 is the clamping nut that holds the motor to the base assembly.

This switch/plunge-lock combination has the advantage of leaving the handles as just that - no switch or plunge-lock in one or the other - which I find makes for easier working.

Depth of cut setting is by means of a simple stop bar against a three-step rotating turret. The stop bar is graduated but I would not rely on it for precise setting. Photo 6 shows a close-up of the stop bar.



The plastic plunge-lock lever mounted on the base assembly. Note also the clamping lock nut

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Table work

It is easy to dismiss a 550W router as useless for table work but the T3 is certainly capable of modelling and miniature work, for which purposes the benefits of a table - fewer work-holding problems, no tilt, the ability to mould edges of boards and part the moulding off etc. - are as relevant as for heavy work. I would guess, though, that most purchasers of a budget router would regard the cost of even the cheapest commercial table to be out of proportion to the cost of the router. For miniature and modelling applications, probably the best idea is to make the 'mini-table'

described, with drawings, in the 'Dolls House Mouldings' section of the Trend Routing Guide. At additional cost, the Trend steel router insert plate can be bought. This is only 3mm thick and provides the thinnest plate available, to regain much of the depth of cut that will be lost when you hang a T3 in a table. A third alternative is to mount the T3 in the little DeWalt DE6900 alloy table (which includes the fine height adjuster in its components), but the fine lateral adjuster for positioning the cutter cannot be used because the T3 does not have the required 6mm tapped holes in the base (the T3 holes are 5mm).



The graduated stop bar

6



The T3 fitted with the Trend FHA/001 height adjuster

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The verdict...

The T3 is a well presented little router with a number of detailed points which put it ahead of similar models. Principal among these is the Trend-compatible base, which enables many standard work aids, such as the new range of Trend plastic router bases and templates, to be fitted. It also simplifies fitting the router to a number of small tables. The build quality looks good and the router is backed with a range of accessories and spares.

Trend describe the T3 as a light duty router for the hobbyist and DIY user. These descriptions could be extended to include much standard cabinet work, and for those who already own heavier machines the T3 would make a useful back-up router for fine work, or for batches of mixed hand/table work when the larger machine is in the table.

List price of the T3 is £46.94 inc. VAT, but it is likely to be found at a slightly lower price than this, or with some cutters included in the deal.

Dovetailing

The Trend router catalogue mentions the use of the T3 in the Trend dovetail jig. I would not attempt dovetailing with a 550W router, except perhaps occasional work with the 1/4in template. Dovetailing is hard work for both router and cutter - you cannot take three light cuts with a dovetail cutter. Where the T3 could be very useful, however, is as a second router for making

preliminary cuts with a straight cutter to remove much of the material before the dovetail cut. All that would be necessary would be an additional guide bush for the dovetail template.

Further information

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