



A Sturdy, Portable Table Saw

by Kent Harris

For years, I have been looking for a good portable table saw. As a custom builder and remodeler, my table-saw needs range from ripping framing lumber and hardwood to running a dado blade and molding head, so I need a saw that is accurate and powerful. I need to be able to transport the table saw to the job site, so it must be portable and sturdy. In my search, I found very few table saws that met these requirements.

As I continued to ask around, one name kept popping up — the Powermatic Artisan (Powermatic, Morrison Rd., McMinnville, TN 37110; 615/473-5551). I was reluctant to buy this saw for two reasons: first, because it would cost me \$769, about \$200 more than I had budgeted, and, second, because I knew the saw was made in Taiwan. But I finally purchased the Artisan saw, trusting in the adage “you get what you pay for,” and also in the manufacturer’s assurances that the Artisan saw is made precisely to Powermatic specifications. I soon learned the designation “Made in Taiwan” shouldn’t always carry the stigma it so often does.

Specifications

The model 63 Artisan table saw has a 10-inch blade driven, via a belt, by a heavy-duty single-phase motor, rated at 1½ h.p. Like most other 10-inch saws, it has a maximum depth of cut of 3⅞ inches at 90 degrees, and 2⅞ inches at 45 degrees.

The cast-iron table is 40⅞ inches wide, including the cast-iron grill extension wings. The table surface is well finished and very flat, unlike most cheap table saws, which typically have steel tables. As modern castings go, I give the table casting a solid B (an A would be a high-quality iron casting such as you might find on industrial tools made at the turn of the century). Inserts for a regular and a dado blade are included as standard equipment, and both can be adjusted with four hex screws to sit flush with the table.

The real litmus test for a table saw is the fence, and the Artisan saw proves worthy with a Vega Fence (made by Vega Enterprises, Harristown, Ill., which also makes replacement fences to fit a variety of other table saws). This fence is a strong, boxed alu-

minum extrusion (3 inches wide by 36 inches long) that is guided by the front and back rails.

Powermatic offers two different rail lengths. I bought the smaller version that will rip 26 inches wide to the right of the blade. With longer rails, the saw will rip 50 inches wide.

The Vega fence has two locking levers. The larger lever squares the fence and locks it securely to the front rail. The smaller one activates a micro-adjust thumb wheel. This feature allows you to align the fence perfectly on a fixed tape, which you can accurately sight through a window with a hairline indicator.

Other standard features include a sturdy T-slot miter gauge that adjusts to 60 degrees left and right, and a dust shroud in the cabinet with a 2½-inch-diameter hookup. Optional features include casters, and a push stick and hold-down that glides along the Vega fence.

The Artisan table saw weighs in at over 200 pounds. It’s not a lightweight package by any means, but with an open stand and detachable motor, it can be transported. I bought a stripped-down version, but I am now thinking of upgrading with the casters to make it a bit easier to move the saw around the site.

Upon receiving the beast, I had to assemble it. This is relatively straightforward, requiring only a 12mm and a 17mm wrench, but I learned that it’s important to put it together on a flat surface so the bolts will align. I also found it was useful to have a wire wheel on hand to knock down a few burrs on the fence castings.

Performance

The Artisan is a pleasure to turn on. The motor hums smooth and strong, and the arbor runs true. After mounting the steel blade included with the saw, I immediately ripped, without a hitch, 60 linear feet of full 8/4 red oak, 25 linear feet of 4/4 maple, and 3 linear feet of 4/4 mahogany. I crosscut and dadoed (⅓ inch wide by 7/8 inch deep) in all three woods with accuracy and proficiency. I even ran a 1¾-inch-deep dado through the oak without hesitation. Finally, with a molding head, I ran a triple and single bead in the face of all



The Powermatic Artisan 10-inch table saw features a powerful motor and an accurate Vega fence.

three woods with satisfactory results.

After several months of use, the only misgiving I have with the saw is that the blade guard interferes with a full-depth 45-degree cut.

It’s too soon to tell if the Artisan table saw will stay as accurate

and powerful as it was when it came out of the box. But if first impressions are any good (and they usually are), I think Powermatic’s got a good saw in the Artisan. ■

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TOOLBITS

Quiet vac. Remodelers depend on a powerful vacuum, but it’s always a little embarrassing when the scream of the vac sends your client through the roof and your subs to the basement. That’s when it might be time for a **Wap**. The **Wap Drywall** (Wap International, 170 E. Freedom Ave., Anaheim, CA 92801; 714/871-8500) is quieter than most electric drills, and I would put it up against any industrial vacuum for suction and durability.

The power of a vacuum is measured by the amount of air it will move (measured in cfm of air) and the strength of the suction (measured in inches of water it can lift when tested). A good industrial vacuum with a portable canister falls into the range of 100 to 130 cfm and can lift 80 to 100 inches of water. The Drywall falls in the middle of this range — moving 120 cfm of air and lifting 90 inches of water.

The Drywall gets its name because it has a superfine filter that will keep drywall and concrete dust out of the motor, and out of the exhaust air. In addition, the vac features a ring brush which circles the filter. While vacuuming, this brush can be plunged periodically (without disassembling the canister) to

wipe away the cake of built-up dust on the filter and maintain full air flow.

An adjustable roof bracket from **Qual-Craft** (Qual-Craft Industries, P.O. Box 559, Stoughton, MA 02072-0559; 617/344-1000) has two safety features worth noting. The first is a simple lock that prevents the roof staging from folding up when you don’t want it to. The second — a safety return that laps over the top of the plank — is soon to become an OSHA requirement for all roof brackets.

Layout stick source. Several readers have inquired about a source of supply for layout sticks. A 4-foot combination stick can be used to quickly and accurately mark 16- and 24-inch centers on wall plates (see “Fast and Accurate Wall Framing,” 4/91). These are now available from **Irmadan Enterprises**, 27 Arielle Ln., Staten Island, NY 10314; 718/698-7459. The Irmadan sticks have flat aluminum blades riveted to an aluminum box rail. This construction makes the stick much sturdier than one made from welded flat stock. It also costs a bit more (about \$40 each), but the layout stick can get thrown around the job site without coming to ruin.

— Clayton DeKorne