

Festool TS 55 REQ Track Saw

by Gary Striegler



TS 55 REQ Specs

Saw weight: about 10 pounds
(with cord and blade)

Amps: 10

Rpm: 2,000 to 5,200

**Maximum cutting depth on track
(in inches):** 1⁵/₁₆ at 0°, 1⁷/₁₆ at 45°

Bevel: -1° to 47°

Price: \$585 (including 55-inch
track and case)

Festool
888/337-8600
festoolusa.com

Weigh In!

Think you're a good candidate to test a new tool? Want to share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, usage tip, or news flash? Take a minute and contact us at JLCtools@hanleywood.com or 707/951-9471.

My crew and I specialize in interior finish, and we build plenty of custom cabinets and closets. For years, we cut most of our sheet goods in the shop, using a table saw with a big outfeed table for ripping long panels and a vertical panel saw for crosscutting and short rips. In a pinch, we broke down panels on site with a portable table saw — an awkward two-man job that seldom produced clean cuts.

When we started using DeWalt's plunge-cutting model DWS520 TrackSaw system about three years ago, it was a revelation. Mark your cut line on a properly supported panel, place the aluminum track so the anti-splinter strip along the edge aligns with the marks, engage the saw with the track, plunge, and complete the square or bevel cut. Rubber friction strips prevent the track from slipping on most materials, but optional clamps easily secure it when necessary. The saw hooks to a vacuum to extract most of the dust.

Armed with a 59-inch and 102-inch track, we can now safely and quickly make perfect splinter-free crosscuts and rips

almost every time with one person, on site or in the shop. We also use the TrackSaw to cut door bottoms, tapered jamb extensions, and pie-shaped stair treads, and to rip straight edges on solid lumber. I've sold my vertical panel saw, and we now use my table saws mostly for repetitive ripping of solid lumber.

When *JLC* asked if I'd like to try the new Festool TS 55 REQ track saw (which is replacing Festool's TS 55 EQ), I didn't hesitate. The basic kit includes a 48-tooth crosscut blade, a splinter guard that reduces tear-out, a Systainer case, a 55-inch track, and a limit stop for the track. Festool also sent a 28-tooth blade for fine ripping, a 106-inch track, two track clamps, and connectors that allow you to join two or more tracks to form longer ones.

Highlights

I love Festool's spring-loaded depth stop; to change the cutting depth, you just press it in and slide it up or down the scale. The stop is also micro-adjustable so you can synchronize it with resharpened saw blades. The scale is metric, but you can cover it with a peel-and-stick imperial scale that comes with the kit.

The saw's plunging action is exceptionally smooth (though to be fair I'm judging the new saw against my 3-year-old DeWalt). When you plunge, the redesigned spring-loaded riving knife drops below the base of the saw before the saw blade does, which is supposed to make it easier to complete a long cut with a short track. We tried that, and it worked okay but didn't give us the usual perfect cut. The saw can bevel from -1 to 47 degrees for added flexibility.

One thing Festool owners brag about is dust collection, and Festool improved the



Gary Striegler

Toolbox

new saw's dust channel to make it even better. Despite using my tired old Porter-Cable and Fein vacuums, I still captured almost all of the dust. When I used the saw without a vacuum, it threw the dust well away from me, which I also appreciated.

Swapping blades couldn't be easier. You just set the maximum cutting depth, lift the "Fast Fix" lever on top of the handle, plunge the blade until it clicks into the locked position, and use the blade wrench that stores in the handle. The spindle locks automatically.

Festool's track connectors and track clamps work well, but your boards have to be at least 5¼ inches wide to use the clamps. My DeWalt tracks can clamp to boards as narrow as 3½ inches, which is better for the work I do. Also, you can only cut along one edge of Festool's tracks, while you can cut along either edge of my DeWalt tracks. If you happen to damage an edge

(which, based on my experience, seems inevitable), DeWalt gives you an extra one.

The Bottom Line

If I were starting from scratch and wanted a track saw for crosscutting panels, trimming door bottoms, and short rips, I'd buy the basic Festool TS 55 REQ kit with the 55-inch track. It costs about \$85 more than the equivalent DeWalt kit, but it's hard to beat Festool's ease of use and exceptional dust control. For the work we do, though, I prefer the convenience of the short and long track, and Festool's version currently costs about \$230 more than DeWalt's. That alone would be a deal-breaker for me.

Both brands offer various track lengths along with track connectors, so there are plenty of other combinations that might work better for you.

Gary Striegler is a builder in Fayetteville, Ark.



To adjust the cutting depth, you simply press the green spring-loaded depth stop and slide it up or down the scale. The scale shows the cutting depth with and without the track. It's metric, but a peel-and-stick imperial scale comes with the kit.

Work Vans

Touring a cluster of Nissan NV Cargo vans at a recent trade show reminded me that a variety of inviting models are now available for builders and remodelers. Nissan's high-roof NV2500 HD, for example, measures 6 feet 3 inches from floor to ceiling, so most of us could walk inside without crouching. It can haul 4x8

sheet goods, two standard pallets, or 10-foot pipes, and the rear opening is wide enough to load with a forklift. Six D-rings in the floor make it easy to secure the load. There are also plenty of attachment points for shelves, racks, and bins; three cargo-area overhead work lights; and two optional 120-volt power outlets for charging power tools. The cabin is a mobile office, with a lockable center console that provides an extendable work surface and can store a laptop. There's even a side drawer beneath the driver's seat. Then again, the rig is 8 feet 9 inches tall, which means it could squeeze through my local McDonald's drive-thru but wouldn't fit into the average parking garage.

The NV2500 HD is just one of many makes and models mentioned in the recent "Van Buying Advice" and "Thinking About Getting a Van" threads in the Tools & Equipment Forum at jlconline.com. Feel free to chime in. — *Bruce Greenlaw*



Recycle Your Batteries

In case you haven't noticed, it's easy to recycle cordless-tool batteries in the U.S. and Canada, free of charge. For a list of your local drop-off points, just visit call2recycle.org or call 877/273-2925 and enter your zip code. I tried it, and although the population of my rural county is just 30,000, I learned and verified that I have eight options within 10 miles of my house, ranging from Home Depot to our school district office. — *B.G.*

call2recycle®

RotoZip RotoSaw

by Josh Overlin



SS355-10 Specs

Weight: 2.5 pounds (including cord)

Amps: 5.5

Rpm: 30,000

Price: \$70

RotoZip

877/768-6947

rotozip.com

As a drywall contractor, I depend on drywall routers for quickly cutting around window and door openings, electrical boxes, and ducts with the drywall tacked in place. Maybe my corrosive coastal environment is partly to blame, but my drywall routers rarely last longer than six months. So I was excited to try the new model SS355 RotoZip RotoSaw to see if it would raise the bar. According to RotoZip, it's the right tool for professional drywallers.

Inline grip. I liked the feel of the tool right away. You can hold the barrel with one hand while gripping the tool almost like a drywall screw gun with the other, so your thumb and forefinger wrap around the end of the motor housing. Most of the time, that dual grip gave me the best control. The tool had ample power, and the exhaust vents did a good job of blowing drywall dust away from my face. Other features include a slide-on/bump-off switch and a rubber loop on the cord that holds the collet wrench.

The outcome. After about six months of use, the RotoZip seized up. But I learned some things I didn't know about the one-year warranty. First, if the tool breaks down under warranty, you can send it to the RotoZip ser-



vice center and receive a new one with a new warranty that runs up to an additional year. Second, if the tool breaks down after the warranty expires, you can send it in and receive a reconditioned replacement with a new one-year warranty at a reduced price. (You can also buy a reconditioned one — with the warranty — at homedepot.com for \$40.)

I also learned a tip from RotoZip customer service: Blow out the vents periodically with compressed air and the tool will last longer. I'll have to try that.

Josh Overlin owns *Chetco Drywall* in Brookings, Ore.

Smart Driver

You won't find a variable-speed trigger or a forward/reverse switch on DeWalt's new variable-speed reversible 8V MAX Gyroscopic Screwdriver (DCF680). Instead, the tool uses "gyroscopic technology" to sense the motion of your gripping hand. After pressing the trigger, you simply twist the tool clockwise for forward or counterclockwise for reverse. The farther you twist in either direction — from top-dead-center to 35 degrees — the faster the speed (until you top out at 430 rpm). A lock-

off prevents accidental activation. The 1.1-pound tool also has a two-position inline/pistol grip, a 1/4-inch quick-change hex chuck for 1-inch bit tips, an LED headlight, and a battery gauge. DeWalt product manager Jim Watson tells us the tool is ideal for light-duty install and maintenance — like mounting cabinet hardware or accessing electrical panels — with enough power to fully sink a 1 5/8-inch wood screw into pine. Kits will be available in August and cost \$90 with one battery or \$100 with two. — B.G.

