

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at jlc_tools@zondahome.com.



TOOLS

OF THE TRADE

Skateplate and Skateguide Circular Saw Guides

BY RICK ARNOLD

The Skateplate and Skateguide are actually two products that are packaged as one. Together, they allow a circular saw to make perfectly straight and repeatable cuts (cross or rip) on pretty much any type of construction lumber.

Skateplate. The Skateplate is a base plate with wide rollers near the front and rear that fits directly onto the base plate of many different brands and models of saws. There are two versions, one for sidewinders and one for wormdrives. Initially, it took me less than five minutes to attach a Skateplate to my sidewinder. The second time, it took me about 15 seconds to mount or remove the plate from my saw. The time frame for mounting the Skateplate to my wormdrive was about the same.

The Skateplate alters the saw by raising the bottom of its plate off the workpiece, preventing the saw from marring it. Since the rollers are wide and precisely integrated into the plate, they help keep the saw oriented in a straight line as it's pushed. The rollers also reduce the friction between the workpiece and the saw, so you need to apply less force to move the saw, which translates into better overall control.

Skateguide. The Skateguide is similar to the basic rip guide that often accompanies a new saw, but is much better. Like the Skateplate, the Skateguide has integrated rollers along its guiding edge. These rollers allow the guide to move smoothly and effortlessly along the edge of the work, again reducing friction and allowing much better control than a standard guide. The Skateguide slides into the Skateplate, and a thumb screw locks it at the desired setting for the width of the cut.

The Skateguide packaged with the Skateplate combo pack (\$80) has a 17-inch bar and a four-roller head that is about 5 inches wide. There's also an optional Skateguide-Zilla (\$73) with a 34-inch bar and

a larger, 10-roller head. The bars and roller heads are interchangeable.

In use. To test the guide and plate, I made crosscuts and rip cuts in different thicknesses of sheathing as well as in some 2-by stock using both the 5-inch and 8-inch roller heads, as well as the two different length bars that the roller heads attach to. The shorter bar allowed for up to about a 13-inch rip from both saws, depending on which side I fed the guide into the plate. With the longer bar, I could easily rip a 4-foot-wide sheet of plywood in half.

The longer guide bar with the wider, 10-roller head provides excellent control of the saw. I used the smaller head on the shorter guide and had no problem with the shorter rips. Using the wider head with the shorter bar would be helpful for budding carpenters.

When I tried ripping 1/4-inch-thick sheet stock, the rollers dropped below the edge of the panel, which rendered them useless. But I found that by moving the head up to

the holes in the bar used for the handle, the rollers worked fine. I'm not sure if the guide was designed for that, but it worked.

All of the narrower rips, as well as a few cuts ripping 2x6s in half, were easily controlled with one hand on the saw. And when I ripped a sheet of PVC, there were no plate marks trailing behind the saw along the cut, as is always the case with an aluminum or dirty base plate.

The Skateplate is made from high-impact nylon and the polyurethane rollers are attached with high-quality bearings and stainless steel. I had two inadvertent drop tests with no consequences.

After working with the Skateguide and Skateplate on a few jobs, I can say that they have rightfully earned some real estate in my construction trailer, especially since now I won't need to lug my table saw around quite so often. skateplate.com

Rick Arnold is a veteran builder, an author, and a frequent presenter at JLC Live.



The Skateplate's wide rollers reduce friction and improve accuracy. Rips to the center of a sheet of plywood are possible when a Skateplate is fitted with the optional 10-roller Skateguide with a 34-inch bar (1). The standard four-roller Skateguide with a 17-inch bar comes kitted with the Skateplate combo pack (2).

Photos by Rick Arnold

DeWalt 20V Max Biscuit Joiner

BY MIKE WHALEN

We don't have any power biscuit-joiner users on our crew, but we do occasionally use this specialty tool for tasks such as reinforcing the miter joints on trim. And since we are already on the DeWalt 20-volt battery platform for many of our other tools, we were interested in trying out the company's DCW682B brushless cordless biscuit joiner.

We used it on a few of our recent remodeling projects, such as a window job that needed a few extension jambs. That was a good opportunity to put it through its paces.

Weighing just a little over 5 pounds without the battery, the tool itself is light and comfortable to hold in the hand, and the brushless motor proved to have plenty of power. We really liked the 20-volt cordless option, which is convenient on site compared with running an extension cord and plugging into an outlet.

There is a depth selection knob that allows for the use of #0, #10, or #20 biscuits; for joining the mitered corners of our extension jamb frames together, we ended up using #10 biscuits in order to achieve a nice, solid connection. Adjusting the height of the fence was easy, thanks to its dual rack-and-pinion design. Adjusting the fence to a 45-degree bevel to make the cuts for the miter joints was just as easy as setting

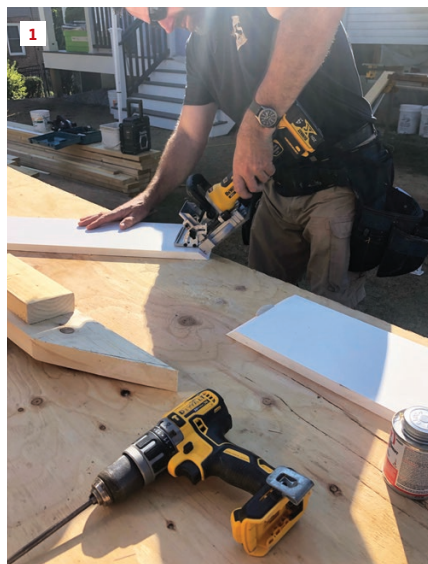
the depth and height of the cut, since all adjustments are tool-free.

Once adjusted, the 4-inch-diameter blade made quick, clean cuts in the 1x10 PVC trim stock that we were using for the extension jambs. There's a paddle switch instead of a trigger for turning the tool on, and an electric brake for stopping the blade and quickly moving on to the next cut.

Since we were cutting PVC stock, we were happy that the tool comes with an angled dust port and dust bag, which did a good job of collecting those little plastic particles that would otherwise fly everywhere and stick to everything. For even better dust collection, the joiner can be connected to a standard 35mm dust extractor or to DeWalt's proprietary AirLock system, though we didn't test this.

We added some PVC glue, inserted the #10 biscuits, and assembled our extension jambs, confident that this small extra step—made easier by DeWalt's cordless biscuit joiner—would give the miter joints extra strength. \$280 (tool only) online. [dewalt.com](https://www.dewalt.com)

Mike Whalen is a project manager at DBS Remodel, a design-build residential remodeling company based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.



DeWalt's DCW682B cordless biscuit joiner is compatible with all of the company's 20-volt Max batteries (1). The integral fence is easily adjusted without tools for angles between 0 and 90 degrees (2). The tool comes with a dust port and bag (3).

Photos by Mike Whalen

Bott Smartvan Work Truck Storage System

BY TOMMIE MULLANEY

When it comes to van shelving for tool storage, getting creative with a few sheets of plywood is the standard approach for most tradespeople, myself included. But not only is this time consuming, plywood shelving is heavy, unsafe in a collision, and quite a challenge to change once everything has been fastened together. That's why I was happy to discover the bott Smartvan storage system, which has dramatically enhanced my ability to organize my current work vehicle, a 2021 Mercedes Sprinter 2500 with a 144-inch wheelbase.

After many successful years in Europe, this German modular shelving system finally made its way to the U.S. It is designed to precisely fit the dimensions of your specific vehicle with zero drilling required and is configured when you order the system on the company's website (systainersystems.com). All that is necessary to install the shelving are a few Allen keys and Torx bits, which are included in the welcome kit that comes with the shelving components. There's no complex measuring and no wasted space; just affix the brackets to the frame and bolt them for a perfect fit.

Installation. Two weeks after I ordered my system, it arrived in two large Gaylord boxes on a wood pallet. The boxes contained a lot of parts, but once I read the illustrated instructions, things started to make sense. During installation, I was impressed by the accuracy of the brackets, which use preexisting holes in the van frame, so no drilling was involved.

Then I added Systainer runners, which are the slides that mount to the brackets to hold the Systainers. They come in two styles to fit both the older generation T-Loc and newer generation SYS3 Systainers. T-Loc runners are cradle-style shelving mounts that hold the T-Loc and SYS3 Systainers as they sit inside of the shelf. SYS3 runners work only with SYS3 Systainers, which have integrated rail slots on their sides. Older T-Loc Systainers require a little more room between units than the newer SYS3 versions due to the runner design, but in both cases, I was able to fit more Systainers in a given space than I could with plywood shelving. In addition, the T-Loc runners accommodate the original style Systainer, which is now being used by brands such as Makita.

Galvanized steel shelving is available in several widths, heights, and depths depending on your needs, and each shelf comes with a rubberized material inside to stop cargo from sliding while also reducing noise. To get further organized, I added several different bottBox kits, which come in various sizes and fit neatly inside of the shelf. These work great for loose handheld items, such as tape measures and Allen keys.

Among many other available options are slide drawers, perforated panels with the company's configured accessories—such as spray-can and caulking-tube holders—and cable hooks for things like air hoses and saw blades. They make a huge difference in terms of cleanliness and organization.



The components of the bott Smartvan storage system mount to epoxy powder-coated MIG-welded brackets with reinforced folds (1). Runners that mount to the brackets are available to fit both older-style T-Loc Systainers and newer SYS3 Systainers (2). The FastCap guide-rail holders mounted on the ceiling aren't part of the bott Smartvan system but are a useful addition to the author's van storage (3).

Photos by Tommie Mullaney

Ceiling-mounted guide rails. To mount my Festool guide rails to the van's ceiling, I secured 1/2-inch-thick strips of plywood to the roof frame with threaded rivet nut inserts, a common fastening method used for camper vans. Then I fastened FastCap Track Racks (\$25 a pair; fastcap.com) to the plywood with 1/2-inch-long wood screws. Metal rails tend to move and vibrate a lot during transport, and these guide-rail holders secure them nicely. They aren't part of the bott Smartvan system but are a great addition to my work van.

Security. bott Smartvan is one of only two companies worldwide to receive an ECE R17 crash test safety rating. This standard, which simulates a collision of an obstacle with a fully-loaded vehicle at 32 mph, focuses on fixing points, flooring, sidewalls, and overall construction of the shelving system. The bott Smartvan system is designed to keep tool cases and storage boxes firmly in place. The frames have integrated lashing rails that work specifically with optional bott Smartvan lashing straps and anti-slip mats to help prevent loads from sliding around. Lashing brackets that attach to the frame with T25 Torx bits are also available, allowing loads to be secured in any position.

Not only am I able to securely carry more tools and equipment, but I also have more space down the center aisle than I did with plywood shelving. This makes life much easier when I have to carry a big load of materials to a jobsite or (as I recently discovered) move my home. And once I had the new shelving and partition installed, I realized how unsafe I had been before with my plywood shelving. I've also noticed better gas mileage due to less weight, and the chassis of the Sprinter van feels more rigid, which has made driving on windy highways much easier.

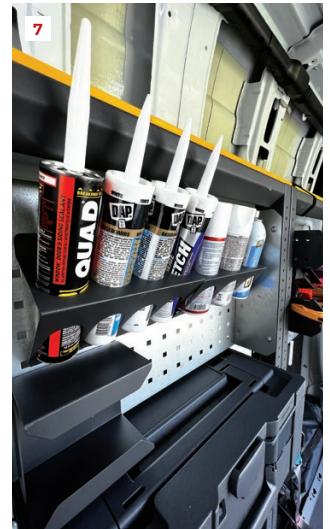
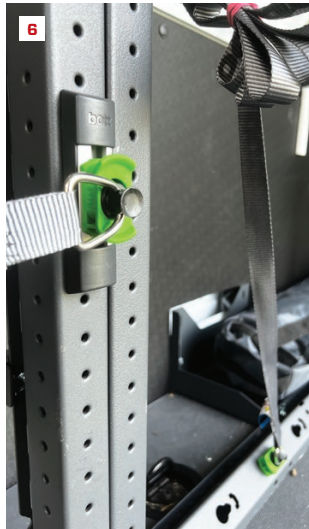
Price. After researching other shelving systems, I found that the bott Smartvan was priced competitively, especially considering the top-notch quality and customization. The rep I dealt with told me that I could add or subtract items as we went, so to become familiar with the system, I started with the Essential kit (\$3,800) with some shelving and the frames, and then ordered runners, large Systainers (for extra storage) to add to the ones that I already owned, and accessories such as hooks, anchors, and lashing straps a few weeks later. I chose this option to ensure I didn't end up with any accessories I couldn't use.

The Advanced kit (\$5,560) includes the same frames but also includes medium and/or large Systainers, drawer boxes, and a few more shelves. By the time I added extra shelves and Systainers to my Essential kit, I essentially made myself an Advanced kit.

I chose large Systainers to fit an assortment of smaller items that would otherwise roll around on the shelves, as well as for bulky items such as vacuum hoses and fittings that I like to store together in one place. And some of my existing Systainers are already maxed out with tools; the new, larger Systainers provide overflow storage and will keep everything more condensed.

You can also build your own system a la carte to be exactly the way you want it. The price is determined by the type and amount of items you choose to complete your build. bott-usa.com/vehicle-conversions

Tommie Mullaney owns Black Label Carpentry in central Florida. You can visit his web page at blacklabelcarpentry.com or follow him on Instagram at @BlackLabelCarpentryCo.



The shelving and Systainer rails are installed with T25 Torx screws, which go into predrilled holes on the brackets, making alignment and installation easy, with zero drilling required (4). In addition to the Systainer rails and shelving, the system can be configured with different-sized bottBox storage boxes (5), lashing points for cargo strapping (6), and spray-can and caulking-tube holders (7).