

- a** Mitre fence
- b** Bridge guard
- c** Slot mortising table
- d** Thickening rise-and-fall
- e** Pullout handle for moving
- f** Saw rise-and-fall

# Optimum performance

The universal is becoming an increasingly popular option for some, so **Alan Holtham** puts the Optal 26, manufactured by Lurem, through its paces

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TEST

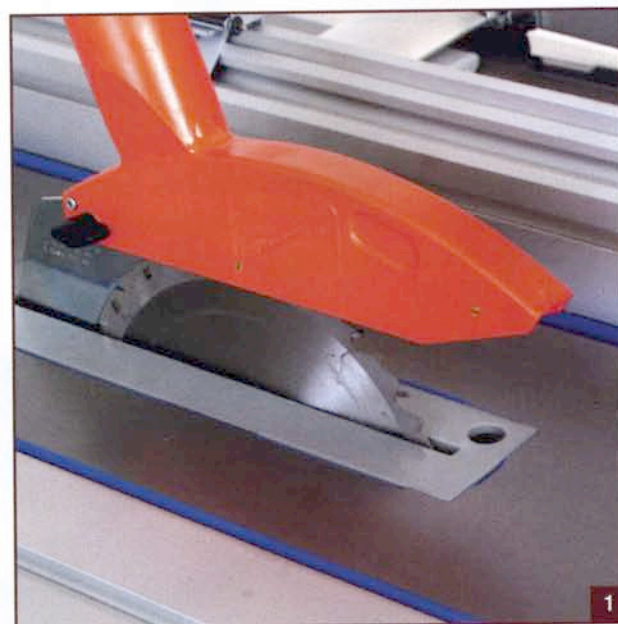
**W**hile the debate about the relative merits of universal machines versus separate units will continue to rage unabated, there is no disputing the fact that there has recently been a resurgence of interest in universals. The various manufacturers have responded accordingly to this increased demand and the marketplace for these machines is becoming rather competitive.

One of the more recent introductions has been the Optal 26, which is manufactured by Lurem, but is to be marketed under the Metabo brand. Lurem has been well established as a manufacturer of high-quality woodworking machines for many years and, as the company is part of the large Metabo group, it seemed sensible to bring the machines into the existing brand, where the emphasis is already on

more professional products. The Optal 26 in one of four universals in the new Metabo range and is the first step-up above the entry-level Maxi 26. Although it shares some similarities with the Maxi, the most significant difference is that the Optal has separate motors for each function, so there is no need for any fiddly belt changing.

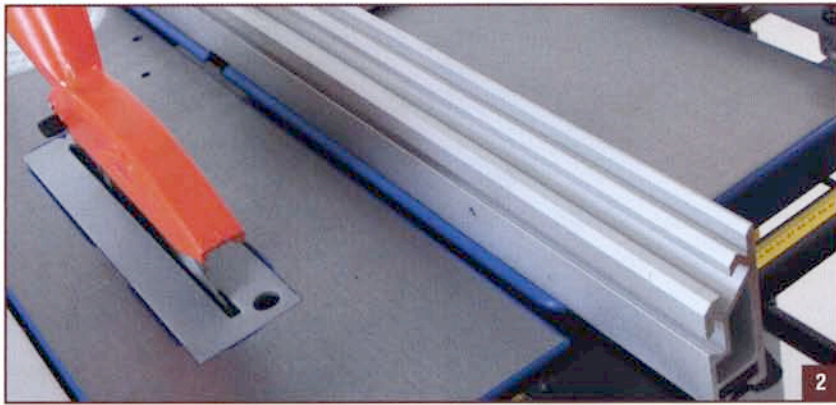
It is supplied in just a single configuration that includes the mortiser, so you have everything

you need in the one unit. In common with most other manufacturers, however, there is nothing supplied in

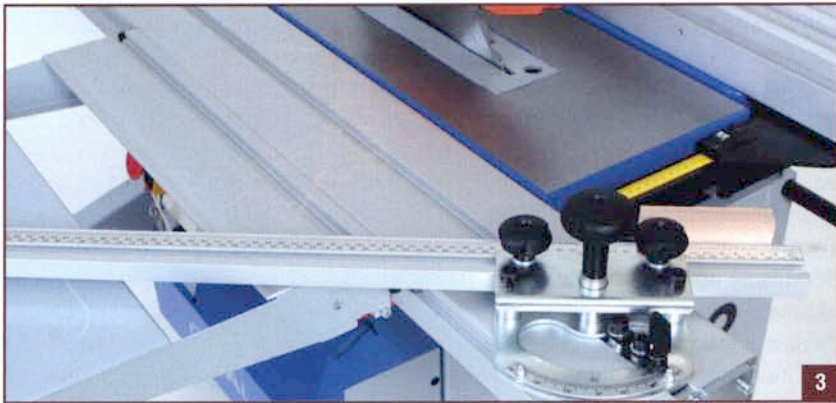


Above Forget fiddly belt changing, the Optal has separate motors for each function

1 The 250mm saw provides a very healthy 86mm (3 3/8in) depth of cut



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3

the way of extra tooling. Therefore, you will have to buy a moulding block and some mortise cutters in order for it to be fully operational.

One of the main advantages of a universal machine is that you end up with a large working surface, and this machine is no exception. The saw and planer tables are flush with the saw/tenoning carriage to give a support area in excess of 1m<sup>2</sup>.

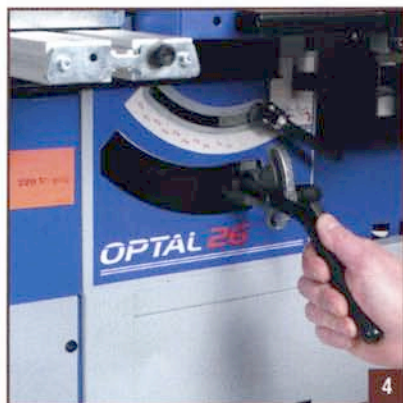
## FUNCTIONS

The saw is 250mm (9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) in diameter and provides a very healthy 86mm (3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in) depth of cut. The crown guard removes easily so you can quickly lower the blade below the table when you need to set up the spindle moulder. The long and substantial rip fence is also used on the planer and is beefy enough for accurate work. It locks securely onto the graduated guide rail with a cam lever, which although rather stiff, is extremely effective once you get the hang of it.

The versatility of the saw is increased dramatically with a large sliding carriage that glides smoothly

backwards and forwards to produce perfect crosscuts when used in conjunction with the angled mitre fence. An additional table just clips into the side of the sliding carriage wherever you want, and provides plenty of extra support for either crosscuts or large-panel work. This whole arrangement works really well and makes accurate crosscutting a real pleasure.

The depth of cut on the saw is adjusted with a simple rise-and-fall handle, which, although effective, is rather crude if you need to make



4

minute adjustments. A more disappointing feature is the tilt arrangement, which has no hand-wheel control, but relies solely on you releasing the lock and manually tilting the blade, using the rise-and-fall handle as a lever. This makes it difficult to achieve precise angle adjustments, though the cutting performance of the saw itself is excellent, even with relatively large sections of hardwood. With the blade tilted to the maximum 45°, the depth of cut is still a respectable 40mm (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in) and the blade is electronically braked to stop spinning in less than five seconds.

## PERFORMANCE

The planer function is another good performer, with a maximum cut width of 260mm (10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) and tables with an overall length of about 1m. I always prefer the ease of operation of planers with a lever-operated rise-and-fall adjustment for the infeed table, and this one is no exception having a useful 3mm (1/8in) depth of cut. The cutter block has two knives and rotates at 6300rpm resulting in a very fine pitch to the cutter marks and, consequently, an excellent finish on the timber surface.

The same saw fence is also used for the planer, but although quite rigid, I would have preferred it to be a little longer for planing. Surprisingly, the planer tables are not slotted at the cutter-block end, so this function is noisier than usual, particularly when you connect up the dust extractor for thickening. I hope this is addressed



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2 The long and substantial rip fence is also used on the planer and is beefy enough for accurate work

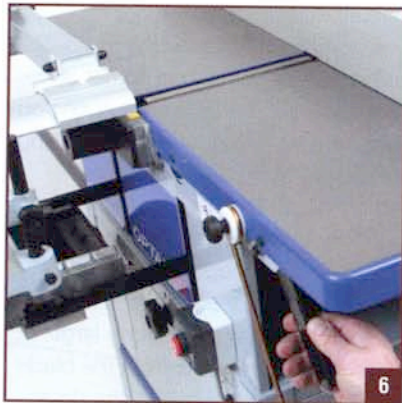
3 When used in conjunction with the angled mitre fence, the large sliding carriage glides backwards and forwards to produce perfect crosscuts

4 The depth of cut on the saw is adjusted with a simple rise-and-fall handle which, although effective, is rather crude if you need to make minute adjustments

5 The cutting performance of the saw itself is excellent, even with relatively large sections of hardwood



**6** The planer function is another good performer, with a maximum cut width of 260mm (10 $\frac{1}{8}$ in) and tables with an overall length of about 1m, providing plenty of support



**7** The surfacing tables stay in place when you use the thickener, which means that you have to reach under them when feeding timber in or out

as noise levels can be a limiting factor, particularly if you are working in a residential area.

With any universal you are inevitably operating all around the machine and the problem of accessing the on/off switch becomes a real safety issue. Some manufacturers don't seem to bother about it, but the Optal has a separate off-switch located handily for the planer function, so you don't have to reach too far.

It is a pity that the on/off switch for the saw is not as equally accessible. Once again the cutter block is electronically braked, in this case, stopping in less than four seconds.

## ON THE SURFACE

The surfacing tables stay in place when you use the thickener, which means that you have to reach under them when feeding timber in or out. This initially feels rather awkward but

you soon get used to it and I do not see it as a real problem. The rise-and-fall control and the thickening scale are both excellent, the rotating handle incorporating one of the unique liquid scale indicators characteristic of Metabo machines. The thickening feed speed of 7m per minute again contributes to an excellent quality surface finish, and there is a theoretical maximum depth of cut of 4mm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ in). The metal feed rollers don't cause any problem as regards marking the surface, and I think that, on balance, I actually prefer them to rubber rollers, provided they are set up correctly like this.

Guarding is well addressed on this machine with an excellent bridge guard for the surfacer, coupled with a flip-over guard on the back of the rip fence to ensure that the cutter block is covered at all times, no matter where the fence is. It always surprises

me how some manufacturers make a real meal out of the guarding, often to such an extent that it is very awkward to use and you consequently end up taking it off. On the Optal the guarding is simple but effective, so I used it!

The machine is supplied with a slot mortiser attached to the thickener table, the cutter being held in a chuck in the end of the planer spindle. I must admit to never having been a fan of slot mortisers and this one is no better or worse than anyone else's, but the single lever and length stop system make it extremely simple to operate.

However, clamping the work firmly enough on the table can be a bit of a problem if you become too ambitious with larger diameter cutters.

## ACCESS

I have already mentioned that you need access all round the machine, which may not always be possible with some large workpieces. However, if you are struggling, it is very easy to move this machine about using the pullout handle to tip it back onto the supplied wheelbase.

This arrangement works very well, the long handle providing more than enough leverage to easily lift the 230kg dead weight of the machine. I would certainly give 10/10 for this feature.

On the subject of access and space, the extension table can be quickly removed and the swinging arm stowed against the side of the machine if you're struggling for room.

**8** The machine is supplied with a slot mortiser attached to the thickener table, the cutter being held in a chuck in the end of the planer spindle



**9** It is very easy to move this machine about using the pullout handle to tip it back onto the supplied wheelbase

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TEST

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## work. don't play.



### OPTAL 26 - 6 Combination machine

Combined with 3 motors, the change of function is done quite simply with a selector - no need for belt changing.

With this machine the project possibilities are endless, due to its high specification and professional build quality, excellent results can be achieved without the need for separate machines.

#### Specifications

Saw Diameter: 250mm, Tilting to 45°, Depth of cut 82mm  
 Saw/Tenoning Carriage - length of cut behind blade 1,300mm  
 Surface Planer: Surface width: 260mm, Max. cut 4mm  
 Thicknesser: Thicknessing height: 4 - 150mm, Max. cut 4mm  
 Spindle moulder: 6,750rpm, Max. øTool: (Fence) 180mm (Table) 150mm  
 Slot Mortiser: 1 speed of rotation, 3 jaw chuck capacity 1-16mm  
 Wheel Kit - included as standard

£2,040.00 excl. VAT £2,397.00 incl. VAT

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# XXL

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