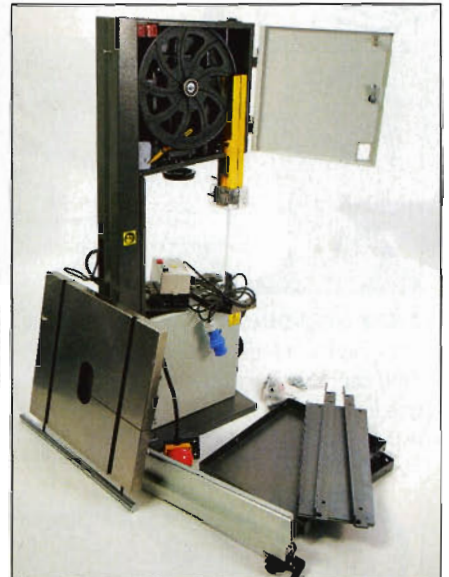


Startrite 352E bandsaw



£799



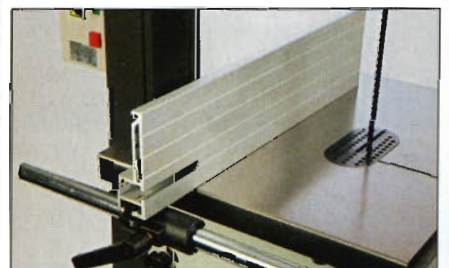
Everything unpacked



The saw and stand united



The extremely heavy table



The strong and rigid fence

The bandsaw has always been my favourite workshop machine, so I jumped at the opportunity to test the new 352E from Startrite, particularly at this was to be a long-term test. The idea is to do an initial review of the machine 'out of the box', and then to install it in my workshop for use under normal working conditions for several months, to allow time for a more detailed assessment of its strengths and weaknesses



**TESTED BY
ALAN HOLTHAM**

My first impression of this machine is that it represents exceptional value for money. I've shown it to several other woodworkers and asked them to guess the retail price; without fail they've all suggested a price over the £1000 mark, when in reality it's just £799.

Regular delivery

I asked for a standard machine to be supplied unopened, just as a retail customer would receive it, and it arrived very well packaged in a substantial wooden case – although at 125kg it took some lifting and moving around.

They parts were all individually wrapped and in perfect condition. There weren't too many separate pieces, the main assembly jobs being the stand and the table.

Stand together

The stand is made from heavy steel sections, and is easy to assemble once you've figured out the rather poor-quality drawing in the instruction manual. The nuts, bolts and washers are all ready-assembled in the correct order, which makes a pleasant change!

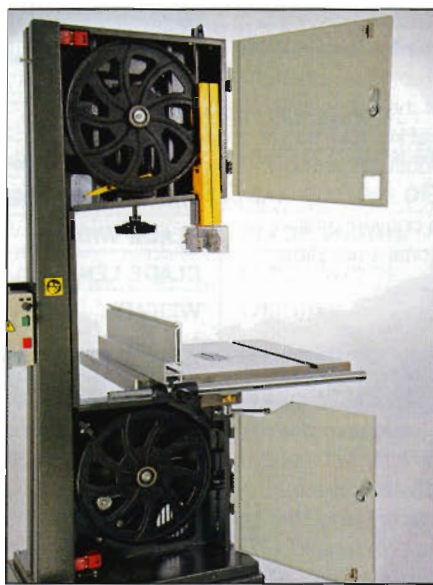
As I was working on my own, I found the best way to marry up the base and stand was to lay them on the floor, bolt them together and then stand the whole thing up as one. This is relatively easy so long as you do it before you fit the heavy table...

Two-part table

The table is an extremely heavy cast iron affair with lots of ribbing underneath and a superbly ground and polished surface. It fits onto two substantial cast iron trunnions and secures with two sturdy metal locking handles.

The first thing you notice is that the slot for fitting the blade is at the side rather than the front, and there is no strap tying the two sides together. The theory is that there is then an unbroken table surface over which to feed the material into the blade. This of course makes blade changing a lot easier, as you don't have to undo a front strap and possibly remove the fence.

I'll reserve judgment as to whether this is a good idea, and see if the two halves of the table remain level under regular use. If they



The doors give easy access

don't, this arrangement will be worse than having a lengthwise slot.

The table tilts to a full 45°, sliding easily on the large trunnions and locking up with two heavy-duty metal handles.

The rip fence is a decent height aluminium extrusion, mounted on a cast iron carrier, and slides effortlessly on the steel bar that runs the full width of the table. It's simple, but strong and rigid.

Blade running

The machine isn't fitted with a blade and there isn't one in the box, although a ¾ x 3tpi skip one does come separately. To my mind this has several advantages. For a start, you can see that you're getting a decent-quality blade, and secondly, it ensures that you set the blade up correctly before switching the machine on.

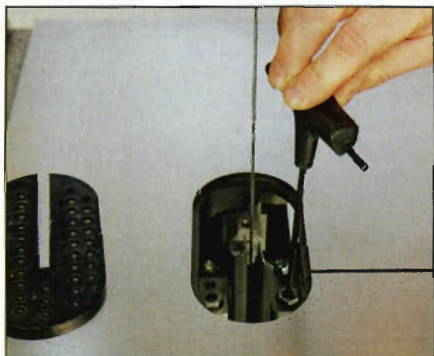
The two independent doors open outwards, and are hinged on the right-hand

side which makes it easier to access the blade. The blade itself is extremely easy to fit, as there are no fiddly guards around which to slot it. Tension is applied using the large handwheel, and the scale appears to work fairly accurately. This whole mechanism is once again all solid cast iron, and looks incredibly strong with a massive spring and mounting.

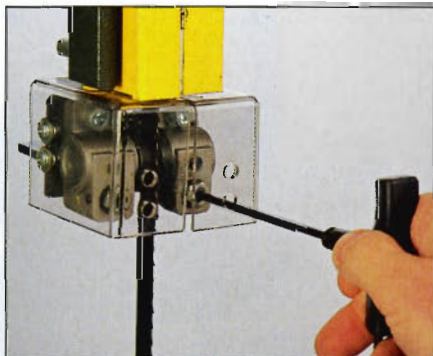
Perfect guides

A unique feature of this machine is that the bottom blade guides can be adjusted from the top through the hole for the table insert. The guides are on cams which are easily moved using the supplied Allen key. The top guides work on a similar cam principle and can be adjusted and set one-handed, this time by operating the key through the Perspex guard. A handy clip on the back of the machine takes the Allen keys.

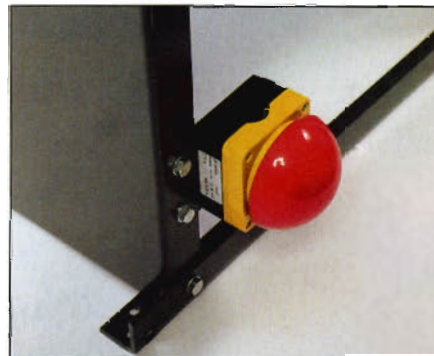
The guides themselves are roller bearings for the sides and solid tungsten thrust pads at the rear. This seemingly crude set-up was standard for decades on the original Startrite machines. In my opinion it's still the simplest and most effective method of controlling thrust – far more efficient than a back bearing that soon wears out.



Adjusting the lower guides...



...and then the upper ones



The emergency kick switch

The band wheels are cast iron and are fitted with rubber tyres which are accurately ground to a crown to help the tracking process. The bottom wheel is driven off the 2hp motor via a belt and idler pulley which allows quick adjustment of the belt tension.

The easily accessible starter includes an integral key lock so you can limit access to the machine. There is also a foot operated kick switch for emergency use.

Lastly, dust extraction is well catered for, with a conventional outlet below the bottom wheel and then an additional small pipe extracting dust from just below the bottom guides.

Noise and shudder

With the inspection over, I was able to install the bandsaw in my workshop and get down to making some trial cuts.

I was initially surprised by the high noise level, and tracked this down to the idler pulley on the drive belt. Slackening this off slightly reduced the noise considerably, though not quite as much as I would have liked. Also, although the machine runs very smoothly, it does shudder somewhat as it runs down after you switch off. I'll continue to watch both these points during the long-term test.

Slot problems

The first snag I found was that using the 3/4in blade, tracking in the middle of the wheel required the slot in the plastic table insert to be lengthened backwards. I tried slackening off all the table mountings in the hope of moving the table back, but there was just not enough adjustment to get the blade running in the middle of the slot.

Over-long fence

The second problem was with the otherwise excellent fence, which is just too long to allow it to hinge up if you want to clear it off the table. The only way to remove the fence at the moment is to take the blade off and then slide the fence clear to the right. I'm sure that shortening the fence slightly or cutting a chamfer on the end would not affect the performance in any way, but would allow instant removal – a feature I think is essential on a bandsaw.

Spark and grind

Trial cuts on deep timber proved very satisfactory, though there was considerable sparking from the top thrust pad. This problem was quickly cured after a brief consultation with Record's technical staff by grinding a tiny chamfer on the edge of the pad. Apparently this is a known issue that has been cured on later machines.

SPECIFICATION

MOTOR	2hp single-phase
TABLE SIZE	548 x 500mm
HEIGHT UNDER GUIDES	280mm
MAX CUTTING DEPTH	345mm
BLADE WIDTHS	6-25mm
BLADE LENGTH	2845mm
WEIGHT	125kg

VERDICT

Too early to tell, but I'll let you know how I get on with it over the next few months in the follow-up test. However, it all looks good so far and I still can't get over what you get for the price!

- PROS**
- Easy assembly (but easier with a helper)
 - Easily adjustable guides
 - Quick blade change
 - Superb fence
 - Sheer mass and build quality

- CONS**
- Perspex blade guards
 - Noise from drive
 - Difficult fence removal

TIME TO UNPACK 25 mins

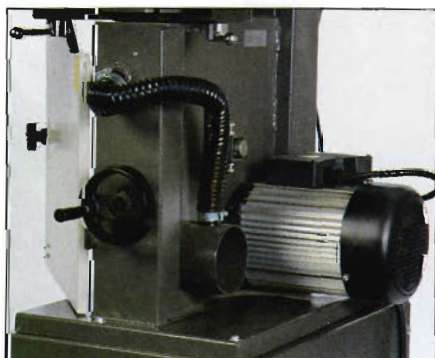
TIME TO ASSEMBLE 50 mins

VALUE FOR MONEY

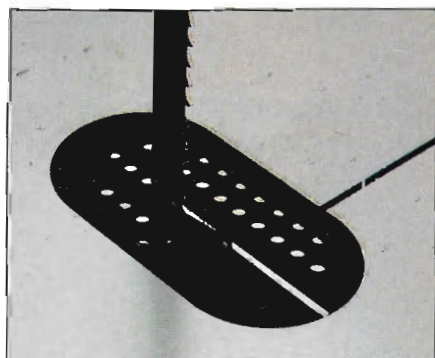
PERFORMANCE Time will tell!

FURTHER INFORMATION

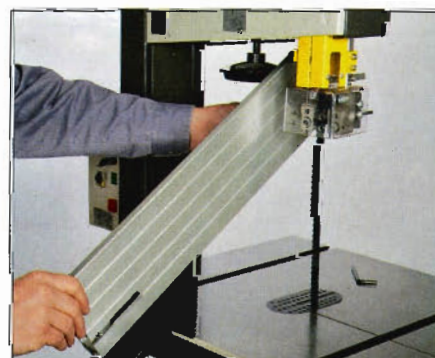
- Record Power
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The dust extraction set-up



The table insert slot – too short



The fence – too long to hinge up