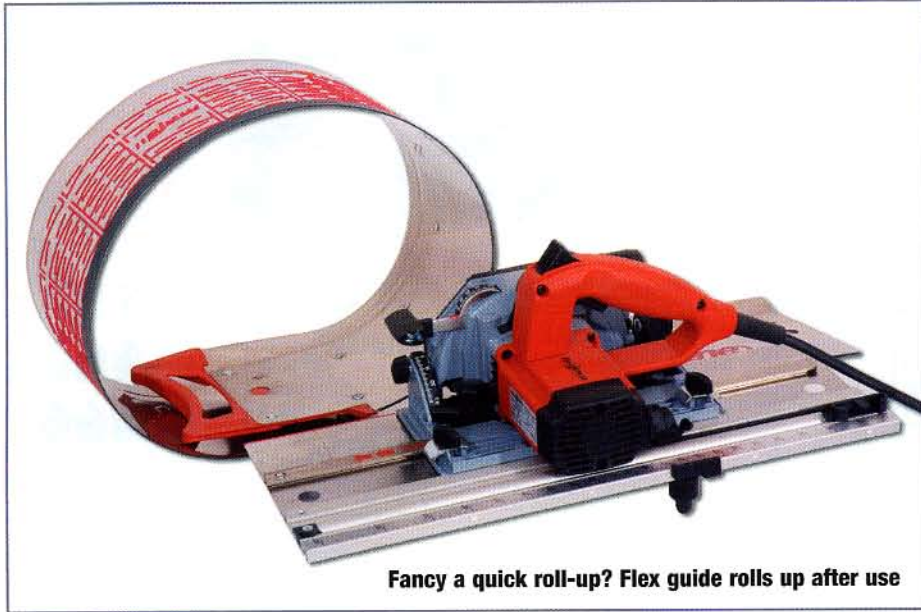


STRAIGHT TALKING



Fancy a quick roll-up? Flex guide rolls up after use

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER BRETT

Peter Brett tests the Mafell Portable Panel System's steering capabilities

As most of us know from bitter experience, without access to a tablesaw, cutting a perfect straight line with a Skil-type circular saw is impossible, so a big welcome then to Mafell's system comprising Systainer-boxed saw, adjustable-for-size rigid alloy guide, crosscut guide and Flex guide that is both flexible and rollable.

The saw can be used separately as a hand-held saw, but in conjunction with any of the guides it becomes an accurate part of the Mafell System.



Depth of cut setting is clear, accurate and simple

SAW

The KSS300 may be dinky blade but it is high-quality, with a rigid and strong grey-coated cast-alloy base. Clearly marked scales for setting depth of cut and bevel angles appeared to be accurate. Depth of cut is set straightforwardly via levers, one above the main blade cover and another for locking. Bevel angle setting requires use of two hand bolts at each end of the blade housing. A separate lever raises the bottom blade guard and, uniquely I think, the riving knife is spring-loaded for easy and relatively safe plunge cuts.

The blade is 120mm in diameter and I was given a 40-tooth TCT as standard. Dust extraction is via the port at the top of the blade guard. Safety is via a large thumb-operated switch which allows a trigger switch beneath the handle to be squeezed on.

FLEX GUIDE

The steel guide rail is useful for cuts up to 1.4m long. Rubberised

zigzag patterns on the base provide non-slip grip on the workpiece, and a handle and stop on one end, with a series of small, triangular, raised indents, guide the edge of the saw base as it is pushed. Using small extrusions clamped to its edge, it is easy to hold the guide in place for accurate cutting.

Afterwards, simply roll it up, secure it with a clip and replace it in the box.

LONG GUIDE

This alloy guide, its four parts held in a 1.8m-long nylon case, offers some brilliant features. With the aid of a large screwdriver, the sections can be accurately and robustly joined to form a number of desired lengths of guide up to a whopping 2.6m. A groove in the saw base runs in a raised edge in the guide so it remains straight and true. A pair of clamps is supplied to hold the guide to the work.

A short piece with an adjustable fence for cutting angles up to 60° to the left and 45° to the right can be joined on the end of any of the larger guide rails.

CROSSCUT GUIDE

At around 455m long, this guide is long enough to do 300mm crosscuts. The saw base is held in grooves and a clip-on elastic mechanism returns the saw to the start of the cut when it is released.

Use of a screw setting on the left-hand side of the guide allows cuts of 60° to the left and 45° to the right.



Nearing the end of a cut using the Flex guide which is dead easy to use



Using the long alloy guide; note the protractor at the end for setting angles of cut



No dust extraction is available, but the saw glides down the guide very easily using only one hand



The alloy guide will go even longer!



Starting a cut using the crosscut guide; note that the cut is angled, having been set by the screw on the left



Crosscut guide complete with scale

THE VERDICT

I had great fun playing with the saw and guides. The saw is light and easy to operate and the guides do their job easily and accurately. For someone who is fitting out a kitchen or rebuilding a house it would be a really useful piece of kit. The downside is the price, because professional users can often justify the cost of expensive tools whereas ordinary blokes like me need to have regular lottery wins to fund our tool habit.

THE TEST

Testing for speed and accuracy, I used a number of 20mm-thick sheet materials including chipboard, ply and MDF, and some 30mm-thick oak planks destined for a tabletop.

I started with the Flex guide and a piece of chipboard, clamping it in place at 90° to the cut by the straightedge under the handle end. The surface of the Flex guide is so smooth and the base of the saw so slippery that a virtually frictionless push is possible, while, underneath, the grid acts like a non-slip mat. It took only a few goes to get it perfect, and cutting even large panels was easy. It is important to maintain side pressure against the indents so the saw does not wander off line.

The cross guide is a real time saver. Cutting right-angled and angled cuts across pieces of timber, melamine or

ply is dead easy, even without resting the material on a trestle. With practice, all you have to do is set the edge of the guide to the side of the timber, support it with your left hand and push the saw across with your right.

Using the longer rigid guide is more complicated because sections must be joined for longer cuts. The square and angle setting piece must also be added if a specific angle or right-angle is needed. Again, practice makes perfect.

The benefits of having a more rigid guide are clear: the saw slides easily in the groove with minimal play. On my narrowish oak planks I couldn't always get the guide to sit perfectly, but on a sheet of MDF the guide worked well, the only problem being the usual one of the operator trying to get round the board as the cut progressed.

DATAFILE

Saw:

Cutting depth 40-42mm depending on which guide

Cutting depth at 45° 27mm

Blade diameter 120mm

Weight 3.2-2.3kg depending on guide used

Dust port diameter 28mm

Power 900W

Cable length 4m

Comes with: Systainer case, FLEX-guide, 2 clamps, parallel guide fence, service tool

NMA (Agencies) Ltd

Tel: 01484 400488

Website: www.nmauk.com

Price:Saw, crosscut rail and FLEX

guide £379 inc VAT

1.8m guide rail £69.95 inc VAT