Heavy-Duty Sliding Saw

by Clayton DeKorne

Tapco — a leading manufacturer of portable metal brakes, aluminum slitters, and gutter-hanging equipment — recently introduced a large sliding saw table. In designing the *Pro-Edge Saw Table and Cutting Station*, Tapco has taken the sliding saw jig used by siding contractors to its ultimate level. Siding mechanics will love this one — but it's questionable how readily the other carpentry trades will embrace this behemoth tool.

Weighing the Advantages

The Pro-Edge Saw Table weighs in at a staggering 130 pounds (not including a circular saw). This supreme poundage has prompted the manufacturer to include an unusual warning with the tool: "Always use two persons when moving and lifting table. Failure to do so may damage saw table and cause serious injury." No joke.

A contractor who has a rack on the pickup truck, a full-time helper, and is used to hefting a metal brake on and off the truck each day won't have too much trouble with the Pro-Edge. But for the rest of us who plan to take this on site everyday, it'll take utter dedication to realize the advantages of this saw table.

To begin with, plan to set aside three hours to puzzle through the instructions and bolt all the pieces together. The parts, at least, are machined from high-quality aluminum alloy, and while some pieces have sharp edges, the fit is satisfying. But the assembly instructions are hard to decipher and the photos are unhelpful. If you've never seen the table put together, the initial assembly will be a true test of your problem-solving skills. Tapco is reportedly working on a user's manual, which should make assembly easier.

To the saw's credit, once it is assembled and you have the help of another person, the whole rig can be set up or broken down in a matter of minutes. It breaks down into two long, flat pieces. One is the table and rotating boom that holds the saw carriage. The other is the collapsible leg assembly. Several siding contractors I spoke with prefer to leave the legs in the garage, and set up the table on horses on site.

Other Pluses

The saw does glide beautifully on the rails. Tape measures run along the rails for measuring the width of stock, and along the fence and telescoping table supports for measuring the length of stock. The table surface has an extra-smooth polypropylene surface. But the clearest advantage of this table is the cutting capacity. The boom that holds the saw will swing over to cut nearly a 74-degree angle on a 10-inch-wide clapboard. The table expands, making it possible to crosscut full sheets of plywood. And the table length telescopes out 8 feet on either side of the saw to support extra-long stock.

Special Cuts

Here are some of the things you can do with this extra capacity:

- ***Siding under the rake.*** At a maximum 73 3/4 degrees at 10 inches, you can cut those sharp-angled clapboards that butt the rake board on shed roofs with a slope as low as 3 1/2 in 12.
- ***Steep plumb cuts.*** The steep miter capacity also lets you quickly cut rafters for extra-steep roofs. This saw, for example, can handle the 63 1/4-degree plumb cut on a 2x14 for a 24/12 A-frame.
- ***Compound cuts.*** By tilting the shoe of the circular saw, you can cut compound miters. The depth of cut is limited to 1 3/4 inches, so you can't do beam work. But the saw can easily handle a 45/45 compound cut on any width 2x framing stock or wood I-beam.

With the Tapco Pro-Edge Saw Table, a carpenter quickly cuts a steep angle on wide framing stock.

- ***Other angle cuts.*** As the width of the stock increases, the maximum angle decreases. Thus, on 12-inch-wide stock you can cut up to 71 1/2 degrees, and on 16-inch-wide stock you can cut up to 65 degrees. The maximum angle on 24-inch-wide stock is 58 degrees; on 36-inch-wide stock it's 38 degrees. On 48-inch-wide stock all you can cut is a straight chop (0 degrees).

  A note of caution: When cutting all these different angle cuts, you'll inevitably slice through the aluminum fence. My advice is to take a strong blade and trim the sides of the fence opening as soon as you get the saw. Then you won't have to be so precise about lining up the blade with the opening, and you won't wind up wasting a good sharp blade in the middle of a job.
- ***Countertops.*** You can make a precision 45-degree miter on a 25-inch countertop (without backsplash). Because of the thickness of the countertop, you have to back the saw slightly out of its tracks to get this cut started.
- ***Rips.*** This saw is not practical for ripping. The saw carriage can be turned so the saw runs parallel to the fence. The manufacturer has also included a few ripping devices — anti-kickback teeth that can be flipped down, and a pair of "tension guides," which ride on the underside of the rails to hold stock tight against the fence. However, I didn't do much ripping because there is no safe way to lock the saw's trigger in the "on" position (the saw stays in place and you feed the stock into the saw). Should I use duct tape? It may be worth finding a safe way to keep the saw running to rip the occasional full piece of oak or birch ply for built-ins. But for sheathing, I'm going to stick to my Skil saw.

While the cutting capacity of the Pro-Edge is impressive, most of these cuts are fairly specialized. According to my local Tapco rep, the Pro-Edge gets the most consideration from contractors who wind up doing a little of everything — a siding job one week, a kitchen remodel the next, then a roofing job. In my opinion, however, this saw will be most useful if you do a lot of specialty work that requires cutting steep angles in wide stock. Otherwise, it's probably more than you need. Especially when you consider the retail price of about $725, which is also a little hefty. Tapco makes a *Junior Dial-N-Angle* that has many of the same features at a fraction of the weight and at a cost of about $225. For most siders, this is the tool of choice. ■