

Tools of the Trade

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Makita Maktrak Modular Storage

by JAMES BURGESS

For several months, I have been using Makita's new modular packout system, the Maktrak. I've brought the full seven-box configuration with me to many jobsites with various working conditions, which has been a great way to test its durability, versatility, and mobility (1).

The first challenge for the Maktrak was that my small, older-model Tacoma pickup truck has no tonneau or cap on the bed. That meant that whenever the containers were in the truck, they were exposed to the elements. But rain, sleet, snow, you name it, the Maktrak had me covered. No moisture ever leaked inside. The lid of each container is double lipped with a rubber gasket all the way around, forming a waterproof seal when it is latched. This seal protects against dust and debris, too, when the containers are near a working area on the jobsite or in the shop.

Another feature of the design is that cables connect the lid and base of the large boxes (2). Even with the bins above full of tools, they prevent the boxes from flipping over. The cables are removable if you ever want to fully remove the lid. The bins all can be locked into each other from the left or right; however, the release lever to disconnect them is on only one side of each unit.

In custom homes, you never know what challenges you'll be facing when you are doing the finish carpentry, so sometimes you need to improvise. To that end, the Maktrak is the perfect height to double as a worktable or a stand for a piece of machinery, like a thickness planer or router table.

I would be interested to see if, one day, Makita releases mounting plates for further customizing the packout with, for example, a small table saw or miter saw.

Labels on the lids clearly warn against using the containers as a step and, while I never used them as that way, they were definitely sturdy enough to accommodate a planer and router table. The lids are a thick, molded plastic and, so far, none have cracked or warped, or appear scratched.

The system lends itself well to customization. Each bin comes with removable trays and dividers, allowing everything to fit snugly. On the rolling tool chest, the large toolbox, and the extra-large extension toolbox, the inside of the lid has slots for Velcro to loop through for organizing the contents even further. When I first received the Maktrak, I transferred every tool in my previous system (from a different manufacturer) to it, plus other tools that were floating around, and I still had room to add more—and I keep finding ways to add even more.

As you load the bins up with tools, you obviously pack on the weight. However, that never seems to be a problem. The design transfers all the weight from the handle down to the wheels so you can easily maneuver the rolling tool chest even with all the other bins stacked on top. The large 9-inch wheels make it easy to pull the whole unit up or down stairs and over extension cords or other debris common on a construction site. Note that the wheels are plastic, so they're not great for finished floors, or even floors with only light protection.

Makita Maktrak storage modules come in seven styles (1, 2). The large bins have hinges on two sides for better access and a removable safety wire to prevent tipping. Using the handle on the rolling tool chest, the author levers the fully loaded stack into the truck as a unit (3).



PHOTOS 1-3: JAMES BURGESS



DeWalt Hood Light

by **MARC FORGET**

The added weight can complicate loading it as a unit in and out of the truck. To help with that, the Maktrak's rolling tool chest handlebar has rubber gecko grip stoppers that are meant to hook onto the end of a tailgate and provide a pivot point when you grab the tool chest from the back end, lift it up, and slide it into the bed. This design reduces the lift strain and makes sliding in all seven boxes, even fully loaded, a breeze (3).

Not every construction site is graced with stairs, or easy access, in which case you may need to break the Maktrak down. All the containers have convenient grip points and large handles, making them easy to carry even while you're wearing gloves.

A concern on the jobsite is security. All the bins that open in two directions have four lockable points, while the containers that open in only one direction have two lockable points. They also have a slot inside meant to store an air tag or similar tracking device so you can keep an eye on your tools.

Overall, the Maktrak is robust and well-designed. While late to the market, Makita has reimagined its storage system with a lot of customization potential. It has already proven itself on the jobsite for me. The cost for all seven pieces shown is \$850 at makitatools.com.

James Burgess is a carpenter and cabinetmaker in Ottawa. Follow him at @jbcwoodwork.



PHOTO OF HOOD LIGHT, FAR RIGHT: MARC FORGET

Lighting is usually a challenge on jobsites. Task lighting can pose even more of a problem, as most available lighting solutions cast light around the space and not down onto your tools. Ideally, I want a light that I can set above a miter saw to cast downward, and I want it to be cordless so it doesn't use scarce outlet space.

The DeWalt hood light is designed to hook on a car's hood and illuminate the engine bay. However, the padded hooks and telescoping arms (51-to-74-inch expansion) that allow it to attach to the underside of a hood also adapt easily to a jobsite. The spring-tensioned arms can grab joists and stud walls and run from one empty pot light rough-in to another without causing damage to the surface. I can now get 1,700 lumens of light directly above my workstation with no dangling cords. A single 5-amp battery lasts about seven hours of continuous light, after which the unit will flash to indicate a low battery. The light folds to a compact 26½ inches and weighs just shy of 7 pounds. It has high and low light settings as well as the option of having only one side lit at a time. While the jobsite is not its intended application, it has proved effective in providing much needed task lighting on site.

The DCL045 Hood Light (bare tool) costs \$170. dewalt.com



DeWalt's hood light provides cord-free task lighting where you need it for almost a full workday on one charge (above).

Levrack Mobile Workstation

by JAKE LEWANDOWSKI

Levrack is a company based in Nebraska with the sole goal of keeping you organized. Everything it makes is heavy-duty and professional grade. Recently, it expanded its lineup to include a few versions of what it calls a “workstation,” or what I know as a “fixture table.” Think of a robust workbench that works like a Festool MFT/table but is made of steel. It has a milled-flat, $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch A36 steel top, with $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch holes spaced every 4 inches. Though it’s called a 4-foot workstation, the overall dimensions differed from the website specifications. I recommend reaching out to Levrack if you need exact sizing (custom sizing is also available). It’s rated to 2,000 pounds; I haven’t put anywhere near that much weight on it, but it has supported several 100-pound rolls of aluminum effortlessly thanks to the large, heavy-duty, lockable casters that come standard with the table.

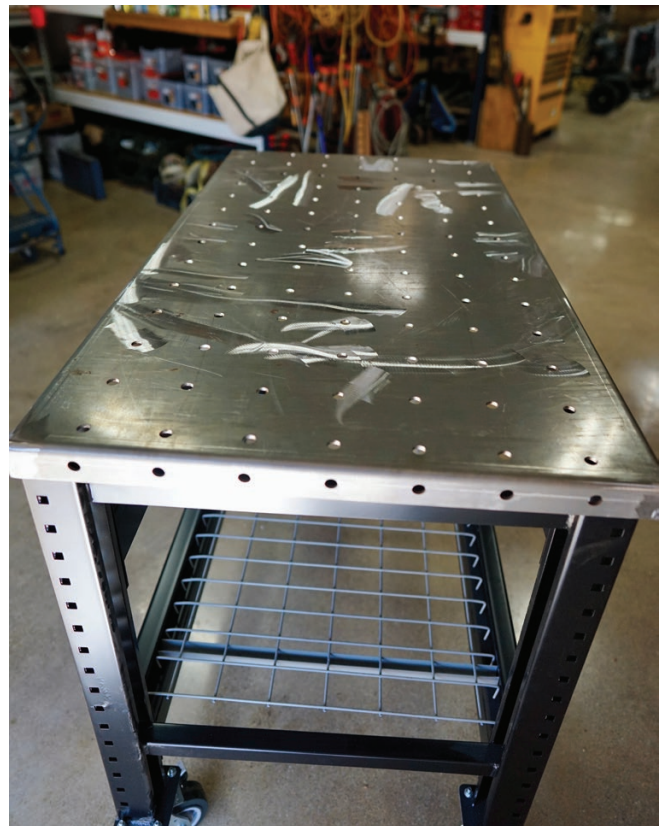
I had originally thought that it would be a dedicated fabrication table for us, and it has excelled at that. Surprisingly, though, I’ve used it more frequently for performing small-engine maintenance and repairing tools and equipment. It’s great to be able to securely clamp what you’re working on straight to the table, exactly where you want it, especially a smaller item that requires a large breaker bar.

It’s hard to find anything that I dislike about this table. I do have two issues that are more an opinion or concern than a dislike. For one, it feels too tall. Tuning up a power trowel or a generator on it can be awkward. Even fabricating rebar cages has me considering grabbing a step stool. I hope to find a

more permanent home for it at the shop and will probably either remove the casters or put the table to use and fabricate a mount to outboard the casters, similar to what you would find on a cabinet saw. My second concern is about the top thickness. The $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch top has held up great for the few months I’ve owned it; still, most fab tables are substantially thicker—along with, of course, being substantially more expensive.

All in all, it’s a great all-around workstation that could bring value to most professional contractors. The Levrack workstation shown here retails at \$1,550 from levrack.com.

Jake Lewandowski is a construction manager with Chicago-based Great Lakes Builders.



The Levrack 4-foot (actual length is 55 inches) workstation has a robust work surface with holes for mounting tools as well as a storage shelf underneath. The table pictured is 30 inches wide; it can be ordered with a solid or perforated top by special request.

PHOTOS: JAKE LEWANDOWSKI