

## The New Festool OF 1400 EQ Router



Which would you rather use to cut a set of dovetails, a router or a hand saw, a chisel and hammer? I ask this question in a Setting Up a Shop course that I teach. The majority usually raise their hands for the router. I then ask if they've made a conscious choice to suffer so that they can enjoy their hobby. I get blank stares until I explain it.

Using hand tools, you have a shop that is quiet, interrupted only by the gentle sounds of sawing and the tap-tap of a chisel in wood. You create no appreciable dust. You can hear the radio. It's a lovely scene.

On the other hand, you have routers. First you need to entomb your head in safety equipment, from glasses to hearing protectors to a dust mask. The router screams, making it impossible to hear the radio or telephone. Chips and dust fly, covering every surface in the shop. "Pleasant" is not an adjective I use to describe routing.

Until now, that is. The new Festool OF1400 makes routing almost enjoyable. It is really quiet. It captures more dust and chips than any router I've ever used. And man does it have 21<sup>st</sup>-century features—almost too many to list (it will be a long review). This router isn't just a little bit better than all the rest. It is worthy of the overused term “awesome.” It is so good that I'm considering cutting dovetails with it.

Taking it out of the box, it seems light. This is not a monster router in size or weight. First thing I do with a new tool is plug it in to hear it run. What does it have to say? There's a strange clanking (over time this goes away) before the soft start (as good as any) and then very little noise. Is the speed turned all the way down? No. I turn the speed all the way down and the router gets substantially quieter. Mind you, it's still a router and louder than a chisel. But there is no immediate pain to the ears when not wearing hearing protectors.

Place the router on top of a bench and start it, and it doesn't walk. The vibration is miniscule. (By the way, this is a good technique for testing router bits—run a router without a bit and feel the vibrations. Chuck the bit and run the router again. The amount of added vibration is all in the bit. Good ones add just a little. Bad ones, a lot).



Chucking a bit in the OF1400 is a novel experience—there's a ratchet mechanism that greatly simplifies and speeds up the process. First you finger-

tighten a bit in the collet (or the ratchet won't engage. Then you get a wrench on the collet nut and press the ratchet switch down with a finger. You don't need to take the wrench off the nut as you tighten—it works like a ratchet wrench. Also since the plunge mechanism posts and depth stop are far apart, you can swing the wrench fully 180 degrees while tightening. It's the same process (in reverse) to loosen the bit. The hardest part is getting used to chucking bits so quickly.

The chip collection on the machine is superlative. This means it's really, really good. There are no less than three types of hood to use separately or together. Each bares a separate description. The first one is the most versatile



The top “extraction connector” attaches to the top of the base plate and must be fitted *after* you chuck the bit. It has a gap in the circumference that allows you to slide it around the bit then attach it to the base.



The second type of extractor connector can be fitted to the parallel guide. The hose connects down low in this case. It works well for edge routing.



The third type of connector is just too awesome for words. It clips into the underside of the router base like the rub collars (see below). It's a black semi-circle that swivels 360 degrees freely covering one side of the bit. Used with the

top mounted extraction connector, you can rout along curves and around corners catching much more dust than with the top connector alone. At first impression, I thought it would get in the way, push the router off course. But when I tried it, it worked as smoothly as silk. I couldn't even tell that it was there except for the almost complete lack of dust and chips flying around my shop. I have never seen anything quite like it before, but every router should have one.



The parallel fence has all the features you'd ever want, including fine adjustment, and moveable fence faces. The fence also attaches to the base of the router in a very cool way. There is one (easy to reach) knob to tighten for both guide rods. This makes moving the fence around so much easier.



Next come the copying rings, which are really over the top. Festool designed the router so that copying rings clip and lock into the base by just pressing them in. Little push levers on the top of the base release them. There are no screws involved at all.

Even more impressive is that the router has been centered on these copying rings at the factory. You don't have to manually center the collar before each use. Just clip it in and go. Simply astounding. And was the ring *really* centered? Yes indeed. The router performed flawlessly when I made a set of complementary templates for some crazy curved joinery. Currently (late February), the routers are shipping with one metric collar. But it seems there are plans to throw in an adapter for standard inch size collars made by Porter Cable and the like.

This is already a long review, but some of the most important features are still left to describe. The great standard features simply fade to the background in view of the innovations. Like the smaller Festool OF1010 router, the OF1400 has a pistol grip handle on one side and a knob on the other. This layout is not

standard on US routers but I find to be an improvement. The pistol grip controls on/off and the knob clamps routing depth (a simple twist). After a few uses, you'll appreciate not having to fish a finger around for a depth-locking lever. Just twist your wrist and the router stays at depth.

The depth-setting mechanism also works really well, with a fine adjustment capability of 0.1 mm. Yes, the scale is metric, but conversion is easy. I'm not bothered by it since I measure as little as possible, cutting things by eye. Also, the maximum plunge travel is a full 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. stroke. The collet face comes within a <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. of the router base. Compared to what I used to have, this is a great help. I now can cut mortises to the depth I want, rather than only as far as I could.

Currently, the router ships with a <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. and 8mm collet. This is because Festool sells a lot of very good 8mm (about 3/8 in.) bits. But there are plans to add in a <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. collet to the basic scope of delivery; when exactly, I don't know.

All in all, this is a must-have router. No two ways about it. The features and performance simply are so much better than anything else out there. Festool has a reputation for being expensive, but the standard list price of \$385 isn't astronomical compared with other routers. I can't give this router a higher recommendation. Go for it.

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