

## The Track for Success

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Like many EMGW members, I do all my woodworking from home. My “shop” is in my basement. And like many with a New England basement, my access is via a bulkhead. To gain entry, you have to step up and over a transom and then navigate about 8 steps to get own and through the not-so-big doorway at the bottom of the steep opening. Bottom line: getting equipment in can be tricky, especially if the equipment doesn’t ship in multiple boxes to be assembled in the shop. Getting a 4x8 sheet of plywood into the workshop in one piece is pretty much impossible because of the angles involved. I think that is the reason I purchased a track saw (Festool) years ago. I also built a foldable “cutting table” that I keep in the garage. The good news: cutting up sheet goods accurately and to a manageable, bulkhead-compatible size is now easy. The bad news: I hardly build anything but jigs from plywood anymore.

I have, however, found other uses for the track saw. Trimming doors is one. Taking 1/16 or 1/8 off the bottom of a door is no problem, even if the cut a slight taper along any of the edges. My porch doors now have a 2-degree bevel cut for a near-perfect fit. I suppose you could accomplish the same goal with a hand plane. But holding a large door steady while planing presents a different challenge. And the track saw approach is much easier.

Another application is ripping long boards. Yes, you can rip on a table saw (the wood moves but the tool is stationary). But I’ve had to do this recently to a couple of pieces of 8’ long stock. Like many, I don’t have the required workshop space before and after the table saw blade. But, with a little attention to supporting a wide track on a narrow board, ripping with the track saw is not problem (the wood is stationary but the tool moves)!

Festool is traditionally the largest exhibitor at the Journal of Light Construction trade show, held annually in pre-COVID times in March in Providence. While Festool products are positioned at the high end of the market, I suspect that the construction industry may be more important to the company than the woodworking market, even when combining the professional and hobbyist components. I’ve overheard more than once at the JLC trade show contractors extoling the virtues of the Festool miter saw that was on display. Probably falls under the theory first published by Einstein that “time is money.”

In earlier times Festool pretty much had a monopoly on track saws. However, I’ve noticed that over the past 2-3 years, the company is seeing increasing competition from other manufacturers who have introduced track saws. Many of the new market entrants offer significant price advantages compared to Festool (not an unusual or difficult position to have) and some are even physically compatible with the Festool track – promoting their own tracks as lower cost alternatives for those who already own the Festool saw. Capitalism at its finest!