



Large-Capacity Sliding Tables

These tablesaw add-ons handle crosscutting tasks up to full-panel width

BY KELLY MEHLER



From the beginning of my career as a furniture maker, I have felt that American tablesaws were missing a major component: a sliding table. Older saws in this country had them, and in Europe they still do. Without one we are forced either to build crosscutting sleds of various sizes and functions or accept sloppy results. Granted, there have been improvements on the miter gauge, but the best still push the work along the table surface and can't handle large workpieces.

Once you experience the effortless feel of a sliding table carrying the workpiece past the blade, you will see the light. All crosscutting—not just large work—becomes easier to handle.

Add-on sliding-table attachments will not create a true sliding tablesaw. They can't match the accuracy of a sliding table that is built into the saw and runs close to the blade, such as that on a European saw. But for the woodworker who has already invested in an American-style tablesaw and needs crosscut capacity up to full-panel width (48 in.), one of the three large models examined in this article may be a good choice. Prices range from \$500 to \$950. There are other add-on units available with smaller cutting capacities and smaller price tags, but I narrowed the focus here to the larger models. I looked at the Exaktor EX-40, the Excalibur EXSLT40 and the Robland Sliding Table Attachment.

Sliding tables make crosscutting safer, placing the user to the left of the blade and supporting heavy, long and wide pieces.

These tables can cut large miters and handle most crosscutting operations, from dadoes to tenons. These models can accurately crosscut 4x8 sheet goods but work best with some side support, especially the Robland, which has the smallest table. I found that a hold-down, which comes with the Exaktor and Robland and is available as an accessory for the Excalibur, is necessary to keep work from lifting or shifting.

The fences are similar on all three models. Each is attached to the table at two points: a right hold-down point that is fixed but pivots, and a left hold-down clamp that slides forward and back to hold the fence at various angles. All of the sliding tables incorporate an adjustable stop to locate the fence at 90°.

All models are added to a tablesaw after removing the saw's left extension wing. The Exaktor and the Excalibur will fit contractor-type saws. And all will require cutting off part of most rip-fence systems, such as the Biesemeyer, unless the whole fence system is remounted farther to the right. On the other hand, the sliding-table manufacturers point out that these sliding units minimize the need for the 52-in. fence systems when cutting wide panels.

It's important to note that a right-tilting tablesaw is more appropriate for sliding tables, because crosscutting is done to the left of the blade.

Two from Canada

The Excalibur and the Exaktor are similar in name, price and design. Both are made



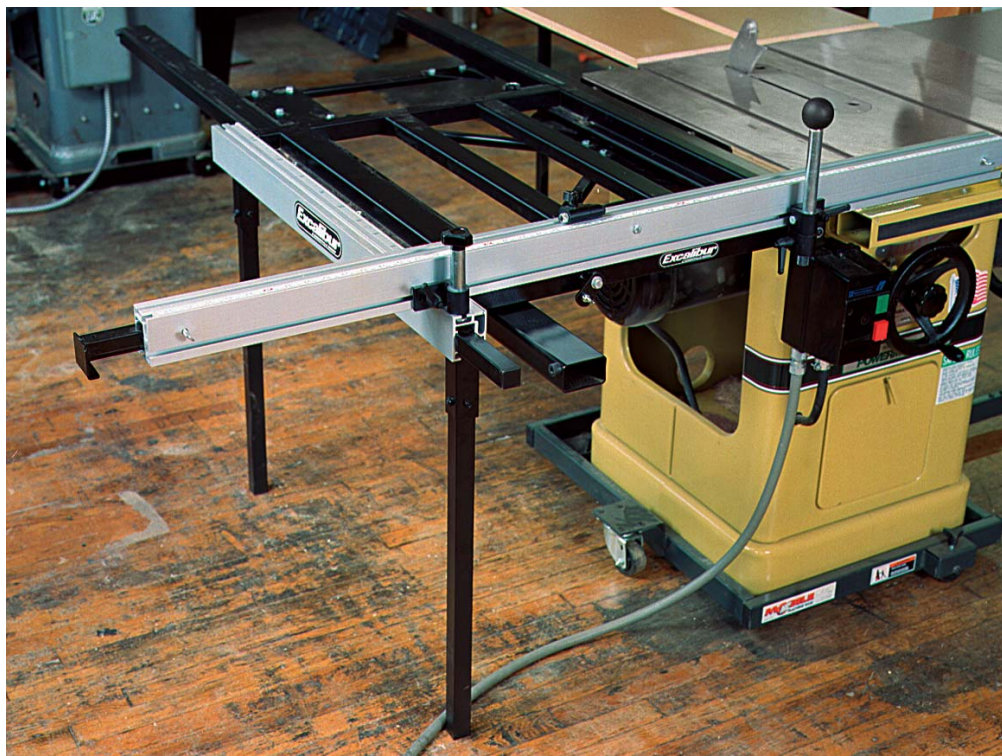
Is your saw missing a sliding table? One of these add-on units certainly will outdo your miter gauge and probably replace a few of your crosscut sleds. Difficult cuts such as large miters and multiple matching dadoes will be easier. However, the units examined here force you to choose between accuracy and the ability to support large stock.

EXCALIBUR EXSLT40/60

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|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Price: | \$499/\$695 |
| Stroke: | 49 in./62 in. |
| Table size: | 26 in. by 31 in./32 in. by 31 in. |
| Fits saw styles: | Cabinet, contractor |
| Assembly/installation time: | 6 hours |
| Ease of alignment: | Difficult |
| Overall accuracy: | Moderate |
| Fence stability: | Good |

Comments: Table is more accurate with panels than with small parts. Comes with one stop, no hold-down, but a hold-down and extra stops are available.

The Excalibur EXSLT40 and the similar Exaktor excel at handling large panels and boards. The Excalibur comes more fully assembled than the Exaktor (facing page), and its fence is easier to remove for ripping.



The Excalibur and Exaktor fences lock solidly. The clamping handles are easily accessible and easy to tighten. The angle scale on both fences is located on the extruded-aluminum outside rail, far from the pivot point, allowing fine graduations.



The flip-down stop on the Excalibur is located and locked along the fence's scale first. Then it's flipped down for use. The Exaktor's is almost identical.



A table lock is handy. Both the Excalibur and Exaktor tables lock in place, which is helpful when loading large panels. A quick pull on the table unlocks it without having to reach underneath for a lock lever.

in Canada. Both tables ride on guide rails—square tubes—that are supported by a metal framework and legs. As a result, both units have a much larger footprint than the third model, the Robland sliding table.

We tested the 49-in. Excalibur and Exaktor models, which can crosscut a 48-in.-wide panel but don't clear the blade at the end of the cut. This means the operator has to be more aware of the blade when removing the workpiece. But both manufacturers offer very similar models with 62-in.

strokes, enough to carry a full sheet past the back of the blade. The Robland comes in only one version, with a 60-in. stroke, enough to carry a 48-in.-wide panel past the back of a 10-in. blade.

On both the Excalibur and Exaktor, the outside guide rail is supported by two legs, while the inner rail sits on a bracket bolted to the saw table. Bearings hug the outside rail, while the right side of the table glides on plastic strips above and below the inside rail.

Both have an extruded-aluminum bar attached to the left (outside) rail with a scale attached to measure the fence angle. The fence's left hold-down slides in this aluminum channel. Both sliding tables allow the fence to be mounted at the front or rear of the table, with the rear position yielding the full cutting capacity.

Both tables are constructed of steel tubes welded together. Because of the space between these tubes and the slight variations in their levels, the Excalibur and Exaktor

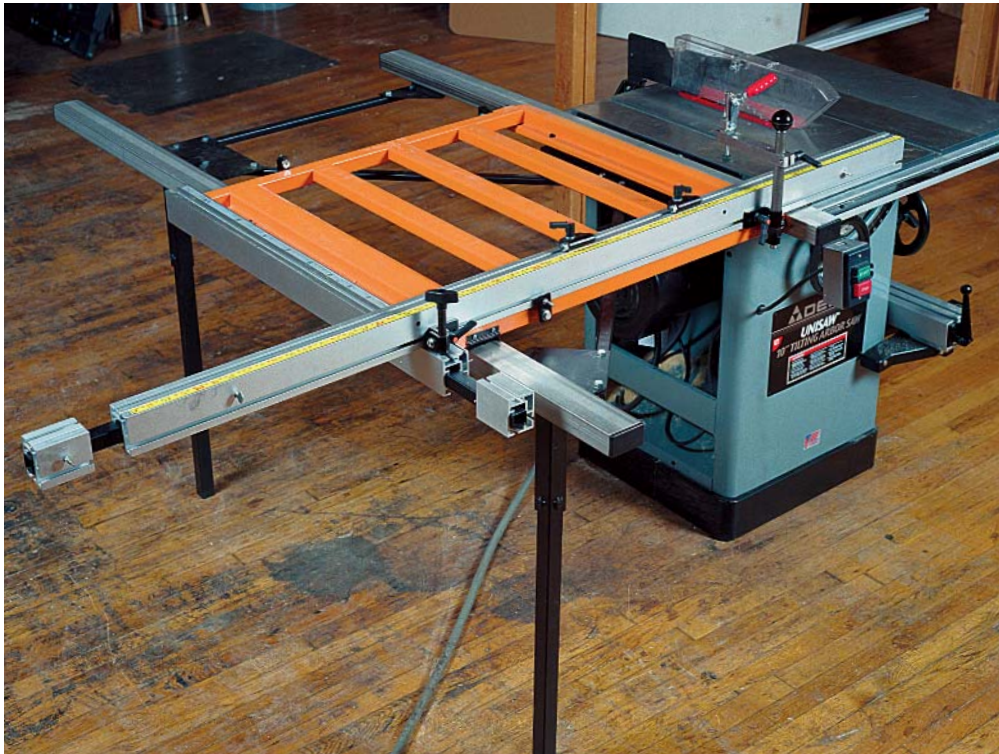
EXAKTOR EX-40/60

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Price: | \$545/\$595* |
| Stroke: | 49 in./62 in. |
| Table size: | 33 in. by 31 in. (both models) |
| Fits saw styles: | Cabinet, contractor |
| Assembly/installation time: | 7 hours |
| Ease of alignment: | Difficult |
| Overall accuracy: | Moderate |
| Fence stability: | Good |

Comments: Table is more accurate with panels than with small parts. Comes with two stops and hold-down.

*Exaktor also offers a \$98 kit that upgrades EX-40's stroke to 62 in.

The Exaktor includes more accessories and a number of innovative details. Its fence extension bar (left) has more of the T-slotted extrusion on it to hold a stop or an improvised work support.



A workpiece hold-down is a necessity for accurate cutting. The Exaktor's hold-down clamp requires some practice. It's easy to apply too much pressure and thus flex the fence backward.



A quick-release bracket can replace the solid one on the Exaktor. This option is free if requested at the time of purchase. And one more of these brackets would make for a quick switch to a shaper.



Another innovative extension rod. Another rod/extrusion combo can be mounted on the front or back of the table, allowing the Exaktor's fence to pivot past 90° and 45°.

achieve better accuracy with panels and long work than they do with small parts.

Both tables can be locked in place, making it easier to load large panels and creating a large extension wing for ripping. Both fences are substantial aluminum extrusions. I found the Excalibur to be flat to within 0.001 in. along its 54-in. length. The Exaktor fence, longer at 64 in., was within 0.001 in. along most of its length, dipping to 0.007 in. near one end. This dip was toward the back of the fence, away from the

workpiece side, and was within Exaktor's 0.010-in. tolerance.

While the Exaktor and Excalibur both included fairly clear instructions, installation took almost a full day for each. It took about an hour longer to assemble the Exaktor because many small parts, primarily on the table, were not preassembled as they were on the Excalibur. But the most time-consuming part of installation for these two units was alignment. Each table's framework must be adjusted and readjust-

ed in three ways: (1) The attachment bracket is set so that the right side of the sliding table is level with the saw table; (2) the support legs are raised or lowered to make the left side of the sliding table level with the right side; and (3) the framework between the guide rails is adjusted to get the table running parallel to the blade. A dial indicator is very helpful for this process.

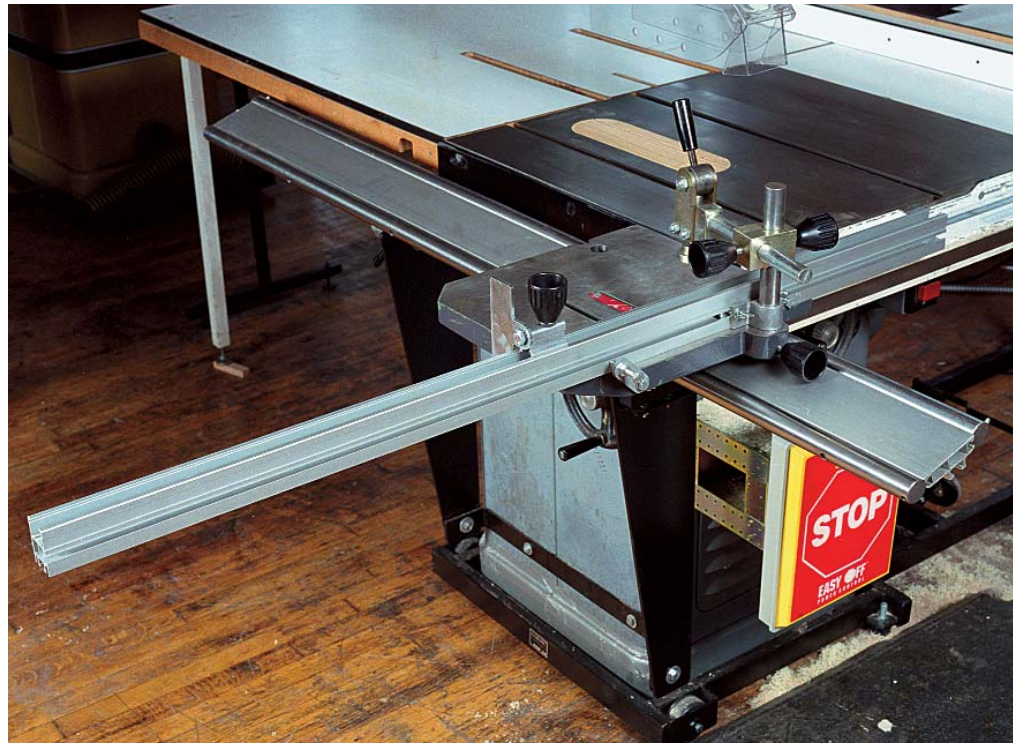
Where they differ—The Exaktor has the advantage of stainless-steel guide rails. The

ROBLAND

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Price: | \$795 (\$945 with longer table) |
| Stroke: | 60 in. |
| Table size: | 14 in. by 14½ in. (larger version 31½ in. long) |
| Fits saw styles: | Cabinet only |
| Assembly/installation time: | 2 hours |
| Ease of alignment: | Moderate |
| Overall accuracy: | Good |
| Fence stability: | Moderate |

Comments: Most accurate with smaller wood parts; panels/sheet goods require extra support.

Size works for and against the Robland. It has the smallest footprint of the three models, taking little more space than the extension wing it replaces. Its table is cast iron but is the smallest of the three, offering the least workpiece support.



The Robland's angle scale gets you in the neighborhood. Miter angles can only be read roughly on the red scale inset into the table. The hold-down on the Robland is the stockiest of the three models. Large knobs fit the hand well, and the height is easy to adjust.



Wide work needs extra support on this narrow unit. The Robland, as well as the other models in some cases, requires side support for long panels and boards.



A sliding rail system. The Robland is the only model that delivers its full crosscut capacity with the fence mounted in front of the table (its only position). A stiff leg is added to support the heavy table and the work. The rails can also be slid to the rear.

Excalibur has painted rails, which eventually wear through and become bumpy. A friend who owns an Excalibur solved this by scraping off the paint on his rails.

The Exaktor has a rail extension on the left that allows the fence to be slid to angles beyond 45° and 90°. And it offers a quick-change attachment bracket, making it easier to remove the system from the saw. The quick-change bracket is a free option, with an extra bracket half available for \$19 for attachment to a shaper, for example.

The Excalibur's fence is the easiest to remove of all three units, including the Robland, a handy advantage when switching to ripping cuts.

The Exaktor EX-40, at \$545, is available direct from the manufacturer (800-387-9789), while the Excalibur EXSLT40 retails for about \$499 in catalogs. However, the Exaktor includes a work hold-down and two flip-down stops, while the Excalibur comes with one stop and no hold-down. The Excalibur's hold-down and an extra

stop are available as accessories, but they will add \$60 to the price tag.

The Exaktor EX-40 can be upgraded to the 62-in. stroke by purchasing a \$98 kit that includes a larger rail set and an extra support leg. The Excalibur is available in the larger size (EXSLT60), but only as an entire unit.

One from Belgium

The Robland Sliding Table Attachment, which is distributed in North America by

Laguna Tools (800-234-1976), is quite different from the other two sliding tables discussed here. For starters, the Robland attaches only to the saw itself, needing no support legs in its standard configuration. It has a narrow, sturdy rail assembly and a small, cast-iron table. The Robland's compact structure is the key to most of this unit's strengths and weaknesses.

With no large framework and no support legs on the floor, the Robland sliding table is easy to align and not very likely to get bumped and knocked out of true. The saw can be moved across a shop floor without throwing off the sliding table's alignment. Also, the operator can walk the work through the cut.

Installation took only two hours for the Robland, with very little assembly required. And alignment was made easier by means of micro-adjustment screws and an eccentric bearing. While the instructions were the least informative of the three, a quick call to the 800 number listed in the booklet cleared up my questions.

The Robland's sliding system is the sturdiest of the three, with heavy-duty bearings riding on solid-steel guide rods. (These round guides collect less sawdust than the square tubes on the Excalibur and Exaktor.) Together with a cast-iron table and the solid attachment to the saw, the Robland system is very stout. Of the three units reviewed here, I was able to get the most accurate cuts with the Robland, especially with smaller workpieces.

The standard table is very small, and the company says most people choose the optional larger table (17 in. longer), which adds \$150 to the \$795 price tag. But the longer table is still much narrower than those on the Excalibur and Exaktor models and needs the most side support when cutting long pieces or sheet goods. The smaller table was flat to within 0.001 in., while the longer version had a minimal rise along its center, running from 0.005 in. to 0.008 in. out of flat.

The fence comes with a heavy-duty hold-down and one stop. The hold-down has large knobs that fit the hand well and make adjustments easy. But the fence's advantages end there.

The Robland fence's major shortcoming is the small wing nut used to clamp it in place from underneath. This wing nut had to be turned with a wrench to clamp the fence tightly enough. The problem can

America follows Europe's lead



The ultimate in accuracy. After years of wrestling with sleds and other devices, the author bit the bullet and ordered the pricey but precise Felder sliding table saw. The sliding table is 78 in. long and runs right alongside the blade. And there are other European models available for less than the Felder.



DeWalt's answer. With its recent table-saw introduction (reviewed in FWW #140, p. 36), DeWalt responded to the need for accurate crosscutting. The 1¾-hp DW746 was designed for an accessory sliding table, placing it closer to the blade than aftermarket sliding tables can go. The DeWalt sliding table offers a 31-in. stroke, a cast-iron top, a well-designed hold-down and a very solid feel.

be addressed, though, by replacing the small wing nut with a larger version or a large clamp lever. A tight hold-down point is especially important with this fence, because its pivot point and hold-down point are the closest together of the three, making the fence more susceptible to bumps and knocks.

Also, this fence is the shortest and lightest extrusion of the three, although it was flat to within 0.001 in. It has no extension to hold a stop or a work support, and it is the most difficult fence to remove.

Different strokes ...

If most of your work is with panels, I recommend the Exaktor sliding table, even though I would be happy with the Excal-

ibur as well. Both have large tables and can support wide workpieces. The Exaktor gets the slight edge with stainless-steel rails and a quick-release bracket.

If you work primarily with solid wood, I recommend the Robland. It is the most accurate, a plus for joinery, and you don't have to worry about it going out of alignment if the saw is moved or bumped. It is suitable for all crosscutting except large panels and long, heavy boards, which put too much pressure on its fence system and are not amply supported by its table. You will have to pay for the extra accuracy of the Robland, especially if you go for the larger table. □

Kelly Mehler is a woodworker in Berea, Ky.