

High-Tech Sanding Block

by Dave Crosby

Most woodworkers have strong opinions about hand sanding. For some, it's an essential finishing touch for top-quality work; for others, it's a necessary evil. Whether you love it or hate it, hand sanding is sometimes the only way to break edges, clean up details, or prep for finishes. Surprisingly, though, few carpenters keep a good sanding block handy. The \$5 rubber blocks you can get

A power sanding belt is more expensive than sandpaper, of course, but it's a lot more durable, too. Based on prices at my local lumberyard, a 3x21-inch belt costing from \$3.39 to \$5.19, depending upon quality and grit, would have to last 10 times longer than garnet or aluminum oxide paper (39¢ to 49¢ a sheet) to break even on cost. I can't verify the manufacturer's claim that the belts last

Hand sanding is easy and efficient with the SandDevil, a plastic sanding block that works with a standard 3x21-inch sanding belt.



at the lumberyard don't work much better than wrapping some sandpaper around a scrap of wood. Neither holds the sandpaper very well, the rubber is too soft for crisp edges or flattening work, and the wood is too hard for rounding edges. And if you need to get into a profile or a detail, both are almost useless.

Advertised as the "faster, better way" for hand sanding, the *SandDevil* uses a standard 3x21-inch sanding belt instead of sheet paper, and is suitable for wet or dry sanding. To load the belt, you just place the heel of the SandDevil on a flat surface and press on the tip, snapping the thermoplastic and stainless steel block into the retracted position. When you snap the block back into the extended position, it holds the belt firmly in place (see photo). The action on the sample block I received felt positive and secure.

"up to 25 times longer" than sandpaper, but on the basis of what I saw, the belts do hold up very well to hand sanding. I ran the SandDevil over a chunk of a 12-inch beam that I'd sawed down the middle with a chainsaw. The cut surface was about as rough as lumber gets and, other than getting clogged with sap in places, the belt was still in good shape after some vigorous sanding with special attention to the edges. A piece of regular sandpaper wouldn't have lasted one stroke on this material. With S4S lumber, of course, there was no problem.

The grip on this block is especially comfortable for large or small hands, which makes it easy to control. The four distinct contours and three flat surfaces make the SandDevil more versatile than a standard block when sanding irregular shapes. Plus, the flat surfaces have different hardnesses, with the

TOOL BITS

Toe Jacks

Sometimes the hardest part of jacking is making clearance for the jack. This line of manual or remote-powered *Hydraulic Toe Jacks* includes six models with toe heights as low as one inch. With lifting capacities from 5 to 25 tons and swivel sockets on some models, these jacks could save you a lot of work in tight spaces. Available through distributors, prices vary.



Contact: Simplex, 2525 Gardner Rd., Broadview, IL 60153; 800/323-9114; www.tksimplex.com.

Right-Handed Tape

If you're right-handed and you pull a typical tape measure left to right, you either have to mark the layout with your left hand or work cross-handed. As long as it doesn't matter which side of the work you're standing on, of course, you can always pull the tape right to left, leaving the right hand free to mark the layout. The problem here, though, is that the numbers will be upside down, and it's too easy to misread a "9" as a "6" and vice versa (tell me you've never done that).



If this has never occurred to you, sorry for bringing it up. But if this is one of those little annoyances you'd be happy to get rid of, try the *Rightape*. The numbers appear right-side up when the tape is pulled from right to left, so the tape can be held in the left hand while layout is marked with the right. Available in 25- or 33-foot models for about \$13. Now all we need is a tape with two sets of numbers, one facing each way.

Contact: Keson Industries, 1660 W. Quincy Ave., Naperville, IL 60540; 800/345-3766.



Super Scoop

The 14-inch-wide galvanized steel *Heavy-Duty Shop-Scoop* can handle spills up to one gallon, whether it's sawdust or motor oil. The durable powder-coated finish comes in red or yellow, and the top-mounted handle is designed for easy use. Retail price is \$14.99 at hardware stores and home centers.

Contact: The Scoop Works, P.O. Box 379, Rockford, MI 49341; 800/526-0906; www.scoopworks.com.

Longer Wallboard Square

If you work with oversize wallboard, the 54-inch *Wallboard Square* could be a real improvement over your standard T-square. The body of this aluminum-alloy tool matches the width of a standard outlet, and features gradations permanently pressed into the bright-yellow powder-paint finish. Suggested retail price is under \$30.

Contact: Swanson Tool, 211 Ontario St., Frankfort, IL 60423; 800/291-3471.



longest surface designed specifically for flattening work. And because the belt can be rotated a little at a time, you can always have fresh abrasive on one of the contours for detail work, and no paper is wasted.

All in all, I was pretty impressed. So was the crew at the local cabinet shop where I dropped off a sample tool for a couple of weeks. They said, "We loved it. It's great for breaking edges, and it doesn't flex like rubber blocks so it's per-

fect for flat surfaces." That was all I needed to hear — these guys have more high-end work than they know what to do with, so they don't have a lot of time or tolerance for gimmicks.

The manufacturer currently has an introductory offer for the SandDevil, priced at \$14.95, with a 30-day guarantee. For more information, contact Beloff-Pappas (133 Eaton Ave., Meriden, CT 06451; 800/974-3557; www.sanddevil.com).

