

**Colin Eden-Eadon** puts the Felder K 975 panel saw through its paces and asks: "Has design come to woodworking machines?"

The K 957 – not a striking name but an impressive saw



# A panel saw to be seen with



**T**he 900 series panel saws represent a departure for Felder. Since 1949, Felder have been recognised for their high quality combination machines. Their circular saws have always been part of other machines – full-blown combinations or saw/spindle set ups. In the last few years, they have started producing individual saws and with this series, they are able to offer dedicated panel saws in a different league. The flagship, top of the range Format 4 has won European awards for its design. It is a machine that is stepping into Altendorf territory at around a cool £20,000, so this editor decided to take one of the new range for a spin to see if Felder had got its sums right!

I thought I would not test the Format 4 as this is probably beyond most bespoke makers, being really a computer guided production machine. There are three saws in the 900 series. Felder have also introduced a whole range of new saws based on these in their latest revamp of their whole product range and called it the new 700 series. More of this in a future test. Although I didn't go for the bells and whistles version, I did go for the next best thing - the K 975.

## First impressions

This looks a cool piece of kit – space age almost. Definitely 21st century. Felder are introducing a new era in woodworking machinery. In striking blue and aluminium, this machine offers enough options to make almost every function electronic – space age indeed. Do we need it? More to go wrong?

Left: **Cross cutting is a very smooth operation**

Right: Although designed as a panel saw, ripping is easy with 5.5hp of power!

Middle right: The control panel is on the side, which is not ideal. You can specify to have them on the front of the sliding carriage and I would definitely go for this if I were buying this saw. The electronic rise and fall is very easy to control though

## Sliding table

Felder have long been producing state-of-the-art sliding carriages, and for the new range of saws they have redesigned the bearing system. Previously set on a V-shaped groove following a V-shaped bed, this system features the XRoll which is two inverted 'V's set in V-grooves. I tried the table on the Format 4, a massive beast, and it is as smooth as silk. The K 975 is just superb. Finger light and precise, it is guaranteed for six years – a sure sign of Felder's confidence. The lock on the carriage is usually a very fiddly affair of fingernail-breaking capacity, but this is a rather neat, moulded lever big enough to get your fingers around. It works by lining up arrows on the carriage to lock off and on – a great improvement on other saws I have seen of this type.

## Crosscutting

I cut a lump of mahogany. Result – like a knife through butter, very gentle and so smooth...wow. I butted the cut surface against a planed piece, as in a mortice and tenon – good enough to glue up straight away. Can't ask for more than that! Of course, that is down to blade design too, but what's impressive is the smoothness and ease of the cut. As with most Continental machines, the fence can be used in two different positions and wood can be held on either side. Some of us used to British examples find this a little strange, but as there are none of these left – except Sedgwick, who do not make this type of panel saw – we will just have to get used to it!

Another nice touch was the squaring-up system for the crosscut fence. In my experience, this usually involves lots of cussing and crawling under the table to adjust tricky little nuts and bolts – all very frustrating generally. Felder use a natty sprung disc with a small rebate, which locates onto the fence on the top of the table. To adjust, therefore, all you have to do is undo the nut, tighten up, let the spring take up the slack and that's it! Did Felder actually talk to some woodworkers!



## Rise and fall

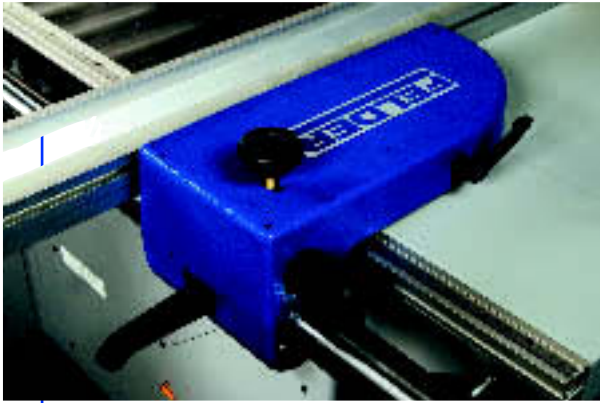
Like cars, woodworking machines are now festooned with technology and electronics. The rise and fall is electronic, which is fascinating to play with and subtle to use. It is faster on the rise than on the fall. I spent rather a long time playing with this. Overall, I am not really sure whether this is an advantage or not, but it's different and quite fun. The saw has a three-speed motor, involving a simple belt change with a lever, which allows for cutting composite materials. You can even choose from a 5.5hp, 7.5hp or a massive 10hp motor!



Above: The new XRoll bearing system that makes the carriage so smooth

Right: A gas strut giving good control supports the guard, which is separate from the riving knife





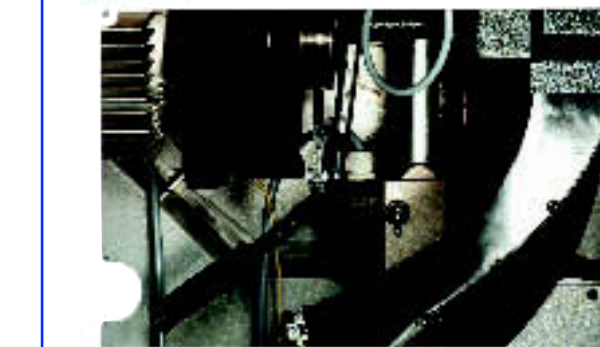
## Fence

As you readers know, one my pet hobbyhorses is the fence and its mountings. Too many times manufacturers get all the rest right and lose the plot when it comes to this essential element of woodworking machines. It has, to be fair, improved greatly of late and most get it right these days. Felder certainly have. A massive cast-iron block supports the fence mounts, which in turn are on a very substantial round bar. Sometimes, moving these across the table can be a trial – friction or something. No such problem with this one though. As with the rest of this machine, it's silky smooth. Like everything on this saw, there is another option – a digital readout! In fact every fence has this facility, even the mitre fence. The fence mountings for bevel cuts are also very good. Solid cast and machined, very easy to adjust and set positively.

Left:  
**The rip fence mounting is very solid and nicely set up to adjust**

Middle left:  
**Speed change is via belt and lever**

Bottom left:  
**The Format 4 – Felder's really big saw!**



## Guard

The crown guard is attached to a girder-like mounting. Having a guard like this is a boon. Usually, the saws I have used have been the riving knife type. The guard itself is gas strut mounted which is yet another nice touch. Very easy to move, it holds the weight while you adjust. Neat! I rather liked the size of the guard with its rollers for ripping and its visibility, making, in my opinion, a much safer saw.

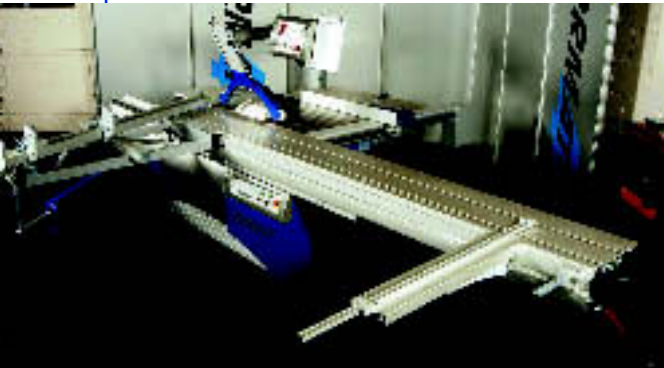
## Blades and changing

All the tools for adjusting the scoring saw and blade changing are situated in a tool post near the operator's area, so are easily to hand. Blade changing is the usual set up on these saws, with a magnetic catch on the cover allowing easy access. The scoring saw is optional, fully adjustable from the top of the table and variable in both directions. Once again, a fully automatic electronic one is available.

## Verdict

You could probably tell I liked this saw. It has many features that suggest someone has been thinking about what the end user wants from a machine like this. I'm not entirely sure of all the electronic bits, but I appreciate all the digital readouts. I could get to like those, but this is a precision saw so the rise and fall is part of the whole accuracy package. It is a big bit of kit, as it needs to be for the job it is designed for. At the end of the day, it is a dedicated panel saw and most shops would still need a rip saw of some sort. Of course, it is perfectly possible to make furniture without kit like this (see Kevin Ley's article on page 31). However, if you are producing a lot of fitted furniture with man-made board materials, this saw is more than a contender.

Take it for a test drive - you'll not regret it. ■



## Facts & figures

<b>Model</b>	<b>K 975 professional</b>
<b>Price basic model</b>	<b>£7038.25 inc VAT</b>
<b>Motor</b>	<b>5.5hp</b>
<b>Max cutting height</b>	<b>104mm (4in)</b>
<b>Scoring saw</b>	<b>optional</b>
<b>Sliding carriage</b>	<b>2.5m (80in)</b>
<b>Outrigger</b>	<b>1.3m (51in)</b>
<b>Ripping capacity</b>	<b>800mm (31in)</b>
<b>Cross cutting fence</b>	<b>2.6m (8ft 6in)</b>
<b>Overhead guard</b>	<b>standard</b>

*There are so many options with this saw and others in the range that you could probably specify your own personal saw!*

## Contact

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