

MILESCRAFT GRABBER, GRABBERPLUS & GRABBERPRO PUSH BLOCKS

On his quest for the ultimate push block, Jonathan Salisbury takes a look at the three Milescraft Grabbers from Wood Workers Workshop

There's nothing particularly complex about a push block; they can be as simple as a flat piece of wood with a handle on top and a small batten glued to the end, which hooks over the edge of the timber. If the batten is omitted, the under-surface has to grip, otherwise it slips and can't be relied on to guide the timber over the planer blade or router cutter, or through the bandsaw. They can be easily made at home, and for a long time I only used ones that I, or a colleague, had created.

The advantage of buying a push block is, of course, that the work has been done for you – both in design terms as well as manufacturing. The materials used enhance the function and comfort and mean that more time can be spent on other projects.



They also provide advantageous features that would be more difficult and time-consuming to replicate in the home workshop.

A recent conversation with Wood Workers Workshop about the best push block led to the suggestion that I look at the Milescraft range. I was sent three to try out as part of my search for the best combination of features and low cost.

The Milescraft range

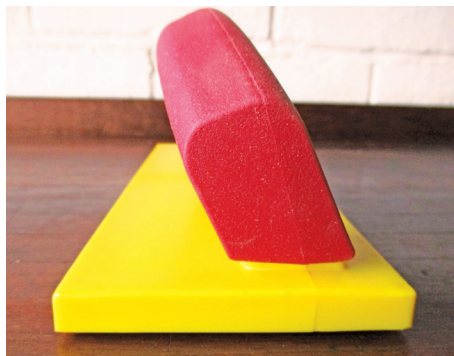
The three blocks on test make up the entire range: the Grabber, GrabberPLUS and GrabberPRO. It's easy to tell how each fits into the Grabber hierarchy. They're all very similar in appearance, with the same burgundy-coloured handle and custard-coloured bodies; not exactly hi-vis, but certainly different enough to make them easier to find among all but the largest pile of shavings. The handles are solid, with a thin non-slip grip coating; any additional parts are also burgundy.

All three models have the same dark grey, non-mark, rhombus-shaped studs on their undersides. The Grabber is the most basic; a flat panel that's placed on top of the material to hold it down and move it along. But, if dust or resistance get in the way, they can slip. For more positive guidance you need to move on to the GrabberPLUS, which has the same size gripper base but adds two spring-loaded, drop-down heels – one on either end – to provide ledges that hook over the end of the material when being pushed into router bits, over a planer, or into machine saw blades. These retract completely into the body if not required, effectively making PLUS into a Grabber.

The GrabberPRO is a different beast, with four strips of grabber material dovetailed to independently moveable and removable plates, which can be set up to bridge saw blades and router cutters that pass right through the material. It can also provide the same type of push as the Grabber and Grabber PLUS, but has a larger heel plate that can be fixed at different angles.



Ergonomic, soft-grip handle



Angle allows for a change of position



Standard diamond base provides excellent grip



PLUS model has an additional feature



The spring-loaded heel drops down for use



Set up for thicker pieces



It can also cope with thinner stock

But do they work?

The grabber material on each model is firm enough to provide a solid feel to the action and flexible enough for sufficient grip. It's not going to disintegrate as fast as the foam I've seen on some push blocks, and it's more supple than the hard rubber found on others. With a light cut on a planer, the Grabber is more than adequate, although the heel on the GrabberPLUS provides additional security for confident, no-slip work. If accidentally lowered too far, the plastic would be damaged by the blades, but your planer knives and saw teeth would be safe. I really don't recommend trying it, though.

Being an American product, the GrabberPRO has been produced for, among other things, bridging table saw blades – although in the UK we use crown guards, so this feature of the PRO is less likely to be required. It can be adapted for use over an exposed router cutter by removing one of its edge pieces, and can be made more stable when pushing narrower pieces with its angled support foot, preventing tilt and keeping the workpiece in contact with the table at all times. The biggest of the bunch, it's particularly useful for wider boards.



The PRO model has extra capabilities...

All three blocks can be used horizontally and vertically, and the symmetrical, angled handles, and fixing points or heels at both ends of the GrabberPLUS and PRO, mean that each can be turned for comfort, convenience or preference, for both right- and left-handed use.

Conclusion

You can never have enough push blocks... Making them is easy, but if you'd prefer to spend your time on other things, there are three different Milescraft Grabber models to choose from. They're more expensive than some I've seen and used, but the Milescraft models are superior in every way.

If you're after complete adaptability in all circumstances, it has to be the PRO model, even if it's more expensive, especially if you do a lot of table routing. However, since it's quite bulky, the PLUS would be better for many applications, especially if you don't need to push over exposed, sharp edges. The PLUS has the best value for features ratio; a Grabber on its own is a bit limited, as it doesn't have the heel – but you could do most jobs with a Grabber and a PLUS, which would be my choice, with



Three grips provide plenty of push...

a home-made, sacrificial push stick for those times when I don't want to risk damaging them.

Whichever you went for, however, I'm sure you'd be happy with the investment. ✂

SPECIFICATION

Grabber

- Provides precision control and protects hands from dangerous bench-top power tool equipment
- Non-marring TPE diamond grip base maintains maximum hold on the workpiece
- Soft grip ergonomic handle for optimal control and ultimate grip
- High visibility ABS yellow body makes it easy to find in busy workshops

Typical price: £14.95

RATING – PERFORMANCE: 4 OUT OF 5
RATING – VALUE: 5 OUT OF 5

GrabberPLUS

- As for the Grabber, plus: spring-loaded locking heels increase control and stability while reducing tear-out when ripping or routing

Typical price: £22.96

RATING – PERFORMANCE: 5 OUT OF 5
RATING – VALUE: 5 OUT OF 5

GrabberPRO

- Over-the-blade, dual-contact design helps prevent kickback and maintain control*
- Four adjustable and interchangeable legs let you customise the GrabberPRO to suit the job
- Cuts clean and precise strips as thin as 1/8in thick
- Ergonomic angled handle design helps you keep constant contact on the workpiece to safely finish cuts and prevent binding*
- Angled support foot can be lowered to provide extra support on tall or narrow cuts
- Adjustable sacrificial heel can be raised or lowered to provide additional forward control on workpieces

Typical price: £41.95

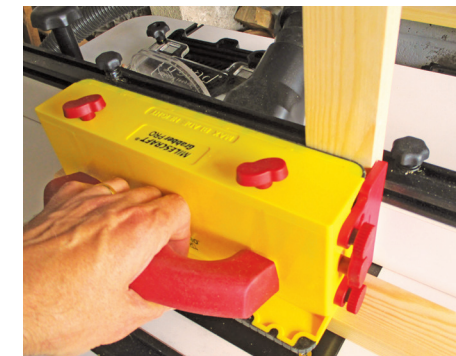
RATING – PERFORMANCE: 5 OUT OF 5
RATING – VALUE: 4 OUT OF 5

All push blocks featured here can be purchased from www.woodworkersworkshop.co.uk

* Refers to use on table saw with crown guard removed, which isn't standard practice in the UK



... and can be moved to suit the situation



Set up for complex work



Tester's choice – a PLUS for pushing...



... and a Grabber up-front