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Combination Router Kits

Never again will you have to decide between a fixed-base or plunge-base router. Now you can get both tools in one complete kit.

Choosing a router is almost a woodworker's rite of passage. And every one of us has faced the age-old question, "Should I buy a fixed-base or a plunge-base router?"

I can't tell you how many times I've tried to answer that question for *Workbench* readers. There's no easy answer. That is, until now.

Thanks to Porter-Cable, Bosch, and Makita, whenever someone asks me if they should buy a fixed-base or a plunge-base router, I'll simply say, "Yes."

All of these tool manufacturers now offer combination router kits that include both a fixed and plunge base with a single motor that can be interchanged between the two.

Porter Cable has been doing this for years with their 693PK. And now that Makita and Bosch are in on the combo act, the question is no longer "fixed or plunge base," but rather, "which combination kit is right for me?"

Well, we've used them all. In the next three pages, we'll help you find the best kit to fit your shop.

PORTER CABLE 693LRPK

The real story of the Porter-Cable combination kit is the recent improvements that have been made to the time-tested 690 router — the router that's at the heart of this kit.

First, the 1½ hp motor has been beefed up to a 1¾ hp version. Also, the old toggle switch has been replaced by a dust-protected rocker switch, which Porter-Cable touts as a more reliable design.

FIXED BASE. Another big improvement on this router is specific to the fixed base. The wing nut that was used to lock the depth of cut is gone. It's been replaced by a lever lock. This makes depth adjustments and bit changing quicker and easier (*Photo A*).

On all other counts, this router is the same outstanding tool it has always been. The base is wide open, so visibility is excellent, and chips clear out quickly. And the new motor has enough power for all but the heaviest cuts.

PLUNGE BASE. An important measure of a combo router kit is how easily you can switch the motor between bases. This kit requires a hex wrench to secure the motor in the plunge base. It's a tedious process and harder than it needs to be.

In spite of that, the plunge base performed fabulously once the motor was mounted.

The depth stop system is simple and accurate. It has the most versatile turret going (*Photo B*). And the plunge



► Recent improvements to Porter-Cable's 690 add even more value to Porter-Cable's popular combo kit.

release lever is easy to reach without changing your grip.

TABLE MANNERS. Mounting the fixed base in a router table really gave the new lever release a chance to shine. No matter how the router is positioned in the table, releasing the lever is effortless.

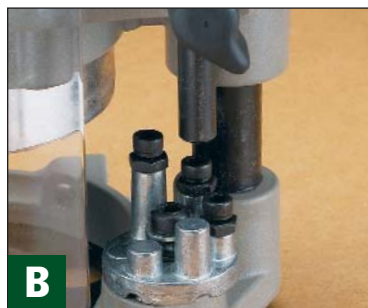
Another table-friendly feature of this router is its compact design. This router is fairly short, so I was able to remove the motor from underneath the table. That let me change bits without moving the fence.

CONCLUSION. For the cost-conscious buyer who wants a capable, inexpensive router, the Porter-Cable combination kit is definitely the best choice.

► The 693LRPK includes both bases, two collets, the collet wrenches, and a hex wrench.



▲ The new lever release on the fixed-base makes depth adjustments and motor changes quick and easy.



▲ The six-position turret is one small part of an excellent depth adjustment system on the plunge base.

At a Glance:

Price:	\$199
Motor:	1¾ hp, 10 Amp
Speed:	27,000 RPM
Collets:	1/4", 1/2"
Plunge Stroke:	2½"
Accessories:	Plastic case
Warranty:	1 year

Virtues: Affordable; Easy-to-use depth adjustment; Six-position turret; Lever release on fixed base.

Vices: Changing motor between bases is difficult; Plunge action is a bit sticky; No soft start.

Verdict: The best value in routers you'll find. Perfect if you want to pay a little money and get a lot of router.

Porter-Cable 800-487-8665
www.Porter-Cable.com

BOSCH 1617EVSPK

► The overall quality of the Bosch 1617EVSPK impressed us as both a plunge-base and fixed-base router.



▲ Fixed base, plunge base, two collets and wrenches, a template guide adapter, and plastic carrying case comprise this kit.

At a Glance:

Price:	\$249
Motor:	2 hp, 12 Amp
Speed:	8,000 - 25,000 RPM
Collets:	1/4", 1/2"
Plunge Depth:	2 1/8"
Accessories:	Plastic case, template guide adapter
Warranty:	1 year

Virtues: Tool-less base changing; Smooth plunge; Variable speed; Soft Start; Lever Release.

Vices: Poor visibility & chip clearing characteristics.

Verdict: Top performer in almost all categories. The right choice for woodworkers who will only settle for the best.

Bosch 877-267-2499
www.BoschTools.com

Bosch built their combo kit around their 2 hp, 1617EVS router — a sure recipe for success.

FIXED BASE. First off, the large maple handles make controlling this router easy and natural. And when you flip the switch, the soft start brings the motor to life gently with very little vibration felt through the handles.

One of the best features on this router is the depth adjustment mechanism. Large adjustments are made by releasing a lever and sliding the motor up or down in the base. Fine adjustments are made with a knurled knob.

There is one small knock I have to give this router. The plastic dust

shield gets packed with dust and chips very quickly, making it difficult to see through it. With the shield removed, a great deal of the dust and debris is ejected right toward your face.

PLUNGE BASE. Switching this router from the fixed base to plunge base is passable. Both bases have a lever lock, so no tools are required. However, the motor fits tightly into both bases, so it does take some effort to get it mounted.

Setting up for plunge cuts is quick and accurate thanks to the excellent depth adjustment system. Gross adjustments are made by sliding the depth rod up and down. Fine adjustments are made by turning an extension on the bottom of the depth rod (Photo A).

The plunge lever is an easy reach with your fingers or thumb, and it takes only a slight pull (Photo B).

Plunging action on the router was smooth. I felt no binding on the plunge or on the return.

TABLE MANNERS. When mounted in a table, the micro-adjustment feature of this fixed-base router is a real asset. Once I had the gross adjustment made, I was able to reach under the table and fine tune the router using the knurled knob.

CONCLUSION. Good control, solid performance, and tolerable base changing make this the perfect choice for anyone who wants the absolute best for their router dollar.



▲ Bosch's unique depth setting system has an extension at the bottom of the plunge rod for fine adjustments.



▲ Pistol-grip handles and an easy-to-reach plunge lever make this router comfortable and controllable.

MAKITA RF1101KIT



► The powerful 2¼ hp motor of the Makita kit makes it a natural for mounting in a router table.

PLUNGE BASE. Mounting the motor in the plunge base requires a screwdriver — not ideal, but still quick and effective.

One thing I really like on this router is the depth-setting system. The depth rod is threaded. To make large adjustments, there's a push button that releases the rod. Fine adjustments are made by twisting a knob on top of the depth rod. It's slightly different than other systems I've used, but I like the idea of making all depth adjustments with the same component.

One thing that could be improved is the three-position turret. Although all three positions are adjustable, it still seems a bit limited.

Another small complaint I have about this router is that the plunge release lever was just *out* of comfortable reach. I had to nearly let go of the knob in order to reach the lever (*Photo B*). And the lever has to be pulled quite a distance to totally free up the base.

TABLE MANNERS. Mounted in a router table, this router proved just as impressive as in a handheld position. Changing the bit depth is easily done by releasing the lever lock and twisting the motor to the desired setting.

CONCLUSION. This is the most comprehensive kit available. It's also the most powerful. No other router offers this much versatility and performance for this kind of money.



The Makita combo router kit has it all — fixed base, plunge base, auxiliary base plate for large diameter bits, a fence, dust collector, two collets, and a plastic carrying case.

The real star of this cast, though is the 2¼ hp, 11-amp motor.

FIXED BASE. A soft start gets the big motor going gently so you can maintain control with one hand. Then the motor winds up to whatever you've dialed in on the electronic variable speed.

When you start routing, the see-through dust collector works great, clearing chips out of the way without obstructing the view (*Photo A*). The collector comes off quickly to accommodate bit changes.

▲ The Makita kit comes complete with both bases, a see-through dust collection port, two collets, fence, collet wrenches, and a sturdy plastic case.

At a Glance:

Price:	\$259
Motor:	2¼ hp, 11 Amp
Speed:	8,000 - 24,000 RPM
Collets:	1/4", 1/2"
Plunge Depth:	2¹⁹/32"
Accessories:	Sub-plate, fence, dust collector, case.
Warranty:	1 year

Virtues: Large motor; Variable speed; Soft Start; Lots of extras.
Vices: Hard-to-reach plunge lever; Three-position turret.
Verdict: This kit includes everything you need (minus bits) for most routing jobs. You won't find a better deal for an all-inclusive kit.

Makita 800-462-5482
www.Makita.com



▲ The see-through dust collection port does a nice job of removing chips without blocking your view.



▲ The plunge release lever is just far enough away to make you change your grip in order to use it.