

FastCap Best Fence Pro Saw Stand

Best Fence Pro
FastCap
888.443.3748
fastcap.com
Web price: \$499 to \$999

by Tyler Van Katwijk

I've tried a number of saw stands over the years, but none of them have quite met my needs as a deck builder. When I was just getting started and working out of the back of my pickup truck, I thought my Trojan Work Center was perfect because it fit into a space about the size of a briefcase when it was folded up. But its portability (the legs clamp onto any 2x material) proved to be its downfall: As I cut and moved decking around, the clamps began to tear into the wood and the whole stand started to become loose. And in order to cut 20-ft. lengths of decking, I needed three extra support rollers on each side of the saw stand, in addition to the pair of rollers that are provided with the Trojan system.

Next I tried Dewalt's saw stand, which took up more room but was much more solid, thanks to its simple but sturdy fold-down leg design. In order to slide a full piece of decking from one side of the saw to the other, however, I still had to add three portable rollers to each side of the stand, and inevitably, those rollers would tip over.

Then I met Paul Akers of FastCap, an innovative company that makes all sorts of tools, glues, gadgets, gizmos, and - most importantly to me - miter saw stands. FastCap's Best Fence Pro series of modular saw stands aren't specifically designed for decking, but they're all based on the same frame which has sturdy legs that swing down and lock into place. When you order your stand, you specify the saw that you'll be using; the saw then can be permanently mounted on the stand, which saves set-up time. Beefy wheels on each end of the stand

allow it to be moved wheelbarrow-style by one man (Figure 1). I was able to roll the stand in and out of a full sized pickup truck by myself, and the wheels are big enough that the stand can roll over rough and varied terrain on the way to a backyard deck project. Once the stand is in position, a pin can be placed in the axle so that the unit doesn't roll, and if the saw is set up on a slope the legs can be adjusted with a simple press of a button. No more flimsy blocks, or digging around with a hammer to level the stand.

The base saw has a single 64-inch fence, but the saw can be accessorized with additional fence sections and support stands - called Upper Hands - to suit your specific needs. We customized my stand in Akers' manufacturing facility in [CITY/STATE?], which is a bit like Willy Wonka's factory but for tools instead of chocolate, with engineers in lab coats flying around on scooters from station

Figure 1. The saw stand has integral wheels that allow it to be easily moved over rough terrain, and it can be customized with additional fence sections and supports to fit long decking stock.





Figure 2. FastCap's optional molding stop, used here to help keep the decking from sliding off the fence.

to station. Starting with a Pro 4 series stand (which already has four fence sections), we added a pair of fence sections to each side of the stand, along with additional Upper Hands to support them. The resulting 8-section fence measured a whopping 512 inches, enough to easily accommodate 20-foot long decking. I wanted to be able to roll the material from one side of the saw to the other, so Paul and his team went back to the drawing board and designed some wheels that could be dropped into the fence. They were able to print the wheels out with their 3D printer and install them the next day. [TYLER, CAN YOUR VERSION OF THE SAW STAND BE PURCHASED FROM FASTCAP NOW, EITHER THROUGH THE WEBSITE ITSELF OR BY SPECIAL ORDER?]



Figure 3. The optional chop saw hood contains dust and can be used to help keep the saw dry in wet weather.

When sliding the decking from one side of the saw to the other, we discovered that the decking would sometimes want to slide right off the fence. To prevent this, we attached FastCap's molding stop accessory to the fence (Figure 2). Another problem I occasionally run into is that deck fascia is usually too wide to be fully supported by a saw stand, but again we just adapted one of the stops to act as a support by removing the upper part of the stop and using the stop base as a fence extension. Molding stops can be attached along the fence anywhere they're needed, and quickly removed when they're not.

The stand has a mount for a power strip so you can have multiple tools plugged in at your work station. There's a simple cut list pad, which is handy for measurements and lists, and a small work table

to give you some extra space. Another feature I really like is the chop saw hood (Figure 3), which not only collects dust and scrap, but also keeps the saw dry (which is important up here in the Pacific Northwest).

All of these features don't come without a price. The Pro 4 fence costs \$999 on the FastCap website (Fastcap.com), while our modifications added another \$XXX?? to the price. But this saw stand is far and away the best one I've ever used, and should more than make up for that cost in improved efficiency.

Tyler Van Katwijk owns Artistic Decks in Bellingham, Wash.

Keen Tacoma Work Boots

Tacoma 6-Inch Work Boot
Keen
866.676.5336
keenfootwear.com
Web price: \$120

by Mark Clement



For digging dusty footing holes in August heat, building fences in freezing February, walking porch roofs, and visiting with clients, the best all-around footwear for me is a 6-inch hiker-style boot. The shorter height breathes in the heat, and if I throw on another pair of socks, the boots keep my feet warm (mostly) in the cold. Hikers—unlike taller, work-only boots—are also nimble enough that I can walk fast or stand on a roof without what feels like an extra ton on each foot. And they're tough enough for jumping on a shovel, standing on extension-ladder rungs, and dealing with the rough ground conditions that come with building decks and working outside.

Unfortunately, most hikers aren't bombproof, and they're far from cheap. The first thing to go is usually the cosmetic over-molded rubber. And even if the maker claims that the boots are waterproof, they're usually not. So despite their advantages, I resent paying \$150 or more for boots that won't last a year on a jobsite and that allow my socks to get damp when I'm walking through wet grass in the morning.

It appears, however, that Keen has made a hiker-style boot that addresses my

complaints. I've worked in Keen's 6-inch Tacomas in temperatures ranging from 3°F to 93°F and they're at home—and so are my feet—at either extreme. This is a shovel-ready hiker, with a tread that provides some grip without being so deep it becomes impacted with mud, and “last” that means business. Beefier than typical hikers, they're stiff enough to push back when I jump on a shovel or kick a hunk of wood out of the way, but they're not so stiff that they don't flex. The breathable leather upper is stamped “waterproof” and so far, it has been. Not just a nod to dry feet. Just dry feet.

What may be my favorite part, however, is the over-molded rubber toe. It's an awesome first line of defense against soaking socks, especially in combination with the waterproof uppers. Not quite a safety toe (which are usually far from comfortable), it's still a stiff toe box and is great if you're the kind of carpenter who uses his toe as a lever to plumb something up or to sneak under a sheet of plywood before lifting it.

Finally, the cost is in line with other high-end hikers, which makes both my feet and my wallet happy.

Contributing editor Mark Clement is a deck builder and writer in Ambler, Pa.