



Heir to the throne

F&C Editor **Colin Eden-Eadon**, relishes the chance to put the new 531 universal from the eagerly awaited Felder 500 Series, through its paces

As many readers know, I have a bit of a thing about universals. I think it started before I joined F&C. After leaving the Barnsley Workshop, I eventually ended up in Cambridge living on a boat. It was this economy of space and everything in its place that attracted me to universals. Then, I was a young man with not many possessions and could live in such a space. So I had a vision of a self contained workshop with one of these.

Now I have so much stuff it would sink my old boat, and I have very different views about workshops, but the fondness for the machines continues, and maybe one day...

The universal market seems to be becoming increasingly competitive, and there are a lot more machines to choose from, with the choices being more difficult as there are some really

excellent kits around now. F&C will be attempting to produce the definitive guide to universals in the near future, so watch this space!

So when Felder asked me to go and have a first look at this new prototype, I could not wait – sad really! Felder of course started with universals, and to

some extent, they are going back to those roots with this machine. It harks back to their best selling machine, the BF631, and there are probably some readers who may still own one. So it makes complete sense to start there in this first machine of the series. The 500 series is intended to make the top end of the market more affordable, and enable Felder machines to be available to a wider group of woodworkers.

COMPACT

So what had the company come up with to tempt makers away from their hard earned cash? This is part of a



Above New kid on the block, the new Felder is an exciting option if you are in the market, and sets a high standard

1 The main fence, which doubles as both a planer and a rip fence, is excellent, robust and precise

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEAR COURTESY OF FELDER

2 The standard set up is a two-knife, quick change system – a four-knife is also available

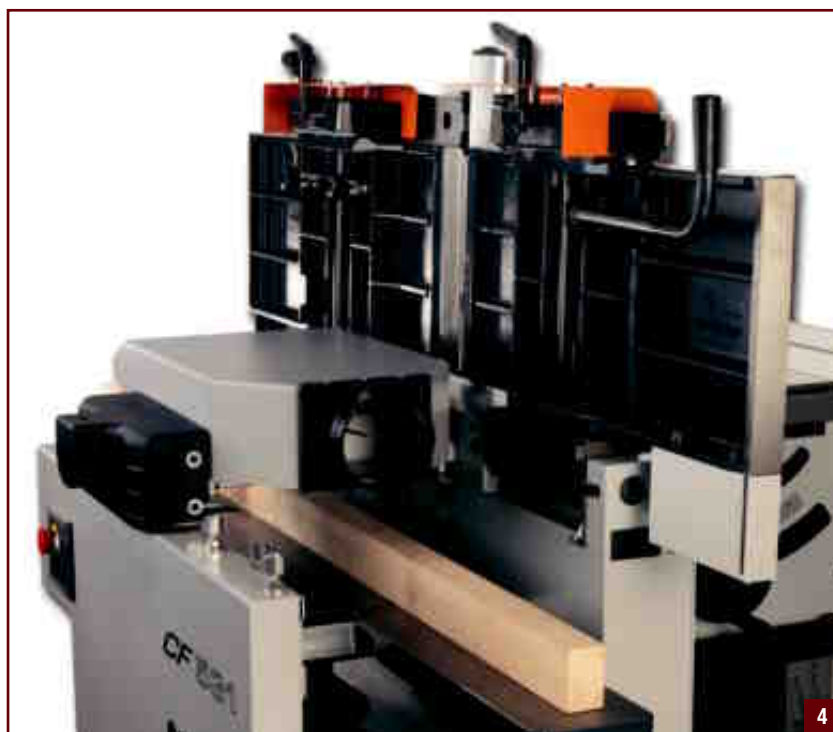
3 Using the surfacer, the tables are very smooth and adjustment is easy



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4 Deep castings, the tables are the gull wing type, but come up straight. Note the extension table, which is an optional extra

completely new range that so far consists of a planer thicknesser, spindle moulder and the 531 universal that I was going to test.

The new prototype is aimed between the 741 series – which is the top of the universal machines that Felder make – and the Hammer, which is their entry-level range (I tested the Hammer universal in *F&C* 114, page 15).

On first looking the machine over, it looks like a baby Felder, or maybe a little brother. It is compact and has many elements from both Felder and Hammer. Would it be a marriage of convenience or a perfect partnership?

The smooth cast tables are Felder, with the distinctive and unique machined groove that takes the fences and extension tables, known as an F groove. Felder have used this system for many years now, and its main virtue is that their extension tables can be directly attached without any extra bits like bars and fiddly fittings.

SWITCHING

There are three sets of switches: saw, planer and spindle, one for each motor. The motors are 4hp for single phase and 5.5hp for the three phase set up. The main switch also acts as an extra stop.

The tilt wheels for both the spindle and saw are mounted on the side, and the rise and fall on the front and back respectively.

The main fences on the 531 are all Felder too, and are very solid – the planer fence doubles as a rip fence as on many universals.

SURFACING

The 531 comes with a two-knife cutter block as standard, with a four-knife available. It is a quick change system, which for my money is worth having as it just makes for an easier hassle-free life – I have spent many an hour frustratingly trying to set up a cutter block the old fashioned way, and I know which I prefer!

The planer fence is a really excellent example with a double pivot cast



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5 Another use for the extension table system – note the support legs

6 View from the other side, showing planer controls

mounting that is very precise, with an accurate 90° stop which comes back to square every time. It is adjustable should you need it to be. It slides easily in the machined groove.

Depth of cut adjustment is via a lever on the left side as you work – the amount of cut is registered on a covered gauge. A two-knife system gives a good finish in most cases, but I may be tempted to have the four-knife block which just gives you more options for those difficult timbers, especially as it is available on the 531; on Hammer machines only three knives are available.

THICKNESSER

The tables are the gull wing type, rather than parallel lift, which swing into the centre of the machine; this is to keep the price competitive. There are three micro switches on the thicknesser, so you can't possibly start it without everything being properly set up. It comes with the digital dial that I like so much on these machines, as standard. This is a real boon and turns the thicknesser into a precision piece of kit. The table is fitted with bars for the extensions that are very much part of the Felder system – these are very

useful for extending and ripping, and can be mounted on all the functions of the universal.

SLIDING TABLE

One of the most noticeable differences between this 531 and the Hammer series is the sliding table – the 531 has the X-Roll system from the main Felder range. This for me is one of the big differences, and makes it worth paying the extra money. The table is light to the touch and smooth

running, and just feels precise, which it is. The angle ruler works well and is very accurate – this is the one Hammer fence – though for speed and extra accuracy, there is an index system available as an optional extra. A neat 90° stop folds out of the way when you don't need it.

The planer fence doubles as a rip fence as on most universals and as such, in this instance, works very well. It is easy to move, you just pull the handle out which has a very precise



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fine adjuster. A scoring saw attachment is available and is not standard. Because the footprint of the 531 is relatively small, if you go for the bigger sliding table, there are two support legs for when the table is at full stretch. The outrigger swings out of the way when not in use, and locks magnetically to the side of the machine.

SPINDLE MOULDER

The spindle is a tilting version, and has four speeds: 3,000, 6,000, 8,000 and 10,000, and there is a router spindle available. As well as tilt, it has reverse – a light comes on to remind you when you select this function!

The really impressive thing about the spindle set is the fence. Apart

from it being pretty substantial, it is very crisply engineered. The fence has a fine adjustment that works on both fences – nothing unusual there, but it has a repeatable function that is ideal for a universal, where you are often changing functions. Basically you can zero the fence to the sizes of the cutter, and then wind it back the depth of the moulding or rebate you are cutting. If you need to come back to this setting, having taken the hood off, it will just locate back at the original set up.

There is a mortising attachment, but I don't suspect that many British buyers will be interested in this. The machine I tested came with some of the accessories that would be options rather than standard.

Conclusion

Bear in mind that this is a prototype, and it will only just be in production when you read this, as it goes on the line in October of this year.

I could not find anything to fault this machine. It is not a collection of Felder parts bolted on to a Hammer chassis – it is a well thought out integrated machine with a high specification. It's easy to use and the fences in particular are superb – the spindle fence especially. It has the power to cope with anything you could throw at it and the precision to achieve fine quality work. This is an excellent machine at a very competitive price, and in terms of what you are getting for your money compared to the Hammer, if I could afford the extra, this is streets ahead.

As a stand-alone in a very competitive market, this machine will take some beating on price and the quality of what you are getting for your money. Simple and easy to use, the change over time is minimal. My verdict? Buy one before they run out! **F&C**

7 The spindle controls

8 The spindle hood propped up showing the locating pins, which give it the repeatable setting and the fine adjustment mechanism

The numbers

Price: Basic machine starts at £6,198 incl VAT. Contact Felder for additional options. Also available in 3 phase

Motors: 3 x 4hp

Planer & Thicknesser

Planing width: 310mm

2- or 4-knife quick-change cutter block

Thicknessing width: 306mm

Thicknessing depth: 230mm

Saw Unit

102mm cutting height

Tilting blade: 90° - 45°

Scoring unit: (optional)

Dado facility: (optional)

Spindle Unit

4 Speed: 3000, 6000, 8000, 10000

Tilting spindle: 90° - 45°

Sliding Table

X-Roll: 1000mm (1300mm, 2050mm)

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TEST