

Despite the increasing popularity of random orbit sanders, there's still a definite place for belt sanders; you just cannot beat them for fast stock removal. Skil is not a name you would normally associate with sanders, but they're now hoping to spread the Skilsaw magic a little wider

Skil 1215 belt sander

£65



Skil's latest belt sander, the 1215, is a 76mm (3in) model aimed more at the hobby market than the professional. Nevertheless it still has a healthy appetite for getting the job done, thanks chiefly to its powerful 650W motor.

The tool has very modern styling, and when you pick it up the ergonomics feel just right. The on/off trigger is easily operated by left- or right-handers, and the trigger lock button is also equally accessible with your thumb. The front grip for two-handed use feels

just right as well. There has obviously been quite a bit of thought put in at the design stage to make this tool so comfortable.

Dealing with dust

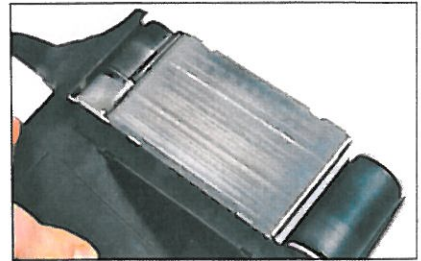
Dust can be a real problem with belt sanders; they produce vast amounts of it very quickly! The 1215 is fitted with an integral dust filter and collection box that looks like something from Star Wars! However, it actually works extremely well and the box soon fills up with fine dust. This



The trigger lock button is conveniently positioned on top



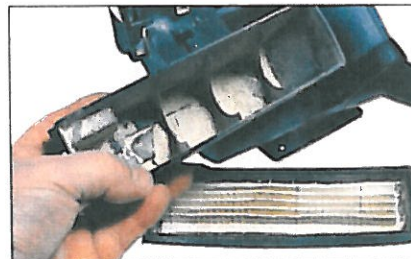
The belt is removed by slackening off the tension lever



The sanding platen is a generously-sized 130 x 76mm



The sander has an integral dust filter and collection box...



...which worked very well, soon filling up with fine dust



The box can be replaced by a connector for a vacuum hose



TESTED BY ALAN HOLTHAM

is so much better than a porous floppy bag. However, the filter is not 100 per cent efficient and fine dust starts to accumulate round the outlet vents, so a dust mask is always recommended as an extra precaution.

For more continuous use, the collection box can be replaced by a clip-in spout to which you can then connect a vacuum hose. This slips in and locks very easily, which suggests that it will still stay in place even with a large hose hanging off the back of it.

Belt centring

The tool has an automatic belt tracking system that's supposed to keep the belt centred whilst sanding, and this seems to work fine provided you use good-quality belts. There is an adjustment screw for manual tracking if you are struggling with cheap belts that never seem to run true. The belt is easily removed by slackening off the tension with a single lever.

Avoiding dig-ins

The sanding platen is 130 x 76 mm, giving you a decent sized sanding area to minimize the risk of digging in. However, the 1215 is also supplied as standard with a very neat sanding frame that eliminates the risk of tilting the sander and digging it in when working on wide, flat surfaces.

I've used all sorts of these sanding frames over the years, including some very complex ones on professional heavy-duty sanders, but this one is by far the easiest to fit and functions just as efficiently; sometimes simple is best. There are no apparent fixings for this frame; it just slots into place and is then held by the belt tension. This is a rather curious arrangement, but it works! What is more, you can change the belt without having to remove the frame, which is a first for a belt sander.

Using the sander

In use the sander performs very well, helped by the ergonomic design that feels comfortable and therefore inspires confidence in its use.

The single standard 80-grit belt supplied with the machine made

SPECIFICATION

MOTOR	650W
BELT SIZE	457 x 76mm
PLATEN SIZE	130 x 76mm
BELT SPEED (no load)	300m/min
FLEX LENGTH	2.75m
WEIGHTS	2.7kg

VERDICT

For the money, this is an excellent tool if you don't require the capacity of a 100mm (4in) model. It does just what it says on the box, and the sanding frame is superb.

PROS ■ The ergonomics
■ The sanding frame

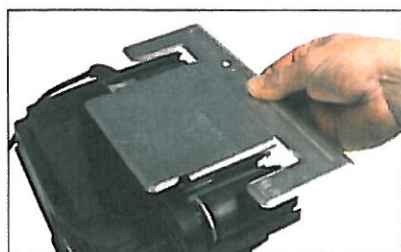
CONS ■ Dust extraction not totally efficient
■ No case or spare belts

VALUE FOR MONEY 
PERFORMANCE 

FURTHER INFORMATION

■ www.skileurope.com

short work of producing smooth timber from rough-sawn hardwood. I use belt sanders a lot for smoothing external curves, and once again the comfort of this one makes the job very easy. The sanding frame is perhaps the most impressive feature, and allows me to belt-sand veneered MDF without any risk of damage – pretty impressive when you think that the veneer is only about 0.5 mm thick.



The sanding frame slides into position without fixings...



The frame allows safe sanding of veneered boards

...and is held in place by the tension in the belt

