

## “Blindness is No Handicap” - The Bill Ruddick Story

Have you ever had one of those moments when you said to yourself, "No this can't be true!" I have and it happen last year (2003) after a phone call from a gentleman called William Ruddick (Bill to most of us.) You see, I am the demonstrator for the Triton Range of Products in Townsville, North Queensland. Bill had rung and wanted some advice on upgrading from a Mk 3 Workcentre to the latest 2000 Workcentre. During the conversation Bill casually told me he was blind.

"How blind?" I asked.

"Totally blind." Bill replied.

My next question was to ask "How many fingers do you have?"

"All of them," he replied.

By the end of the phone call we had made arrangements to meet and see what assistance I could offer Bill.

The short history of Bill is, he was born 60 years ago, at the age of seven lost the sight in one eye and 23 years ago lost the sight in his other eye. Bill is not the type to let any handicap stop him from doing something, it will only slow him down until he finds a way around it. He had been using a Trion Mk3 Workcentre for about six years and now wanted to upgrade and explore using a router to improve his standard of workmanship. He had heard of the new table when in Brisbane, so he and his brother attended a demonstration. On his return to Townsville he was told by a local hardware store to contact me. Since then we have spent many Saturdays assembling his new Triton 2000 Workcentre and Triton 300 Router Table and working out different methods for Bill to use the tables in the safest manner possible while maintaining their versatility.

The first problem to overcome was not with Bill but with me, I had now to look at the way I explained things to him. At normal demonstrations I can pick up an item and show you how to use it or where it goes on the table but not with Bill, he has to feel it with his hands, also he now had to stand where I normally did or it would be confusing when he actually used the table. Bill has a very good sense of humour so now when I need him to feel something as I explain it, I ask for his best seeing fingers and we proceed from there.

Try this little test to understand what Bill has to overcome to use his Triton Tables. Close your eyes and try and set the router fence square to the front of your table. How many times did you try? It is easy to use the table scales, our simple solution for Bill is to use a square on one edge of the table against the fence, close your eyes and try it now. This is just one example of how we have worked on problems. Another solution is to make jigs where possible. The main area of my concern was on the Router Table when working on small pieces of timber. We made a simple jig with adjustable height and sandpaper faces for grip to keep Bill's fingers from trailing on the timber. He calls it his surfboard because of its shape. The Blind Society has some useful aids such as click rules etc. which Bill uses to set distances from the saw blade or router cutter, for fine measurements his wife Joan is required or any other person he can rope in.

We have not changed the Workcentre, Router Table or Triton Router ( Bill blew his budget on this router as it suits him with it's multi height adjustment systems and through table cutter changing) in any way, they are still the same as yours and mine, the only thing we have done is to cut small notches on different items e.g. the bearing channels on the Workcentre have had small notches filed in them so Bill can re-align the saw more easily, on the Router Table we have notched either side of the Zero point on the Micro Adjusters to give Bill a reference to move them in or out for fine adjustments.

He has also purchased a Triton Finger Jointer and after only two demonstrations from me proceeded to make a box by himself. Bill makes a wide variety of items both small and large. At the moment he is making a doll's house for a friend and is rebuilding his own workshop which as well equipped as any you will see with sanders, drill press and drop saws. In the past has made tables, cupboards workbenches and many other projects. Bill is not satisfied to

stop at the basics but is looking to the future when he can upgrade his saw to a Triton Saw and add a Height Winder Kit, Planer Attachment, Router Stand, Sliding Table, Biscuit Joiner and Dust Collection System to his workshop to further improve the quality and expand his range of work.

There will be many more problems to overcome as Bill becomes more familiar with his new tools and their capabilities, but it seems to me that this will not slow him down but spur him on to bigger and better things.

Edwin Legge (Jose)

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UPDATE:

Since working with Bill another sight impaired gentleman has come forward seeking advice and assistance on using the Triton Range of products.

UPDATE 2011

I am still working with Bill, advising on woodwork and repairing his Triton equipment as you can understand Bill's equipment is put under a little more stress than yours or mine as it takes a little longer for him to realise that something is amiss, but overall it is still in good condition. Bill has progressed from small objects to now making tables and cupboards. He will even makes picture frames (routing his own mouldings ) with 45 degree corners and we all know how hard it can be to get that right.

We have changed is workshop over time to better suit his needs and give him better results.

Best of all - Bill still has all his fingers to date, but has had a few close calls.



Working on the saw table



Router Table



Bill using a jig



Traffic lights for Grand Daughters School



Bill's fingers and workshop