**User Report**

**Ergonomics and technology instead of the workbench cliché**

The large panels and heavy doors cannot be handled alone. The Rothfuß joinery has therefore been using a vacuum lifting aid from Schmalz to facilitate the handling of large-format loads for a long time. A year ago, the new VacuMaster Wood moved in for a field test. "It was already good before," is how master carpenter Alexander Bohnet begins his conclusion, which is of course followed by a "but". How did the new version specifically for the woodworking trade fare?

Alexander Bohnet makes it clear straight away: "Modern carpentry no longer has anything to do with Master Eder and his Pumuckl. It's high-tech here today." Bohnet has been working at the Rothfuß joinery in Schopfloch near Freudenstadt since 1992. His apprenticeship was followed by master craftsman training. He is now also an authorised signatory in the family business, which belongs to his brother-in-law Thomas Rothfuß. On a production area of around 2,000 square metres, the 17-person company manufactures house, contract and fire doors, home furnishings and kitchens as well as contract furniture and special parts for industry. These include machine panelling made of solid wood, CNC-milled moulded parts and exhibition furniture - including for Schmalz, the specialist for automated and manual handling and clamping systems with vacuum.

Instead of sanding blocks and planing benches, CNC milling and drilling machines, a horizontal panel saw and an edge banding machine with workpiece return are used here. "With this modern machinery, precise work is of course no problem. What is difficult, however, is the lack of skilled labour and the resulting lack of time," admits Bohnet. It is the lack of role models and social media that make young people unwilling to get into work trousers. Yet carpentry is a fascinating profession. "We create something great out of nothing," comments Bohnet. And we do this with modern technology: at Rothfuß, a panel saw cuts a wooden board into strips. These run through the four-sided planing machine and come out as precise square timbers. They are then ready for further processing on the CNC machine.

**"Even the JumboErgo was worth its weight in gold"**

Thanks to ergonomic lifting aids, the physical strain on employees has decreased. Things were different over 20 years ago, as Bohnet recalls: "Back then, we always had to get a second person to lift the heavy house and soundproof doors or large carpentry panels onto the CNC machine. With short processing times, it was hardly worthwhile for them to do their actual work." This is how the joinery came to purchase the first lifting aid from Schmalz, the JumboErgo. "One person could effortlessly load and unload the machine alone. That was really worth its weight in gold," emphasises Bohnet. After the horizontal panel saw moved in in 2011/2012, the company replaced the Ergo version with the swivelling VacuMaster. The panels delivered usually measure 2.80 x 2.00 metres. However, a length of five metres is not unusual. With a thickness of up to 60 millimetres, a panel weighs well over 200 kilograms. "They are unwieldy and heavy," says Bohnet, summarising the challenges. Thanks to the long operating handle of the lifting aid, one person can comfortably place the panels, which are delivered lying down, on the processing table. They then lift and swivel the offcut and place it on a transport trolley to take it to the offcut store. "With the VacuMaster, which is suspended from a track, we can also carry it directly to the shelf," adds Bohnet.

The lifting aids are not the only Schmalz products to be found in the joinery: Drying trolleys in the painting room are just as much a part of this as block suction cups on the CNC machines. "Even the senior boss worked with Schmalz," reports Bohnet. This is due to the quality, but also the proximity: The two companies are just under four kilometres apart. "It's important to us that we have good machines from the neighbourhood, including HOMAG and Schmalz," adds Bohnet, describing the collaboration as always very pleasant. There is the odd personal contact, and Rothfuß is not only a customer, but also a supplier to Schmalz.

**Update brings even more ergonomics**

Schmalz approached Rothfuß in 2022: the vacuum experts selected the joinery for a field test of the new VacuMaster Wood. The exchange took less than a day and the employees were already able to try out the new variant extensively. Bohnet quickly realised: The VacuMaster Wood is much more pleasant to use. "Before, I had three different operating areas. Firstly, I switched on the vacuum generator using the main switch. The buttons for picking up, swivelling and releasing the load were 80 centimetres away, and the hand bulb for operating the chain hoist was a further 40 centimetres away. Today, I have everything within easy reach on the Comfort control panel. I can hold the vacuum lifter securely with both hands and operate the switches with my thumbs at the same time without having to reach round," explains Bohnet. The carpenter also notes that the new lifting aid is much lighter and more compact. "Of course, the rails carry the load, but I don't just have to pull the weight of the panel, but also the weight of the lifting device. It was already good before, but the new VacuMaster Wood is another significant step towards easier and more ergonomic working," summarises the master carpenter.

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**Meta-Title:** VacuMaster Wood: Convincing in the field test

**Meta-Description:** Does the VacuMaster Wood deliver what Schmalz promises? The Rothfuß joinery was a field test customer. Authorised signatory Alexander Bohnet reveals whether the new version especially for the woodworking trade was allowed to stay.

**Keywords:** Schmalz; Joinery; VacuMaster Wood; Ergonomics; Lifting aid; Vacuum lifter;

**Images:**

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|  | **Image 1:**  Alexander Bohnet ergonomically handles panels weighing up to 250 kilograms with the VacuMaster Wood. After delivery, the wooden panels are cut to size. |
|  | **Image 2:**  With the investment in a horizontal panel saw, the first lifting aid also arrived at Rothfuß. Now the VacuMaster Wood takes timber handling to the next level of ergonomics. |
|  | **Image 3:**  The swivelling function allows the carpenter to push the panels delivered horizontally or later offcuts directly into the rack in an upright position. |
|  | **Image 4:**  The VacuMaster Wood is lighter and more compact than the previous model used by the Rothfuß joinery. Handling has also been significantly improved thanks to the Comfort operating element. |

Images: J. Schmalz GmbH

**About the company**

Schmalz is one of the market leaders in vacuum automation and ergonomic handling systems. The internationally positioned company's products are used in logistics applications as well as in the automotive industry, the electronics sector and furniture production. The broad spectrum in the vacuum automation business field includes individual components such as suction pads or vacuum generators, complete gripping systems and clamping solutions for holding workpieces, for example on CNC machining centres. In the Handling division, Schmalz offers innovative handling solutions for industry and trade with vacuum lifters and crane systems. With the Energy Storage business area, the company is establishing a further mainstay in the field of stationary energy storage systems.

The combination of comprehensive advice, a strong focus on innovation and first-class quality ensures sustainable added value for customers. Intelligent solutions from Schmalz make production and logistics processes more flexible and efficient - and at the same time fit for advancing digitalisation.

Schmalz is represented in all major markets with its own locations and trading partners in around 70 countries. The family-owned company, headquartered in Glatten in the Black Forest, employs around 1,800 people at 31 locations worldwide.

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