



Bryan Hancock (left) and Nick Jones with their new Cube.

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one pass one man

Rockfield Woodworkers have been in the joinery game since 1972, but the present team came into being when owners Nick and Bryan purchased the business in 2003. Both qualified joiners, Nick and Bryan have worked together for a long time, and the mix of Nick's enthusiasm and Bryan's realism is a great balance.

The old owner was mainly making louvre doors, but Nick and Bryan took the core business and branched out, into interior doors, exterior doors, and windows. "If it looks like a door or window, we'll have a look at it", says Bryan. "While we have basic styles, almost everything is made to order." With this philosophy in mind, Rockfield have carved out a niche as a flexible supplier of bespoke joinery.

Rockfield had been short a four sider since removing an old Wadkin 5 head machine. The setup time and skilled labour required had been a problem, and the footprint was large, "We have three machines in its place now." Initially there was no plan to replace the Wadkin, but after seeing the Weinig Cube demonstrated at Jacks, Nick knew he'd found the machine for him. "I had to work on Bryan, though!"

The Cube has been a great compliment to Rockfield's flexible operation. The staffing has remained unchanged, but the Cube has increased throughput. "Output has gone up, sure," says Nick. "We have 4 guys. 5 if you count the Cube, though!" Bryan is noticing the increased production speed as well. He is mostly office based, while Nick normally handles the workshop, but Bryan was finding the guys back in his office a lot more frequently.

"It took some getting used to. In the first week or so, we'd give them a job, and next thing you look around they're already tenoning."

Nick reckons that their throughput is around 5 metres per minute with one operator, including material handling at the infeed and outfeed, and setup. "The other day we were cutting 26 door stiles, and seeing this stack of rough timber, then a stack of dressed timber minutes later, it's outstanding. What was a 2 hour job has become more like 30 minutes. The thicknesser was going pretty much all the time before. Now it's more like once a week, just for really wide stock." Materials handling has also become a great deal simpler. Dressing long lengths on the buzzer used to require setting up roller tables, using two men with one end of the material sticking out the door. "I used to see a long length and my heart would sink knowing what we'd need to do to process it" says Nick. "The cube means one man, one time. Saving time, saving effort."

There have been some unexpected side benefits too - the quick turnaround is great for keeping the customers happy. "Last week we were waiting on facing from a supplier with paint line problems. We ripped, dressed 4 sides, glued, and primed, and 2 hours later were back on the job." The customer had the job completed on time and Rockfield's schedule only had a minor disruption.

Rockfield have even begun to offer a straight four siding service to other joiners, effectively renting time on their Cube just as they have been doing with their Holytek wide-belt sander. Their flexibility means they can cope with

one-off or unusually sized jobs with a short lead time, while larger timber processors are restricted to list sizes by their setup times. "For us, we've got the flexibility. We'll do it the size you want. Changing sizes is just the push of a button on the touch screen; there's almost no setup." While we're talking, a joiner rings wanting some straight four side dressing done. "American oak, dressed, no problem. We specialise in not saying no," Nick grins.

The small footprint of the Cube is ideal for Rockfield's medium workshop. "We were very conscious of the need to place a machine like that carefully. It didn't take up a massive amount of space."

The ease of use of the machine is also a key benefit for Rockfield. "It's one machine we don't have to worry about. Anyone can use it, without needing to be qualified. It takes minutes to learn." Knife changes are simple and swift, taking Nick about 15 minutes for the set. The laser guides are also a hit.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing though. Nick says that "The biggest problems are that we have less kindling to take home, and have to get the extractor emptied more often. But I find myself smiling more in the workshop." Great problems to have!

