

“Pro-Cut” Pockets: Does Tight Make Right?

By Roger Long

The term “pro-cut pockets” has been floating around for a while now. Hearsay evidence seems to indicate that one pool table manufacturer is being credited for having coined this phrase and that it is meant to describe their own pockets, which many believe to be much tighter than those found on competitive makes. But is that really true?

I did a little research and could not find any actual evidence that the manufacturer in question uses the term “Pro-Cut” in any of their advertising. I could be wrong – I just didn’t find evidence to substantiate that it is their terminology. But this manufacturer does make their pool tables to have tougher pockets. Now notice I said “tougher,” not tighter.

Many pool players are under the misconception that the tighter a pocket is, the tougher it plays. That’s not necessarily so. What really makes the most difference in pocket toughness is the depth of the shelf. To understand what I mean, look at the drawing below. The shelf depth is measured from the pocket opening to the slate drop-off point at the pocket throat. Again looking at the drawing, it should be easily understandable how a ball that “rattles” the pocket has less chance of falling in with a deep shelf than it would with a narrow shelf, therefore the deep shelf would be said to be “tougher.” It might be helpful to point out here that the deepest pocket shelves I’ve found measured 2 inches, and the narrowest measured 3/4 –inch.

The next thing we have to look at is the width of the pocket at its opening as compared to its width at the throat. These two dimensions will determine the particular angle that the sides will take into the pocket. That angle can be measured in degrees starting from where the cushion cloth and the wooden rail come together, and ending at the corner of the pocket opening.

The pocket angle is important because it can either help direct an errant ball into the pocket, or it can help rebound it away from the pocket. Look at the drawing again to see what I mean. See the ball coming down the rail? See the rebound line it will take after it hits the side of the pocket? Now imagine where the ball would go if it was to hit a flat surface instead of one that is angled. Where would it go then? That’s right; it would rebound straight back, not even close to the pocket. But now imagine that the angle is more than the 40-degrees shown. What happens then? It directs the ball’s rebound more inward, toward the pocket.

By now you might be getting a little confused as it’s probably becoming apparent that pockets with wider openings (assumed to be easier) provide smaller angles (assumed to be tougher). But we have to realize that the actual angle achieved will be determined by the width of the pocket opening PLUS the width of the pocket at the throat (end of the slate). This is where tables can differ by quite a bit. Manufacturers that want to cater to the casual player will make their pockets easy to play on by making them with wide openings, wide throats, and narrow shelves. Manufacturers that want to build tables for professional play will make them with narrow openings, narrow throats, and deep shelves.

Now here’s a little formula and guide for rating the pocket toughness on any given table.

OPENING X THROAT \div SHELF = RATING

Example:

5.00 in. X 4.25 in. \div 1.375 in. = 15.45 rating

Guide:

7 – 11 = Extra Tough (XT)

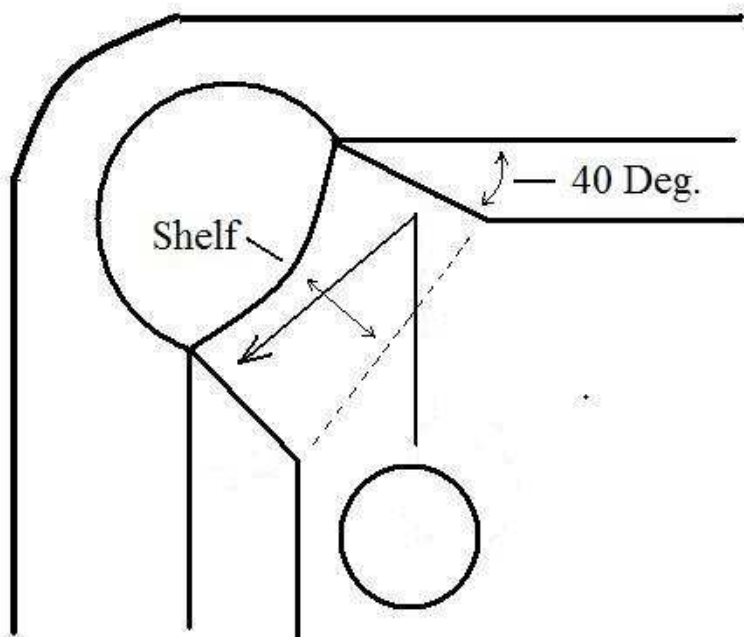
12 – 16 = Tough (T)

17 – 21 = Easy (E)

22 – 27 = Extra Easy (XE)

I give this range because the toughest non-shimmed professional pockets I found had a rating of 7.59, and the easiest pockets I found were on bar tables that had a rating of 27.00.

I hope this helps.



NOTE: Subsequent to the writing of this article, David Alciatore (Dr, Dave) developed a more comprehensive formula for calculating pocket toughness. It is my belief that his method, and not mine, should be the standard used in the industry when rating tables. - Roger