

SELECTING A SEWING MACHINE

Make the right decision – guarantee sewing precision

Selecting a sewing machine is similar in many ways to selecting a car. When you purchase a car, you closely consider its features, durability and dependability to determine the amount of mileage you can expect from it. When you purchase a sewing machine, these same factors should also be considered. The amount of features the machine has will affect the price. Therefore, consider the features you select as investment in developing your sewing skills. If used often, they will eventually pay for themselves. Durability and dependability are harder to evaluate since they only become apparent after continued use. The criteria for these qualities are the ability to last a number of years, while standing up to various sewing conditions with a minimum of care and repair. Three good ways to ensure that you will purchase a quality sewing machine are: select a known brand, buy from a reputable dealer with good service and ask the opinion of friends who are accomplished sewers.

Knowing the right questions to ask yourself and the dealer is the key to guarantee that you will be happy with the sewing machine you choose. Use the steps below as your guidelines to uncover the information you will need to consider. Above all, compare several models . . . and take a test drive!

STEP 1:

Know the type of service you can expect from both the manufacturer and the dealer. This is especially important for beginner sewers. To guarantee your satisfaction with the service of the machine, be sure you know the answers to the following questions.

TIP

Consider whether the manufacturer and dealer belong to one of the major trade associations, such as the American Home Sewing Association (AHSA) or the Independent Sewing Machine Dealers Association (ISMDA). While membership doesn't guarantee reputation, it does imply commitment to the growth and good health of the industry.

- Is the dealer a factory authorized representative?
- Will dealers service the sewing machines in other cities, in case you move?
- How long does the dealer offer free service, is it transferable to another city?
- How long is the warrantor responsible for repairs or replacement of defective parts? (Note: The difference between a defect and a damage is that a "damage" is the result of improper use or accidents.)
- How long will warrantor make replacement of parts for the model for free or otherwise?

- Are any conditions associated with the warranty, are lessons required, must you mail in a warranty card, must you bring the machine to the dealer?

STEP 2:

Look for machines that will match your sewing projects. Certain features are basic necessities, while others are special extras which are nice to have. Compare the features of at least three models. Use the list below to identify the basic features the machine must have and those extra features you would also like.

TIP

Remember the "Two Red Don'ts": don't pay for more features than you will use and don't economize by selecting a machine that will fall short of your expectations in a year from now.

BASIC FEATURES

- Machine starts and stops smoothly and is jamproof if you sew off edge of fabric.
- Bobbin doesn't vibrate while sewing and feeds thread evenly.
- Bobbin is simple to wind and easy to insert into bobbin case.
- Thread guides are easy to follow.
- Needle is easy to install.
- Fabric feeds evenly under needle to facilitate matching plaids.
- Variety of utility stitches to join seams, overcast edges, topstitch, hem, sew over elastic, sew stretch fabrics and darn. (Note: Names of stitches vary between companies, ask the dealer to identify the stitch functions.)
- Variety of throat plates and feet attachments for the utility stitches.
- Needle plate markings to guide seam widths.
- Accurate reverse stitching.
- Controllable stitch lengths and widths.
- Adjustable tension and pressure knobs.
- Variations in speed controls for stitching accuracy.
- Light that illuminates needle area.
- Foot or knee pedal is easy and comfortable to operate.
- Sturdy one piece body construction.
- Easy to clean, limited amount of oiling.
- Instruction book you can understand.

SELECTING A SEWING MACHINE (continued)

EXTRA FEATURES

For Operating Ease

- Bobbin has large holding capacity, eliminating frequent re-winding.
- Limited amount of re-adjustments when changing stitch types.
- Stitch memory for self repeating stitch patterns.
- Knobs, controls and lighting designed for the visually or physically disabled person.
- Sews over two or more layers of thick fabric.
- Sews over extra sheer fabrics without puckering.
- Built-in buttonholer versus buttonholer attachment.
- Non-automatic buttonholer, requires pivoting of fabric.
- Automatic buttonholer, requires no pivoting of fabric.
- Super automatic buttonholer, requires no pivoting of fabric and automatically gauges the buttonhole size.
- Feed control adaptation for darning and embroidery.
- Multiple needle position control, increases stitch possibilities.
- Automatic needle threader for easy threading.
- Solid state foot control, allows slow stitching without limiting piercing power of needle.
- Free-arm for access to tubular sewing area, with a convertible flatbed surface for regular flat sewing.

For Special Effects

- Decorative stitches to add personal touches.
- Ability to program in more newly developed stitches.
- Holds more than one top thread, for decorative stitching.
- Special attachments for specific tasks: seam guide, ruffler, quilting foot, etc.

For Safety

- Self-releasing reverse control, prevents possibility of leaving machine in reverse.
- Childproof on and off switch.
- Automatic bobbin winder shut off, prevents bobbin from overfilling.

For Convenience

- Stationary model in a cabinet versus portable model which also fits into a cabinet.
- Lightweight portable to travel with.
- Free sewing lessons.

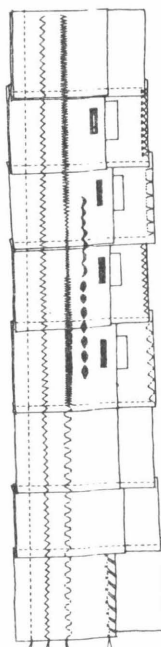
STEP 3:

Test drive the machine yourself. A precision machine should be able to stitch on a variety of fabric types with equal ease. Look for even stitches with good tension control. If the tension is correct, the stitches will look the same on both the top and bottom of the fabric without puckers.

TIP

New sewers, ask the dealer to take you through a test drive on fabrics of different weights and textures. Experienced sewers, make a test patchwork of fabric as described below. Use one for each machine you plan to test. The patchwork will reveal problems associated with certain fabrics. Have the dealer explain the solutions.

How To Make & Use a Test Patchwork



You'll need these fabric types: light, medium and heavyweight wovens, light and medium weight knits, stretchy knits, novelty fabrics, leather, fake fur. Cut two rectangles of each fabric sample. One should be 6" x 6" (15 x 15cm), the other 6" x 7" (15 x 18cm). Also make several 2" (5cm) squares of interfacing for testing the buttonholer. Next, arrange your rectangles right sides together with the smaller piece on top and the left edges aligned. Overlap by 1/2" (1.3cm) the bottom of the top set with the upper edge of the next one until all the fabric sets are lined up. Baste them together where they overlap.

Test the machine by making rows of stitches you are interested in. Start near the left side of the patchwork. Use the right side to test the edge finishing stitches on single layers of the woven fabrics (knits usually don't require finishing). To test the buttonholer, place the 2" (5cm) square of the interfacing under the right edge of the top layer of a set of woven and a set of knit fabrics. Make buttonholes over the interfaced areas. Remember to bring your own thread.

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