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WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING A NEW SEWING MACHINE

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The purchase of a sewing machine can be a rewarding adventure. Great satisfactions can be obtained from the products created, the money saved, and the pleasurable hours invested in achievement. However, buying a sewing machine for home use is a long-term investment and careful shopping is necessary in order to obtain the machine that is right for you. With so many machines on the market, buying the best one for your needs is a matter of matching the capability, complexity, and the cost of various machines to the types of sewing you will be doing.

If you are a beginner, a simple basic zigzag machine could be your best choice. For less than \$100, you can buy a machine that will stitch on a variety of fabrics--firm, flexible, and stretch--and make buttonholes. This should satisfy the needs of most home sewing--at least for a time. If your budget allows, there are some fine models in all price ranges above \$100 that are not too complicated for a beginning seamstress. But do not be pushed into a decision beyond your needs or budget. Start with a simple basic machine and trade up as your needs and skills increase.

If you are an experienced seamstress who likes to add elegant touches or couture treatments, a more complicated machine may be your choice. These machines include those with separate cams and other attachments or they may have a large number of built-in stitches called automatic and super-automatic, with an elongator to lengthen or shorten them. However, patience and concentration are required to master the various controls and operations of these more complex machines. The resulting creative endeavor will be a blending of your ideas and the capabilities of the sewing machine.

Sewing machines have also been developed for handicapped people who have impaired vision or limited use of their hands, arms, or legs. For those with restricted use of the hands, the speed control is designed to be operated by the foot, arm, or knee. Knobs are fitted with projecting spokes, levers have knobs at the end, and clamp screws hold the needle in place. A slow speed control makes operation of the machine by a handicapped person easier. A special tong makes the removal and insertion of the bobbin case and bobbin an easier task. A guide bar is designed to assist in feeding the fabric straight under the needle which greatly simplifies sewing for persons with defective vision.

BASIC QUESTIONS

Regardless of the frills the sewing machine offers, and regardless of your own sewing skill and background, there are certain questions you should ask before you commit yourself to a purchase.

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First, ask around town to see if the dealer has been at his location long enough to establish a reputation for service and general helpfulness when questions about machines arise. Many unbranded sewing machines are on the market and are sold by individual dealers and some chain stores which put their own names on them. Several of these off-brands are manufactured by well-known companies while others are not. They are usually lower-priced than comparable machines with brand names. If in your shopping you see one of these and find it appealing, be most careful to check the guarantee and servicing of the machine. Will the guarantee be honored and can servicing be done in other locations of the country in case you move sometime in the future?

What does the guarantee say? Who backs it--the manufacturer, the distributor, or a local dealer? If the guarantee is backed only by the local dealer, make sure he is a member of the Independent Sewing Machine Dealers of America. This is a national association of which all members will repair sewing machines brought in for service, and independent dealers are supported by this association.

How do guarantees between machines compare? The difference between two machines can be more significant when guarantees are compared. Therefore, the consumer should check the guarantees on every machine before making a decision to buy.

Do all the controls work properly? Does the machine stitch well on all types of fabrics? Do not be afraid to inspect a sewing machine very carefully. Take your time and do not rush through your examination. The dealer is there to help you and you should take this opportunity to learn all you can about the models he carries. To personally inspect the machine, sit before it in the position you will take when you sew on it at home. Look closely at the controls, turn all the dials, push all the buttons, move all the levers, turn on the light, and do not be afraid to ask questions. If you have never sewn before, you might find it a good idea to bring along a seamstress friend to conduct the sewing test. If it is not possible to do this, ask the dealer to demonstrate the machine so that you may answer many of the questions yourself. Whether a friend, the dealer, or you conduct the sewing test, bring with you to the store your own package of test fabrics. Dealers often demonstrate their machines using a stiff cotton fabric on which almost any machine will make quality stitches. Your package of test fabric should contain a single cotton or acrylic knit (not a bonded one) a doubleknit, a nylon tricot, a piece of fake fur, some chiffon or voile or batiste, a lightweight wool, and a heavyweight wool with a textured surface. If you have difficulty collecting all these fabrics, the most important ones are the single and double knit, the two wools, and one sheer.

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The following is a checklist of questions to ask the dealer and to answer yourself upon examination of a sewing machine:

SEWING MACHINE SHOPPING CHECKLIST

List manufacturer, cost, and model number in vertical columns; as you shop, use a check to indicate a "yes" response and a blank space for a "no" response for each question on those sewing machine models which interest you most.

Questions for the Dealer

1. Does the sewing machine have wide distribution throughout the U. S.?
2. Can the machine be serviced readily in all areas?
3. Are the service parts carried in stock?
4. If the guarantee is backed only by the dealer, is that dealer a member of the Independent Sewing Machine Dealers of America?
5. If the sewing machine is an off-brand, will member dealers of the Independent Sewing Machine Dealers of America accept this machine for servicing and repair?
6. Does the guarantee cover the motor for the same length of time as it covers the labor and parts on the head?
7. Will the guarantee be honored if the distributorship changes?
8. Can a cabinet model be serviced at home?
9. Find out if the machine must be sent back to the factory for repair. Can it be repaired locally and in a relatively short period of time?
10. Can you easily reach the areas of the machine that need regular cleaning?
11. Are cleaning tools and oil provided by the manufacturer in the accessory box that accompanies the machine?
12. Does the dealer provide for free instruction or lessons in the operation and maintenance of the machine?
13. Is a good detailed, well-illustrated instruction manual included with the machine?

40. Is the head of the machine well constructed of a durable material with no sharp edges?
41. Is it easy to remove and replace the presser foot?
42. Are needles easily changed?
43. Is the wiring located where it will not be pinched, and is it protected against wear?
44. Is the wiring protected against oil drip?
45. Is the cabinet well constructed, are hinges sturdy, legs well braced, and is the leaf well supported and level when opened?

A blank space indicating a negative answer to more than a few of these questions should lead you to look at other models or brands of sewing machines. With the great diversity of today's market, no seamstress should have to compromise on more than three or four of these questions, and there should be no compromise at all on some of them, especially those dealing with the service, guarantee and basic stitch capability.

Careful shopping for both features and price should help you find a sewing machine that will give good performance for as many years as you want to use it.

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