



Important for Beginners: A Good Quality Sewing Machine

By Rosie

I teach many of Sew Pro's Beginning Sewing classes. I have written numerous articles in Sew Pro's Journal recommending the right tools for sewing. But I don't think I've put quite enough emphasis on the most important tool in the sewing room: **YOUR SEWING MACHINE!**

It's important for every sewer to have a sewing machine that is in good working order. It is especially important for a beginning sewer to have a reliable machine that works properly!

As a sewing instructor, I see so many students struggling with the machine they're using in class. Sometimes people give their children Grandma's 60-year-old, 40-plus pounder that's been stored in the garage for safe keeping for 25 years . . . or worse, it's been out on the patio that long!

Every once in a while that machine turns out to be a real treasure. But usually it's not so much. For Pete's sake, we aren't using Grandma's 60-year-old refrigerator or dishwasher or any of her other appliances, are we? Old sentimental possessions like that should be lovingly displayed somewhere in the home but not necessarily pushed onto the newest sewer in the family.

Really old machines were designed before most of our new fabrics were even somebody's dream. I remember sewing on Mom's old machine and changing tension every time I went from one layer of fabric to two, and again when I went back to a single layer!

The other mistake we see so often is someone buys a very inexpensive machine that is very poor quality and expects it to do the job of a good-quality machine. You should expect to pay about \$250 and up for a nicely performing machine. But this investment will be worth it. It will do a great job and last a lo-o-o-n-n-n-g time.

First, I don't recommend you buy one of those battery-operated sewing machines for anyone with a serious desire to sew, not even for a seven-year-old! These are simply toys. They go kachunka, kachunka, kachunka while they sew about 20 stitches per minute. They will only sew approximately two layers of muslin without breaking down. I'm not sure you can find needles for them when you run out. And I know you can't find replacement parts for them.

I had a student bring one in for a messenger bag class. The machine wouldn't go through two layers of soft denim, let alone the seams where four or six layers came together. They have NO strength whatsoever and I'm guessing they can't even be timed. Don't assume a child needs a toy machine or a very simple sewing machine, (in other words, cheap). Every year we teach lots of customers how to use their new sewing machines. If there are any kids in a class, the kids always catch on faster than most of the adults!

Second, don't just purchase the lowest-priced machine you can find for a brand-new sewer! The problems and frustrations will only discourage them from wanting to learn to sew.

After teaching numerous "Learn to Sew" classes, I can tell you a little about purchasing a sewing machine for a beginner. One of the biggest problems with these very inexpensive machines is that they don't hold their timing well.

Stewart, our Master Sewing Machine Technician, tells me that this is because everything inside and out on these machines is usually plastic, even the entire casting and the main shaft. Stewart says it is "unreal" how poorly made these machines are.

A "DEAL" is not always a DEAL

People think they are getting a great "deal" when they purchase them at a discount store or online. They mistakenly think it is the same model dealerships carry for hundreds of dollars more. In reality, these machines are designed and built for that very low price point and the discount store market.

Often these bargain machines will have about 100 stitches and won't sew anything very well. You don't need a thousand decorative stitches, but you need a dependable machine that performs well when you want to use it!

Stewart says extremely cheap machines are incredibly inferior quality. They are very poorly engineered and their fabric feeding system is inadequate. They don't handle thin to thick fabrics like better-quality machines.

Stewart says even at a very low price, you are getting ripped off. But Sew Pro's Service and Repair Department does really well by repairing those machines. He says, "They keep us very, very busy!"

So, I've put together a few points to consider when shopping for a machine:

- 1.** Ease of operation! It has to be easy or you just won't bother.
- 2.** You need a machine that is able to sew many different types of fabric without having to adjust the tensions. The tensions should stay consistent from very thin to very thick fabric.
- 3.** Speaking of thick fabric, the machine should feel strong and steady on thick fabrics. It should not feel wobbly or like it is straining. The feeding should be straight and not feel like the fabric is moving or twisting slightly side to side as it moves forward through a seam.
- 4.** The machine should have a good solid quality to it. This isn't as easy to explain as it is to have you feel it for yourself. Sew on a really cheap machine and a good quality machine side by side and feel the difference. It's sort of like driving a car where the steering wheel shakes or wobbles.
- 5.** A beautiful, easy buttonhole!
- 6.** I prefer to be able to adjust the length and width of my stitches myself. A beginner needs to be able to at least adjust the stitch length. There are machines designed to be very simple that only have preset stitch lengths, usually small, medium, and large. The problem is that usually the small length is way too tiny, and sometimes so is the medium. The large stitch is longer than average. Being able to adjust the stitch yourself ensures the proper stitch length for the fabric.
- 7.** If you are planning to machine quilt or do machine arts, you need a feed dog that drops out of the way. If you have to cover the feed dogs, that lump will get in the way.
- 8.** If you want to quilt, or if you want to sew knits and fleeces, it is advisable to have adjustable presser foot pressure. That way the presser foot doesn't push down on the fabric so hard that it stretches it out of shape. Nothing shouts "Home Made" like stretched out seams!
- 9.** Operator instructions! Everyone, especially beginners, should receive essential instructions on threading, basic maintenance and how to set the machine for simple stitching.

Sew Pro's has always felt that it is important for a customer to learn how to operate their new machine. We give a series of free instructions with nearly every machine we sell.

These classes are free to the original purchaser for as long as they own the machine and keep proof of purchase. We have people taking brush-up classes 20 or 30 years after they've purchased a machine.

Elna – A Great Machine for a Beginner!

My favorite machine for beginners is the Elna. The entry-level Elnas don't have a zillion stitches, but what they do have, they do very well. They come equipped with all the stitches you need to make a garment, quilt, or decorate your home.

The most amazing thing is how well their lower-priced machines sew from very sheer to very thick fabrics. All of the Elnas have an extra-high presser foot lift. So you can get really thick fabrics in there to sew.

With an Elna, you step on the pedal and immediately feel the strength and power of the machine. The fabric is feeding straight without you hanging on for dear life. You only have to guide the fabric slightly with your hand.

All Elna models make beautiful buttonholes. Depending on the model, they either have a four-step buttonhole or a one-step buttonhole. The entry-level model, Sew Fun 1000, has a four-step buttonhole and adjustable length and width on both the straight and zig zag stitches.

The models 320 and 340 have a drop-in bobbin and adjustable length and width on all stitches. This gives you control on all the stitches you sew. They also have drop-feed dogs and adjustable presser foot pressure. Those features make sewing on knits and free-motion quilting and embroidery much easier. The model 340 even has a one-step buttonholer and an automatic needle-threader!

I asked Tech Stewart what he thinks of the Elna sewing machines. He says that for an entry-level machine, nothing else compares!

Even the most basic Elna machines have a superior hook system. (That's the part of the machine that ties the stitch.) Elna's bobbin cases hold up better than any of the other brands. They hold their timing and their tensions.

So, Elna is a great machine for a beginning sewer. It's a great machine for someone who just wants a good quality basic machine. Elnas tackle the projects so easily in the classes I teach: tote bags, messenger bags, decorator pillows. In the classroom, we're always confident the Elnas will handle any heavy-duty project we put them through.

Before you buy any other machine, take a look at the Elnas. Whether you are a beginning sewer or looking for a gift . . . come into one of Sew Pro's three locations and try out an Elna.

EMBARK ON A VOYAGE TO NEW CREATIVE DESTINATIONS!

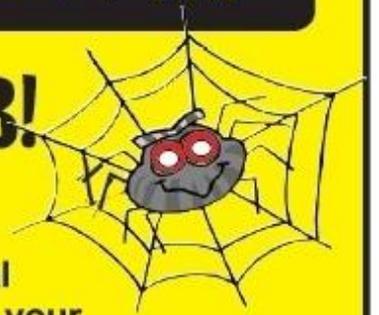
Sail through the most complex sewing challenges! With the Elna 320 and 340, you'll navigate effortlessly through any project, from minor alterations to major new creations. Feel the bracing thrill of new possibilities, ride the wave of your imagination and above all... enjoy yourself!

Thanks to Elna's easy-change spool system and the model 340 automatic needle-threader, every move is a winner. And you'll go overboard using the huge range of practical and decorative stitches as you chart a new course in creativity.

/// CAUTION ///

Don't Get Caught in the WEB!

Easy to get bit buying on the internet!



Sewing Machine deals on the Internet may look like a real bargain, but are you sure you're getting the best value for your dollar? There are many advantages to using a reputable Sewing Machine Dealer to purchase your new machine:

1. You're dealing face-to-face with a Factory-Authorized Sewing Machine Dealer. You'll get just as good a deal . . . or better . . . and without mailing and handling costs.
2. Free classes to learn machine and if something crops up during your sewing – broken needle, thread jam, puckered seams -- again you have a real live person to assist you . . . and to basically hold your hand.
3. The Internet cannot give you the same level of neighborly concern as your caring Sewing Consultant at Sew Pro's.
4. Sewing is our passion and our profession; no one is better able to help you with your selection and personal concerns.
5. Since we love to sew, we often have first-hand experience with your chosen project. We've stitched that path before so we're here to guide you!