



How to keep your longarm quilter happy!

Timeless Stitches – Quilt Capital of Kansas

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Among the quilting community, there are those who piece tops and those who do the actual quilting that connects the top, batting, and backing together. Some quilters do both steps; however, there are many who “quilt by check” and send their tops out to shops or individuals who have longarm quilting machines to do the final assembly of the three layers for them. Today we are offering some helpful tips that will help keep your longarm quilter happy!

Once a top is completed, then it’s time to decide on your backing which can be a single piece of wide backing, two or more lengths of ~40” wide quilting cotton sewn together, or even a pieced back with various blocks or designs pieced into the overall back. All of these options work; however, a little extra knowledge will make it easier on your quilter.

When delivering your quilt layers to your longarm quilter, there is no need to make the quilt sandwich ahead of time. Just neatly fold all three layers to take to your quilter. The quilt sandwich gets made in the process of adding each individual layer to the machine. Please don’t layer and safety pin them ahead of time. This process has to be undone before it can be loaded onto the machine.

When loading a quilt onto a longarm machine, the backing is loaded first with entire top edge attached to a leader cloth and the entire bottom edge to another leader cloth attached to the lower rail. Whether the backing is attached with Red Snappers, pins, or basted to a zipper leader cloth, extra fabric is necessary to make the process work. Once loaded with the batting and top added, there are clamps that are attached on both sides of the backing that keep the quilt sandwich taut across the width of the quilt. Therefore, the backing needs to be ~8” larger than your quilt top to allow the ~4” all the way around for it to be attached properly.

If, by chance, you are making a two-sided quilt or using a pieced back that is about the same size as your top, you will need to baste strips of muslin or other fabric to all sides of the back to provide the extra fabric needed for loading. Once quilted, these strips will be trimmed off before binding. If you do not do this, expect to be charged for the extra time and material your quilter has to take to do this for you. A little pre-planning on your part will save you money and help your quilter.

Most quilting cottons are ~42” wide from selvedge to selvedge. These can be pieced together in a variety of configurations to create a backing big enough for any quilt. Blocks can be pieced in or creative designs made that can add character to any quilt. You may also use a wide backing that is made specifically to use as a single piece on the back of a quilt.

Wide backs come in several widths from selvedge to selvedge of 90” up to 120”. Most quilt shops carry a variety of wide backings to choose from. Because of the added width, it seems more sizing/chemicals are added to stabilize the fabric when double folded and rolled onto bolts. Some shops cut the wide backs with

their rotary cutters. Other shops tear wide backs. At Quilters' Paradise, we prefer tearing wide backings as the torn edge will be on the straight of grain, while cut edges may have a crooked edge due to the fabric being tweaked when double folded and rolled by machine onto the bolts. If I (Liz) know a shop cuts them, I always ask for $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ yard more to allow for any loss when straightening the backing. Then I can tear them when I get home to square it up before using it. Personally, I also prefer to serge or zigzag stitch the cut or torn edges of these wide backings and prewash them to get that excess of sizing out of the fabric before sandwiching my quilts.

Regardless of whether you piece your quilt backs or use a wide backing, always plan ahead and trim your backing to be ~8" larger width x length than your top (the 4" around to attach to the leaders & clamps on the longarm) before you take it to your quilter. She/he will greatly appreciate it, saving them the extra time to do that simple task that you can do at home.