



Quilting by Machine

Timeless Stitches — Quilt Capital of Kansas

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In our last column, Sharon gave a wonderful overview of what makes a quilt a quilt. This time Liz will give more detail on just what the quilting process can involve when done by machine. Our acronyms for this issue are FMQ or Free Motion Quilting and LAQ or Long Arm Quilting. As long as there are three layers—a top, middle, and back—the piece becomes a quilt when they are stitched together.

Many of today's quilters send their quilt tops out to long arm quilters who "quilt for hire" with a long arm quilting machine that is mounted on a frame and moves over the quilt as it stitches. Long arm quilting machines are not only quite expensive, they also take a large amount of space to set up. LAQs typically have at least



a 10-foot-long frame, with a 12-foot-long frame to accommodate king size quilts being the most common; although, some may have a 14-foot-long frame for very large quilts. The depth of the frame itself is about 2.5 feet. The dedicated quilting machines with no feed-dogs range in size based on throat space from 18 inches to 28 inches. The deeper throat space allows the quilter to work on larger areas of quilts at a time. The machine is mounted on a platform that rolls on the frame both up and down along the length of the quilt, as well as back and forth across the frame. Depending on the machine, it may or may not come with stitch-regulation. Those with stitch-regulation can be set to a specific number of stitches per inch and the machine speeds up or slows down the stitching as the machine is moved, keeping uniform stitches throughout. Those without regulation

take a lot of practice to get a good rhythm between the quilter and the machine to make uniform stitches on their own.



Basic LAQ machines require all quilting to be done by hand guiding the machine across the quilt, sometimes using rulers for straight lines or specific curves, or by tracing with a laser a printed pantograph quilting design that is laid along a table behind the quilt. Pantographs are repeating designs that are typically quilted edge-to-edge, rolling the quilt on the frame after each pass to create a continuous quilting design across the entire quilt. There are also LAQs that come with computers that can do elaborate custom

designs, can be used in combination with computer generated designs and free motion or ruler quilting, or can be used to quilt computer generated edge-to-edge pantographs independently.

Midarm quilting machines have become more popular with quilters who wish to quilt their own quilts, but don't have the budget to "quilt by check" or the budget or space for a long arm and frame. Midarms are similar to a LAQ but are usually smaller with 16-inch to 18-inch throat machines that are mounted in a 3-foot-wide by 2.5-foot-deep table with optional extensions to bring the total table width to 6 feet. These require the quilter to move the quilt under the needle, thus leaving all the designs to be entirely free motion or ruler guided.



A growing number of hobby quilters are learning to quilt on their domestic sewing machines. If you can drop or cover the feed-dogs and have a quilting or darning foot that floats above the quilt sandwich, any machine will do. There are even quilters who quilt projects on vintage Singer 221 Featherweight sewing machines! With the feed-dogs down, the quilter herself is controlling the stitch length and can take a lot of practice to stitch nice even stitches. Some quilters who use their DSMs leave their feed-dogs up and use a walking foot to stitch simple straight-line designs for a more modern look rather than doing free motion.

For hobby quilters who want to quilt their own and make smaller projects such as table runners, baby quilts or throws, learning to free motion quilt on your domestic sewing machine is the most affordable option.