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Buying a New Sewing Machine

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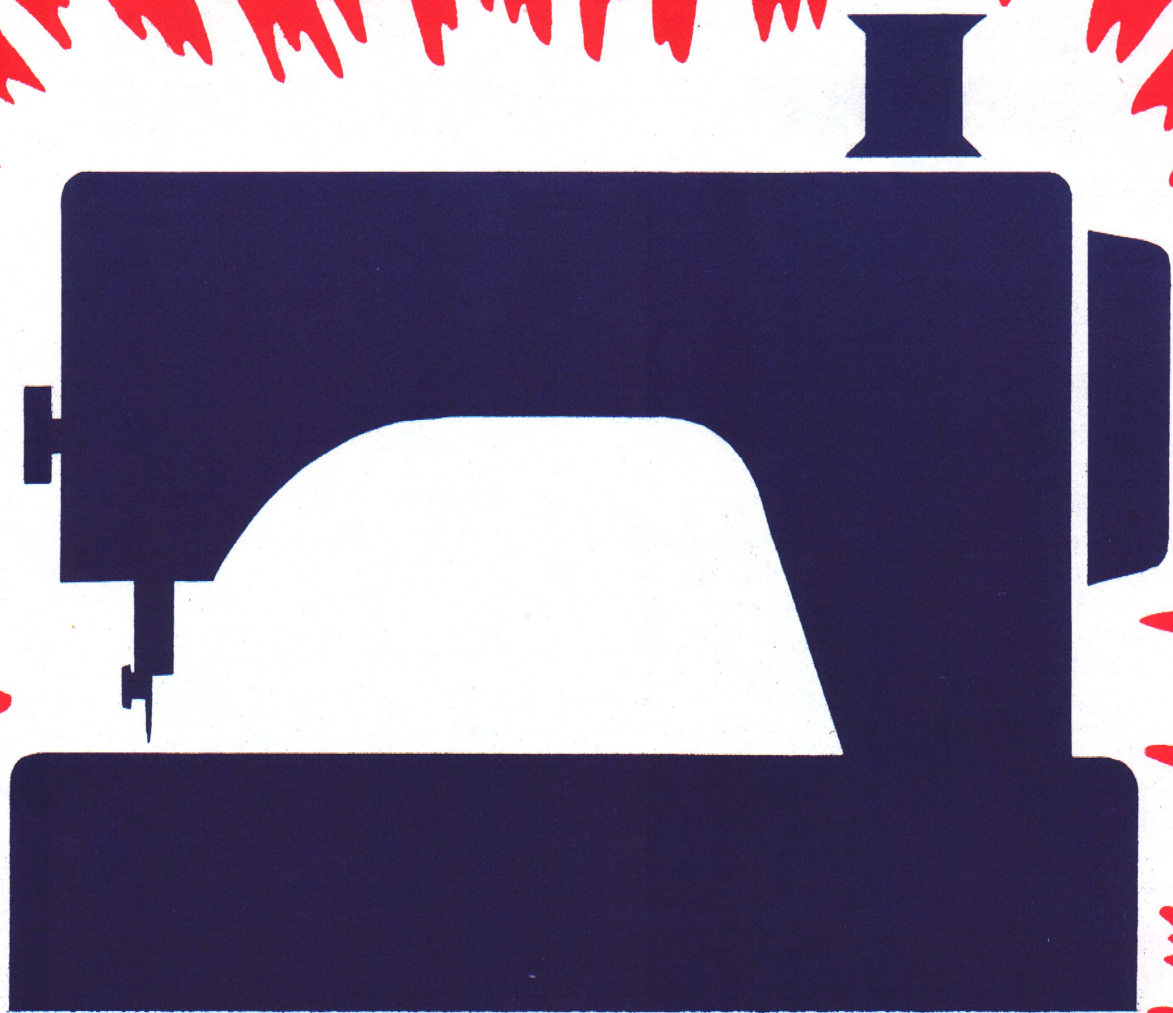
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Buying a New Sewing Machine

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Buying a New Sewing Machine

By **BERNETTA KAHABKA**, *Extension Specialist, Department of Human Environment and Design*

A SEWING MACHINE is a major appliance. It can cost you as much or more money than a washer and dryer. But, do you give the purchase of a sewing machine the same attention you give buying other household appliances? If your answer is **no**, perhaps it's because a sewing machine is used less regularly.

Many people feel that home sewing can save money compared with buying ready-to-wear clothes. When making such comparisons, be sure you understand the **real** cost differences.

Home sewing costs include more than the cost of patterns, fabrics, and notions. A significant cost is in the equipment needed to do the job. The sewing machine is the major cost factor. Not only can a sewing machine represent a sizeable investment of money, but the frequency of its use determines the return on the investment. This is one of the "hidden" but real costs of home sewing.

If you are thinking about buying a sewing machine, some self-questioning can be your best bet in getting a machine that is the most useful to you and that also makes the best use of your money.

WHY DO YOU NEED A SEWING MACHINE?

To sew, naturally, but what *kinds* of sewing?

Is it mostly functional like mending, sewing seams, putting ordinary type cloths together?

Do you sew clothes like coats, snowsuits, and more involved outerwear clothes?

Is your sewing fanciful like using a lot of decorative stitching and elaborate combinations of trims and fabrics?

Do you sew very seldom, occasionally, often, in seasonal spurts, or when the spirit moves you?

Do you sew for others in order to have extra income?

The kind and frequency of your sewing can be your best guide in deciding whether you need a sewing machine.

IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A MACHINE

If It Works

- Does it handle what you want to sew?
- Do you use it much? Why or why not?
- Does it satisfy your sewing need? Why? Why not?

If It Doesn't Work

- Can you get it fixed easily?
- Will it cost more to repair than what it is worth?
- Will you use it after it's repaired?
- If not, can it be used as a fair trade-in without repair?

DO YOU STILL WANT A SEWING MACHINE?

Because:

- You'll save money in the long run
- It will be more convenient
- You'll sew more if you have a new one
- You want the children to learn to sew
- The children want to sew
- You just want a new machine

Although:

- The initial cost is high
- You'll have to buy on credit
- It will add to your debt load
- Trade-in value of your old machine is small
- You'll have to give up something else

WHAT'S YOUR DECISION?

To buy

Not to buy

You've Decided to Buy . . .

CHOOSE THE STITCH TYPE

A **Straight Stitch** machine takes care of most sewing. It's possible to buy an attachment to make a simple zigzag stitch, but that may not be as convenient as you would like. Attachments add to cost, of course.

A **Simple ZigZag Stitch** machine will serve most ordinary needs very well, making it possible to overcast, blind stitch, darn, satin stitch, buttonhole, and sew on buttons as well as do plain seaming.

A **ZigZag Variation Stitch** machine can make stitching variations from several up to 25. This is done by built in "cams" which you control by dial, lever, or button or by additional loose cams which you attach.

Stitch variations have been introduced in sewing machines to correspond with fabric developments. The "stretch" stitch machine for use on stretch fabrics is one example. The double needle and electronic machines are other developments.

Decide for yourself which of the available machine variations is your best choice in relation to its convenience for you and its price. Do you need every added new mechanical feature which comes along? Will it be useful? Will you use it often?

Let's take the "stretch" stitch variation as an example.

PRO

It stretches as the extensible fabric stretches, both returning to original shape after stretching.

CON

By feeding more thread into any stitch (like a loose tension and more stitches per inch) a simple zigzag or even straight stitch can successfully sew an extensible fabric.

The point is that the STRETCH stitch variation provides a convenience, but stitching techniques with any machine can handle most fabrics. Such techniques include stitch length, thread tension, needle type, and thread size. (For further information see Sewing Fashion Fabrics, MSU Extension Bulletin E-634, Reprint January 1, 1975.)

The more mechanically specialized and extra-feature laden a sewing machine, it will very likely:

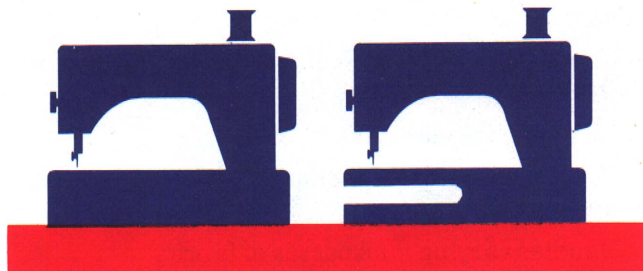
- cost more
- require more attention to the instruction manual
- require more skill and patience to operate easily
- require more adjustment and servicing

FLATBED OR FREE-ARM MODEL?

Do you do a lot of sewing of tubular shaped garment pieces like sleeves, pants, and cuffs?

Will the convenience of a free-arm machine be worth the attention involved in attaching an extension plate for easy flat sewing?

Is there a difference in cost, how much is it, and which is the better use for your sewing and with your dollars?



WHICH STYLE?

A *Lightweight Portable* saves space, is easy to move around but may be limited for sewing heavy, bulky fabrics.

A *Portable Cabinet* can often handle a wider variation in fabrics but is heavier to carry. It can be fitted into a cabinet or table "at extra cost."

A *Cabinet or Console* is always "at the ready" for sewing and provides some flat surface around the machine. Any cabinet should be sturdy enough to support the machine without excessive vibration when sewing. You may have to sacrifice sturdiness for appearance or vice versa and cabinet costs vary widely.

In a Nutshell . . .

Know yourself and buy a machine
with features that best suit you
and your finances.

Buyer's Check List. . .

YOU'LL USE IT, SO YOU TEST IT!

Do you want a machine that's convenient to operate and adjust? Then, you try the demonstrator machines—don't take someone else's word for how it suits you. Check the following which are important to you:

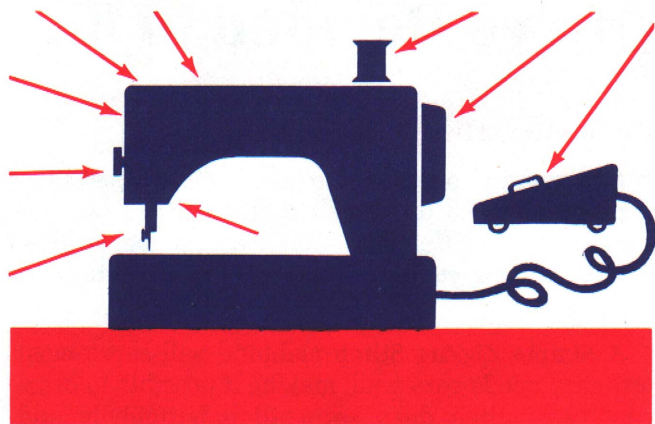
- Machine easy to set up, thread, wind and insert bobbins.
- Any stitch variations easy to adjust.
- Thread stitch length and tension easy to read and adjust.
- Starts and stops smoothly, speeds easily controlled.
- No excessive vibration.
- Easy to guide the direction of stitching, straight and curved.
- Handles varying thicknesses of fabric.
- Feeds fabric layers through together.
- Enough light at the right area.
- Extra parts easy to attach and use.
- Easy to clean, oil, and exchange attachments.
- Manual well illustrated and easy to follow.
- Cabinet height your most comfortable working height.
- Instructional help or classes from the dealer.

THE GUARANTEE OF IT ALL!

The July 1975 federal Warranty Act will influence the extent of guarantees offered by sewing machine companies.

Be sure that you understand the warranty or guarantee and that it is in writing.

- Which parts of the machine (head, motor) are guaranteed and for how long?
- Is there a free service period?
- If parts need replacing, who pays the labor charges?
- What conditions do you have to meet or pay for to follow through with the guarantee?
- Do you return it to the dealer or manufacturer?



THERE'S MORE SAFETY AHEAD

Totally electrically grounded machines will soon be required.

Fingerguards are the best defense against punctured fingers although they may have some disadvantages with getting in the way of needle changing, threading, and easy vision.

On/off motor switches prevent accidental operation of the machine, especially if small children are around when sewing is done.

GIVE IT A GOOD WORKOUT RIGHT AWAY!

Once your new sewing machine is delivered, use it immediately so that any defects will show up. Do this before any free service period, instructional period or warranty period is over.

Become familiar with the instruction manual. Take care of your machine as recommended. Keep that sewing machine in good condition to optimize your long term investment.

OTHER REFERENCES

1. *Buying a New Sewing Machine*
(15 cents) U.S.D.A. Bulletin AID-1044
U.S. Government Print Office
Washington, D.C. 20420
2. *Sewing Fashion Fabrics*
MSU Extension Bulletin E-634, Jan./75 reprint
3. *Cleaning and Adjusting Your Sewing Machine*
MSU Extension Bulletin E-612

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