

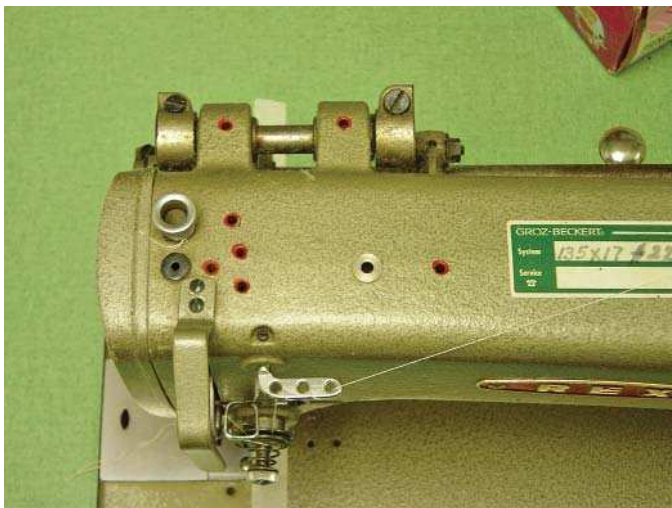
Sewing Machine Maintenance

How do you maintain your sewing machines? Do you wait until you're in the middle of a ten panel rush job and you've jammed your needle so far into the bobbin case that the only thing you can do is call the repair man? Then when he shows up and asks you when you last oiled the machine, you look at him funny and say, "Oil. What Oil?" Do you wait until you've broken your needle before you even think about replacing it? Well you shouldn't. Here are some tips to help you maintain your machines and keep them humming along.

Straight stitch machines

For your straight stitch and all your other machines the best thing you can do for them is maintain the oil. Some machines, like the Juki, (see Photograph 1) sit in a full pan of oil and oil does not need to be added regularly. However, the level of the oil should be checked every two to three weeks. If, when you look in the oil pan, you notice the oil has changed color or gives off a bad odor, it is time to change it. Many machines have a small valve at the bottom of the oil pan which lets the oil drain out. Drain it, wipe it down to get rid of any excess lint, and refill it.

Other machines do not have an oil pan. Rather they have small holes all over the machine to place a drop of oil into.



*Photograph 2
Straight Stitch with Oiling Holes Marked*

If you don't know which holes to put the oil in, check your manual or talk to your repair man. Then put a small dot of bright red nail polish next to all the holes (see Photograph 2) and you'll never have to look it up again.



*Photograph 1
Machine with Oil Pan*

If your machine is less than ten years old you should be using clear sewing machine grade oil. Older machines use a little heavier oil, but never use 3-in-1 oil. It is too hard on your machine.

Many workrooms wait until their needles break before they replace them. Or they discover that the needle is so dull that it won't even go through the loosest weave linen. Needles should be replaced after every eight to ten hours of sewing. An easy rule of thumb is to change the needle every time you start the next big project. Needles typically cost about \$.80. Compare that to a \$120 repair bill and it's worth the little extra expense to change them regularly.

If the thread isn't stitching correctly no matter how many times you fuss with the bobbin, you may need to make sure you are using the right needle and that it is in the machine correctly. Check that the needle is facing the right way. Then see that it is up as far as it will go before you



*Photograph 3
Throat Plate Removed*

tighten the needle screw. Finally make sure you aren't using a needle that is too light weight for the project. Needles that are too light weight will bend and then hit the side of the throat plate and break.

About once a month you should take the screws out of the throat plate, remove it and the bobbin case, and blow all the dust and lint out of the machine with canned air. If some of it is stubborn and won't come loose, use a very small paint brush to get in between the feed dogs.

If you are having a lot of problems with bobbin backlash (the bobbin thread becomes a giant mess on the back of the fabric), take the bobbin case out of the machine and put a small drop of oil in the very bottom of it to lubricate the case. The oil will not seep through to the thread or fabric and it will help the machine sew much smoother. You can do this about once a week.

If you have broken a lot of needles or the fabric is catching on the throat plate, take it off (see Photograph 3) and get some 360 grit (very fine) sand paper and polish the top of the plate.

Sergers

Sergers also need to be oiled and cleaned. Regularly open your serger, take off the throat plate, hold all the threads to the side, and blow out all the dust and thread with canned air. If you wait too long to clean the serger, lint can get so

backed up it can actually crack the throat plate. While you have the throat plate off you can also polish it with the 360 grit sand paper.

Sergers are oiled in the small holes across the machine. Mark these with red nail polish so that you know where to put the oil in. The serger will need to have the oil and filter changed about every three to four years. It is actually a waste of money to do it any more often.

If your serger is not cutting right and you can't tell if the knives are dull, here's a little trick. Hold all the threads and sew off a fairly large chain. Then bring it around to the knives to have them cut it. If it doesn't cut the threads right away, the knives need to be replaced. The top knives are typically made of carbide and last longer than the lower knives but you can buy carbide lower knives to keep them from having to be replaced as often.

If your needle thread is breaking you probably need to replace the needle. Make sure it is the proper needle for the machine, it is in as high as it will go, and that the screw is tight

Another trick to keep the machine running smoothly is to lower the top looper down to its lowest point and expose the needle bar. Put a drop of oil where the top looper connects to the shaft and comes out of the casting (see Photograph 4).



*Photograph 4
Oiling Shaft of Top Looper*



*Photograph 5
Blind Hemmer with Oiling Holes Marked*

Blind Hemmer

Adding one or two drops of oil in the proper holes of your blind hemmer (see Photograph 5) will cut out a lot of basic problems. When you begin to experience problems with the blind hemmer, check the needle first. Often they get bent or have a burr on the bottom of them. When using silk, make sure you are using a finer silk needle and that you replace it with a stronger needle when you start to work with other fabrics.

If you typically turn the lining and sometimes interlining into the hem, the blind hemmer will not go through that bottom thickness on the side hems and you are stuck hand sewing it. To eliminate this, finish the lining at the bottom of the hem, then fold it up the double 8" hem and serge the bottom of the interlining, and let it hang free. This will leave less bulk in the hem for the blind hemmer. Many

workrooms pull a large length of the blind hem thread at the end of the panel and use this to finish hand stitching their seam.

Although there are no throat plates to remove on the blind hemmer, dust and loose threads still build up in it and it never hurts to give it a little blast of air from time to time.

Finally, if you are currently using monofilament thread, STOP. Besides not having any UV protection and breaking down if your clients take their treatments to the dry cleaner, it is very harsh on sewing machines. Over time, it will cut through hooks and eyes on sergers and straight stitch machines.

Sewing machine manuals

If you are looking for a manual for your machine, first try calling the machine manufacturer.

Other places to buy and download manuals are:

- www.sewingmanuals.com
- www.sewusa.com
- www.sew4less.com

Doing a little maintenance on your machines on a regular basis will keep them and your business running smoother. And remember, a new needle in ten days, keeps the repair man at bay.

My special thanks to Lewis Connor of Bill's Sewing Machine Company for his advice and assistance with this article.



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