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www.SewingDocAcademy.com

Things to Consider

1. Are you planning to sew garments? Do you need a freearm option?

There are many vintage machines that offer a freearm option. Models that immediately come to mind are many of the Elna machines, which is one reason the SU series is so popular, and many of the Kenmore machines. If you are going to be sewing sleeves or pant legs, you'll definitely need a free arm option.

2. Are you planning on piecing quilts or making things that require a full flat bed?

If you primarily sew other things such as quilts, you will have a much better experience if your machine has a full-sized bed. Or if the machine you are considering does have a free arm option, you should make sure that it also has the bed component so that you can use it either way.

3. Do you need a machine that easily allows adjusting of the pressure foot and/or the feed dog height? (i.e. the difference between sewing chiffon vs. quilting cotton vs. canvas).

Most vintage machines have a knob on the top left of the machine that allows you to increase or decrease the amount of pressure on the presser foot. You may have to look inside the needle bar cover or on the outside of the machine to locate this adjustment point.

On the same note, many vintage machines have a lever that allows you to adjust how high the feed dogs are to adjust for more delicate fabrics. The Singer 400 and 500 series is very popular for this option for those that sew garments with different types of materials.

While the Touch and Sew and Futura-type models are not the best investments this day in age, one of the more popular features about them is that they came standard with rubber-coated feed dogs that allowed very delicate fabrics to be sewn without damage or any issue.

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4. What type of stitch capability do you need?

Straight stitch - This is the stitch you will use most often

Zig Zag – Used when you need a finished look for raw edges.

Stretch straight – This is the stitch to use on anything you need to be secure after much use. It's a precision stitch and you want a machine that can produce it correctly.

Tri-motion – finishes your edges and prevents unraveling.

Button hole – A one step button hole option will save you lots of grief if you ever need to make button holes for clothing or other projects such as shower curtains.

5. If it needs cams or attachments, is it easy to get what you will need?

Many machines for, instance, have a built in buttonhole option to make the process easier. If your machine doesn't have this feature, many brands offered a seperate buttonholer foot that would accomplish this easily. Singer and Kenmore especially are known for their attachments. Make sure that if you need a special foot or accessory, that the machine your purchase has one with it or that you can find one.

6. Is the machine suitable in size and weight?

Machines were often stored in cabinets, and some people love them, some people don't have room for them. Also, there are a handful of machines, Singer specifically, that have to sit in a cabinet or a base in order to work properly.

If you have limited space and plan on moving your sewing machine around (i.e. storing it in a closet and pulling it out to sew at the dining room table), you need to make sure that the weight of the machine is something you can handle. This is especially important if you live alone or don't have someone that can help you. The average weight of a vintage machine is between 20 and 30 pounds, but there are many models (the Lady Kenmore, for instance) that weigh closer to 40 pounds and even mnore when they are in a wooden carrying case. It is very easy to injure yourself lifting and carrying sewing machines!

Favorite Resources for Identifying Machines

ISMACS serial number for Singer -

http://ismacs.net/singer_sewing_machine_company/serial-numbers/singer-sewing-machine-serial-number-database.html

Clickable path to sewing machine identification -

<http://www.sandman-collectibles.com/id-singer-machines.htm>

Visual database of vintage sewing machines -

<https://www.collectorsweekly.com/sewing/non-singer-machines/stories>

Singer comparison chart to identify machines -

<http://needlebar.org/main/sident/index.html>

Sears Archive for Kenmore, etc. -

http://www.searsarchives.com/history/files/sewing_id.pdf

White sewing machine aging info -

<http://www.treadleon.net/WhiteSM/whites.html>

Singer 15 clone machines -

<https://www.quiltingroomwithmel.com/2017/01/singer-15-clone-vintage-sewing-machines.html>

Singer serial number decoder -

<https://serial-number-decoder.com/singer-sewing-machines/singer-sewing-machines.htm>

Great article about Kenmore machines -

<https://silverbobbin.com/kenmore-sewing-machine-models/>