



FOR TKGA MACHINE KNITTING MEMBERS

TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY A KNITTING MACHINE

by Marcia Moran for TKGA

While I am not “the expert”, I personally love machine knitting. I enjoy the fact that it is productive, I learn something every time I use my machine, and for me it is a great stress release. Because you may find it to be a great pastime for you, too, I want to share some thoughts related to buying a machine.

Learn What Others Say about Machines

Read up on machines. I recommend an article called “Buying A Knitting Machine”, written by Angie Scarola for TKGA in 2002. Although the article is a bit dated, it is very informative. TKGA members can find it at www.TKGA.com in the Members section under "Online Lessons and Articles". It explains the different types of machines, the advantages of each, plus many machine details, such as which types of yarns go best with what machine.

Machine Availability

From what I can find, Silver Reed and Artisan are the only two knitting machines that are currently being produced. Silver Reed is made in Japan and Artisan is made in China. Silver Reed has a fine gauge, standard gauge, mid gauge and a bulky (or chunky) machine. Artisan has a standard gauge, mid gauge and a bulky. Prices vary depending on the type of machine, and if you purchase a ribber at the same time, or any accessories like a G-carriage. Where you buy, whether you buy through a dealer, a private sale or on the Internet, can also affect the price.

Even though not as many machines are being made today, older models can still be found in abundance through Internet searches.

What Dealers Say

Because I am the curious sort and wondered about the state of independent dealers of knitting machines, I did a little searching on the Internet. I typed in “Machine Knitting Dealers in the U.S.” on Google and was overwhelmed when 45,300 sites popped up! I began culling it down by eliminating knitting clubs, E-Bay and Amazon and those that sell only spool knitting machines. While many states do not have a dealer, I contacted some in Arizona, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio and Oregon who were willing to take the time to correspond with me and talk about the business of machine knitting.

I learned that knitting machine dealers are more diversified than they used to be. Some also carry sewing and embroidery machines, as well as knitting machines. They carry more yarns, books, patterns, and accessories than before, plus they do more traveling, even to other states, to give lessons and seminars and to promote machine knitting in any way they can. They say that renewal of interest in machine knitting is very slow, but interest is still there. All related that

dealers do not have the support they used to have. And the personal service that dealers have traditionally offered, like hands-on teaching, personal encouragement, yarns, books, patterns, accessories, etcetera, now has stiff competition with the Internet. Most of the dealers continue to carry parts for the Brother and other machines that are no longer being manufactured, and said they will do so as long as they can get them.

Where most of the machines sold used to be the standard gauge and the bulky gauge, the mid-gauge machine is now popular. Julie at Julie's Knit-Knacks in Ohio says there is a wide range of yarns that this machine can handle easily – from sport weight to worsted weight, plus the 4 ply yarns that double for weaving and other textured work. (I have some cotton yarn that when knit at tension ten on one of my standard gauge machines makes it hard to push the carriage and the swatch is tighter than what I care to work with. When I reknit it at tension one on my bulky the swatch is too loose and flimsy. Maybe it's time for me to consider a mid-gauge machine!)

The younger generation that is involved in machine knitting generally does not have much time to spend with it, and when they do knit they mostly knit for their babies and younger children. The fact that there are often no teachers and dealers near them for support leads to frustration, and the machines are eventually put under the bed or in the closet until later in life. Retailers lament the fact that there are not as many machine knitting clubs as in years past, there are not as many knitters involved in the clubs and most of those involved are older. But some clubs do still exist and can sometimes be found through an Internet search or by checking with local yarn shops or even through weaving shops that sell cone yarn.

There are also fewer machine knitting magazines than in years past, but they can still be found through Internet searches. From time to time a hand knitting magazine will include an article or section on machine knitting. You just have to keep looking.

Bright Spots for Machine Knitters

There are still some bright spots for machine knitters. A few years ago I finally decided to work my way through the Master Machine Knitting Program that The Knitting Guild Association offers. What a wonderful experience! I was encouraged to learn and try techniques that I had never done before, and most likely would not have tried if it had not been for the Program. I learned about my machines and why they do what they do. I learned how to do pattern work by hand. I learned new techniques such as tuck stitch, fair isle, weaving, and more. I did lots of reading, practicing and, yes, probably more ripping out and doing over than I'd ever done before. The feeling, though, of accomplishment and pride I experienced when I got my level back with "passed" is special!

Be warned though, the Masters Program is addictive. When you get it in the mail you can't wait to get started, and after completing each level, you can't wait to order the next one.

Especially while working through the levels, and even now, I go back into my old issues of *Cast On*, or into the TKGGA.com "On Your Way to the Masters" online area and read articles that pertain to a technique that I have not done in a while.

I have also learned to appreciate that just because a technical book is written for, say, the Studio machines (like the "The Bible for Machine Knitting"), doesn't mean you can't apply those techniques to your Brother or other machines. The use of ravel cord is the same no matter which machine you have. The same is true of increasing, decreasing, button holes, short rows, and so forth. It only means that you push a different button or nob. The only thing that is important is to get to know your machine and open yourself up to as many books, magazines and articles as you can.

The value of organizations like The Knitting Guild Association, local machine knitting clubs, and local dealers is invaluable and they all need to be supported.

Find the Machine You Enjoy!

When asked which machine I feel would be best for someone my answer is “the one you will enjoy learning and working with”. You know your interest and what it is you want to be able to do. Go with that! I’m certainly enjoying my machines (like many machine knitters, I have more than one!) and I hope you will find machine knitting to be as rewarding for you.

References:

Dealers:

K.N.I.T.S. etcetera in Andover, Kansas
Knit Castle in Portland, Oregon
Jullie's Knit-Knacks in Beaver Creek, Ohio
Snug Harbor Artisans in Wallingford, Connecticut
Our Shop in Columbus Junction, Iowa
Angelika's Yarn Store in Lakeside, Oregon

Main Web Sites:

Silver Reed.com
Artisan.com
Clearwater Knits.com
www.TKGA.com