

Sewing Machine BUYER'S GUIDE

How to choose and
buy a sewing machine
that's right for you



stitch | craft
create

SO YOU WANT TO Sew?

Whether you've been inspired by shows like The Great British Sewing Bee or have just been bitten by the sewing bug, when it comes to choosing a sewing machine there is a lot to think about. This helpful guide will talk you through all you need to consider before you invest in your new sewing machine!

YOU AND YOUR SEWING MACHINE

A Love Story

Deborah Moebes is a sewing teacher, fabric shop owner and craft author who began sewing at the age of seven. In her book, *Stitch by Stitch*, she reveals the love story between a sewer and their sewing machine:

Given to me by my stepmother, my first sewing machine was a 1969 Singer, which weighed more than you and me put together. With a cast-iron construction and heavy-duty everything, it was an absolute beast. When I began sewing professionally, though, I knew I needed to invest in a newer model with some additional features. I purchased my current machine and have never, ever regretted it: I was able to afford a lot of machine on my budget, and got all kinds of goodies thrown in at the same time. Today, I would go to bed with my sewing machine on the pillow next to me if I could, but my husband frowns on it.

I share this to indicate how attached you can get to your machine. Today, maybe you look out of the corner of your eye at a contraption you are certain will be your sworn enemy, but tomorrow you might feel a blossoming affection for your beast.

The first step in your relationship is getting to know one another.



CHOOSING A MACHINE

One of the most frequent questions I am asked is about how to choose the right sewing machine. It's a hard question to answer because, in some ways, which machine is right for you is subjective, and in others, it doesn't make a huge difference. The differences you'll see in most machines on the market are in how many and what types of functions they perform and in the interface.

Most people brand-new to sewing don't need a top-of-the-line quilting-and-embroidery machine; it's just a whole lot of machine to get to know, and so many are already intimidated by the mechanical-ness to begin with. More options are not necessarily better, especially if you never bother to use them. I know I might ruffle some feathers by saying this, but it's OK to get a starter machine to begin with, and then move up later once you really know you love sewing (which you totally will). Think of it like when you get your first place after moving away from home: Hardly anyone ever moves out and into a huge house with seven bedrooms and a chef's kitchen; most of us start with a small apartment and our own bathroom (oh, luxury!). Your first machine is kind of like that.

Now, I'm not advocating getting a cheap, poor-quality machine that won't work past the first week – far from it. There are several great models on the market that are reasonably priced, that will last you five or ten years and that you won't have to feel guilty passing on to someone else when you're ready to graduate to another, fancier machine (assuming you even do – some people fall so in love with their starter machine that it's the only one they ever buy). You do want to look for some features, though, that will make your first machine great and help you avoid frustration:



- You'll want to be able to independently adjust the stitch length and stitch width. Some machines – usually the least expensive model manufactured by a particular brand – have preset stitch selections and don't allow you to adjust the length and width of your stitches by mixing and matching them. You really, really want to be able to do this.
- You want a machine that offers additional presser feet. At a minimum, look for a zipper foot and a buttonhole foot. More feet are nice but not necessary.
- Most machines offer you a free-arm feature, which allows you to remove a portion of the work area to make a smaller space that's more suitable for working on sleeves or cuffs. Steer clear of any machine where the work space is too wide to allow you to comfortably stitch smaller projects.

Beyond these basic guidelines, choosing a machine really becomes a matter of personal preference and aesthetics. Do you like the way it looks? Does it scare you with too many buttons? Do you prefer levers and dials to buttons and touchscreens when adjusting your settings? Think carefully about what you want your experience to be like and try to match a model to your needs.

For example...

I want to be able to carry my machine to my sewing classes.
You'll need a lightweight model with a hard case to prevent knocks in transit.

I want to sew buttonholes quicker and more easily.
Opt for a model with a one-step buttonhole feature.

I want to do freehand machine embroidery.
Choose a model that allows you to drop the feed dogs so you can take control.

I want to sew heavy fabrics like denim regularly.
Choose a heavier duty model with a high-powered motor for better needle penetration.



Manual or Computerised?

A manual machine doesn't have any of the fun features that you may find on other machines. If you plan on using your machine only on occasion or need to stick to a tight budget a manual machine should be fine. Computerised machines cost more but have some beneficial features: a typical unit offers touch pad controls, an LED screen, an array of presser feet for challenges such as piping and top stitching, and settings for dozens or even hundreds of stitch types. More advanced machines have the ability to do monogramming and embroidery.

MACHINE PARTS

All sewing machines have certain traits in common, passed down from their forebears. The particular model you end up choosing will have variations, obviously, so use this guide in conjunction with the owner's manual to locate all the features you have at your disposal.

All sewing machines produced since the 1850s or so function in roughly the same way:

An upper thread is carried by a needle through an opening where it loops around a lower thread before coming back up. When fabric is placed between the two threads, the loops bind the fabric together in the form of a stitch.

Let's walk through the process of threading your machine, and as we do, look at the functions of the various parts. You'll find, too, that sewing terminology is delightfully uncomplicated in many cases, and the names of things are generally fairly clear indicators of their function.



1. Spool Holder
2. Thread Guides
3. Tension Mechanism
4. Take-Up Lever
5. Thread Guides
6. Needle
7. Needle Bar
8. Handwheel
9. Throat Plate
10. Feed Dogs
11. Guide Lines
12. Presser Foot
13. Presser Foot Lever (at back - not visible)
14. Bobbin Holder
15. Bobbin Winder

THE UPPER THREADING

Start at the top of your machine, with the spool holder (1). This is where the spool of thread will sit as you stitch. It may be vertical or horizontal; most horizontal models come with a cap of some kind to hold the spool in place so it doesn't go spinning off into the distance as your machine picks up speed.

From there, your thread will travel through one or more thread guides (2) These serve to carry the thread so it doesn't get tangled through the machine's innards.

The thread guides will lead you past the machine's tension mechanism (3).

After the tension mechanism, you'll run the thread through the take-up lever (4). It does just what it sounds like: carries the thread up and down as the machine creates stitches.

Below the take-up lever you'll find one or more thread guides (5), and finally the needle (6), which on most models threads front-to-back.



THE PRESSER FOOT AND THROAT PLATE

So, here we are at the needle, where all the action is. You can see that the needle is inserted in the needle bar (7), which raises and lowers as the motor turns the handwheel (8). Give it a test: Turn your handwheel towards you (towards you because that's how the motor works) and watch as the take-up lever and the needle move up and down.

As the needle descends, it disappears into a hole in a metal plate, called the throat plate (9). This plate has a number of openings, one that allows the needle to go beneath it, and two others that have rows of sharp teeth peeking out. Turn that handwheel again, and you'll see that as the needle goes up and down, the teeth - called feed dogs (10) - move to the back, drop down, come forwards, lift up, and move to the back again, over and over. This action moves your fabric through the machine. If you want to do freehand machine embroidery or sew on buttons with your machine, make sure you choose a model on which the feed dogs can be lowered - on many

machines there is a lever at the back to allow you to lower the dogs and control the fabric yourself, which is essential for these techniques.

Surrounding the feed dogs on the throat plate is a series of guide lines (11), score marks in the metal of the plate. Each of these lines represents the distance from the needle and is how we maintain a straight stitch line while sewing.

I've mentioned the presser foot (12) several times now. That's the flat-bottomed ski-like part through which the needle passes. The presser foot is squeezed down on top of the feed dogs when it's lowered by the presser foot lever (13), usually on the back or inside arm of the machine. The fabric goes between the presser foot and the feed dogs, and as the feed dogs move the fabric forward, the presser foot keeps it from flying all over the place.

Your sewing machine operates by using two threads: the upper thread and the bobbin thread. A bobbin is a small spool that fits in the bobbin holder

(14) below the throat plate and allows the top thread to make a loop in your fabric – that loop is a stitch. To use the bobbin, you'll first have to wind it.

On top of your machine is the bobbin winder (15), which will hold the bobbin and rotate it while it winds thread off your spool. Refer to your sewing machine's manual for how to do this.

POWER AND LIGHT

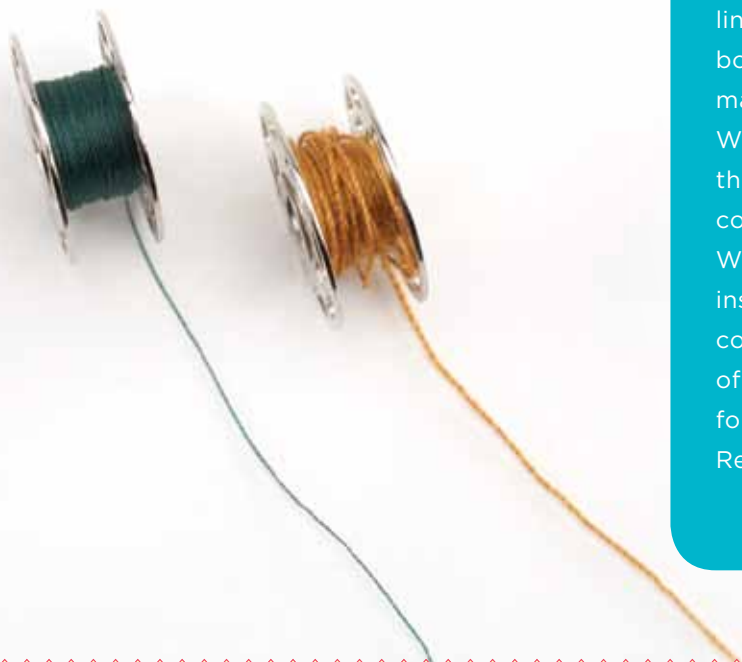
To run the motor, you have a foot pedal, which attaches to the machine via a cord. Your pedal should be turned so that the angle is going up, away from you, like a ramp or like the accelerator pedal in your car (rather than with the ramp down towards you, which gives you significantly less control over your speed and acceleration). Near the port where the foot pedal connects, you'll find a power switch – if your machine isn't working, check here first! Most power switches also activate a small light over the throat plate that illuminates the work area.



Sewing machine preventive maintenance

Regular cleaning and proper maintenance is key to preventing sewing problems and to keep the machine running smoothly. Keep the machine covered when not in use, change needles after eight hours of use, wind bobbins properly and clean the machine on a regular basis.

To clean the machine, lift the presser foot to release the pressure between tension discs. Clean tension discs with a folded piece of lint-free cloth. Then spray compressed air from back to front to dislodge loose dirt and lint. Remove the needle, needle plate, bobbin, bobbin case and hook race (computerised machines won't have a removable hook). With a small brush, clean around and under the feed dogs. Spray the bobbin area with compressed air, spraying lint outwards. Wipe the hook with a spot of oil. Clean inside the bobbin case with a lint brush and compressed air. Give the bobbin case a drop of oil before reinserting. Check your manual for additional oiling spots of your machine. Replace with a new needle.



BEST SEWING MACHINE MODELS STITCH CRAFT CREATE

Recommends...

At Stitch Craft Create we favour Janome sewing machines for their superb quality, versatility and ease of use – they are the world's leading sewing machine manufacturer for a very good reason!

Here we look at our favourite models for different budgets and uses.



JANOME

BEST FOR SEWING ON THE GO...

Janome J324

J3 series machines are lightweight machines making them easily portable. They have a front-loading bobbin case and a convertible free-arm for circular sewing. Top of the J3 series, this model offers the facility of variable stitch width and stitch length adjustment allowing maximum benefit from 24 stitch options - 16 utility and 8 decorative stitches. The J3-24 has a fully automatic one-step buttonhole, an automatic needle threader, an instruction manual and an accessory pack. A hard cover provides great protection when not in use.



FEATURES

- 24 built-in stitch choices
- Automatic one-step buttonhole
- Variable stitch width and length
- Built-in needle threader
- Quick foot conversion
- Drop feed for freehand embroidery
- Convertible free arm for circular sewing
- Convenient one-hand thread cutter
- Accessory storage
- Hard cover

ACCESSORIES

- Standard foot
- Automatic buttonhole foot
- Zipper foot
- Hemmer foot 2mm
- Blind hem foot
- Satin stitch foot
- Screwdriver
- Needles
- Seam ripper
- Bobbins

WEIGHT

6kg

PRICE

£189

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BEST ALL-ROUNDER...

Janome 525S

Voted BEST BUY by the UK's leading consumer magazine, this is a really popular model and well balanced in terms of stitches and features. It is ideal for both beginners and those who are more experienced. It handles all fabric types very well and offers affordable power and precision. The 525S is a lightweight machine with a top-loading jam-proof bobbin system and convertible free-arm for circular sewing. It features 24 stitches plus a fully automatic one-step buttonhole and a built-in needle threader. It offers both stitch width and length adjustment and a drop feed facility for freehand embroidery and free motion quilting. The 525S also has an auto-declutch bobbin winder and is supplied with a two-speed foot controller and a hard cover.



FEATURES

- 24 built-in stitch choices
- Automatic one-step buttonhole
- Variable stitch width and length
- Jam-proof drop-in bobbin
- Built-in needle threader
- Quick foot conversion
- Drop feed for freehand embroidery
- Convertible free-arm for circular sewing
- Convenient one-hand thread cutter
- Adjustable foot pressure
- Accessory storage
- Hard cover

ACCESSORIES

- Standard foot
- Zipper foot
- Automatic buttonhole foot
- Blind hem foot
- Overcasting foot
- Quilting guide
- Set of needles
- Screwdriver
- Lint brush
- Bobbins (4)
- Seam ripper
- Large and small spool caps
- Spare spool pin

WEIGHT

6.8kg

PRICE

£249

[BUY NOW](#)

BEST FOR POWER...

Janome CXL301

This machine is a great introduction to computerised sewing. It's easy to use with lots of features including 30 pre-programmed stitches and 6 different fully automatic buttonholes. The LCD display makes it easy to see which stitch you've chosen as well as the stitch width and length, which are fully adjustable. A jam-proof, magnetic, top-loading, full rotary hook system eliminates the need for a removable bobbin case. The hook cover plate opens at the touch of a button, and the extra needle penetration power of the CXL301 lets you sew across heavier fabrics and multiple layers. The extension table also detaches for free-arm sewing. This machine also features a seven-piece feed mechanism, a drop feed facility, automatic needle threader, a slide speed control and comes complete with a soft cover.



FEATURES

- Fully computerised
- Free-arm
- 30 stitch options
- 6 auto one-step buttonholes
- Information screen
- Jam-proof drop-in bobbin
- Variable stitch length and width
- Superior feed system (SFS)
- Drop feed for freehand work
- Auto needle threader
- Maximum speed controller
- Programmable needle up/down
- Lock stitch feature
- Start/stop button
- Twin needle capability
- Quick snap on feet
- Soft cover

ACCESSORIES

- Standard foot
- Automatic buttonhole foot
- Satin stitch foot
- Zipper foot
- Screwdriver – three-prong type
- Large and small spool caps
- Spare spool pin
- Needles
- Bobbins

WEIGHT

8kg

PRICE

£299

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BEST FOR RELIABILITY...

Janome 423S

The 423S is a sturdy, all metal body machine which makes it heavier than other models but this solidity means it is ultra sturdy – it is a well loved model in schools where reliability and robustness are essential. It has a great range of stitches and features, with a front loading bobbin case and a convertible free-arm for circular sewing. It's a great all round machine featuring 22 built-in stitches, stitch width and length controls, a fully automatic one-step buttonhole and a drop feed facility for freehand embroidery. In addition it is fitted with an automatic needle threader and comes with a hard protective cover.



FEATURES

- 24 built-in stitch choices
- Automatic one-step buttonhole
- Variable stitch width and length
- Built-in needle threader
- Quick foot conversion
- Drop feed for freehand embroidery
- Convertible free-arm for circular sewing
- Convenient one-hand thread cutter
- Adjustable foot pressure
- Robust metal body
- Accessory storage
- Hard cover

ACCESSORIES

- Standard foot
- Buttonhole foot
- Hemmer foot
- Zipper foot
- Blind hem guide
- Lint brush
- Screwdriver – three-pronged type
- Seam ripper
- Set of needles
- Bobbins (4)
- Oil

WEIGHT

7.4kg

PRICE

£269

[BUY NOW](#)

BEST FOR QUILTERS...

Janome Memory Craft 5900QC

The Janome Memory Craft 5900QC (Quilter's Companion) is a machine made especially for quilters. It has over 500 stitches and a host of features that makes it the perfect machine for dressmaking and home furnishing as well as quilting! It has an extra large, backlit LCD display with easy-to-follow icons. Previous Setting Recall, allows the MC5900QC to remember the last stitch that was sewn - even after the machine has been turned off. The full rotary, horizontal, magnetic hook system provides whisper-quiet operation. And, automatic thread tension assures legendary Janome stitch quality. Everything is made easy with this machine. Each stitch key has an LED light activated when you select one of the 30 direct select keys. It has an easy set bobbin with no need to pull up your bobbin thread and a unique bobbin winding system.



FEATURES

- Fully computerised
- Free arm
- 534 stitch options including alphabets
- 10 auto one-step buttonholes
- 3 fonts
- Pattern elongation - up to 5 times
- Information screen
- Jam-proof drop-in bobbin
- Variable stitch length and width
- Automatic tension control
- Memorise stitch and alphabet combinations
- Last stitch recall
- Superior feed system (SFS)
- Drop feed for freehand work
- Auto needle threader
- Maximum speed controller
- Programmable needle up/down
- Lock stitch feature
- Start/stop button
- Adjustable foot pressure
- Twin needle regulator
- 2 lights
- Quick snap on feet
- Extension table
- Hard cover
- Multi-language

ACCESSORIES

- Standard foot
- 1/4" seam foot
- Walking foot and quilter guide
- Automatic buttonhole foot
- Zipper foot
- Satin stitch foot
- Blind hem foot
- Cording foot
- Overcast foot
- Overedge foot
- Button sewing foot
- Embroidery/free motion quilting foot
- Hemmer foot
- Knee lifter
- Large extension table 24" x 16" (optional)
- Additional spool pin
- Spool pin felt
- Quilting bar
- Seam ripper
- Lint brush
- Bobbins
- Screwdriver - winged
- Large and small spool caps
- Needles

WEIGHT

8.8kg

PRICE

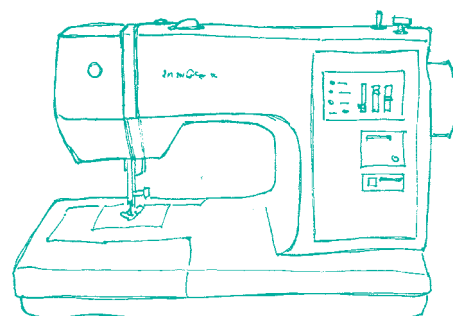
£799

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SEWING MACHINE

Glossary of Terms

Sometimes the jargon can be what puts you off a purchase. Read our glossary of sewing machine terms and you'll soon feel more confident!



ADAPTOR: Used to change sewing feet. Attach the adaptor to your machine and push a lever in the back of the adaptor to attach and release feet.

BLIND HEM: A blind hem is not seen on the front of the fabric and is nearly invisible. Only one piece of fabric thread is picked up, rather than a group of stitching. The hem is specially folded, and the guide of a blind hemmer foot maintains the left swing of the needle to catch only one fabric thread.

BOBBIN: The bobbin holds the lower thread; as the needle penetrates the bobbin area, the thread forms a loop to make a stitch. Bobbins are placed in the bobbin case underneath the needle plate.

BOBBIN CASE: Holds the bobbin and maintains tension on the lower thread. The bobbin case can be built in the machine (called a "drop-in" bobbin) or can be placed in the lower part of the machine.

BUTTONHOLE: A slit in fabric secured by stitching that allows a button to pass through. Can be made by hand or by machine using a buttonhole foot.

FEED DOGS: The teeth under the needle plate that move the fabric while sewing.

FEET: Sewing machine attachments that attach to the needle bar. Each foot has a specific sewing purpose. For example, the sequins foot feeds strips of sequins through quite easily.

FOOT PEDAL: Pedal that attaches to the machine by a cord which is gently pressed to run the motor.

FREE-ARM: A portion of the work area on the sewing machine is removable to make a smaller space when working on sleeves or cuffs.

FREE-MOTION QUILTING: Sewing technique that allows you to 'drive' the thread over the fabric and control more directly how much thread is deposited in particular places on the project.

HANDWHEEL: Wheel, usually found on the right-hand side of sewing machines that can be used to manually drive the needle bar.

HEM GUIDE: Ruled device used to measure the consistent depth of a hem on a garment; can also be used for other, non-clothing projects.

HEMMER FOOT: Sewing machine foot specially designed for stitching hems.

MACHINE BED: The lower level of a sewing machine, where the throat plate sits and where most of the work gets done.

MACHINE HEAD: The upper portion of a sewing machine, where the needle bar is located, and which is directly attached to the motor.

NEEDLE: Long, slender tool with a pointed tip. Used to sew cloth using thread. Choose the sewing needle specific for the fabric, such as ballpoint for knits.

NEEDLE BAR: The part of your sewing machine that carries the needle up and down by way of the motor.

NOTIONS: All your sewing needs, from buttons and snaps to pressing tools. Includes interfacing, stabilizers, marking pens, needles, scissors and threads to name just a few.

OVERCAST: A finished edge that prevents raveling and can be accomplished by hand or by machine. By hand, whipstitch the raw edge. By machine, use a small zigzag or overcast stitch.

OVERLOCK: A finished edge that prevents ravelling and is usually performed by an overlocker that cuts the fabric at the same time.

PIVOT: A sharp turn of the needle while sewing. To pivot, stitch to the turn or corner; stop on the upward stroke of the needle with needle down; raise presser foot; turn the fabric; lower the presser foot and continue sewing.

PRESSER FOOT: A sewing machine attachment that holds the fabric against the feed dogs while sewing. Additional feet can be purchased to accomplish specific sewing tasks.

PRESSER FOOT LEVER: Lowers and raises the presser foot; usually located at the back of the machine head.

QUILTING GUIDE: A seam guide that is attached to the machine to help you sew perfectly straight lines of stitches, essential when piecing a patchwork quilt.

SEAM ALLOWANCE: The area between the stitch line and the edge of fabric. They commonly range from $\frac{1}{4}$ in, $\frac{1}{2}$ in and $\frac{3}{8}$ in (6.4mm, 12.7mm and 15.9mm). Accurate seam allowance is crucial for slick results.

SEAM RIPPER: A sewing accessory with a pointed tip and sharp edge to allow easy unpicking of stitches if you make a mistake.

SPOOL: A small stand that holds the thread spool on a sewing machine. Some machines have two, one horizontal and one vertical.

STITCH LENGTH: The amount of fabric per each forward/backward stitch. A stitch length adjuster on

a sewing machine adjusts the length of the stitches. The adjustment actually takes place at the feed dogs, and not the needle. When lengthening the stitch, the feed dogs lengthen the actual amount of fabric that is fed through the machine; when shortening the length, the feed dogs lessen the amount of fabric fed under the presser foot.

STITCH WIDTH: The amount of fabric per each side-to-side stitch. Machines that have zigzag capability have a stitch width adjustment. A width of 0 produces a straight stitch, and as the number increases, the width of the stitch increases.

TAKE-UP LEVER: Machine part that controls the thread on its way towards the needle bar.

TENSION: Refers to how tight the thread is on a sewing machine. Perfect stitches are formed when both upper and lower tension loop the stitches together properly. The upper sewing machine tension are discs that place "tension" on the thread. Bobbins also have a tension control, which is rarely adjusted.

THREAD GUIDES: Small metal loops or fingers on the sewing machine that direct the thread and prevent tangling during sewing.

THROAT PLATE: The metal plate on the machine bed that indicates distance from the needle and allows the needle to pass through to the bobbin below.

WALKING FOOT: Also called an Even Feed foot. Works to keep both layers of fabric running evenly through the feed dogs. Especially useful when sewing thicker fabrics, such as with quilt layers, and other hard-to-sew fabrics, such as vinyls, leathers and "slippery" fabrics.

WING NEEDLE: A needle with a flange on each side to create hemstitching and other decorative needlework with the sewing machine.

ZIGZAG STITCH: A machine stitch that goes side to side. Used for finishing seams and for decoration.

ZIPPER FOOT: A special foot that allows you to sew very close to the edge of zips for a perfect finish.

Go ahead... get creative!



JP760 A ¾ size machine that is light enough to carry to classes, yet packed with 60 stitches and full of computerised features to make sewing easy.



DXL603 With built in stitches for quilting and heirloom as well as general sewing this is an excellent all round machine. Stitch selection and settings are so easy on the large information LCD screen.



QXL605 All the features of the DXL603 but with an automatic built-in thread cutter and advanced feeding system for precise stitching.



TXL607 Our first model with alphabet & memory facilities. It has direct stitch selection for the most useful stitches and a handy panel for quick selection.



MC5900QC This machine has computerised precision and is packed with over 500 stitches including 10 auto 1-step buttonholes. Type in and edit lettering from 3 full alphabets and create custom combinations of up to 50 stitches, it's all in the finer detail.



Janome has a great range of machines to offer the very best in computerised sewing.

Sewing difficult fabrics can get really tricky even for the more experienced. Janome machines are reliable and robust and tackle difficult fabrics with ease. The Memory Craft 5900QC has an incredible range of stitch options... whilst the portable Jem Platinum, DXL603 / QXL605 and TXL607 models are high specification machines at affordable prices.

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