

Monogram Week: What to Shop For in a Machine That Can Monogram

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Friday, 23 October 2009 9:00



Shopping for a first embroidery machine can be a little intimidating to the uninitiated. There are quite a few options to choose from at a wide variety of price points. Fortunately for you, we did our homework in preparation for Monogram Week, and have broken down the necessities to a few top-level considerations.

We'll start off with a disclaimer: Since we're sponsored by Janome, we're pretty biased to their products, and this article will use them to illustrate features throughout. Of course, many companies make home embroidery machines, and you should visit a variety of dealers to find which machines suit you best.

Most people's first thought when entering the sewing machine store is price. Embroidery machines can be priced from somewhere in the hundreds, to quite a few thousand dollars.

Embroidery only



For the budget conscious, you'll probably want to investigate embroidery-only machines. These machines don't 'sew'; they can

only stitch out designs. Our sponsor, Janome, offers three machines in this category, the Memory Craft [200E](#), [300E](#), and [350E](#). One downside to embroidery-only machines is they are an add-on to your regular sewing machine – so if space is an issue, you'll need to get creative with storage and work areas. The upside to this, your embroidery-only machine can be embroidering its little heart out while you use your regular sewing machine to complete other steps of your project. It's like doubling your output.

Sewing and Embroidery



The next level of embroidery machine can perform regular sewing functions as well as embroidery. You can find basic models capable of this task, all the way up to the highest end sewing and embroidery machines. Our dream machine is the [Janome Memory Craft 11000 Special Edition](#). It offers an incredible selection of built in embroidery designs and monograms, as well as amazing functionality for regular sewing. Another great sewing and embroidery model is the [Memory Craft 9700](#). This machine offers a solid selection of designs and advanced features at a conservative price.

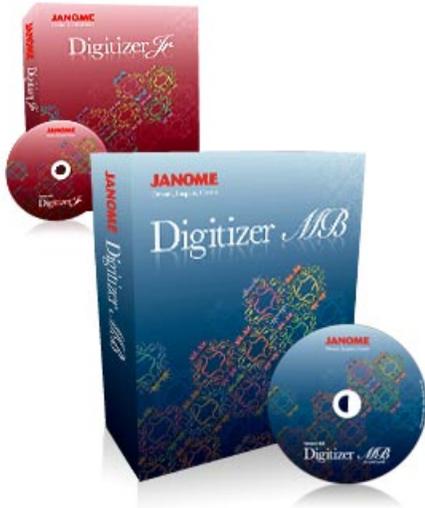
Two-step conversion



One of our favorite things about the Janome sewing and embroidery machines is their two-step conversion from sewing to

embroidery, with no bulky attachments. Nobody else we tested had this feature. I don't know about you, but my work space is at a premium, and the last thing I have room for is a giant attachment I have to drag out every time I want to embroider. It makes a lot more sense to push a couple buttons, swing out the embroidery arm, snap on the hoop and go. Better still, there's NO deterioration in quality. In fact, the Janome stitch precision was the best of the bunch.

Design software



All of these machines are capable of intricate embroidery and monogram work. Some come with more built-in monogram design possibilities than others. But, if you are interested in creating your own embroidery designs, all machines are compatible with special software, called Digitizing Software, that allows you to layout and design embroidery. Janome offers this software in two versions, Digitizer Jr., for the 'newbie' and Digitizer MB, for someone who is ready to really get involved. One of the great things about this software is you can upgrade the Jr. version once you are ready for more challenging work.

Embroidery "field"



Next, think about what you're going to want to monogram. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, you want to make sure your machine is going to be able to handle your material. Each machine has different sized embroidery fields, and you want to make sure your machine can accommodate what you're hoping to do. The size of the designs will also translate into certain hoop sizes. Each machine can accommodate certain size hoops, and the hoops will dictate how large the monogrammed designs can be. Many machines or software programs offer the ability to 'split' designs, which means you can break a design into smaller elements, so you can use a smaller hoop to stitch out a large design in parts. This way, you aren't limited by the hoop size of your machine, but it is going to dictate how complicated a given project may be. Some machines come with a few hoops, and offer others as additional accessories. Other machines can only stitch on the hoop that comes with the machine.

Whole bunch o' hoops



While we're on the topic of hoops, here's a quick review of the hoops that may be available. First, is a standard hoop. This is usually approximately 5" x 5" and will handle most embroidery jobs. Some machines also come with a larger hoop. This will allow you to cover a larger area. Beyond this, many companies offer a very large hoop, which will have a name like "Macro Hoop" or "Giga Hoop" or something designating 'large'. This hoop will allow you to stitch very large designs without re-hooping your fabric – you'd want something like this if you were going to put a large team monogram on the back of a jacket, for instance. On the other side, you can also purchase a very small hoop, which can be used for embroidering small initials on socks or cuffs, or for other small detail work. You may also find specialized hoops, like hat hoops, which (surprise!) are made specifically for embroidering hats.

Data transfer





Another point you will want to consider is the type of digital transfer medium the embroidery machine is capable of reading. This sounds pretty complicated, but really it's not – though it is an important aspect to understand. Embroidery machines are capable of importing designs from other sources, like the Internet or special embroidery design cards. A very common mode of design transfer is the ATA PC card. Many machines use this mode of transfer, and this is a common way designs are sold. Machines will have a port built directly into the machine to read the designs. If you want to download designs from your computer onto an ATA PC card, you will likely need a special card writer to add-on. Some of the newer home embroidery models have a built-in USB port, so you can transfer designs using a memory stick. And, many of the higher end embroidery machines actually contain a direct PC link, so you can plug your desktop or laptop computer directly into the machine to transfer an embroidery design.

Where to shop

We say this quite often on Sew4Home, but it's because we truly believe it: don't skimp on cost at the expense of after-sale support! Especially when you're considering a technical investment like an embroidery machine and the corresponding software. You should purchase your machine from a specialized dealer, not a big box store. A dealer will be there for you in the event the machine needs service, or if you want lessons to really understand the amazing functionality of your new machine. A good dealer gives you the support you need to be able to start monogramming right out of the box.

What to ask

Here's a list of the things mentioned above, as well as a few other features to ask about when you're visiting a dealer:

- What is the size of the embroidery field?
- What size hoops come standard with the machine? Are additional hoop sizes available for this machine?
- How many designs are built in to the machine?
- What is the software compatibility of this machine? What are my choices for digitizing software?
- What is the design transfer medium?
- Does this machine offer two-step conversion from sewing to embroidery?
- Are there additional attachments for converting from sewing to embroidery?
- Does my purchase include lessons or support for the machine?
- Does the manufacturer offer consumer support?
- Finally – ask for a stitch demo. Are the stitches precise and even? Does the machine make a lot of noise, or shake a lot? (If it does – cross it off your list immediately.) Are the steps for monogramming and embroidering intuitive or will you

need a stack of manuals close at hand?

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