

# Buying a knitting machine



## Step One: Decide which gauge machine you are going to buy

Fine Gauge	Needles are 3.5 mm or 3.6 mm apart and equate to 7 gauge. They knit yarns up to and including 3 ply and some fine 4 ply yarns. Pre-owned machines can be difficult to find as they weren't sold in great numbers. Very few new machines around as they are no longer in production.
Standard gauge	Needles are 4.5 mm apart, 5.6 gauge. They knit yarns up to and including 4 ply and some fine double knit yarns. These machines are the most popular and easiest to find, new or pre-owned.
Mid-gauge	Needles are 6 mm or 7 mm apart, approx. 3.9 gauge and work well with DK yarns, including hand knit yarns. These machines often have plastic beds and limited patterning facilities.
Chunky gauge	Needles are 9 mm apart, 2.8 gauge and knit the DK, aran and light chunky weight yarns.

Plastic bed machines are great starter machines for beginners. They are often cheaper than metal bed machines, but do not have the patterning facilities.

All machines are over 1 metre in length and can be as long as 2 metres when all the accessories are added. Japanese plastic machines usually weigh around 4.5 Kg, whilst metal machines weigh in around 16Kg. European machines are heavier still.

You may wish to avoid a Passap if you are a complete beginner. They are generally regarded as being harder to learn (if you have experience of Japanese machines). You cannot see what you are knitting (it comes out underneath and between the two beds of needles) and their patterning is different. Many people prefer to have a motor to move the carriage as it can be less easy to move than the Japanese machines carriages and the patterns may require more movements of the carriage. There is less information available on them. Once you have mastered the necessary skills and techniques to work these machines they produce excellent knitted items. These machines come under the European range of machines and are 5mm needle gauge.

## Step two: Decide what method of patterning you want

**Manual patterning:** needles are selected by hand.

**Push Button patterning:** buttons are pressed and a handle cranked to select needles as required for every row of pattern. Only available on machines that were manufactured pre 1970 approx.

**Punchcard patterning:** needles are selected by the machine according to the pattern punched on a card which is inserted into the card reader. Usually 24 stitch repeat, but some models were 12 or 18 stitch repeat. Fine gauge machines are usually 30 stitch repeat. Patterns can be any length. The punchcards can be flipped and rotated. They can be made "double length" by knitting each row twice but they cannot be knitted "double width".

**Electronic patterning:** needles are selected by the machine according to a pattern loaded into the computer memory of the machine which can contain up to 700 patterns. The patterns can be up to 200 stitches wide (depending on model of machine). Patterns can be flipped, rotated and doubled in length and width. Parts of the pattern can be isolated to create new patterns. Some machines read patterns from mylar sheets or external reader boxes. It is also possible to connect some machines to a computer and input the pattern directly. There may also be a slot for a pattern cartridge which contains additional patterns.

## Step three: Decide whether you are going to buy new or pre-owned

Silver Reed is the main manufacturer of new knitting machines sold in the UK.

<http://www.silverviscount.co.uk/shop/index.php?cPath=22>

There are company in Hong Kong and China manufacturing machines which are occasionally available in the UK and can be purchased via the internet for delivery to the UK. There may be additional import duty, VAT and customs and handling charges on top of the price you see on overseas websites.

The Guild of Machine Knitters website shows links to suppliers of new and pre-owned knitting machines and related equipment.

#### **Step four: Decide how much you can spend and purchase your chosen machine**

Prices vary considerably, depending on whether you are buying new or used, from a dealer or a private sale. Set yourself a limit on how much you want to spend and stick to it. Don't be persuaded by a seller who is telling you it is the bargain of the century and you are a fool to pass it up! Don't be fooled by "it worked when last used" as this could be 20 years or more ago!! An honest seller will be happy to answer questions and help you with your purchase.

When buying new or used from a dealer you can be sure that the machine is in working condition and is complete unless they tell you otherwise. A used machine may also have a short warranty as well. Be aware that some e-bay dealers do not specialise in machine knitting equipment and therefore do not clean and service the machines before they sell them.

Buying privately from an auction site or an advert in a magazine or newspaper can be a bit of a gamble unless you can see the machine working before you buy. It may have parts and instruction manuals missing or that need replacing. Depending on how it was stored and for how long, it may be bent, dirty or even rusty. There are parts that deteriorate with age regardless of how well it has been stored. It will also need careful packaging if it is being posted or couriered to you as it can be damaged through mishandling. Knitting machines are heavy, being typically in excess of 16 Kg before packing.

If you have the option to buy a ribber and other accessories at the same time as the machine, and can afford it, then do so. You don't have to start using them all to begin with but you will have them when you are ready and won't have difficulty in sourcing the correct models.

With all purchases, it should be "Buyer beware". If in doubt about what you are buying – contact us; we may be able to offer an unbiased opinion.

#### **Pre 1960's Machines**

These machines were often well made, mostly from metal with plastic being introduced into the later ones. They may not have a tension mast, or it may be attached to the carriage. The yarn may be carried in a ball holder on the carriage. It may not have a needle retaining bar like the ones used today, instead having either a metal strip or thick cord. Those machines with a needle retaining bar often have different dimensions to the ones used currently so no spares available. Some had moveable sinkers and static needles. The gauges are often non standard and it is almost impossible to purchase spares for them. The earlier machines did not have any patterning mechanism so were great for stocking stitch, but any other stitch needed to be done by hand manipulation of the needles and controls. There were lots of different makes around at this time. Many of the companies did not survive as the machines were not as easy to use as others.

Sellers often think that because the machines are old they are valuable. However there are often essential accessories and instruction books missing. Unless you are a collector they are not worth much at all. A new machine in the 1950's cost between £10 and £35 and you should not expect to pay more than half that for one of them today if it is in working condition.

The exception to this is the Victorian Circular Sock Machines. In working condition these are very desirable and can command fairly high prices. They are extremely heavy. Those that are not in working condition can be restored, but it is an expensive process. Beware of buying a modern copy. Whilst these are good you should not expect to pay as high a price as for a genuine Victorian one.

## **Post 1960's Machines**

Most Japanese machines came with a purpose built lid that closed the machine to make it convenient to carry and store when not in use. It was fitted out with places to store the various tools that came with the machine, and boxes to keep the smaller accessories together. European machines were usually supplied in a cardboard box which has often been lost over the years. An instruction book or manual showing all the pieces that were supplied with the machine and its operation is an advantage. However over the years things can get separated. It is worth checking to make sure all the main parts are present and in good condition. Some parts can be sourced but replacing major items such as the carriage and tension mast can prove expensive and difficult. Before purchase, check that the plastic parts are not cracked or damaged as this can indicate that the machine has been badly treated. The plastic may have changed colour due to UV light, but this should not affect the strength of the plastic or the working of the machine. Check the machine carefully for rust, especially the needles. It may be possible to save a machine with a little light rust, but anything more should be treated with great caution. Grime (often oil, yarn fibres and dust mixed) can often be removed with surgical spirit and a lot of patience. Re-oil the machine with light oil such as sewing machine oil. Do not try to knit with a machine of this age unless the needle retaining bar is in good condition. This bar holds the needles in the correct position so that when the carriage passes over the bed, the needles can collect the yarn and knit the stitch. If the needles are not in the correct position it can result in damage to the needles, carriage and machine.

The optional ribbers do not have a case, but were supplied in a cardboard box with polystyrene packaging. The ribbers, if not stored properly, can bow making them impossible to use. A set of tools, raising clamps, combs and weights as well as a carriage and connecting arm were supplied with the ribber. They are pictured in the instruction book supplied with the ribber.

### **Step 5: Collect your machine**

If possible collect the machine so that you can check it over for damage or missing parts. You may also be able to see it working.

If it isn't possible to collect, the machine should be packed with great care. Wherever possible it should be in the original cardboard box plus additional cushioning material such as bubble wrap or corrugated cardboard inside and outside the machine and its box. It should then have an outer wrapping. It will also need "manual handling only" stickers as the package will be approx 1.5 metre long and about 16Kg for a metal machine. If it is allowed to travel on the conveyor systems it will be damaged unless extreme care is taken with the packaging due to the drops between belts and less than careful handling.

### **Step 6: Set your machine up and start learning how to use it**

It is a steep learning curve so expect to be frustrated when you first start. Take it slowly and read the instruction book. There are also You-Tube videos that may help you. Practice regularly for a shorter time, rather than less frequently for a longer time.

Persevere.

There is help available if you need it.

[www.guild-mach-knit.org.uk](http://www.guild-mach-knit.org.uk)