

## **Operating a Fur Sewing Machine**

I couldn't find written instructions on this, so tried to write some myself, in the hope it helps the next person. There are some videos on the internet that are worth watching.

The model I have is made by Bonis. There are a few different models apparently with the "A" type for lighter sewing and the "B" type for heavier sewing. I wanted to be able to sew beaver as well as raccoon and fox so was advised to get a "B" type.

The Bonis website provides downloadable instruction manuals, that include how to thread the machine. No recommendation about the type of thread is provided though.

I was told to buy nylon 33 or beading thread, which is fine but very strong, by a local sewing machine repairman who has used fur sewing machines for making Teddy bears. It seems to work.

The books I can find about sewing fur suggest waxed cotton thread. New Bedford Thread makes such a product for both machine and hand sewing in several colors, if you can find it at a supplier.

The needles are very difficult to find and usually have to be ordered from Bonis directly in packages of 100 or 1000. An industrial sewing supplier, such as Samuel Bauer in New York, Rubenstein Brothers in Winnipeg, etc., may sell packets of 10 needles.

A packet of ten size 12 needles came with my machine, but apparently Bonis B machines can take 8, 10, 12, and 14. Note that contrary to a traditional home sewing machine, the diameter of the needle is larger for the lower numbers. I also received a pair of bent end tweezers that greatly help in pulling the thread end that one finally manages to push up through the needle, out more for sewing.

The principle involves sewing a chain stitch. There is no bobbin. The needle is horizontal and a little arm called a looper, grabs the thread to help make the chain stitch.

To secure the last stitch, first be sure the needle is as far back as it will go, then one has to open the two wheels, pull the sewn item down and to the front with a yank that both breaks and locks the thread. If one pulls out the sewn material incorrectly (say to the left), then the whole chain stitch quickly starts to unravel, as chain stitch does. If that happens to you and you want to save what hasn't yet unraveled, grab the loop of thread at the front with those tweezers and pull the thread forward and through it to tighten that last loop.

If you pull the leather or fabric too hard the needle may tend to get pulled forward and instead of going into its little groove in the plate above the front wheel, it hits an edge of metal and breaks.

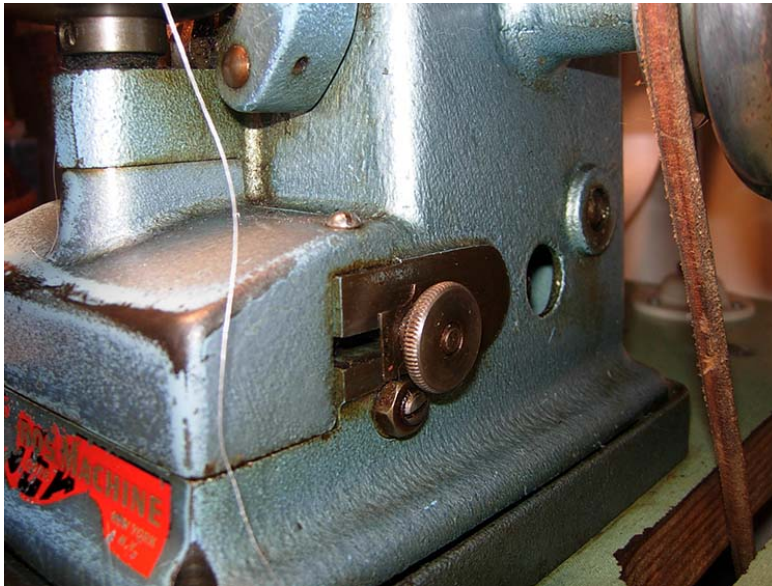
To begin, try to find some scrap leather, even if you cut up an old coat from a thrift store. Starting with fur right away, adds an extra complexity.

Align two pieces of practice leather and then use your foot to press on the wrought iron pedal that pulls the front wheel towards you and allows you to place the pieces of leather between the two wheels vertically. The manual wheel at the right can be used to pull the needle back away from the opening.

To sew, use the larger treadle and a “light foot”. I find that slower is better. But maintaining a slow pace seems quite difficult since the machine wants to go very fast.

On the B models, there is a little arm that juts out over the back wheel at the left. That arm is meant to be the guide that lets you know the right level at which to position the leather pieces. If you go too high, problems arise.

The A model apparently doesn't have such a guide.



There is a knob on the base of the machine's right side. If you loosen it you can adjust the spacing of the stitches. Moving it back makes the stitches further apart. Moving it forward makes the stitches closer together.

I have not found a way to adjust the height of the stitches.

To adjust the tension, use the knob at the top of the machine. Turning the knob to the right, makes the stitches tighter.

If you miss passing the thread over the little screw at the left over the rear wheel, the stitches skip and are a mess, so this is critical and may be one aspect of the tension.



## Sewing Fur

Once you feel you've mastered the speed and height to get a nice even row of stitches on leather, consistently, you could try fur.

Many videos make it look very easy because they take a piece of fake fur and fold it so that the fold is up between the wheels and the furry side of the fabric is down. I guess that would be another way to practice BUT.....



In reality you would not want to just put a tuck in a piece of fur but to actually join two pieces of fur together or perhaps one piece of fur to grosgrain ribbon or twill tape edging.

You must carefully push the fur hairs down so that the exposed edges are hidden only with no fur protruding. If fur protrudes, it will interfere with the looper arm and you'll get a tangle instead of a row of chain stitches.

Note that to the left the beaver fur is tucked down and OK, but to the right would be terrible. Being able to slow down the machine is particularly helpful for this.

Using alligator clamps to hold the two fur pieces together instead of pins can be helpful to stay aligned.

It is slightly easier to have only one piece of fur and the other twill tape or grosgrain, but depending on the item you want to make, there may not be any such sewing to do. Also try not to begin with a very thick skinned, plush fur like beaver.

Sheila Schmutz, 28 Dec 2014