

Hey everybody, it's Rob. Welcome back to Man Sewing. Again, I hope you had a fantastic week without me but I'm certainly glad you're joining in. Today I want to play with some fun basic tips on free motion machine quilting. And of course we're getting very excited out there. A lot of us are diving deep into the world of our own free motion machine quilting. It's one of the reasons I started quilting. But let's talk a little bit about some of the differences real quick, right? So a lot of folks are treating themselves to those fantastic long-arms or like I have in my home studio, a nice sit down like a 16 to 18 inch. We call those the sit down mid-arms a lot of time. But I want to show you how to do a lot of this set up on your standard little domestic sewing machine here. So this is a Baby Lock Melody. And it's very similar to a lot of entry level machines let's say. So there's a few key features if you have. We like to go ahead and drop our feed dogs on the machine. So a lot of these machines have the feed dogs drop on the back end. So I drop my feed dogs personally and that keeps them from kind of feeling on the fabric. Or you could set your stitch length to zero. I'm going to also put one of these kinds of extension tables. This is almost a must for me. And the reason I say that is when we approach our machine we want to be able to have both of our hands kind of comfortably here at roughly a 90 degree angle. You'll have to forgive me a little bit, I'm standing obviously on the set here while I do this. At home of course, I'm seated. But this is actually a pretty good position for me with this sewing machine. As I stand here though and my hands kind of fit in, I notice that I can't visually see the needle real well. So a lot of times I will push the machine back from my body a little ways or right now today, I'm just going to step back because I want to be able to see what the needle's doing even though I'm not watching each and every stitch.

Now I've got a couple of quick tips out there that will give you more information on my needle choices and the different free motion feet. But let's start with putting on the free motion foot from Baby Lock. Always use the one that comes from your manufacturer when possible. This is considered a standard hopping foot so it's spring loaded like you see here. And one of my tricks is as I come around, I've already removed my standard presser foot. And as I come around here, I'm going to push down on the spring to try to bring the shank holder onto the screw on the presser foot bar. A lot of technical terms, sorry about that. And then the other thing I was looking for, there's a little wire feature that comes above the foot. And that's going to actually ride on the spring. So as my needle goes up and down, that spring is controlled by the movement of the needle actually. So it goes up and over the needle bar. Some of us struggle putting that on location or putting it into the machine. So my trick is, once I start wrestling with it, I'll lower my needle slightly so that I can get the spring up and over that needle screw itself. It's always a good idea to check to make sure that your needle is in nice and tight because there's going to be a lot of vibration on that needle screw. As well as your presser foot is also on tight because if

it falls off while you're stitching, you will probably not get the best results. And you might even say some negative words, so. But anyways, just be careful with that. Those are tightened in. And then I'm also using right now, a sharpes 70. For you beginners, I'm going to recommend the sharpes 80. It's just a little bit larger needle. And that will keep you from some thread shredding if your body mechanics aren't perfect at the beginning, right? But I also love the jeans/denim needles because they both feature a fairly small eye and a nice sharp tip to deliver the needle through the quilt, nice and fast.

Now there's a bazillion, which is a combination between a billion and a million, apparently. So bazillion. Different kinds of accessories out there. There's only a few that I really, truly use. I like some sort of a teflon mat. My favorite is the Sew Slip mat. And this will normally cover the bed of the machine so it turns the bed of the machine into like an ice skating rink. So the fabric has no drag and flows nice and smooth. One of the things you're challenged with is fatigue. So if you approach your machine, and your shoulders go up like this, you're going to cramp up in your neck pretty quickly. And or if you have a lot of drag on your machine, you're going to start to wear out in your forearms. Or if you're squeezing real tight on your quilt, you also might start to tighten up your forearms. Once your body fatigues, your motions are going to get choppy and your stitch quality will probably drop. So I say you can quilt as long as you're not fatigued. Some of us fatigue during our warm up and we never get into our real quilting process, right? So having that slider mat on there will help you eliminate friction. And then I also always wear these Machingers gloves. So the Machingers gloves is a nice lightweight glove but it's got a rubberized tip. Grabbery gloves are also wonderful. I like those as well. I apologize, I won't be putting them on today because I left mine at home. And these small/mediums are not fitting the Man Sewing hands today. So we're just going to set those aside. So that is also my excuse, right? If my stitching doesn't go well while we're doing live filming today I'm just going to blame it on not having my accessories. How does that sound? That's my casual disclaimer there as we get started now.

So the next thing we want to talk about, a little bit, is I've just taken and made myself a practice sandwich. Now the fun thing about a practice sandwich like this, you can see I've even tested my machine already before we started rolling cameras today. Is something like this gives me quadrants. A lot of us as we approach our machine quilting we kind of freak out, like Oh my gosh, what am I going to do all over the quilt. Well my dear friend Angela Walters taught me early on, Hey just look at it one piece at a time. And just practice in each little area as you go. So I love making practice sandwiches that have a little bit of patchwork in them. So that I can focus on one specific area. So I planned to give you a couple of different practice motifs after I

explain a little bit about what we're doing here. So I have also basted this quilt with my safety pins. I usually just use the curved safety pins because it's nice and easy. And normally you would have a safety pin about this distance apart but I've already been able to remove it from the center because I have this basted down now with the actual free motion machine quilting. On the back, fabric. In the middle, batting. On the top, your quilt or your practice piece. And I cannot tell you how important it is to always warm up and always practice before you put your real quilt underneath the machine. It's just no fun to tear out a free motion machine quilting stitches, right?.

I've got the Sew Slip mat installed for you already but let me tell you what I've done. I've pulled the paper off of the back. And it has a silicone on the back and a teflon topper. And of course all the mats work the same way. This is just one I happen to enjoy using. And it has a single little hole cut out of it that's a little bit smaller than a dime and that's going to go through the opening on the stitch plate and when you drop your needle, you want to make sure your needle is going to go into the center of that hole or near the center of that hole as you go.

So let's go ahead and bring our sandwich in. And one of the first questions I often get asked is how do we start? What do we do with our bobbin thread? So I'm going to push this over here. And if you have a needle up, needle down feature on your sewing machine, it's one of the easiest ways to get a stitch, a single stitch I should say. And I'm also going to go ahead and try to line this up right in the seam allowance or somewhere where it's fairly invisible to see to start with. So I'm dropping my needle. And I'm picking it back up. And I'm going to take my needle's thread, and I'm going to literally floss underneath the presser foot and bring that bobbin thread right up as well. I have two different colors of thread in the machine. This is a practice sample. One of the best ways to see how your tension is functioning, hopefully very well. Is to run two different colors of thread. So that you can see where the pull is happening so that you can adjust your top tension accordingly. So let me tell you what that means. If I see the dark blue from my bobbin, on the top of the quilt, my top tension is too tight, generally. Or the bobbin is not in tension at all. But generally it's the top tension so I'm going to loosen it to allow that loop to form in the batting again. If I'm seeing specks on the back of quilt of the top thread, then my top tension was too loose. If I've got a caterpillar being born on the back of the quilt, big long loops you could run your finger through, there was no tension on your thread. So there's a difference between poor tension and no tension. And I'm sure unfortunately we've all seen both sides of that coin. So I have both of my threads now up on the top of my quilt. I'm going to take a few stitches to lock it in. Actually I'm going to put my presser foot back down and take a few stitches to lock it in. And then I'm going to begin sewing.

My first practice motif for you is to learn circles. A lot of folks are very terrified of circles but circles are the end and beginning of all of your curves. Now my first quilting teacher was Mr. Miyagi. Remember, quilt on, quilt off kind of thing. So with that, I'm going to show a big circle, little circle drill to get both of my hands working correctly so that I can spin my curves in any direction at any time, let's hope. Here we go. So I'm going to bring the fabric towards me. And I'm going to begin stitching a couple stitches away. And I'm going to go into like a little circle and then I'm going to come out here and do a bigger circle. Back into a little circle. And a big circle. And this is a really good practice motif to kind of, like I said, get used to your circles. But there's another thing that can really happen in this. Some machines have a tendency to drop stitches or skip stitches more than others. Some of us have to take responsibility for that ourselves as well. When the needle drops, actually when the needle drops, the hook passes behind and forms, helps form the stitch. When we're free motion machine quilting we can be bending that needle around, therefore, if we pull the needle out of the way, we could skip a stitch. And if we push the needle into the way we could break thread or break a needle. So when I'm doing my circles, if I'm having problems especially at the bottom end of my circle on almost all machines, I am probably pulling the quilt too hard. I'm not driving the Auto Bahn correctly and spinning out of those curves kinds of things. So if you're doing circles and you see the same problem over and over, the same, think of it like a clock. Maybe between four o'clock and seven o'clock, it's probably that you're pulling the quilt a little faster than the machine really wants to go. I hope that makes a little bit of sense for you. So that's why I like this drill so much. But then as you get good at circles, you can actually start getting into a pebbles or a circle motif. The pebbles or the circle motif is really fun but the key to this, and this is a great filler by the way. The key to the circle or the key to the pebble motif is always complete 360 degrees of your circle. So yes, you will be stitching over the top of thread that you had already laid down before. I'm just going to spend a moment and do some circles. Watch along if you can. I'll try to keep my shoulder out of the way here.

One of the things that happens a lot of the times is you'll work yourself into or paint yourself into a corner, you are more than welcome to rotate your quilt as long as your needle is not moving. So watch. If I wanted to spin this to get a little different angle so I could see where I'm going, I'm happy to rotate the quilt but the machine was not moving while I did that. And one of the other fun things once you get your circles dialed in or even better if you're struggling getting those rounded shape circles, cobblestones and circles are both very wonderful fillers. But they look a little different. So cobblestones are going to be rectangles and triangles. Think about a fireplace. So you can take your circle motif and then the key is just make some more oblonger shapes.

But my brain is stuck on circles right now. But you still want to fill in that gap. You can see how I just followed myself back around so I can get myself out of that corner I was painted into again. So again, with these filler stitches, it's really functional and gives you a lot of freedom to get away from where you don't want to be or get you where you want to be. Now the fun thing about circles over time is a lot of us achieve or strive to achieve things like feathers and cool swirls and swoops. So once my arms got used to doing that circular motion then what I personally like to do is, let's say I'll just come out and just set a curve and then I kind of play with it.

So come in nice and close, you're going to see what I define as consistency. That's right. If you look nice and close you're going to see my stitches are almost all different lengths, and therefore that defines the consistency. Of course, they're all supposed to be the same length. And this stitch length right here is nice because you can see the quilting. Short, short stitches tend to bring your bobbin thread to the top. Big long stitches tend to get really chunky or blocky. Think of it this way, a circle with only four stitch points, is a square. So no, you don't have to put 360 stitches in every circle but the more stitches, the more round it looks. So here were our circles down in here. Starting with the small circle to big circle. Then I was playing with the cobble, so a little bit more oblong shapes and things, still filling in the area in between. And you can see where I've been able to travel in and out of my stitching. And then here I was just playing with those swirls and playing with the hoops and loops and things. And then into my scallops which I also find are a nice filler. So reminder, the circle is important because it builds your hand control. But it also shows you if you're having odd spots between you and your machine. Once you can do circles, you can curve in any direction and that's why I like you to do big smirgle, circle, small circle drills so that you start to control your brain. What happens to me sometimes is I'm thinking, Gosh I certainly, I'm getting stuck. And sometimes when I get stuck I just keep the machine going and it's like circling with a big red marker like: He didn't know what to do right here. He didn't know what to do right here. So if you're getting stuck, just stop and replan. And that's a nice reason to be working in different sections. So you want to see another quick drill here?

Ok, so for our next motif we're going to do some straight line stitching. And what we want to do with the straight line stitching is try to do no more than about two stitch point at each change of direction. So I'd be going straight, stitch, stitch, the next direction. These make cool fillers as well. Kind of Aztec looking maybe. One of the keys I like to do is not to make all of them the same size so sometimes big long runs. Sometimes short little runs. Kind of changing directions as I go. That works a really nice motif, let me show you what that looks like, ok? So there's a version of some of those straight line stitches and that's just nice easy stitching but changing

direction. But let's talk a little bit more about our stitch consistency, right? See these stitches here, those are a little long for my taste. How did that happen? Big stitches come from a slow moving machine and fast moving hands, right? I'm jumping too quickly between my stitches. Conversely small stitches come from a machine that's going really, really fast and I'm just barely moving my hands, kind of like you saw in the circles. So big stitches and small stitches come from your rhythm with the machine. And one of my tricks usually is headphones so I'm feeling the vibration in the machine and I've got something else setting my pace, some nice music going on in my head. And of course something that I like to listen to.

So meandering is where a lot of us start. Meandering can be pretty easy but a lot of folks kind of get stuck in that puzzle piece mode. And I've heard a lot of wonderful educators describe how to work through that mode, one of the easiest, I thought was really neat was kind of looking at like heart shapes, half hearts as you go around and then you're changing direction again. So let me see if I can do that for you real quick. I'm going to do these a little bit larger than you normally would want to do them. And then once I've set a few in, I just kind of play with those with those as I go. And I am so happy right now because I am starting to show some tension issues. I kind of felt my needle snag earlier and I didn't take the time to check what was going on in the bobbin. So I'm going to be able to show you some really nice tension problems here in a second. Just what you all hoped for, right? Ok, now let's stop, finish our motifs for the day and talk one more troubleshooting issue as well. And I think we've all been told this a million times but now you're going to see it live. Whenever you have a poor stitch situation or a thread jam, you are really wisest to re-thread your entire machine, cutting your thread at the spool, taking it all the way out in sewing direction always. That way the lint travels out of your machine nicely. But then also take the time to check your bobbin. When I was pulling up my bobbin thread last, I felt like that bobbin thread was loose. And now look at what we have going on. I'm now seeing that dark blue thread from the backside show up on the top of the quilt so my fear came true right here. And you can really see it exaggerated in the stitch points. So I could talk free motion machine quilting forever. I absolutely love this. And I tell you what, I hope you enjoyed it as well. So if you will for me, in the comments section below, ask me some questions and/or ask me or send me some information about what else you would like to see with free motion. Our goal with Man Sewing here is to offer this kind of information constantly for you. But I really want to know what you really want to know. So when you finish up your practice piece, let me know what you still need to know about free motion machine quilting and we'll get it answered for you here at Man Sewing.