

# Bad Sewing Room Habits

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Everyone knows how much I love vintage sewing machines: finding them, servicing them, collecting them – and, of course, sewing with them. They really are mechanical marvels that will give years of service in exchange for a little TLC.



As interesting as the machines themselves are the traces left behind by the people whose lives they have already passed through. The care they took with their machines, their attention to detail and their preferences, the little extras tucked into cabinets and cases – all of these tell a story. I love to imagine my predecessors sewing beautiful garments, toys, and household items with their much-loved machines.



But then again, maybe not. As much as I like to imagine dedicated machine owners, I also all too frequently see evidence of bad habits in the care of these beautiful vintage workhorses.

Below are my top picks for the three worst sewing room habits I've come across in my years caring for and sewing on vintage sewing machines.

## Bad Habit #1: Razor Blades

It turns out a lot of people use razor blades to rip out stitches, but double-edged blades?! What are you thinking?



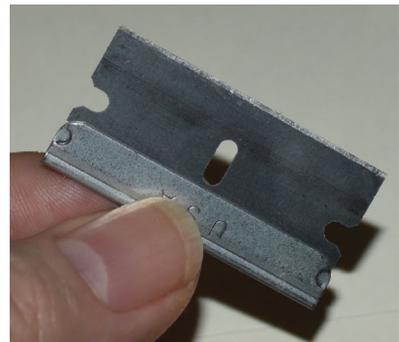
There's just no way to wield these bare blades without risking injury. But even more disturbing is how many people simply toss the loose blades into the accessory box. I can't begin to count how many times I've opened a box of vintage attachments, only to find one or more of

these un-sheathed blades loose among the contents. It's a practice that's not only stupid and dangerous, but all too common. (If you happen to buy one of these boxes, do be sure to dump the contents out and check them before scrabbling through with unwary fingers.)

Here's the thing: seam rippers are sharp when new and cheap to replace, so you should never really need to use a razor blade to rip out stitches.



However, if for some reason you just have to reach for a razor blade, choose a single-edged style that has a safe edge to hold onto. Then store or dispose of it safely, with blade covered.



## Bad Habit #2: Pin Rags

Every collector of vintage machines has seen this at least once: a length of cloth wrapped around the machine arm, in place of a pincushion. I have even seen this



odious practice recommended in a book of sewing hints!! But you should NEVER do this. The photo below shows why.

This beautiful model 15 treadle machine came to me with its finish destroyed by scarring from just such a pin rag. What a shame, and short of refinishing the entire machine,



there is nothing that can be done to repair unsightly damage like this. Please DON'T DO THIS to your vintage machine – or any machine – no matter where you see it recommended. Use an actual pincushion instead.

### **Bad Habit #3: Double-Wound Bobbins**

Have you ever come across this habit of winding a second colour of thread onto a bobbin on top of thread already wound in place? I first saw this done by a sewing friend when I was a young teen, and it's always driven me nuts. I didn't get it then and I still don't. My friend seemed to think it saved thread, but actually this isn't the case. Plus it's inconvenient for a host of reasons.



The bottom thread on a double-wound bobbin is inaccessible, and thus already wasted, so why not just empty the bobbin and reload it with the new colour when you're starting a project?

As well, the machine can't evenly wind a bobbin when it has thread already on it, so you may well end up with feed problems and uneven stitches. Also, it's



frustrating to run short of thread because the bobbin that looks to be full of the fashion colour actually isn't. And finally, thread that has been compacted under another layer can become impossible to unwind, and must be cut free -- way more work than removing the leftover thread in the first place. (BTW, the double-wound bobbins in the pictures weren't filled by me. They came this way with some of my pre-owned machines.)

Here's a better solution: Bobbins for most domestic machines are readily available and inexpensive, so do yourself a favour and buy a few extras. As for me, I have well over 100 of each type used in my machines (66, 15, class L, and 221).