

So What's It Like? First Impressions of the Halo X

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It's not quite a week since my new Halo X was delivered to my door. I had hoped to take some photos of the unboxing when the crate arrived, but my brother and sister-in-law unpacked the crate and moved the machine upstairs before I had a chance to get out the camera.

The machine is installed now in the craft loft, and although I haven't yet mastered the machine, I've been playing with it a fair bit since last Saturday.

The Halo X normally comes with these standard accessories:

INCLUDED ACCESSORIES

- Solid mobile steel stand
- Independent bobbin winder
- Maintenance tool kit
- 1 x 90mm round hoop
- 1 x 120mm round hoop
- 1 x 170mm round hoop
- 1 x 240mm square hoop
- 1 x 360mm x 240mm rectangular hoop



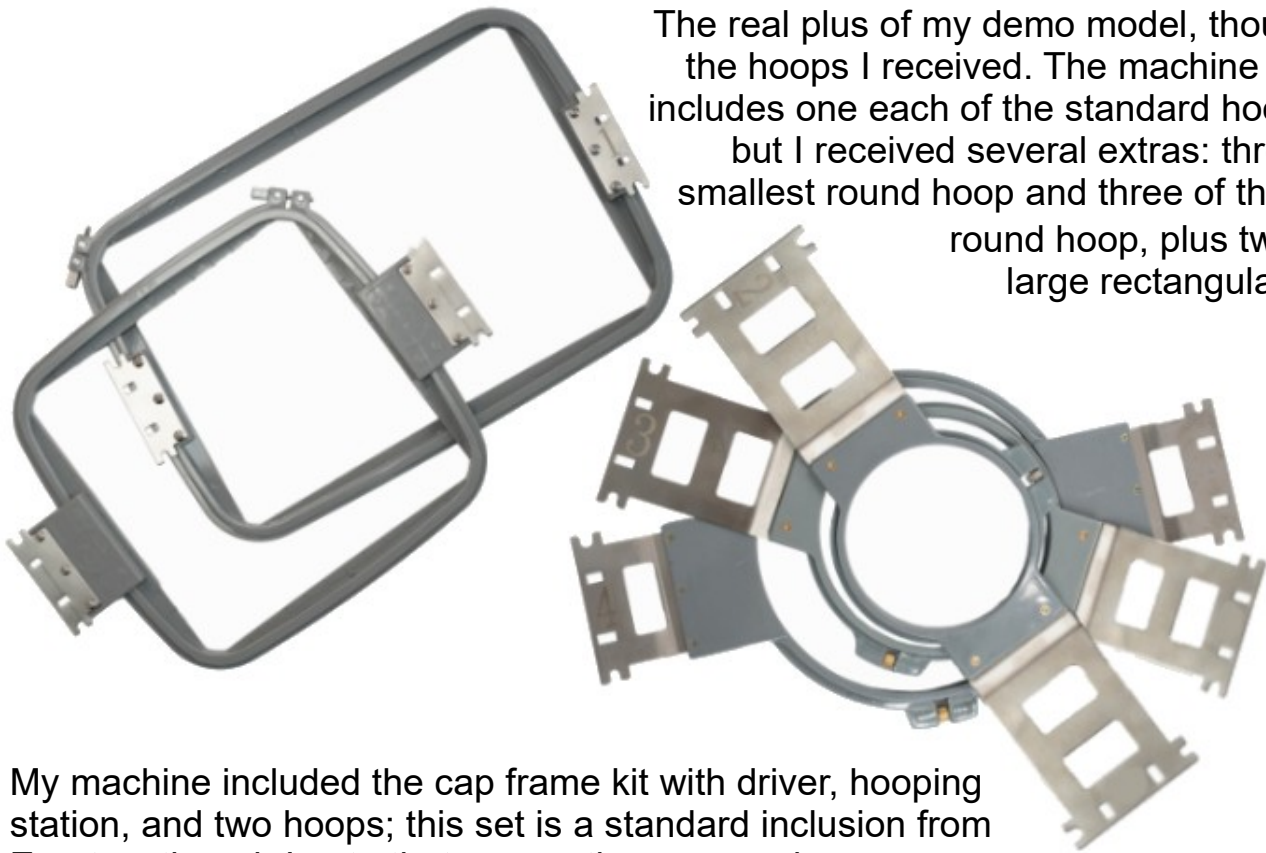
I should note again that mine is a demo model, so what came with it doesn't quite correspond to the standard list at left.

For starters, my machine didn't include the bobbin winder that normally comes with a new machine. I already own a different model winder, but if I did want one like this, I discovered what looks to be the identical model on line for about \$50 CDN. I think my friend plans to get me one for Christmas.



Although I didn't get the winder, I more than made up for it with some extras that did come with my demo machine. First off, I received 10 large cones of Madeira embroidery thread; most are partly used, but there's still a lot of thread here. New, these cones cost \$15, plus shipping.

The real plus of my demo model, though, is in the hoops I received. The machine normally includes one each of the standard hoop sizes, but I received several extras: three of the smallest round hoop and three of the largest round hoop, plus two of the large rectangular hoop.



My machine included the cap frame kit with driver, hooping station, and two hoops; this set is a standard inclusion from Eurotex, though I note that some other companies offer the cap kit as an expensive extra.

My demo machine also included two more accessories that are normally add-ons costing around \$250: a sock frame with two hoops and a shoe frame.



I've never seen hoops like these before: I don't think such things are available for the Brother line. I can't wait to try them out, once I get completely comfortable with the machine.



I haven't done many projects yet -- just a few things to start getting a feel for the machine: a couple of tee shirts for Christmas, including this Black Sabbath tee for my SIL in her favourite colour (purple). I kind of wish now that I'd

done the image in a different shade of purple instead of the gold: I think it might have looked good as a tone-on-tone design.



In addition to the tee shirts (I've done five so far), I have also made a couple of ornaments and some toy eyes. I even tried out a brand new Mini Stocking ornament, just digitized this morning. This is my family tartan, and I can't wait to make these for my siblings, once I decide on a tiny toy to put inside.



So: what are my first impressions of the Halo X? As advertised, it really is very quiet, and it has a substantial feel to it, as befits a more industrial style machine. Threading is actually pretty straightforward, and although it's got more guides than the Brother, it's not particularly complicated once you've done it a couple of times. I should mention that this machine, like most industrials, doesn't have an automatic threader, so you have to thread the needles by hand. The needles are quite accessible though, so it's not particularly difficult to do. Plus, I'm used to hand-threading, since my PR600 threader has been broken for years (!).

I'll admit I was a little apprehensive at first about adapting to DST format, which doesn't store colour information. I feared I might find it confusing to sew out designs with many colour changes, such as this Mesh Stocking Ornament design, which has 14 colour changes. At right is what it looks like in my software, with the colours set as I want them to look.



But – oh no! -- below is how the design looked when I first loaded it into the machine: every colour rendered the same. How on earth will I ever be able to keep track of my colour changes??



In fact I need not have worried, because the Halo is way ahead of me, and what I had feared might be an issue is absolutely a non-problem.

As it turns out, you can actually set the colours right in the machine, by clicking on the colour list at the right of the screen, which takes you to a window where you can select the needle with the colour you want for each stitch object. Then -- presto! -- the design shows on the screen in the colours you want to sew.



I love the display on the Halo: it's nice and bright, and although the panel itself is only 7", the area showing the design stitch-out is large and clear, and it shows the progress of the design, so there's no ambiguity about where you are in the process. It's miles ahead of the display on my poor old PR600.

It's going to take me a bit more practice to master the commands, which are in symbols rather than words as they are on the Brother. There's a bit of a learning curve, all right, but I love the machine so far.

I haven't yet tried the largest hoop (the 9.5" x 14" size), but I do really like the large square hoop (240mm, or 9.5") for doing tee-shirts. I'm not yet fully accustomed to the round hoops. I think they're better in many ways than the square and rectangular hoops featured on domestic machines, because the fabric is held with the same tension in all directions. But it seems to me that they might waste a bit more stabilizer because of the configuration. I just have to get used to thinking in those terms when I'm setting up the design for stitching -- and when I'm digitizing.

It occurs to me that I will be needing a new hooping station, because my HoopMaster PR600 version won't support the Halo hoops. So far I haven't been able to find one in Canada, so I may have to see if I can come up with something on my own. That's a project for another day.

I'm also going to have to reorganize my craft loft, to accommodate both the Brother (for now) and the Halo. That may mean disposing of some of the sewing machines so I will have room to actually work. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

At any rate, I am really enjoying my new Halo so far, and I'm even more delighted with the deal I got on purchase, and with the extra hoops that were included. I really couldn't be happier with my purchase.

Now to get stitching: I've still got projects to complete for Christmas, and time is not getting any longer!

