A Year In: Halo X Update

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Originally Posted 2026 October 16



As you may recall, it's just about a year since I got my new Halo 10-needle embroidery machine, to replace my poor old Brother PR600, which is coming to the end of its life.

This is a commercial machine and more complex than my PR600; possibly it's more machine than I really need, but as I get more comfortable with it, I'm sure I'll be doing many more projects than I was able to do on my Brother as it began to fail.

Happily, the basic embroidery functions are fairly straightforward, so I was able to start embroidering right away.



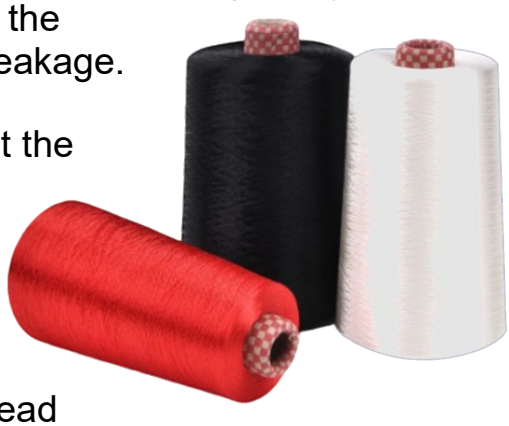
Actually, I did a fair bit of stitching leading up to Christmas last year, right after I got the machine: a few tees and some small patches and ornament projects mainly. I was thrilled with the results.

The machine is quiet, as promised, and the stitch quality is superb – in those respects it's all that could be hoped for.

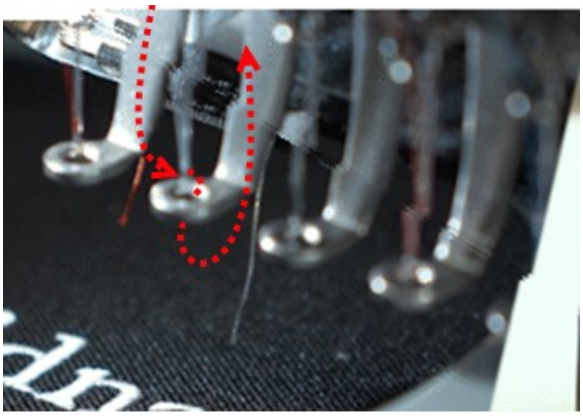
But as with any new piece of equipment, there have been a few growing pains.

The first concern I ran into was thread breaks, which I found to be much more of an issue than I ever recall having with my PR600. For a time I was having to re-thread the machine multiple times during each small project. What a pain!

It turned out that the thread breakage problem was the result of a combination of factors. First, although I've mostly used polyester thread for years, I do have some rayon threads left from when I first bought my Brother PR600. Though they worked fine in the Brother, this machine does not seem to like the rayon, which is much more prone to shredding and breakage.



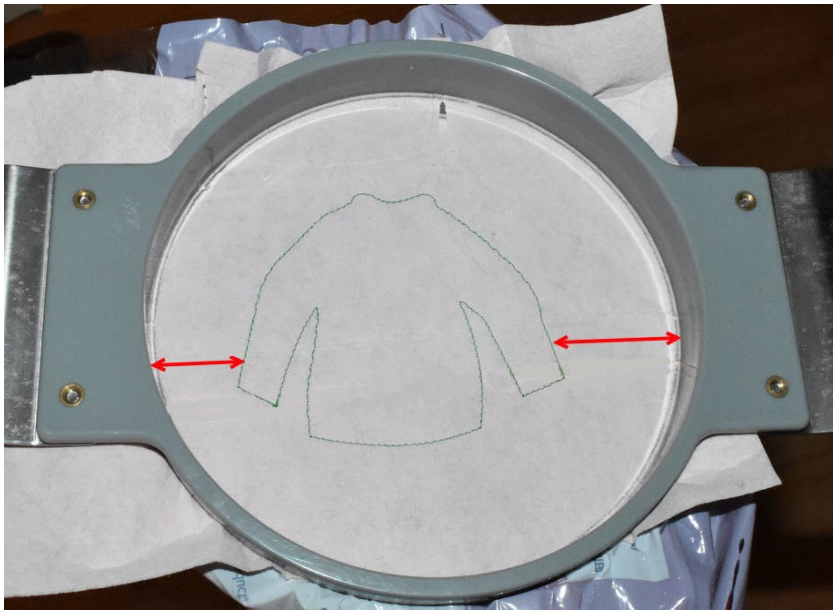
And, I'm embarrassed to say, I had neglected to adjust the tension on the needles, just leaving the settings where they were when the machine arrived. I now suspect that they may have been tightened up for shipping, because they were set too tight.



The rest of the thread breakage problem seems to have been operator error: I had neglected to run the thread down through the eye of the foot after threading the needle. This a step isn't required on the Brother, so by habit I had fallen back into threading just as I used to do on the PR600.

I'm happy to report that now that I'm sewing exclusively with polyester thread, and correctly drawing the thread through the foot, and now that I've loosened the tension a bit, the thread-breaking issue seems to have pretty much taken care of itself.

The next issue is a bit more serious: I have been unable to get the installed hoops to centre correctly. This didn't seem to be an issue with the larger hoops that I used for t-shirts, but when I stitched an ornament design on one of the small round hoops, I ran into a persistent issue.



Although I centred my design in the settings menu, it repeatedly sewed out off-centre.

For example, I was making some Hogwarts Sweater ornaments, but although I centred the design in the hoop, it shifted slightly to the left of centre, as you can see on this test outline that I stitched after discovering that the machine wasn't lining up correctly.

I ruined several pieces of felt before I realized that the machine wasn't auto-centring. It also wasn't allowing me to centre the designs manually. I found a short-term solution, using my test-stitched outline to position my felt pieces off-centre, and I got the sweaters finished up without further mishap.





But this isn't a long-term solution. Possibly there's a setting issue that may stem from this having been a demo machine, and possibly the hoops just need to be recalibrated (as I used to have to do on my PR600 from time to time), but frustratingly, the manual doesn't address how to do this, and I have been unable to find any information on line.

Meanwhile, I really need to know reliably where the centre of my design will fall within the hoop, or I'll be in for a lot of frustration and wasted materials. Fortunately, despite my relative unfamiliarity with the machine, I have managed to find a work-around.

Unlike my Brother, the Halo has a "no hoop" option in the hoop selection window, which disables the machine's hoop detection function and allows me to manually centre the design in any hoop. I just need to run the trace function to ensure that the design is positioned properly and that the needle won't hit the sides of the hoop.

With this hack, I can even use my old PR600 hoops with the new brackets that adapt them to the Halo.





Until I figure out how to re-calibrate the installed hoops, I can use this work-around to keep myself in stitches. So far it's been 100% effective.

I'm pretty sure that I'll eventually learn how to correct this calibration issue, just as I used to do from time to time on my Brother. Apart from this glitch, I'm am otherwise really pleased with the machine. Right now I'm already busy working on some of the many small projects I am making for Christmas. Among these are some new ornaments for Louise, who kicked things off with another four VON shirts.



Next I made this set of beautiful FSL Christmas angels from Sonia Showalter. I love this colour combination, and the machine stitched the lace beautifully.





I expect I'll be making a bunch of my new "Hugs" ornaments, like these ones for Louise that feature the name of her home town. The versatile design can be customized to any province or town by changing the applique fabric and the caption.



I'm really very chuffed with this snowshoe ornament that Louise requested. It's made with a freestanding lace technique, and stiffened using Aleene's fabric stiffener solution. As an afterthought, I added a touch of greenery and alder cones for a decorative touch. I know she'll love these.

Now that I've got an effective work-around for the hoop centring issue, I can get to work on the several other embroidery projects that I've got in the queue for Christmas: more shirts, some additional patches, several embroidered ornaments, and more Christmas gift bags. Maybe I'll even make another couple of Christmas stockings!