

My Kenmore Rotary 117.600

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My sewing machine collecting began about 15 years ago, just after my mom gifted me her vintage Singer 99. Until that point, I had carefully avoided collecting *anything*. But for some reason the 99 opened the floodgates, and I was hooked. Before I knew it, the “herd” had swelled to 100+ machines.



I've had a lot of fun gathering these beautiful machines, and learning a bit about servicing them, and they are all lovely in their own way. But the truth is I now just have too many. I can't possibly use all of them, and I hate to see any machine sitting unused, so . . . it's time to move some of them on to new homes.

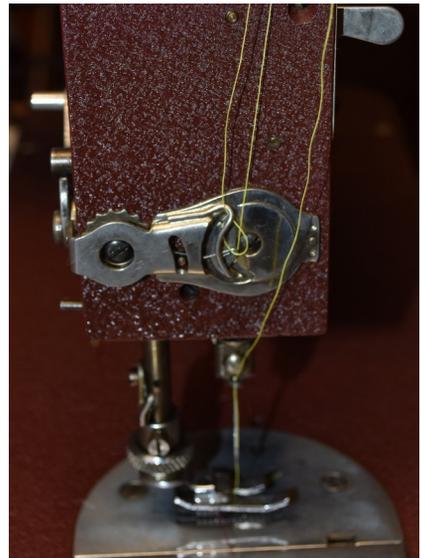
Once I had made the decision to clear out some of the machines, I planned to base my selection on a single factor: not on which are most “collectable”, nor which are rarest. Instead, I'll keep only machines that I really *love* to sew on. Some choices, like my mom's 99, or my gorgeous Kenmore 158.16, have been easy. But others aren't quite so straightforward.



Enter the Kenmore 117.600. This one's a bit of an oddball, with its unusual angular appearance, strange controls, a handwheel that turns away from the user, unique bobbins, and an old-fashioned top-mount presser foot style.



I've had this machine for a few years now, but had never actually sewn on it. I think I was a bit intimidated by its strangeness. For one thing, take a look at this tensioner, which is unlike any I've encountered before. At first, I wasn't even sure I'd be able to thread the thing! For another, the machine takes unusual bobbins that are difficult to find and very expensive (I just saw a set of 4 listed for \$15 USD on Etsy!)



It did come with a single bobbin, but you may recall that I like to keep extras on hand for all my machines, and I didn't fancy paying that much to acquire more. I also didn't have any presser feet to fit, and wasn't sure if I had even threaded it correctly.

Thanks to some helpful youtubers, I was I was able to confirm the threading and bobbin function, so I could give the machine a try. In preparation for listing it, I made a couple of small projects . . . and guess what happened next!

It turns out that the Kenmore 117.600 sews like a dream – it's smooth as butter, with perfectly formed stitches. And it's strong too – it will stitch through multiple layers of denim and not even notice. And it's actually FUN to sew on!

The decision I had expected to be easy was turning out to be more difficult than I'd anticipated. I agonized. I fretted. I really like sewing on this machine. But no bobbins? And no presser feet?

That's when Destiny took a hand, because it turned out I did already have some bobbins, picked up some time ago at a thrift store. At the time I didn't even know what machine these fit, but the price was right, and I'm always happy to have extra bobbins just in case. So in a flash I went from a single bobbin to nine! And then, on my



very next thrifting excursion, I found this box of attachments – the correct mount for the Kenmore Rotary – marked only \$2.99, with 30% off. Talk about serendipity!

With my reasons for moving the machine along quickly evaporating, I ended up deciding to keep it.

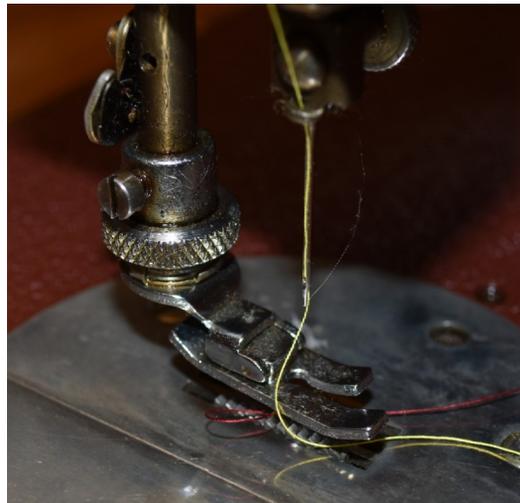
If the records I found are correct, this machine dates to 1938. It's badged Kenmore, but it's actually a White Rotary, the first of their round bobbin models. It's a robust and reliable stitcher, and it's also in remarkably good condition, both cosmetically and mechanically. It's been sewing for 83 years, and I'm sure it will keep on sewing for another 83. Let's have a closer look.

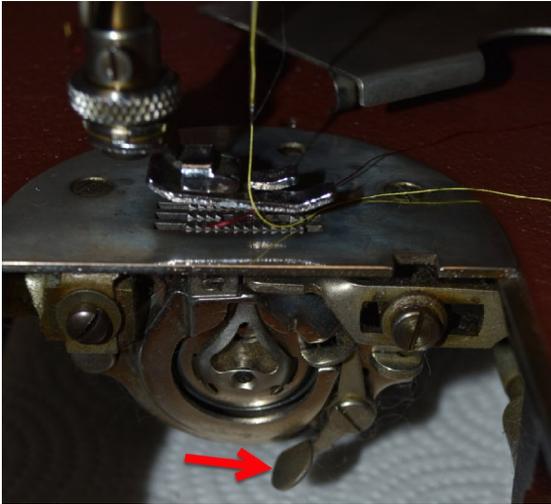
The reason the handwheel turns away from the user is that it's a direct friction drive – a rubber gasket on the motor turns the wheel directly.



The stitch length control and the reverse setting are the opposite of my vintage Singers – up for forward and down for backstitch. I love the look, though it will take me a little bit of practice to really get used to the opposite direction.

The presser foot is a top-mount design, as you can see on the binder below. It attaches to the post with the large thumb screw you can see at right.





The bobbin case can be released by lifting the lever indicated by the red arrow. It's a cool design.

I can't claim that this was love at first sight, but now that I've actually spent some time with my Kenmore Rotary, I've changed my mind on letting it go.

I've come to appreciate its eccentricities, and it turns out

that it fits my main requirement for a keeper: I love sewing with it. And given that the bobbins and the presser feet appeared as if by magic, just when I needed them, I guess the 117.600 and I are meant to be together.

It's a happy ending for both of us, and I'm a bit of a sucker for those.

