Urethane Thermoplastic Belting (Rounthane)

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There's nothing in the sewing room that quite matches the sheer pleasure of sewing with a treadle: the rhythmic movement, the quiet tick-tick-tick as you work the pedal, the satisfaction of a people-powered mechanism.

I own a few treadles, including this pretty Memphis-decaled Singer 127. Traditionally these are powered by a round leather belt (you can see the red belt clearly in the photo) joined with a staple driven through the leather. These belts will stretch somewhat after the first bit of use, and must be re-sized. With use and time, the leather will eventually deteriorate around the staple, and the belt will need to be replaced. If you're a treadle purist, the leather belts are still readily available and are reasonably priced.





But . . . here's an intriguing alternative. The treadle I use most often, my workhorse Singer 15, wears a new bright yellow belt.

It won't slip, won't stretch or split, and is impervious to oil and grease. And it's easy to cut to length with scissors.

It's not leather, but an industrial belting product made of urethane. Since it's made to withstand the demands of industrial applications, a home sewist will never be able to wear it out sewing on a treadle machine.

It's called Rounthane.

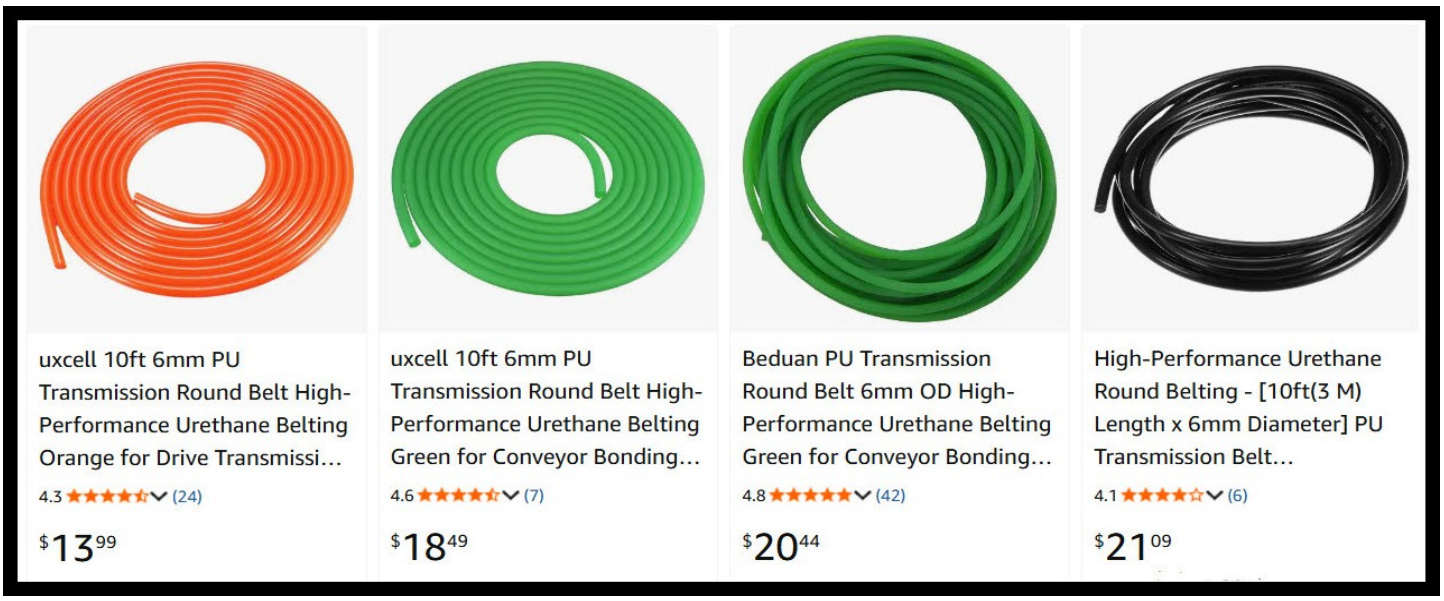
Back when I first learned of it, Rounthane could be obtained only from an industrial supplier (I seem to recall that 50 yards was the minimum purchase; I split the lot with my friend Rob, a fellow sewing machine enthusiast who also wanted to use it for treadle belts). The 6mm version we bought is hollow, and the ends are fastened together using ridged aluminum connectors.





There is also a solid version of this belting, which is joined by melting the ends slightly on a heated metal platen, then pressing them together so they fuse. After seeing this method demonstrated, I decided to try it on my Rounthane, and to my delight, it not only worked but also produced a smoother result, and it seems to be quite durable. I've since made several belts by fusing the ends in this way, and so far the welds are holding up very well. (You can buy a special heating tool for this purpose, but I just used an old iron to melt the ends.)

Since Rob and I bought the Rounthane, I've noticed that thermoplastic urethane belting has become more readily available at the retail level; it's cheaper, and you don't have to buy massive quantities.



These Amazon belts are not the Rounthane brand, so I can't personally attest to the quality, but they do appear to be the same kind of product. They are solid rather than hollow, and *must* be joined using the melt-and-fuse method.



If you're a treadling purist, you may prefer the authenticity of a leather belt. However, for me the durability of the urethane belting makes it an attractive alternative for a working treadle.



An even happier discovery is that I can use the same 6mm Rounthane to create shorter belts for some of my motor-driven machines, such as this 3/4 sized Singer 185.

I've also used Rounthane to make custom sized belts for several of my other vintage machines, including Singer Models 66, 206, and 316G, which off-the-shelf belts don't fit. And though my supply of Rounthane is the hollow version, I now routinely use the melt-and-fuse method for joining the belts; I've even come to prefer it over using the connectors.



I've been really happy with my urethane replacement belts: they don't slip, they won't degrade if exposed to machine oil, and they will never wear out through normal use.

Perhaps best of all, with a supply of Rounthane on hand, I always have the right sized belt at my fingertips, no matter what the machine. Love that.