

Writing a Manual for a Mid-Century Zigzag Sewing Machine

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One of the challenges of collecting mid-century Japanese sewing machines is that they rarely come with instruction manuals. If the machine is a basic zigzag, you can usually manage quite well without the manual, but those with built-in fancy stitches can sometimes be a little trickier.

You can sometimes locate a copy of the instruction book for your model on line -- assuming you can track down the exact model, a challenge in itself -- but these can be rather pricey and many are not all that well written.



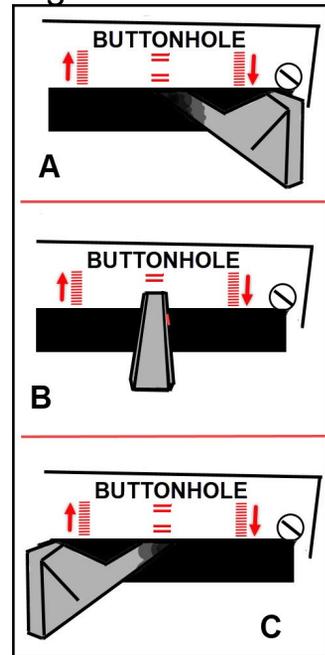
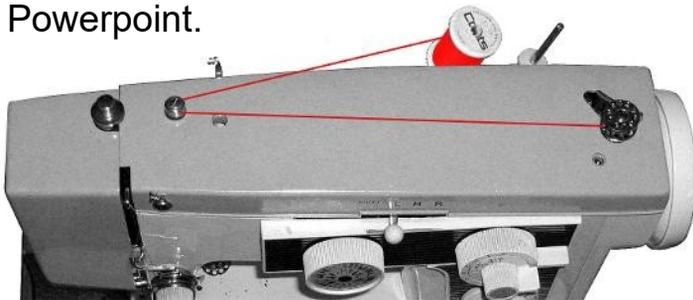
Several of my C877 Kenmores came to me without the instruction manuals, and I thought it might be a fun challenge to create my own.

Recently I've been working on the books to accompany this Kenmore C877.06 (top right) and its sister machine, the C877.08 (right), and expect to be moving on to some of the others once these are completed.



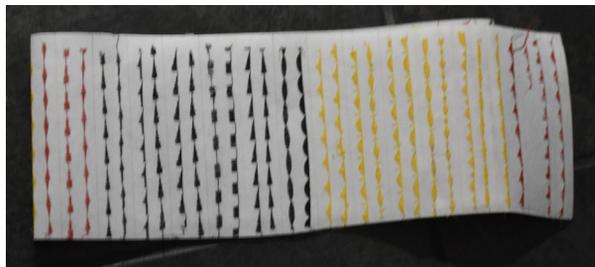
I started out by studying some of the manuals that did come with a few of my vintage machines; these gave me an organizational structure and a place to begin.

Once I had a general sense of how I wanted to organize the manual, I wrote all the text, and used a combination of visuals to illustrate the various procedures, combining stock images with drawings and photos of my own (right and below). Then I assembled the manual using a platform similar to Powerpoint.



One of the challenges was creating a guide to the built-in stitch patterns. I had no luck finding appropriate illustrations on line, so I ended up stitching a sample on every decorative setting, using thread to match the illustrations on the stitch dial.

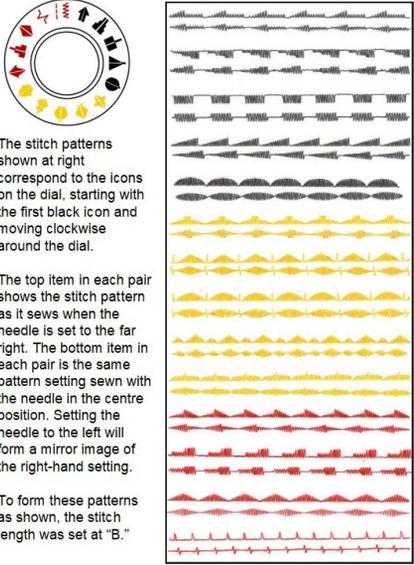
The patterns in this machine are simple combinations but several of them are ones I don't have in any of my other machines.



Then I scanned the stitch-outs into my computer and arranged them in order. I couldn't get a clear enough photo of the stitch dial, so I drew a diagram to accompany the stitch patterns.

At right is the actual page I made for the manual, showing both the dial and the patterns from the C877.06. The C877.08 stitches the same patterns.

Decorative Patterns



The stitch patterns shown at right correspond to the icons on the dial, starting with the first black icon and moving clockwise around the dial.

The top item in each pair shows the stitch pattern as it sews when the needle is set to the far right. The bottom item in each pair is the same pattern setting sewn with the needle in the centre position. Setting the needle to the left will form a mirror image of the right-hand setting.

To form these patterns as shown, the stitch length was set at "B."

To Begin Sewing

Loosely holding the end of the thread in your left hand, slowly turn the handwheel toward you with your right hand, just until the needle moves down into the shuttle and comes up again to its highest point. Gently pull on the end of the upper thread to draw up the lower thread. Place both threads underneath the presser foot, pulling out 4-6 inches.

Place the fabric to be stitched beneath the presser foot and lower the foot. Hold the thread ends, turn the handwheel toward you by hand a few times. Then press the foot pedal to begin sewing.



Fig 12

Note: Never run the threaded machine without fabric beneath the foot. You will cause a jam that may damage the machine.

Straight Stitching

For straight sewing, set the Stitch Pattern Selection Dial (no 28) to . Ensure that the Buttonhole Selector Lever (No 25) is set to the far right and the Stitch Width Dial (No 24) is set to 0. Set the Needle Position Lever (no 27) to the right, and select stitch length on the Stitch Length Dial (No 20).

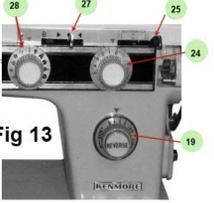


Fig 13

This sample page shows a stock illustration along with one of my own photographs.

Although I've written instruction books before, this whole process has been somewhat more challenging than I anticipated when I started working on these manuals a few months ago. I'm still doing finishing touch-ups, but I'm almost ready to print out a copy for each of these machines.

Once those are completed, it should be easier to work on manuals for my other vintage machines, since some of the material I've already written for these ones can be used in the other manuals too.