

Are You Thinking of Purchasing a Longarm Quilting Machine? Are You Thinking of Starting a Longarm Quilting Business?

Cindy Roth, Longarm University

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You have admired machine quilting for a while – maybe even done some on your home sewing machine and thought “There has to be an easier way to do this.” Maybe you have seen a longarm quilting machine demonstrated at a local quilt show or have watched your local longarm quilter in action and have admired her (or his) work. Maybe you are thinking of getting a longarm quilting machine to start a business for supplemental income. Where do you start looking for information to make an informed choice if you do decide to purchase a longarm quilting machine? You have so many questions and so few answers!

Purchasing a longarm quilting machine is very much like purchasing a new car. You need to do some research and take it for a test drive. Of course, cost is a major consideration, but **don't dwell only** on the price of the machine. There is a lot to consider before making your decision to purchase of a particular brand of machine.

Here are some ideas, guidelines and questions you need to ask yourself and longarm quilting machine dealers/manufacturers before purchasing a machine.

Here is a list of longarm quilting machine manufacturers listed

A-1 Quilting Machines

www.a1quiltingmachines.com

American Professional Quilting Systems

www.apqs.com

Gammill Quilting Machines

www.gammill.com

Handi Quilter

www.handiquilter.com

Nolting Quilting Machines

www.nolting.com

NuStyle Quilting Machines

www.nustylequilting.com

Prodigy Quilting Machines

www.prodigyquilter.com

www.LongarmUniversity.com

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Tin Lizzie

www.tinlizzie18.com

Innova Quilting Machine

www.maimin.com/Pages/Innova.aspx

Note: Many home sewing machine manufacturers such as Bernina, Brother, Pfaff, etc., now have quilting machines. Please check with your local sewing machine dealer for their version of a longarm quilting machine.

I suggest you begin your longarm quilting machine research by going to the websites of the longarm machine manufacturers (listed alphabetically above).

Look to see if they have any dealers listed in your geographical area and contact the individual dealers and ask if you can come and look, touch, feel and run their machines. Before making a final decision on a quilting machine “test drive” as many different machine brands as you can. You may have to travel to several locations and/or states to test drive various machines.

Another option is to travel to a longarm machine quilting conference such as:

Machine Quilter’s Expo

www.mqxshow.com

New Hampshire

Machine Quilters Showcase

www.mqsshow.org

Many Midwest locations. Check the website for the current event location

Home Machine Quilting Show

www.hmqsshow.org

Salt Lake City, Utah

These conferences will have many different brands of machines set up to test drive, classes in longarm quilting and wonderful quilt shows. These machine quilting conferences are the best way to get a LOT of longarm quilting information in one location in a short amount of time.

There are many longarm teachers who travel all over the country teaching classes and many longarm teachers teach classes in their studios. These talented teachers teach both beginning and advanced longarm classes. Another great way to get longarm education is to attend classes at **Longarm University**, www.LongarmUniversity.com.

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All the longarm quilting machines on the market are very good, well built machines that will do an excellent job. But, as with cars, each manufacturer's machine is a little different and has different features. You have to make the decision as to which feature is **BEST for YOU!**

Here are some questions you may want to ask yourself before looking for a longarm quilting machine:

Where will I put the machine? These machines are **BIG!!** Most machines come with a 12 foot table and you need at least 2 to 3 feet of clearance on three sides of the machine.

What else will be in the room with the machine? Will this be a dedicated quilting space or will the machine share space with a spare bedroom or sewing/crafts area?

How will a 12 foot length of 2 inch steel (the top, bottom and take up bars) be moved into this space? If the machine is to be located on a second floor or basement will the bars be able to "turn the corner" to get it up or down stairs?

If you are considering this purchase to start a business:

Save all your receipts for any travel and related expenses you incur during the research stage as they may be deductible as a business start up cost. Talk to your tax advisor about these expenses.

Make a business plan and besides the cost of the machine include other start up costs including business set up costs (business licenses, business insurance, any construction or remodeling that may be needed to your studio, etc.), thread, batting, fabrics, patterns, machine accessories, etc.

Think about the type of quilting you would like to do. Do you want to do simple, all over, edge to edge, row (pantograph) patterns or do you want to do creative, custom, "fancy" quilting?

Be realistic about the number of quilts you plan to quilt. Even though some advertising will state you can complete 3 quilts a day, I feel that this is a very inaccurate statement. The reality is that most quilters complete one quilt per day or less depending on the density of the quilting. The more dense the quilting the longer it will take to complete. And yes, I have quilted quilts that have taken many, many days to complete.

Be realistic about your own physical capabilities. Longarm quilting is not as physically challenging as some occupations. However, operating a longarm quilting machine will require you to be on your feet and use upper body movements (especially your arms and shoulders) for extended periods of time. Will you be able to do this for several hours each day, several days per week?

Be realistic about the time you have to devote to a quilting business. If you have small children, work full time, have other time commitments such as church, school, family, volunteer and other organizations, you may not have the time it takes to run a quilting business.

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Be realistic about the money that you can earn quilting for others. I recommend that people consider income from a quilting business be considered as supplemental income rather than their main income. I would recommend underestimating any income you expect to make from quilting, at least for the first year or so.

I would highly recommend the booklets

Pricing for Your Longarm Quilting Business, Your Customer Worksheet

These booklets are available on the Longarm University website

Also recommended is the ONLINE video class

Pricing for Your Longarm Quilting Business recorded live at Innovations 2010

This class is on the Longarm Classroom website at www.LongarmClassroom.com

Visit the blog, **Machine Quilting Business**, mqbusiness.wordpress.com for more information about machine quilting as a successful business

Be realistic about how quickly your skills as a longarm quilter will develop. Longarm quilting is a skill that is learned. How quickly you learn this skill depends on a lot of factors, but the most important factor is practice, practice, practice and practice some more. Give yourself several months of practice time before quilting on someone else's quilt.

If you are considering a longarm quilting machine purchase for your own personal use:

Are you going to quilt your own quilt tops? Are you going to make quilts for family only? For friends? For charitable organizations?

What would you do if a neighbor asks you to quilt her quilt? Would you charge her a fee? If so, how much? What if she asked if you would quilt for a friend of hers? Where will you "draw the line" for quilting for others? (If you charge her a fee, then you are in business and need to have the appropriate business licensing.)

If you quilt for charitable organizations will you set a "limit" of quilts you will do for them? What if they expect you to quilt many more quilts that you are able to? Is it important to you to get recognition within the volunteer group for your donated quilting services?

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Here are some questions you may want to ask a longarm quilting machine dealer/manufacturee beyond the price of the machine, what is included in this price and warranty information:

Will you come and set up the quilting machine? Is there a cost for this and what does the set up fee cover? Be honest when you tell the dealer/manufacturee where the machine will be located. If the dealer/manufacturee will not set up the machine, do they have instructions on how to set up the machine correctly? Do you have access to the "muscle" necessary to set up a machine? Most longarm machines have parts that are heavy and the machine needs at least two people to set it up.

Who will do the maintenance and repair on the machine? The vast majority of machines have NO problems, but what happens if you break a needle and the "timing" is off. Who will repair it for you? If there is no local repair person does the manufacturee /dealer offer phone repair consultations and is there a fee for this?

Is there any education included with the machine purchase? If so, when are the classes and where are they located? How long the classes and what is included? Are there any follow up classes for more experienced quilters? Are there comprehensive operation/instruction manuals available? Can you purchase a copy before you purchase a machine? Is it possible to attend this class BEFORE you purchase your machine? (Note: you may have to pay a fee to attend the class prior to purchase.)

Will the dealer/manufacturee give you references to others who have purchased their machines?

If you have any local longarm quilters in your area you may want to talk to them about their businesses. Be honest with them and tell them you are considering purchasing a machine. Many professional quilters will talk with others about their businesses, but be respectful of those who do not want to discuss the details of their business.

Here are some questions you may want to ask a local longarm quilter:

Why did they purchase the machine they did?

Where did they purchase it? Is there a local dealer/rep? Are they satisfied with the service they have received?

Who is their local service person? Are they reliable?

Is there a local longarm guild or group in your area? Can you attend the meeting before purchasing a machine? Get the name and contact info of the person in charge of the group/guild and contact them and attend the meetings

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Would the local longarm quilter be willing to be a mentor for you?

If the local longarm quilter could “do it over again” what would she/he do differently?

How many quilts does she/he complete per week? Per month? Per year?

After you have asked questions, received the answers and gathered the information then you can make the informed decision to purchase a machine.

Cindy Roth, Kent, WA