

The Featherweight Sewing Machine

By April Henry

*M*y Mother taught me to sew on a tiny sewing machine when I was about 7. When I turned 14, I began making my own clothes on her machine. I was the most stylish girl in school (not really, but I certainly thought so). My mother learned to make her own clothes from her mother, and so the tradition continued... I hope to teach my daughter to sew, as well.



sewing – apparel, home decorating, mending, darning, and so much more – and Singer did not sacrifice durability or quality.

In the mid 1950's, Singer improved the Featherweight design and engineered the world's smallest free-arm machine with the Singer Featherweight model 222. The bed extension slides off, revealing a narrow little free-arm, which

I remember mom sewing airplane wing covers for extra household income (money was very tight on a single-income teacher's salary with four children). The covers were made out of orangey-red nylon and took up the entire room when she sewed. It was very cold where we lived, and to prevent frost buildup, covers were essential for keeping the little planes warm right after landing and before takeoff. Mom occasionally let me stay up late and keep her company while she sewed. I recall the only light in the room being her Singer Sewing Machine light.

makes for perfect stitching in tight places – dress sleeves, cuffs, pant hems, etc. This particular model proved cost-prohibitive and was made for just a few years. Due to the limited production, these scarce machines are significantly more expensive in today's market.

I remember my grandma's sewing room very well – the smell, the light coming through the window, and even the placement of the furniture. You see, this was the room where we children would sleep while staying for a long visit in the summer months. There was something special about Grandma's sewing room. Whatever we needed, she nearly always made for us there. Some of my very first "princess" dresses came by way of hours in that little room. I loved them because they were so soft, feminine and pretty.

It wasn't until the 1980's that the little Featherweight started to become a collectible amongst quilters. The machine's light-weightedness, portability, gold-medal stitch, and bed-extension made it ideal for piecing. A quilter could take the machine to classes easily, thus sharing her new-found-joy and making what was old new again.

And now? Well, I sew on an antique sewing machine manufactured by the Singer Sewing Machine Company and it has quite a history. It's called The Featherweight 221 and it was first introduced in 1933 at the World's Fair in Chicago. It was quite different from other Singer Sewing Machines because of its cast-aluminum design rather than the traditional cast steel. This made the machine weigh just over 11 pounds, and thus it was coined the "Featherweight," with enthusiastic marketers calling it "light as a feather."

To this day, the Featherweight's popularity is spreading, and not just amongst quilters. Mothers are seeing how invaluable these little machines can be to teach their young girls the love of sewing. The Featherweight's size and simplicity is ideal, and it maintains enough quality to become a lifetime sewing machine. All Featherweights are straight-stitch machines with a reverse stitch regulator. But just because it is a straight-stitch machine doesn't limit the sewing function - quite the contrary! The Featherweight has a low, vertical shank for the presser foot, which allows for same style attachments new and old. Buttonholers, Zigzagers, Blind Stitchers, Decorative Embroiderers, Free-Motion/Darning Attachments and Hemstitchers are just a few examples of the accessories that can be purchased for use on this machine. The attachments move the fabric rather than the needle. The Singer engineering of yesterday truly is a modern-day marvel!

Over the next 30 years, the design of the machine really didn't change, except for a few cosmetic alterations. In the 1950's a tan machine was introduced, and in the 1960's the white Featherweight (sometimes referred to as celery green or even light turquoise) came to market. Aside from the changes in paint color and shorter bed extension, there were only minor design differences. The overall style and portability continued. It was the perfect machine for the young seamstress to take to college!

April Henry has been married to her husband, Carmon, for nearly 13 years. They are the parents of two children, Christian (age 9) and Ruth (age 5). April has always been inspired by the 1930's era, a simpler, more grateful approach to living which opened the doors to April 1930's ~ A Sewing Shoppe. It has been the Henry's family business since 2005 and they are constantly in awe of the Lord's gracious provision. Carmon is a skilled Singer Featherweight Specialist / Technician teaching Singer Featherweight Care and Maintenance Classes at a local quilt shop and providing technical support to customers worldwide over the phone or by appointment in their Idaho shop. The Henry's offer Singer Featherweight Machines, Attachments and Accessories (new & old), parts and service. Visit April's online store at <http://www.april1930s.com>.

The Featherweight is arguably one of the best machines Singer ever invented. The quality of the straight stitch provides perfection and accuracy, while the simplicity of the machine allows for easy maintenance by the homemaker or young girl. Yes, these little machines were made for everyday