



## Things to Know Before Taking Your Quilt to a Long Arm Quilter

Below is a basic listing of things to remember when preparing to send your quilt top to a long arm quilter. Your quilter will have other specific suggestions and requirements so don't forget to check with them before delivering your top. Good communications between the top owner and the long arm quilter are essential for good working relations and a great finished product!

### General Information:

- ◆ The top and backing material edges must be straight. If either piece is a parallelogram or other shape that does not have 90 degree angle corners it needs to be squared up before being dropped off. If your quilt is to have rounded edges, it is suggested to wait until after the quilting is completed before rounding. If the quilt has uneven edges such as a Grandmother's Garden quilt or when using scalloped edges, contact the quilter before dropping off to get special instructions and pricing.
- ◆ Never thread baste or pin together the top, batting and backing. Always leave them separate.
- ◆ Measure the width of your quilt top horizontally through the center, along the top edge and along the bottom edge. If these 3 measurements vary by more than a couple inches, you will end up with uneven quilt edges and perhaps even tucks in your quilt. Go back and square up the top by trimming, adding another border or resewing as needed. Make sure to take these same three measurements vertically, as well as horizontally. Proper repair beforehand saves heartaches later.
- ◆ The backing fabric must be between 4 inches and 6 inches larger than the size of the quilt top.
- ◆ Inspect your top and backing before delivery for loose thread, holes or other potential problems. After any needed repairs, carefully press and fold your top and backing. Most long arm quilters have a surcharge if they are required to press the top or backing before quilting it.
- ◆ Thread color and design choices: You may have something very specific in mind for your quilt or you may want your long armer to

make suggestions. Most long arm quilters can suggest several different ways to quilt your top and may have ideas you have not considered. You should always feel free to talk out what you envision and what the long armer suggests but ultimately the decision is up to you.

- ◆ It is your responsibility to fully understand your quilter's fee chart. If you leave the design area incomplete on your paperwork or tell the quilter to quilt it as she/he thinks it should be quilted; you are turning over the design process to the quilter. Remember this will affect the cost of quilting. Upon pickup you may feel that your quilt didn't get the quilting detail it deserved or you may feel it was over done. To avoid disappointment make sure your long armer understands your wishes and you get an estimate of the cost when the quilt top is dropped off.
- ◆ Complete all required paperwork before dropping off the quilt whether you leave it with a quilt shop or directly with the long armer. Leave phone numbers and times when you can be reached and any other important information. Expect to leave a deposit (usually half of the approximated fee) when dropping off your top. Full payment is expected at time of pickup. If this is a problem for you contact the long armer before the pickup date.
- ◆ If you must have your quilt before the expected completion date talk with your quilter. Many quilters have a rush service available; but expect to pay a surcharge if you choose this option.
- ◆ If you have to mail your quilt in to be quilted the shipping and insurance charges are paid by the customer. Do not ship any quilt without insurance. Contact your quilter before shipping; many will have special quilt mailing instructions and addresses.

#### Top Tips:

- ◆ If the top of your quilt is not obvious, place a safety pin with a small note attached to the top to alert the quilter.
- ◆ If you use spray starch in the piecing process or use inexpensive fabrics with heavy fabric sizing, your top should be washed before quilting. If not, the hard surface on the fabric will 'fight' with the running of the needle and machine thread causing breakage, uneven stitches and an overall lesser quality of stitching will result.
- ◆ Never attach embellishments before your top is quilted. The top and backing are loaded onto rollers and then brought together with the batting sandwiched in the center, as it is quilted. The top and

back need to be flat and smooth to run through the machine. The quilter may be working from the back of the machine and not be looking directly at the top as it is being sewn. Hitting an embellishment could damage the machine and make you liable for the repairs. Deliver the plain top to be quilted but after you receive it back; embellish to your heart's content!

- ◆ If you have used dark thread to piece on a multi-colored top, it is up to you to make sure there are no dark threads under a lighter fabric. As mentioned before, the quilter is sometimes working from the back of the machine and not looking directly at the quilt as it is sewn so dark or loose threads are not always caught by them.

#### Batting Considerations:

- ◆ Check with your quilter to see if you may supply the batting or if you must purchase from them. Most long armers offer several types of batting for sale and prefer to use batting they know will run with the best results in their machine. They can also recommend the batting type that is best for your quilt and its expected use.

#### Quilt Backs:

- ◆ Long arm quilting can require many starts and stops in the quilting process. These starts and stops can be hard to hide even under the best circumstances. Help yourself get better results by choosing a backing fabric that is not a solid color; typically a multi-colored, multi-directional fabric is a better choice.
- ◆ If you need to piece two or three large pieces of fabric together for the backing, use a one half inch seam allowance and press allowance open. Always remove selvage edges when piecing a quilt.
- ◆ Having a seam running horizontally or vertically through the very center of a quilt back will cause a weak point in the quilt. This is because most quilts are folded along this line and stress will wear on this seam. You may wish to consider this fact, when you are piecing your backing fabric.
- ◆ A few words about multi-pieced backs: Currently many piecers are making pieced backs for their quilt tops with almost the same number of pieces as the front. Batting and fabrics in the top and back are rather fluid, they have a tendency to shift, move and

stretch. They are not like sheets of paper that stack perfectly on top of each other. If you have made a fancy back and want it centered with the front side, talk with your long arm quilter before you deliver them. Your quilter may have some special instructions for you, such as adding more than the standard 4 to 6 inch extra material in the backing piece. It takes more time and skill to center a top over the back and have it come out evenly; a slight surcharge is sometimes added for this option.

I want my customers to be as happy as possible when they get their quilts back from my studio. My customers know that I reserve the right to make a design change, if necessary. I've never had a complaint because something needed to be changed, in fact, they are usually happy to be the recipients of something a little different -- perhaps even new designs made especially for their quilt! There are many different reasons why changing a planned design is sometimes necessary; rest assured it results in a better finished quilt than originally planned. Just be sure you and your long arm quilter understand each other....It's a special collaborative that lasts a lifetime in your quilts!

Happy Quilting!  
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