

# Pressing Matters

By Martyn Smith



“Press as you sew” is what we all heard when we were learning to sew, and it really hasn’t changed a great deal. A light press during the process of making up knit garments is still necessary but one can get away without doing this if the chosen construction techniques allow. There is a big difference between ‘ironing’ and ‘pressing’! Ironing is the movement of the iron while the heating sole is on the fabric (this can cause stretching when garment making). Pressing is the lifting and repositioning of the iron onto the fabric so as not to stretch the fabric.



Pressing equipment is usually very low on the ‘things to buy’ list for the sewing room, yet without good pressing tools it is almost impossible to get a professional finish on any garment. A press is a very important piece of equipment for any sewer and a great time-saver when applying fusible interfacing, pressing garments either during or on the completion of construction and after laundering. For those who have never had the opportunity to use such an appliance it seems like such an extravagance, but for the many who already own a pressing unit, it’s much easier to justify.



When purchasing a press there are a few things to look out for. Price is definitely a governing factor as we all have to shop according to our pocket book. There are fundamentally two different sorts of press. Elna make a 'dry press', meaning there is no steam-generating facility on the unit but the lack of this feature is well compensated for by the additions of a built-in sleeve board, see photo 1, timer unit and an 'auto power-off' safety device. Also in addition to the press they include a small pressing pad for tricky areas like cuffs and a 'vap-o-jet' spray unit that mists the board when top pressing. Singer made a series of very affordable presses with built-in steam-generation units and one with its own floor stand for ease of use. Both brands also make a smaller sized press for those who don't have the room for the larger unit. These brands also offer accessories such as board covers and foams (it's important to replace the foam each time the cover is replaced), heating shoe cleaners and silicon protector sealant to prevent the heating shoe from becoming dirty too quickly.

See photo 2. When the silicon sealant is applied, the heating shoe can just be dusted down with a cloth to keep it clean and prevents the need for hard scrubbing to remove any burnt-on debris. When using a press to apply interfacing it isn't all that hard to make the heating shoe dirty during the process and having a second press-board cover is a must to prevent any unwanted interfacing over-spill marking a garment that is being pressed off!

A press does require a bit of 'mastery' when first attempting to use it to do the household laundry, but it's purely a case of practice. Follow the care label on the garment as a recommendation for the heat setting and remember two things, buttons should never come in contact with the top heating shoe, and only close the press for about three or four seconds (this is different for applying interfacing as it's more like 20 seconds on the wool setting to create a good bond). It has been suggested in advertising that a press can take the

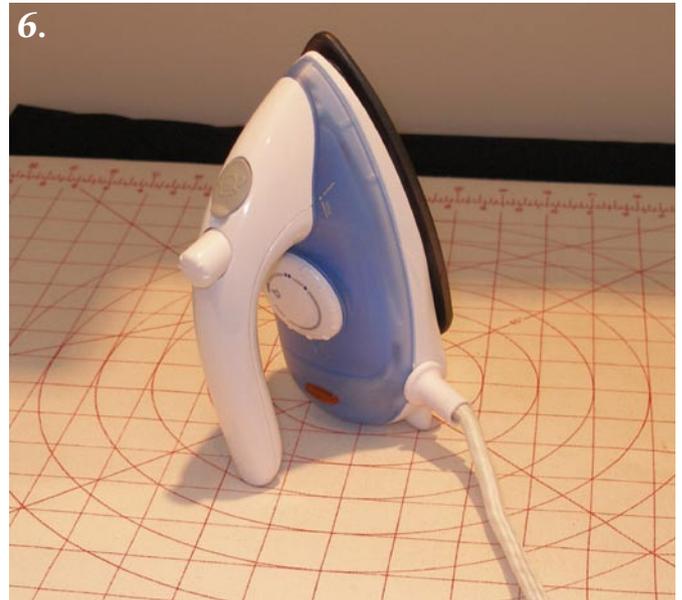


place of a hand-iron but this is not really true for someone who is a garment maker or crafter. Nothing can replace the tip of a hand-iron for opening seams, pressing small areas during construction and getting into tight areas easily.

A good quality iron and board is worth its weight in gold. If you are lucky enough to own a LauraStar ironing system, then you will know exactly what I am meaning. See photo 3. These systems have a built-in boiler unit that generates a constant flow of steam and also a built-in vacuum unit that removes the steam through the garment allowing the garment to settle under the dry heat of the iron. Some of these units have a 'blow' function on them that aerates up through the garment while pressing, making piled fabrics and easily creased fabrics a breeze to work with. This blowing system is based on a similar idea to the 'air forma' dolly that a dry-cleaner uses to press torso garments on (it sort of looks like a vinyl blow-up mannequin with no head). The results from these units are remarkable and the price tag is well justified!

Pressing accessories are a must as well, such as a heat-proof 'jelly plate' that the iron can rest on without scorching the ironing surface and a removable Teflon glide sole that slips onto the iron when pressing fabric that are either dark or mark easily (a lot of people have this sort of sole on their iron all the time, for safety). See photo 4. There are also some 'should haves' for pressing: a sleeve-board for pressing skinny enclosed seams, a couple of different pressing pads for putting inside garments while opening up seams or pressing off and a Rajah cloth (pressing cloth that has been chemically treated for great results). See photo 5. Brown paper for pressing in pleats and an old linen tea-towel (always used damp) can be added to these pressing necessities.

You don't have to have the latest and greatest to get a result. A good sturdy household steam iron and a well-padded ironing board will do just fine. The iron should have controls that are easily manoeuvred during use. To press a seam it is necessary



to open the seam up with steam and then dry the seam off by turning the steam off. This sets the fibres into place but there are some fabrics out there that want to curl up once pressed, no matter what you do to them, but an immediate press on the right side of the fabric does help but be careful not to bruise the fabric!

A small travel iron (approx \$AUD20) that is set up next to the sewing machine on a quilters pressing pad/mat is very handy to do quick pressing jobs without having to get up and go to the ironing board. See photo 6. If your iron is set up in another part of the house, then having this small iron is a god-send when stitching and it also encourages 'press as you sew' techniques. Quilters quite often have a small iron set up beside their machine so why shouldn't garment makers. Larger irons can get in the way of the garment and accidentally scorch any garment piece that is resting against the hot sole.

*This article sounds a bit like an infomercial but I have found, like most of us, buying a cheap iron that only lasts six months is frustrating as it seems like you only just get the feel of the iron and how it copes with different types of fabrics and then it goes fizz! Most frustrating! The Lichfield shirt company in New Zealand had a phrase on their labelling that said "no one ever regretted buying quality" and that's exactly how I feel about pressing equipment.*  
 – Martyn



Turn to page 50 for a chance to **WIN** a **SINGER** Magic Steam Press CSP1 from Singer valued at \$499