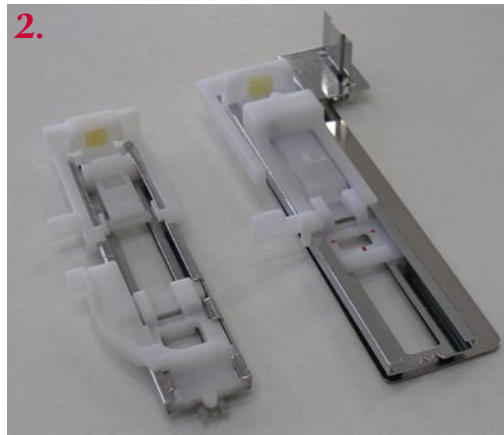


Machined Buttonholes

By Martyn Smith

Buttonholes can make or break a garment. Many people seem to struggle with them, but it's more to do with knowing what your machine is capable of and how to change the preset settings on the machine.



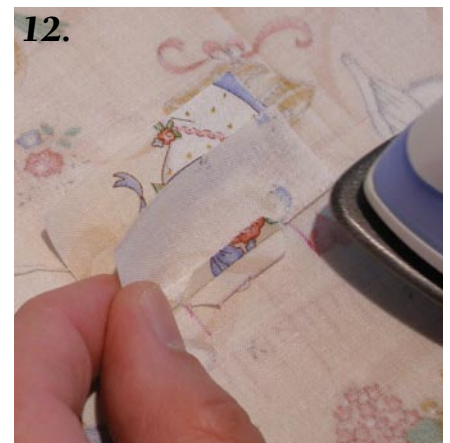
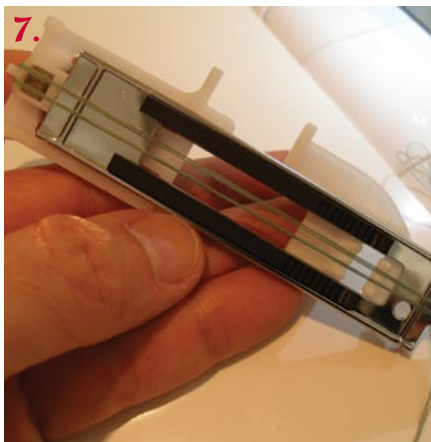
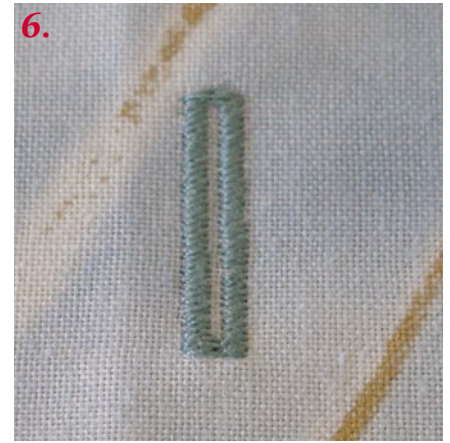
There are three different families of buttonhole feet on machines today – ‘fully automatic’ feet that have a sensor wheel that counts the distance travelled over the fabric to create the correct length buttonhole. See photo 1. These feet are fantastic as long as they don't have to deal with uneven bulk. Machines that offer this sort of foot also include a manual foot to cope with awkward situations (eg. waistbands, collar stands and any uneven area that a buttonhole needs to go into). There are different variations of the most common buttonhole foot that is classed as ‘automatic’. These feet have a space at the back of the foot for a button to be inserted and then there is a ‘pull down’ guide bar that is attached to the machine head that senses the distance needed to be travelled to create the right length buttonhole. See photo 2. These feet are basically foolproof and have taken a lot of the guess work out of consistently even sized buttonhole making. The last is the manual buttonhole foot for the ‘four-step’ buttonhole method. See photo 3. The middle slide foot was the precursor to the automatic sensor foot and has markings along one side to act as a measurement guide to follow. These feet all work well but you need to fully mark the buttonhole placement on your garment to get even buttonholes. These feet, as I've already stated, are the best for dealing with areas of uneven bulk. Most machines have extra buttonhole feet available if your machine doesn't have two already.

When creating a buttonhole, follow your instruction manual carefully, and if you can't make it work properly then go back to where you purchased your machine and get some help.

Sometimes the buttonhole function of a machine needs adjusting by a technician, especially if the sides look uneven or the ‘automatic’ function runs under or over by a few stitches. Always make sure that there is interfacing or tear-away stabiliser between the layers of fabric you are placing a buttonhole on and use a fresh needle so there is no chance of thread ladders running out from the buttonhole after completion. It's silly to make up an entire garment and then use a dull needle to make the buttonholes!

TIP: Use a topstitching, jeans/denim or quilting needle to stitch the buttonholes and then return it to the packet as it's still relatively fresh. Test a few different needles with the fabric you are using to find if there is any difference.

A common cause of mismatched sides of a buttonhole can be due to the needle thread getting caught when the buttonhole first starts off. Make sure that the needle thread tail is under the foot or through the cut-out of the foot before proceeding. See photo 4. Test the standard automatic buttonhole on the pre-set setting of the machine. See photo 5. It's quite acceptable, but when tweaked by compacting the stitch (reducing the stitch length) and by loosening off the top tension a notch or two (eg. tension set at 4.5 would be reduced to 3) this will give a slightly raised satin stitch tunnel effect to the sides of the buttonhole and make it more of a feature. See photo 6. An old-fashioned way of making a corded buttonhole is still the nicest, and most machine feet still have the front and back



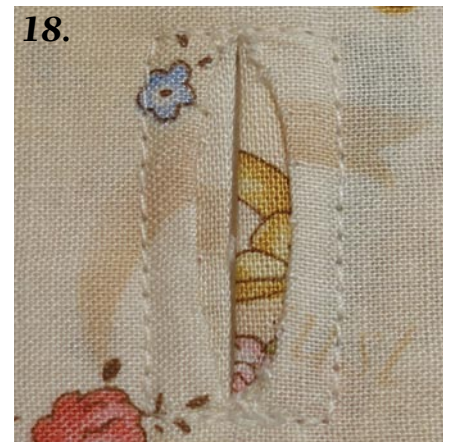
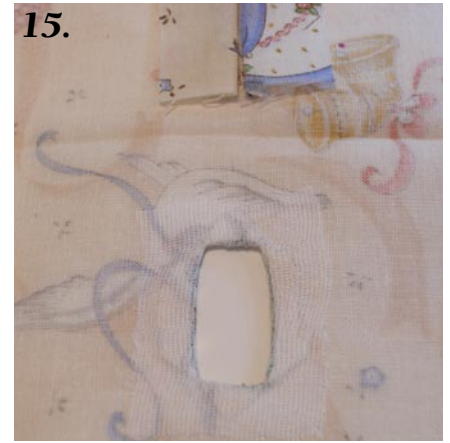
latches to anchor the cording threads to. Use a good length 'four thread' (four threads twisted to make a slim cord) and attach it to the foot (check with your instruction book for correct placement). See photo 7. Stitch out the buttonhole, catching the cord under the stitching. See photo 8. This type of buttonhole has a tendency to look slightly raised and is very sturdy for a tailored garment. See photo 9. This technique is only successful if you have some time to master it by practise.

Bound buttonholes

Bound buttonholes still have a place in garment making, are definitely time consuming, but look stunning when completed. However, mastering this very simple concept is easy, but again

it's having time to practise. A bound buttonhole is a must for a big button as machined buttonholes end up gaping or drooping after a while. Most of the Asian market garments still have these sorts of buttonholes on them and they are as durable as, if not more so, than a machine buttonhole. See photo 10.

Carefully mark the buttonhole placements on the wrong side of the garment front and stitch out the 'finished size' rectangle (or window as it is technically called), making sure there is enough fabric to work with on the sides and the ends. See photo 11. For a medium-sized button a 5 x 5 cm (2 x 2 in) square is sufficient. A small strip of interfacing through the middle of this strip is good for support and if you need a guide to stitch out your perfect window then this is ideal to mark it on as it will be



enclosed inside the workings and won't be seen. Turn through and press to create the window and then press open the length seams (having a small travel-iron beside the machine is a bonus when doing this sort of small pressing work).

See photo 12. When everything is pressed into final position it's exactly like making a minute jetted-pocket opening.

See photo 13. With the facing turned or stitched into its finished position, transfer the four corner points by stabbing a pin into each corner. See photo 14. Stitch out the window through the facing, like the first step, but use a square of iron-on interfacing instead of fabric (make sure you have the right sides together otherwise the interfacing will stick to the iron). This will reduce the bulk in the finished buttonhole and also make it quicker and easier to press and finish.

See photo 15. Line up and then stitch from the front through all layers, either stitching in the ditch or edgestitching (edgestitching shows the buttonhole a little better and brings attention to your handiwork!). See photo 16.

There are some alternative ways of finishing the backs of bound buttonholes. Appliqué or machine blanket stitch the facing to the bound buttonhole and then cut away the back as the raw edge will be encased by the blanket/appliqué stitch.

See photo 17.

Stitch around the edge of the finished buttonhole to attach the facing. Cut a straight line through the length of the buttonhole on the facing side and slipstitch under a gentle curve. See photo 18. This is a very popular and quick way of finishing and is most commonly used in the Asian markets.

Another way is to work a machined buttonhole on the facing side and then stitch through all layers as normal to fasten the facing to the garment.

See photo 19. This is an ideal way to deal with thicker fabrics on coats and jackets and as it is less bulky and very easy to do. This is a more European way of dealing with the back of a bound buttonhole.



NOTE: This photo is not a great example as it would be rare to see it done on a cotton fabric.

Bound buttonholes can be used for a belt to go through or a tie of a wrap dress or even as a stunning contrast detail on a very plain suit jacket. Chanel always had bound buttonholes on her jackets and they are a true mark of couture.

Any questions on this article please contact Martyn: martyn.smith@kwiksew.com