

# Seam Splitting

*(battle of the bulge)*

By Martyn Smith

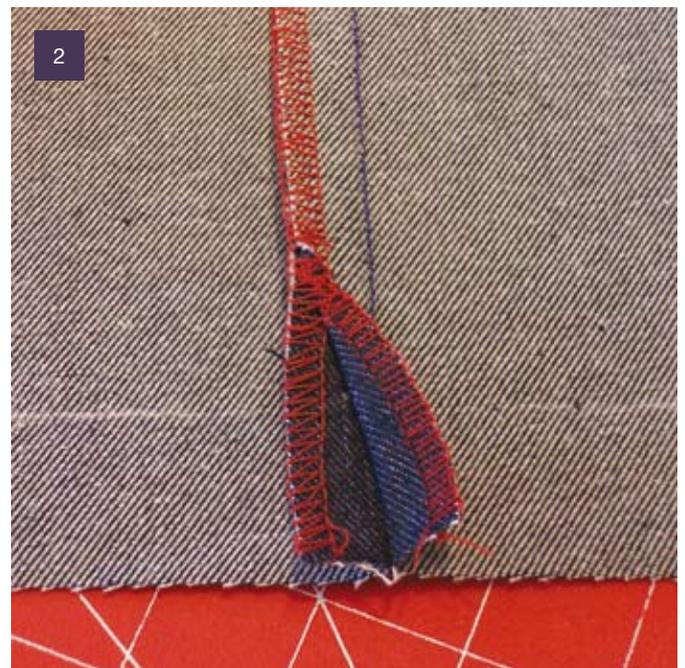
There are many factors that can make a garment look ‘home-made’ and the major one is dealing with bulk at corners and intersections. When learning bespoke tailoring we were taught to deal with bulk not only by layering seams and cutting away canvas but also splitting seams at hems and seam junctions. Cutting and clipping sometimes allows the structure of the garment to be undermined and can also show through to the right side of the garment once pressed. It was also easier for us to disguise the layering and trimming by lining, but in today’s garments there isn’t a lining and the fabrics quite often have elastaine in them and this spongy fibre often adds even more bulk!

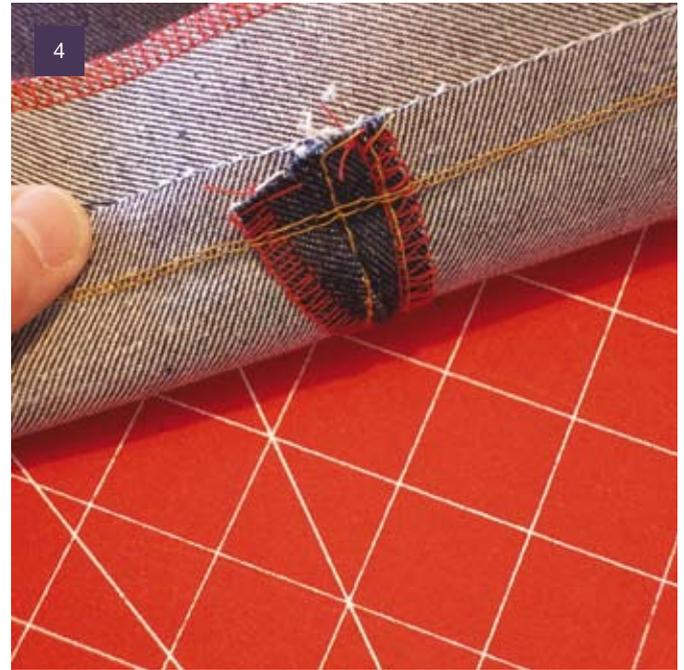
Seam splitting is an age-old technique that leatherwear manufacturers use to help keep seams and edges looking smooth and flush. New leather that hasn’t been broken in by wear is often quite rigid to sew and is prone to bulk but this in itself is helpful to keep topstitching looking straight and regimented.

The following method works very well when dealing with thick fabrics and also denim (as used in this example). A major bulk issue occurs when working with denim makes the stitching of hems almost impossible for some sewing machines to labour through. By thinking ahead this can be slightly resolved.

To prepare the seam and hem area, firstly chalk in the hem fold allowance and overlock the hem area for approximately twice the hem width (both sides must be overlocked, only one shown on sample). [See photo 1.](#)

Overlock the seam together, but leave open the previously overlocked section by folding it out of the way before the machine gets to it (make sure that the thread ends of the previously overlocked section are just caught to ensure they don’t unravel). [See photo 2.](#) Now this seam can be lightly pressed to sit in one direction, leaving the open split seam to remain flat. If topstitching is to be done, sew through the hem section without allowing the open seam to close.





Turn up the hem allowance, leaving the 'slip' open and stitch in place; when stitched the seam split will be open just above the inside hem edge. **See photo 3.** The sewing machine has only had to traverse six layers of denim on the seam instead of nine. This makes a huge difference to both the machine and the stitcher as there will be less chance of breaking a needle or having the tension disengage itself because of the height of the bulk. This method is great for knit fabrics that are bulky, such as polar and arctic fleece and sweat-shirting, as hemming these fabrics (especially with a cover-stitch machine) can be a problem.

This method can be easily transferred into other areas of the garment-making process, such as the centre-front waist area of a denim skirt that has a detail seam up the front of it. **See photo 4.** This seam, when finished, can look bulky and the waistline can look slightly peaked at the top of this seam. Pressing can sometimes get this to sit well, but by seam splitting in this area the problem just doesn't exist any longer. **See photos 5 and 6.**

Sometimes it is necessary to have a seam that runs all the way around a garment (e.g. the chest or hipline) and this lends itself to being a bulky

problem at the side seam, especially if the seams are edge- or topstitched. By seam splitting both horizontal seams two seams away from the edge, this will no longer be a problem. **See photo 7.** Although this method seems very simple, hardly anyone in the domestic sewing industry uses it. Give it a try the next time you have a bulk issue that needs resolving.

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