

WoodenBoat REVIEW

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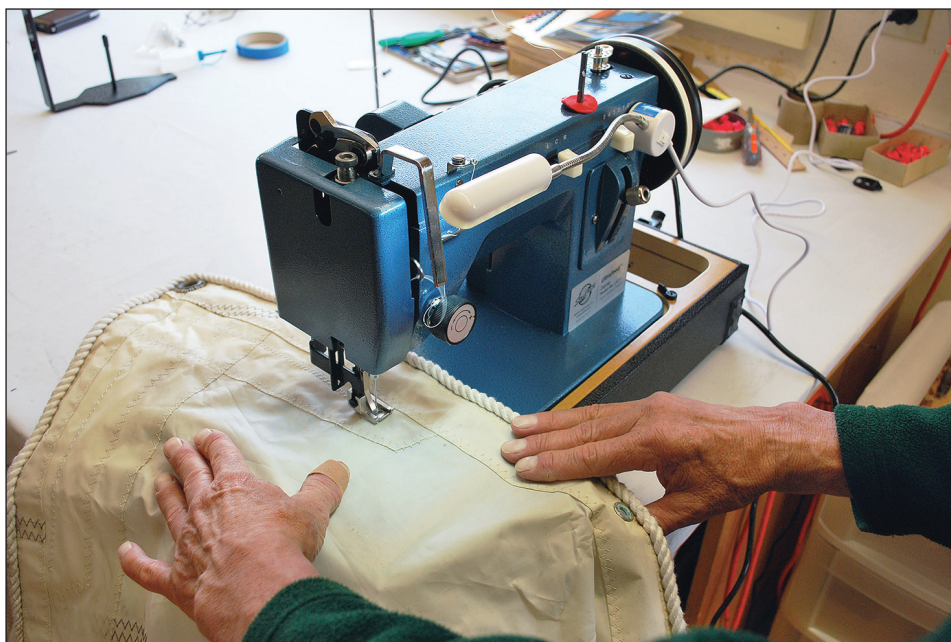
The Sailrite LSZ-1 Plus Ultrafeed Sewing Machine

Reviewed by Robin Lincoln

A sewing machine is a practical tool. Sooner or later, every sailor must sew something or have something sewn for them—whether it be a new sail, an emergency repair, or an awning, sailcover, or sailbag.

The Sailrite LSZ-1 Plus Ultrafeed is a lightweight sewing machine with some big-machine capabilities. It sews both straight and zigzag stitches, making it versatile for canvaswork and serious sailmaking and repair. It features a “walking foot,” which feeds the top material through the machine at the same rate as the bottom material, thus eliminating unevenness, puckering, and skipped stitches. There is an optional powerful hand crank, which allows for sewing onboard (or elsewhere) without AC power. The user can easily switch back and forth between the hand crank and electric power, so the hand crank also gives precise slow-speed control, if that’s needed.

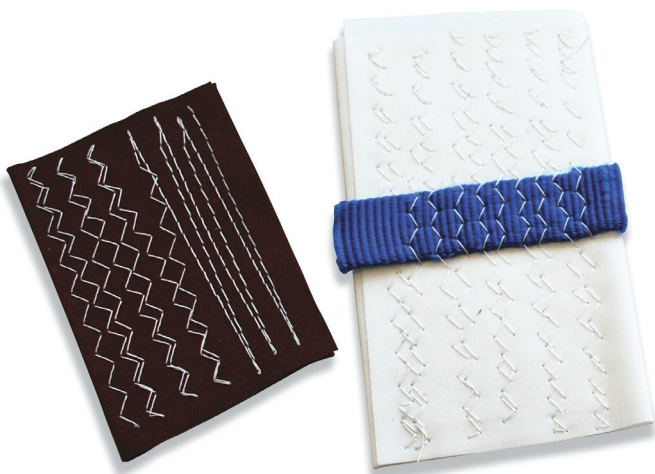
At just 48 lbs, the machine is quite portable, an advantage both onboard and at home if the machine is to be stored when not in use. It is quick and simple to put away and get out and start sewing again. One drawback to any portable machine is that, in order to keep



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATHEW P. MURPHY

the weight and size down, the throat must be rather shallow. On this machine the throat is a little over 7". You'd have a tough time reaching the middle of a 400–500-sq-ft mainsail to repair a seam without some careful maneuvering of the cloth through the throat. It could be done, but you might need a second pair of hands.

But that's a small compromise for a machine that's heavy-duty, reliable, durable, and portable. All the components that go into this machine are high-quality and rugged. The housing and all the inner parts are metal.



A stitch sample from the Sailrite LSZ-1. The machine is rugged enough to sew through eight layers of Dacron. It will also stitch through webbing, and 10 layers of canvas.

If you compare the inner working parts of the Sailrite Ultrafeed machine to others in its niche, the Sailrite's are of superior alloys and better cast. They don't show pitting over time. In fact, after examining other machines, I would say the Sailrite Ultrafeed is the best semi-industrial portable machine available on the market today. If you take care of it, and keep it clean and oiled, it should last a lifetime.

Sailrite is a second-generation family-owned business. It has a consistent and excellent reputation for customer support and high-quality products. When it first opened in 1969, Sailrite was somewhat of a novelty, offering instructions and tools to amateur sailmakers—people who were fascinated, as I was, by the idea of building something beautiful and functional, such as a sail. They were pioneers in the field of do-it-yourself sailmaking, and they geared their products toward a small niche of liveaboard cruising sailors and people wanting to learn how to sew and make their own sails or do their own canvaswork.

Sailmaking was somewhat of a mysterious art in those days. There were some books on the topic, but mostly the art was passed down from master sailmaker to apprentice in the loft. At the time, Sailrite founder James Lowell Grant, who was a master sailmaker, wrote a 10-lesson course of instruction on sailmaking and also one on canvaswork. The company also offered a good sewing machine. This was the beginning of Sailrite.

Over the years, the company has grown into a sophisticated business. They have expanded their market, offering complete kits for making sails. The kits come with all of the panels cut, labeled, and ready to stick together and sew. All the edge material and hardware is included, as are complete instructions for putting the sail together. Although the cost of these kits is a little lower than what you would pay for a new sail from a good

sailmaker, I wouldn't suggest taking on such a project to save money; I would do it for the experience and knowledge. For a knowledgeable sailmaker is a valuable resource, and a deeper understanding of your sails will make you a better sailor.

Sailrite's extensive catalog sells all the tools that a do-it-yourself sewer would need to complete a sailmaking or canvas project. They sell cloth and hardware and tools for making awnings, sails, cushions, sailcovers, and bags. There are dozens of Sailrite-produced videos on the Internet that cover in great visual detail how to make just about anything that you might ever want to sew. They have expanded their market to home sewers, upholsterers, and awning makers as well. And they have grown and improved continually over the past several decades. The Ultrafeed sewing machine is a great example of their excellence.

Last spring, I had the chance to work with a brand-new Sailrite "LSZ-1 Plus" Ultrafeed, and gave it a full test by making a custom cover for a wherry. The Ultrafeed arrived well packaged with everything needed to assemble it and get started sewing. The printed guidebook is meant for quick reference, and covers tuning, oiling, parts, and part numbers. The Ultrafeed also includes an in-depth instructional DVD, and I highly recommend that you watch it before you take the machine out of the box. If you are too excited to do this, as I was, at least start by watching the sections on assembling the machine and winding the bobbin. Each phase of using the machine is on the DVD—which is over two hours long. That's a serious commitment to setup on Sailrite's part, but I believe all of your questions will be answered. The DVD is so complete that a novice sailmaker could learn to sew from it. After you've watched the DVD, use the machine—a lot. As with any tool, an accumulation of experience will make you comfortable and confident, and able to take on more and more projects.



A patented clutch system transfers 100 percent of the machine's power from the balance wheel to the needle, without slipping.



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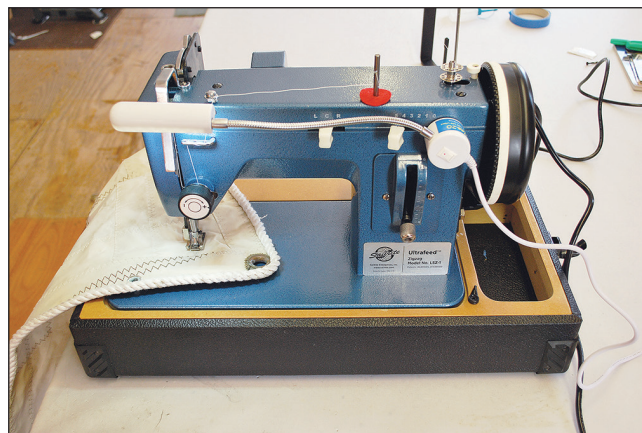
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The LSZ-1 has the power of an industrial machine. The trade-off for its portability is the machine's shallow throat, which will make it a challenge to reach the middle of a 500-sq-ft mainsail. It could be done, though—with some help.

What impressed me the most was that once we got the machine assembled, we were immediately ready to start sewing our project. Everything we needed to start sewing—thread, needles, and tools—was in the box. It was a very simple and straightforward setup process. Throughout the project, the machine gave me no trouble at all. The foot pedal allowed smooth speed control, the timing was perfect, and the stitches were even. There were no surprises and no disappointments.

We used Sunbrella cloth, No. 69 Dacron thread, and a No. 18 needle. The Sailrite machines will take No. 138 thread and smaller (No. 92, No. 69, No. 46) and use No. 22 needles and smaller (No. 20, No. 18, No. 16, No. 14). The stitch width and length range is 6 mm. The machine has aggressive feed dogs and powerful transfer of power from the balance wheel to the needle bar, which is why the Ultrafeed can sew through eight layers of Sunbrella or 6-oz Dacron without strain. It also can sew through two layers of cotton duck, and would be fine for lighter duty.

The Ultrafeed LSZ-1 may be a bit more expensive than other machines in its niche, but the things that set it apart are its durability and excellent product support—not to mention the instructions. Sailrite listens to their customers and consistently makes improvements. The machines they sell today are of better quality than those sold 30 years ago—which seems to be the opposite of the saying, "They don't make them like they used to." From what I can tell, Sailrite has worked hard to improve their machines, rather than cheapen them.

No tool can do everything. But if I were in the market for a portable semi-industrial machine to do canvas or sail work, I would seriously consider buying this machine.

Robin Lincoln is an occasional contributor to WoodenBoat and was, for many years, proprietor of Center Harbor Sails in Brooklin, Maine.

The Sailrite LSZ-1 retails for \$899. For more information, contact Sailrite Enterprises, 2390 E. 100 South, Columbia City, IN 46725; 800-348-2769; sailrite@sailrite.com, www.sailrite.com.