

Pointers for Perfect Longarm Quilting Results

There are times when we just feel like “winging-it.” Other times, we are afraid the “quilt police” will put us in jail for not following the rules. Quilting is not either or. There is room for unbridled creativity as well as following some guidelines that will assure that our quilt is not a disappointment. And, if you quilt for others, you know that your customers have certain expectations when their quilt is returned to them.

Here are a few pointers (guidelines) that will help assure perfect quilting results.

1. Backing needs to be squared up on both ends and loaded so that the ends are parallel with the rollers keeping the sides of the backing square or at a right angle with the rollers. Pin evenly to the leaders or zippers, or take care when using leader grips to keep the ends even. If the backing is seamed, a horizontal seam loads perfectly while a vertical seam will bunch up on the rollers causing scoops and dips along the sides of the backing. See this video for tips on how to load backing with a vertical seam. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWn-0HcXCWE>
2. Batting needs to be squared off on the top end. Trim off any batting that is wavy or stretched out of shape and trim square. Only use quality batting that is consistent in thickness. Inconsistent batting thickness presents a challenge in maintaining an even machine tension.
3. Top – trim all loose threads and make sure the seams are pressed flat. Check for problem areas, such as places where multiple seams come together (example: star points). If possible, during construction, those seams should be pressed open or fanned to eliminate bulk.
4. Baste the batting to the backing with the vertical channel (machine) locked. With the channel lock on, this basting becomes a line that is perfectly parallel to the roller and is the placement line for the top of the quilt top.
5. Baste the top to the batting/backing with the center point of the top matched to the leader center. Measure across the quilt, not at the edge to determine the real width of the quilt and place half that distance each side of center. By basting the top less than ¼” from the edge of the top, no basting stitches will need to be removed as they will be covered by the binding when finishing the quilt.
6. Use a zero center tape mounted near the belly bar to make sure the sides of the quilt top are equidistant from the center point, then, baste the sides of the quilt as far as you can go without advancing.
7. Follow the A, B, C of quilting as you work. A = advance (make sure the quilt runs true and square using the measurements on the zero center tape, adjust the top right – left to those measurements every time), B = baste (the sides), C = clamp (replace the clamps or side leader grips)
8. If you find that the block rows in the quilt are not running parallel to the rollers, adjust the quilt top to keep them running parallel. This may mean that you need to “ease” in a little extra along

the side as you baste the side of the quilt top after advancing.* Divide the fullness out over the distance pinning to hold it before basting the side (keep pins back from stitching area, or remember to remove each one as you stitch). Because the Nolting machines have a hopping foot, it hops over the fullness without causing puckers. After quilting the area that was eased, you will not even see the fullness anymore and the quilt rows will remain parallel to the rollers.

No amount of beautiful quilting, edge-to-edge, custom, or over the top “out of the box,” can cover up a lopsided, dog-eared, or puckered quilt. Although these tips may seem tedious, if followed, they give outstanding results in the final appearance of the quilt.

Note: Easing will remove a small amount of fullness. If there is a lot of fullness in the border, it is likely the border was not applied properly. Measure the quilt top first (not at the edges), cut opposite border strips to the same measurement. Border strips may need to be eased slightly when stitching to the top. Properly applied borders should square the quilt top.