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Singer model 201-2

April 12, 2015 in Review, Machine When it comes to vintage sewing machines, few are as well known as the Singer 201. Originally manufactured back in the 1930s, this amazing piece of post war engineering represented the top of the line in sewing technology and remained a best seller for years to come despite it's prohibitively high cost. Most domestic machines available at this point were offered as a hand crank or treadle unit, but the 201 had the option of an electric motor! This particular machine is a 201-2 and holds a special place in my heart. It was the very first vintage machine I purchased--the catalyst that launched me into what has now become an insatiable obsession! The astute reader may notice that my 201 is devoid of its iconic decals, more so resembling a Singer 1200* in appearance.*The Singer 1200 is identical to the 201-2 except it has a built in knee lifter, no decals and was intended as a high speed artisan machine for tailors.The 201 is a cast-iron, fully gear driven, top loading, horizontal rotary hook machine. It uses class 66 bobbins like the 3/4 sized Singer 99s and the Singer 66 that predates it. The 201 features a unique motor mounted in the back that resembles a pot--often referred to as a 'potted motor.'. While the build quality of these machines is second to none, you may discover that time has not been kind to the wiring. In many cases, the insulation may have rotted away so if the wiring looks suspect, don't plug it in until it's been fixed. The risk of electric shock is very real. Though not for the faint of heart, the re-wiring procedure itself isn't too difficult. I won't go into the process here as there are some fantastic tutorials readily available online.The potted motor is rated at .6 amps and isn't particularly beefy but due to it's construction, the piercing power on the 201 is comparable to other Class 15 clones with much larger motors. The 201 came in four different subclasses in the US.201-1 - a treadle operated version (much more common than hand cranks in the US)201-2 - has an electric potted motor 201-3 - has an electric external belted motor201-4 - uses a hand crank (more common in the UK)While I've never encountered a 201-3 with the external belted motor, I've contemplated replacing the potted motor on my 201 with a more powerful external motor to boost speed. With the potted motor, the 201-2 tops out at about 1100 stitches per minute--not a slow machine by any stretch of the means but it does have a slow acceleration curve. Unlike the oscillating hook on the nearly identical Singer 15-91, the rotary hook on the 201s can theoretically handle much higher top speeds. If you do try retrofit a potted 201 with an external belted motor, you'll need to replace the hand wheel with a Singer 15-91 hand wheel and belt guard in addition to the motor to fit the horizontal shaft properly. Sonically, you'll find the timbre is quite different between the two motors--the belted motors being quieter than the whirring of the gear driven potted motors. Peeking inside the nose, you'll find the 201 basically looks like a more robust version of the Featherweight. Under it's flat bed, you'll find a thumbscrew that allows you to drop the feed dogs. This machine features a matching stitch length regulator. The thumbscrew is mounted on the side of the lever and secures a plate that locks in your desired forward and reverse length. This mechanism works much better than the thumbscrews often found attached to the base of the stitch length lever as that design has a tendency to loosen during use. I can't say I'm a fan of the bobbin winder though. It's very finicky compared to the winders found on Featherweights and the 301s.The light powers on independently from the machine. In fact the machine draws power as soon as you plug it in, so make sure you leave your 201 unplugged when not in use. The 201 uses the same narrow feed dog configuration as the other black head Singers which handles curves beautifully!Below is a refinished Singer Cabinet no. 65 which I've somehow managed to scuff up again. I love how it completely hides the machine inside. This is far and away my favorite vintage Singer cabinet. The styling is much more versatile and can blend in suitably with more modern decor. It has 3 usable drawers on the right and a fourth faux drawer in front. There is a spring loaded support arm that pops out as soon as you lift the leaves of the desk. Just swing the machine up and you're ready to sew! These tables also come with a pedal mounting bracket found on the inside of the front facing facade. This allows the operator to activate the foot control with a retractable knee lever. It's worth noting, the 201 is a very stable table top machine, even without a bentwood base. There are two flat gear covers found under the machine that serve wonderfully as legs. Weighing in at nearly 40 pounds, this vintage stitcher won't bounce around annoyingly when sewing at top speed unlike some of the more modern Stylists and Fashion Mates often seated in plastic bases. Features: Straight stitch only Matching forward and reverse Rotary hook Large harp space Drop-able feed dogs Adjustable presser foot pressure Class 66 bobbins Accepts low shank feet In summary, the 201 is a fine machine indeed. While it is exceptionally stable as a table top machine, it is much better served in a cabinet due to it's weight. If I didn't have a garage full of industrial machines, this would be my straight stitch machine of choice. The Singer 201 series of full size sewing machines were produced mainly in the USA and the UK, although smaller numbers were also made in some other factories as well. The Class 201 were first introduced in 1935 and continued in production up until 1961. It was the Singer Manufacturing Company's finest domestic sewing machine. Hundreds of thousands of them were produced and most of them are still sewing as finely and as strongly today as when they were first produced over 70 years ago. As the top of the range model, the 201 machines were always the most expensive to buy. A 1947 price list shows that an electric model 201K3 cost £28-11s-6d compared to £25-14s-6d for a 15K82, or £23-6s-6d for a 99K13 Some 201D models were made at the Wittenberge factory in Germany until the factory was closed at the end of WW1! 201P models were the same as 201K23's but they were assembled in Penrth, Australia from parts made in the Kilbowie factory in the UK. The bases and cases for 201P models were made locally in Australia and are different to those for UK built machines. The full rotary hook and high-carbon super-hard meshing gears gave the machine a new smoothness. Even though the machine is straight stitch only, with reverse, Singer produced lots of attachments to achieve different finishes. These included Buttonholers, Zigzag attachments, Blind Stitchers and many more. Favoured by tailors and professional seamstresses because of the large 'harp' space, to accommodate bulky fabric, they could easily cost 6 months wages and so were frequently purchased on credit. A 'big brother' to the marvellous 99K and same size cousin to the 66K, it shares the same drop-in class 66 bobbin, making it a very easy to use machine. However one difference was the needle insertion and threading. Contrary to most other models, the needle must be inserted into a 201 with the flat side facing to the left and threaded from right to left. The bobbin is placed in the machine with the thread winding off the bobbin in a clockwise direction (in the 66K & 99K the direction is anti-clockwise). The 201 has a numbered tension dial and stitch length indicator and is able to drop its feed dogs for darning and free-motion sewing. It is also very good at decorative top stitching with different thickness threads in the top of the machine and the bobbin. An extra spool pin was positioned to allow the bobbin to be re-filled without the need to re-thread the machine. The electric versions also came with a light attached. Early models have the chrome scroll work face plate and back access cover. With a cast iron body and an overall weight of about 30lbs these machines weighed about the same as the 66K. They could not really be called portable and more often than not, were mounted into tables or cabinets. There were hand-crank, treadle and electric models. The 201 models utilised a unique direct drive gear mechanism for the underbed transfer of power to the shuttle. Model 201K - Underbed Mechanism In the 1950's a new design shape was introduced. Made of aluminium the machine was a lighter and more portable at 24lbs and came in either a wooden 'Bentwood' case or a two-tone vinyl covered case. The new 'butch' looks, with redesigned bodywork and plain black/chrome faceplate was produced in the classic black with gold decals and also in brown and beige, which was thought to be more modern looking at the time. The black ones are far rarer and harder to find and are the most prized versions now. These 'new look' models still had the top of the range mechanics and an unbeatable stitch quality, but by now the finest sewing machine in the world had become just too expensive to make, and so in 1961 production ceased. Many enthusiasts will say that today there is still no sewing machine made that will stitch better than a Singer 201. Singer 201, 201K, 201P Variants Model Year Notes USA 1935 - 1957 201-1 Treadle operated 201-2 PH Potted motor with direct gear drive 201-3 BR external motor with belt drive 201-4 Hand cranked UK 1935 - 1962 201K1 Treadle 201K2 PHK potted motor with direct gear drive 201K3 BAK or BZK external motor & belt 201K4 Hank Crank 201K21,23 & 24 1954 - 1962 As 201K1-K4 but with new style aluminium body and solid balance wheel. BAK4 motor with belt drive. Black or beige models 201K29 As 201K23 but with spoked balance wheel Australia 1956 - 19?? 201P Assembled in Australia from parts made in UK Germany 1935 - 1944? 201D Cast iron models as 201K3 etc. Photos If you find this site useful and want to make a small donation to support its maintenance and expansion, then please use button below.

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