

FEATHERWEIGHT 221 THE PERFECT PORTABLE®

And Its Stitches Across History

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with

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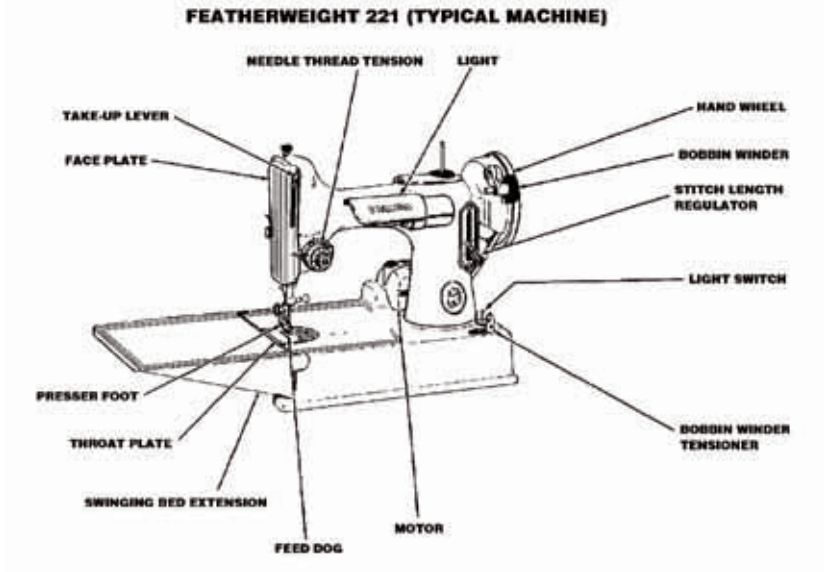
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DESIGN FEATURES

I'll start this section with an illustration of a typical *Featherweight* machine for reference in the text that follows.



The Sewhandy Machine:

As I wrote previously, the *Sewhandy* was an innovation when it came on the market. It was first available in several proprietary colors: marine blue, larch green and ashes of roses. Black was added to the line later. Sales lasted until about 1931 when *Singer* bought *Ossan*. By 1933, *Singer* had time to study the pluses and minuses of the *Sewhandy*. One of its far-sighted design features was the concept of using a single piece of metal for both the machine bed and its lower housing. *Sewhandys* were totally self-contained and didn't require a separate base or cabinet

to enclose the shafts, gears and other gizmos beneath the machine - all of the things we have to oil from time to time. Actually, its bed was made of aluminum, like an inverted cake baking pan; and there was enough space inside for the machinery I mentioned. A piece of walnut-finished plywood provided access for oiling and maintenance, and it was attached by several machine screws. The advantages of this design were that the Sewhandy was self-contained, and it was small and light (12 pounds/5.4 kg.).

The Featherweight inherited this basic design from the *Sewhandy*. However, *Singer's* engineers greatly improved it by adding a swinging bed extension or platform, to increase the sewing surface to the left of its needle. It may seem like a simple concept today, but this bed extension was a stroke of design genius at the time. It proved to be immensely valuable to women who piece large sections of fabric such as quilt tops. In addition, a thin metal cover plate was provided on the bottom of the machine for lubrication and maintenance of the lower bed mechanism. This cover plate was held on by a single thumb nut, and it had a gasket to prevent oil and grease leakage onto the table or work. In comparison, the *Sewhandy* had several remote "oil holes" located in strategic places on its bed surface. Direct application of oil or grease to the lower drive was tedious - its wooden bottom cover had to be removed, and a good size screwdriver was needed to remove the four machine screws that held it in place. Also, you had to unscrew the two tiny screws that held its sewing light and wires (small screwdriver), and carefully move everything through a small hole in its bed. Needless to say, oiling was mostly done by using the oil holes . . . if and when the owner remembered to do it. This thought really hit me when I saw that the (circa 1932) *General Electric* version of the machine had more oiling places than the earliest versions of the *Sewhandy*.

Oil holes are prone to blockage due to fabric dust and lint, which keeps oil from reaching the bearing and sliding surfaces in the lower bed. I believe this accounts in part for the low survival rate of Sewhandys . Before I wrote the original version of this book in 1992, I'd seen only one Sewhandy machine in all of my quilt teaching travels. And I bought it, mainly for research.