

*The following information concerning zippers originally appeared as a blog post - so it's rather chatty but will assist you in understanding how to attach zippers purchased from Quilts 'N Kaboodle to your take up rollers and how to load the quilt using zippers.*

Attaching Zippers to Longarm Leaders © From the Quilt Rambler, Karen E Overton

<http://quiltsnkaboodle.blogspot.com/2010/04/attatching-zippers-to-longarm-leaders.html>



This Sunday afternoon was my designated day to straighten my take up leaders on my A1 Quilting Machine and add zippers, as it's technically '*my day off*' and the only day the frame wasn't loaded with a quilt (grin). So naturally I decided that I *really should* do a documentation of my actions, who knows who it might benefit!

I've given you a very wordy description of what I did and at the end of this ramble a very amateur video actually showing what I'm trying to describe...so hopefully the combination of pictures, words, and voice visual will be beneficial. At least I tried (grin).

For the record, my machine is almost 5 years old. I originally had a set of zippers attached to my leaders (that I'd done, but not as neatly as this go-around), but opted to remove them after the Houston

Quilt Festival for the latest craze of Velcro leaders.

Hum. Honestly, I hated the Velcro. Wasted time, wasted money. Lesson learned.

First of all, it was a unnecessary adjustment to my machine - somehow I forgot the simple truth of ***if it's not broke don't fix it!*** . One reason I don't like Velcro is that it's always wadding up and getting stuck on something other than what I wanted it to stick to. I know I know, there's the argument that you can make adjustments to make sure your quilt is lined up, but I have decided that the best way to line things up is to have the accuracy of the teeth of the zipper matching one side to the other, besides, zipping up is quicker than trying to fussy place the Velcro to match...anyway, these are just a few of my reasons for wanting to go back to zippers...so if you are considering zippers here's a tutorial of how I put mine on this afternoon. Can't say I'm an expert, but I've done it twice now and this time was easier, better, and it's staying put! I'm sold on zippered leaders.

If you have a longarm then you are aware that most machines have three take up rollers with attached canvas leaders. (If you don't have one you probably won't make it to the end of this post...however, for grins you might like to watch the video). Generally we pin the quilt backing to two of the rollers and pin the bottom of the quilt top to the third (or some prefer not to use this third roller and do a "full float" - but that's a topic for debate another day)...the reason for zippered leaders are numerous, but most like the convenience of being able to remove a quilt without having to unpin and then being able to return that same quilt back to the frame again without having to repin, thus saving countless hours...why would you remove a quilt? perhaps you are working on one that demands a lot of time consuming custom work and you want to squeeze in a quick baby quilt so you remove the one to add the other, or perhaps you had a major boo-boo and need to do a lot of *frogging* (rip it rip it), much easier to take off the frame

and sit on the couch for this task...more than likely it's just the convenience of having another quilt prepared and ready to zip on when the first one comes off - some like to pin, others like to baste with their domestic machines or even a Cover Pro machine (I purchased one at Festival and have good intentions of learning to use this! I've been promised a lesson with a friend I hope to visit next month - so watch for this rambling). However you like to do it, you've got to have the zippers attached to your canvas leaders and for the most part, this task of installing is up to you, the machine owner as I'm not aware of any quilting machine manufacturer that offers zippered leaders..

Okay, so on with the instructions! First of all I cut off the offending Velcro - literally just cut my canvas and started over. I'd dare say this won't be your first step (grin) but the next part is important. Take a look at the top photo, you will notice that I have pinned a small width of 108" fabric between my backing take up rollers - I call them the top backing leader and bottom backing leader. If your canvas leaders are somewhat stretched now is a good time to take a spray bottle with a little distilled water and lightly mist the canvas. Let it dry while you finish reading my ramble, this will help draw the stretched canvas back into shape. After it's dry you are ready to jump right in and follow this tutorial.

Once the fabric is pinned between the two backing leaders tighten the tension like you would on a real quilt back, with the exception of placement. Notice in the photo below that I have my A1 Quilting Machine pushed away from the fabric as far as it will go (bumping up against the table stop). Line this area up to the edge of the exposed canvas being careful NOT to hit the pins.

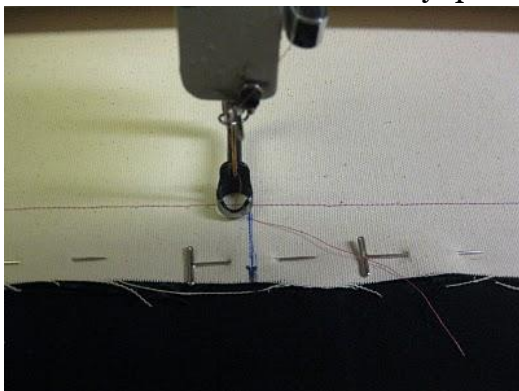


This is how I cheat the system and create my own accurate "channel lock". I will now stitch a straight line across the bottom backing leader, pressing my machine back against the roller to force an accurate straight line.

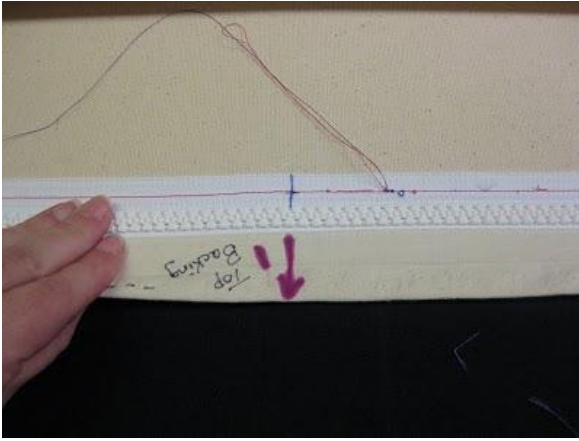
Once I did that I found my dad's tape measure, ya'know, the metal type that is used in woodworking, and found the exact center of my roller (I have a 12 foot table with 11 foot of canvas on the roller, so my center was at 70 inches) I then used a sharpie to mark my center.

Now it's time to sew on the zipper for this side.

Side note here, the set of zippers for my leaders included three male sides of the zipper (sides with the pull tab) and 6 female sides of the zippers (sides without the pull tab) - this gives me 3 to attach to the canvas and the other 6 to use to attach to my quilt backing (2) and top (1) making two sets to be able to alternate quilts. ***I will be offering zipper sets for sale in the upcoming weeks, if interested see my email address below.*** Your set may include 3 males and 6 females OR 3 females and 6 males...I know this sounds goofy, but think about it - 6 full sets of zippers are split to accommodate 2 machines. It's more economical -Trust me on this one. If you purchase from another supplier I have no idea what you'll get (grin) *so follow their instructions.*



Karen E Overton



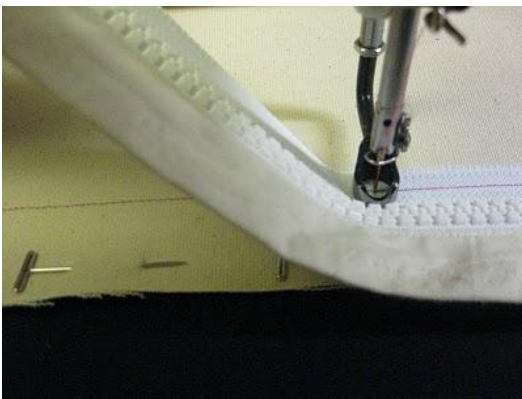
Okay, so determine which way your set is, more males or more females. The easiest way to do this is to zip up three sets and the left over three sides will be your additional sides to pin a second quilt to. Set these aside right now so you don't get confused. Which ever side you have three of will be the side sewn to the canvas.

Here's another free suggestion (grin) on the zipper sides that I have 6 of (the ones I will be pinning or basting to in the future) I added a small muslin flap to be able to have something to pin to. You will see this in the following photos as I have written on them "**top backing**" and "**bottom backing**" so I'd know how to load the quilt. *True confessions, I only did this for one set and have good intentions of doing this for the second.* The third zipper that I used for the quilt top I marked in one inch increments to aide in centering the quilt top...but again, good intentions of adding a small muslin flap to aid in the basting I hope to do with my Cover Pro. For the record, I've pinned on the edge of the zipper for a number of years and haven't worn it out yet, so you don't have to add a fabric edge if you don't want to.



Regardless of your decision to add a fabric extension or to mark your own measuring tape right on the side of the zipper *you must determine* and some how mark for reference which side of the zipper will be sewn on the canvas leader and which side will be the removable side for pinning/basting the quilt.

These photos are of the top take up leader canvas, you can see where the fabric extension is going toward the black fabric pinned between the leaders - think of this as your quilt. You must stitch the zipper where it will separate on the proper side for future pinning/basting.

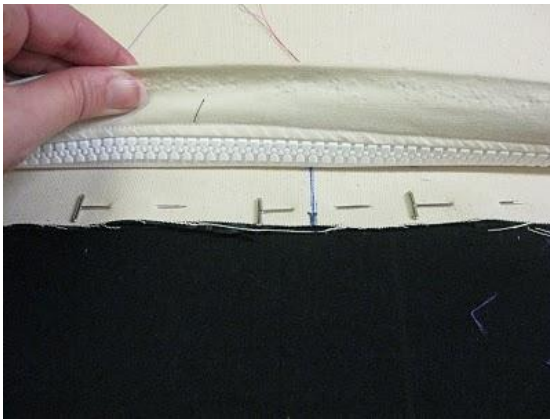


This step is really very simple. Mark the center of the zipper and match to the center of the leader canvas. Position the zipper to where your sewing line will be the same straight line you stitched in the earlier section. Using the same method of pushing the machine back as far as it will go to force that straight line, stitch from the center out using your hopping foot as a guide against the zipper teeth.

Here I've lifted up the zipper set to show you how I am indeed stitching right over that earlier line. This is what will give you a straight zippered leaders which is what we all desire to have straight finished quilts.

Once I completed sewing from the center to one side I repeated and went from the center to the other side. Be forewarned, the end of the canvas is sorta tricky and may not end up being *professionally neat*, but it works....you'll figure out what I'm talking about as you do this, for one

thing, the machine will not be able to go the full length because it just can't (grin) BUT you can move the canvas and zipper to go to the needle where the needle can't go to it. Trust me, it makes sense when you do this. Again, the last few inches aren't going to be perfect, so just be humble and accept this.



The photo above shows how the zipper set looks once you lift it up to see what's under it. Yep, there's leftover canvas and those pins. The pins will come out later, of course, and you will be left with this raw edge. We'll talk about that a little later so hold on.

Now it's time to advance our fabric and canvas leader to the area where the bottom backing leader is in a position to repeat the process of creating a "channel lock" with the machine pushed all the way against the top bar and making a straight line across the entire length of the canvas.

Sorta *see one, do one* (grin) You are simply doing the same thing - but notice that your zipper teeth will be different - you must make sure that your free side, or the side that you will be pinning/basting to, is towards the fabric in the center.

Match the centers and repeat the process of sewing on the zipper along the straight edge previously created.

Okay, I might add here the notes I made on my muslin flap -- I wanted to make sure when I'm pinning/basting the quilt back that I know which zipper goes where. I have also marked the center so that when zipped together I know that my fabric is indeed centered on the frame - something that I found to be a purer center with the zippered leaders vs the Velcro leaders - at least it worked the best for me. On my second set of zippers I will actually zip them on and mark against the stationary side and label as which one they are (top backing, bottom backing, quilt top bottom) so that I will consistently use the right zippers for the right position. Just a safe guard in making sure everything lines up as it should.



Okay, so away we go. Place the zipper set on the canvas matching centers and stitch from the center to one side, then from the center to the other side, getting creative on those last few inches (grin)



Remember I mentioned those raw edges on the back side? Well, if they bother you, you can either trim them with pinking shears or actually fold under and hem *which is a lot of trouble but can be done - I suggest if you want to do this that you enlist a friend to help you sew...I've done this before, used my extended base, folded the canvas under, put my needle in the down position, sat at the front of the machine using both hands and having my friend 'drive' the machine from the other side stopping and starting for me to reposition the fabric and my hands - way too much trouble if you ask me!* So this time

around I'm just ignoring them - they won't inhibit the fabric of either my quilt backing or top since these will be pinned to the further most side. To some this may seem unfinished or unprofessional, but to me, this is just another tool that aides in my work, it doesn't have to be pretty or perfect. The choice is certainly yours.

Okay. So now you have two out of three zippers put on. Pat yourself on the back! It wasn't that hard now was it? To do the third zipper on the quilt top take up roller you will need to unpin the backing bottom take up roller and repin the fabric to the quilt top take up roller. You will be doing the same process of stitching a straight line then positioning your zipper and stitching from center to side, then center to other side. Ta-da - that's all there is to doing it the way I did today!

Here's the home made video to share more details with you. Again, forgive the boo-boos, I can't edit video (heck, I'm lucky to just know how to do it considering it's not done on a real video camera). If you think this is goofy you should see the bloopers!

Again, I will be making zipper sets available for sale in the near future so if you are interested you may contact me at [karen@quiltsnkaboodle.com](mailto:karen@quiltsnkaboodle.com) for pricing information.

You Tube Address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQu1uaYZEaw>

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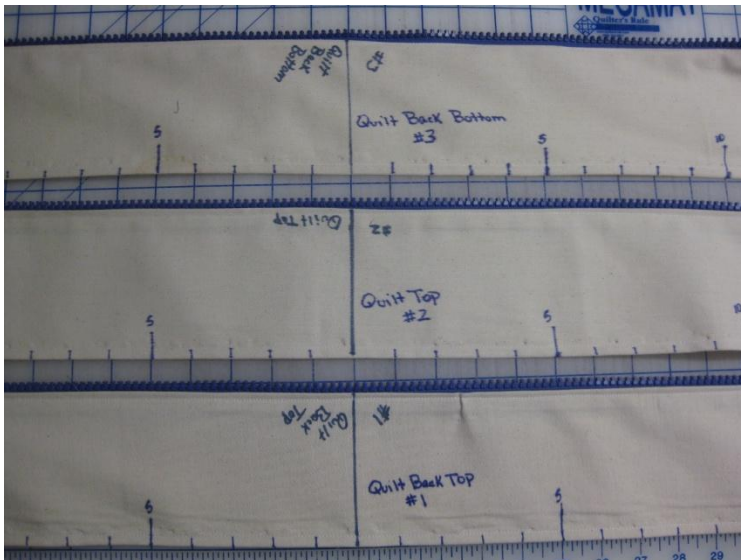
*The following is "part two" of the original blog post sharing how to load the quilt with zippers as well as how to use Tensionology, a patented fabric advance for A1*

# Tensionology™ 101: Loading a Quilt with Zippered Leaders

Zippers on your A1 Quilting Machine offer several advantages. If you have not installed zippers please refer to my previous tutorial on how to do so. <http://quiltsnkaboodle.blogspot.com/2010/04/attatching-zippers-to-longarm-leaders.html> (or email [karen@quiltsnkaboodle.com](mailto:karen@quiltsnkaboodle.com) for a PDF version) Regardless of having zippers or not, pinning or using a chain stitch, this tutorial will share how to load a quilt using your Tensionology™ feature on your A1 Quilting Machine.

Now let's begin where the last tutorial left off...

Having zippers on your leaders typically means you have at least two sets to be able to switch out quilts with the ease of zipping one off and the other on. In this photo I've shared how I marked my second set of zippers.



I've marked my zippered leaders to correspond with the take up rollers. On my machine the take up bar that is at the back of the machine is # 1, it's easy for me to remember this because it's a solo bar. The other two are on the front of the machine and may be 'stacked' or off-set – either way, the take up roller that is your batting access bar (the one that lifts) is #2 and the other one is #3.

This translates to #1 equals the top of the quilt backing, #3 is the bottom of the quilt backing and #2 is the bottom of the quilt top. With Tensionology™ you do not “float” your tops (you can, of course, but then you lose the purpose of keeping the tension on the entire quilt sandwich which is why you purchased Tensionology™ in the first place!)

On each set of zippered leaders I marked the corresponding center – doing so by actually zipping each one on to it's proper location and making the mark according to the center that was previously marked on the actual take up roller. By doing all this labeling you have not only greatly reduced any opportunity for confusion as to what part goes where, but you have also guaranteed that your centers will truly be center. In addition I chose to mark one inch increments with a zero center and going out to 60 on both sides, to save time I just labeled 5,10,15, etc.

With your zippered leaders properly labeled you are now ready to attach the quilt backing and top. This can be done by pinning or using a chain stitch. My photos will show attaching using my Janome Cover Pro, but again, pinning works just as well. For the record, I've pinned for 6 years and this is the first quilt done using the chain stitch. The choice is yours! The important thing is that you notice the proper

placement of fabric to the leader. By the way, if you are pinning this can be done both at the machine with the leaders already zipped on or unattached as described in the photos.



With a batik backing it's hard to tell which is the right and wrong side of the fabric in this photos, but it will show up in the next photo when you see a seam (grin), for now, just trust me.

I've started with the Quilt Backing Top, which is labeled as #1. For the sake of instruction the side of the zippered leader that is labeled will be called the RIGHT side and the unlabeled side will be noted as the WRONG side. Find the center of your quilt backing and place the RIGHT side of the backing to the WRONG side of the zippered leader, matching

centers and working your way from the center out, place pins about every 10 inches in preparation to sew.



My example is a chain stitch from my Cover Pro – you may have a serger or sewing machine that does this. I chose to use two different colors of thread so I'd know which was the top and which the bottom to make it easier to pull out later. Again, you may choose to pin using the pins that came with your machine package, regardless, here's the list of which side goes where:

Quilt Backing Top: Leader #1 Quilt Backing RIGHT side to WRONG side leader

Quilt Backing Bottom: Leader #3, Quilt Backing RIGHT side to WRONG side leader

Quilt Top Bottom: Leader #2, Quilt Top WRONG side to WRONG side leader (photo next page)



It is important that you predetermine how you will load the quilt top, typically you will attach the bottom of the quilt top to the #2 leader, but on occasion if something is directional you may wish to reverse this. For the sake of the tutorial we will be attaching the BOTTOM of the quilt top to the zippered leader #2. Again, WRONG side of quilt top to WRONG side of zippered leader.

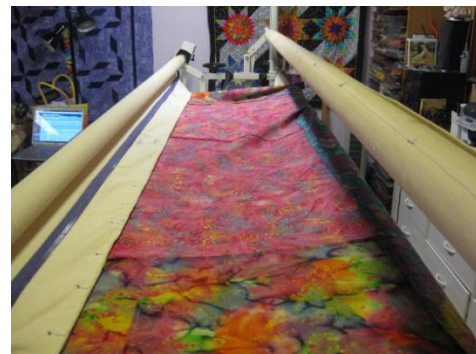
Ta Da, this part is done! Now let's go to the machine.



Okay, this may look a tad confusing, but let me explain. The top take up roller (#2) is being held up by the batting access lever. I've zipped on the #3 zippered leader which holds the Quilt Backing Bottom and have all the fabric draping on the floor. Then I roll it up by hand, *very roughly*. I know this doesn't look right, but trust me.



Next attach zipper leader #1 to the solo take up roller #1 at the back of the machine. It too is going to look rather unsettling – hold on, there's a reason for this.



Now it's time to play with the Tensionology™

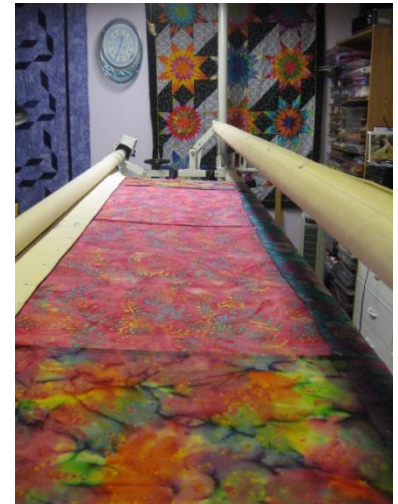


This is the pulley end of the bottom take up roller #3. (Again, take up roller #2 is raised by the batting access lever so it's not in the photo). Notice the arrow on the pulley near the connection to the bar. (If yours doesn't have an arrow you can add one with a sharpie). This pulley needs to have the wire wound around counter clockwise. I'm using the wire/weights on the left, which are the back side of the machine or panto side.

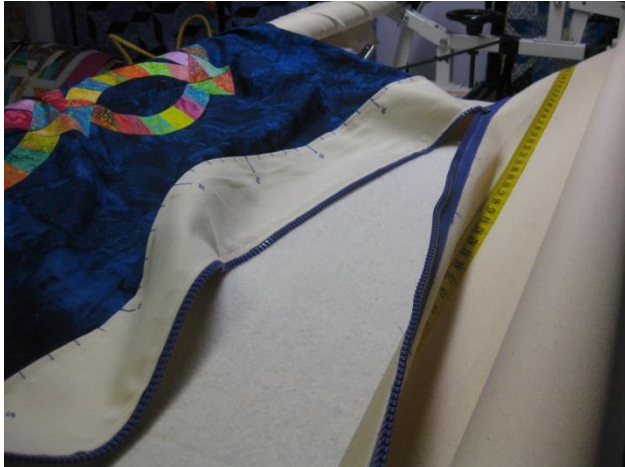


Next add weights. I generally find that two weights give me the tension that I desire. Play around and decide what you prefer, 1, 2 or 3 weights realizing it can vary from quilt to quilt. One word of caution – if it is too tight you may experience thread issues during the quilting process.

Now take the fob that came with your Tensionology™ and advance the fabric to the top take up roller #1 by pressing B on the fob – I remember it as “B for back” because I am generally working from the front of the machine - although that line of thinking doesn't work totally logically because you'd think “A for advance” and B actually advances ... SO just think B to go BACK on to take up roller #1. Whatever works for you (grin). Again, this is a rough roll, it looks strange but don't be overly concerned how the fabric is rolling. After all the backing is on take up roller #1 you will press A on the fob and now rewind to have all the fabric on take up roller #3 slowly, carefully, smoothing as you go until it's all neat and proper. This technique is especially helpful with pieced backings. During this process the weights will go up and down as the wire is being wound/unwound on the pulley.



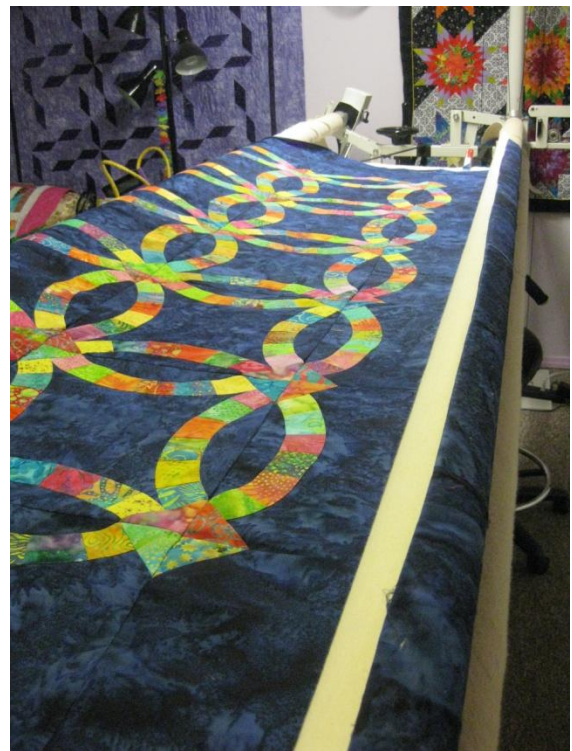
Now it's time to load the batting and baste it to the top. I've not given you photo documentation on this as it was covered during your set up/training. For reference here's a simplified explanation. With the batting access bar still holding take up roller #2 in the upward position, place the batting along the top edge of the quilt backing. Smooth out by hand; release the batting access lever to lower take up roller #2. Adjust the quilt by advancing or backing up the Tensionology™ to where the back of your backing and batting come to an area where you can push the machine to its further most point to create a channel lock and then stitch down the batting to the backing with a straight line – this will be your reference point to line up the top of the pieced quilt. (If this isn't clear, refer back to the Attaching Zippers blog/You Tube to demonstrate how to create a channel lock). Some prefer to stitch from the center out to each side; I generally go from left to right. Again, personal preference.

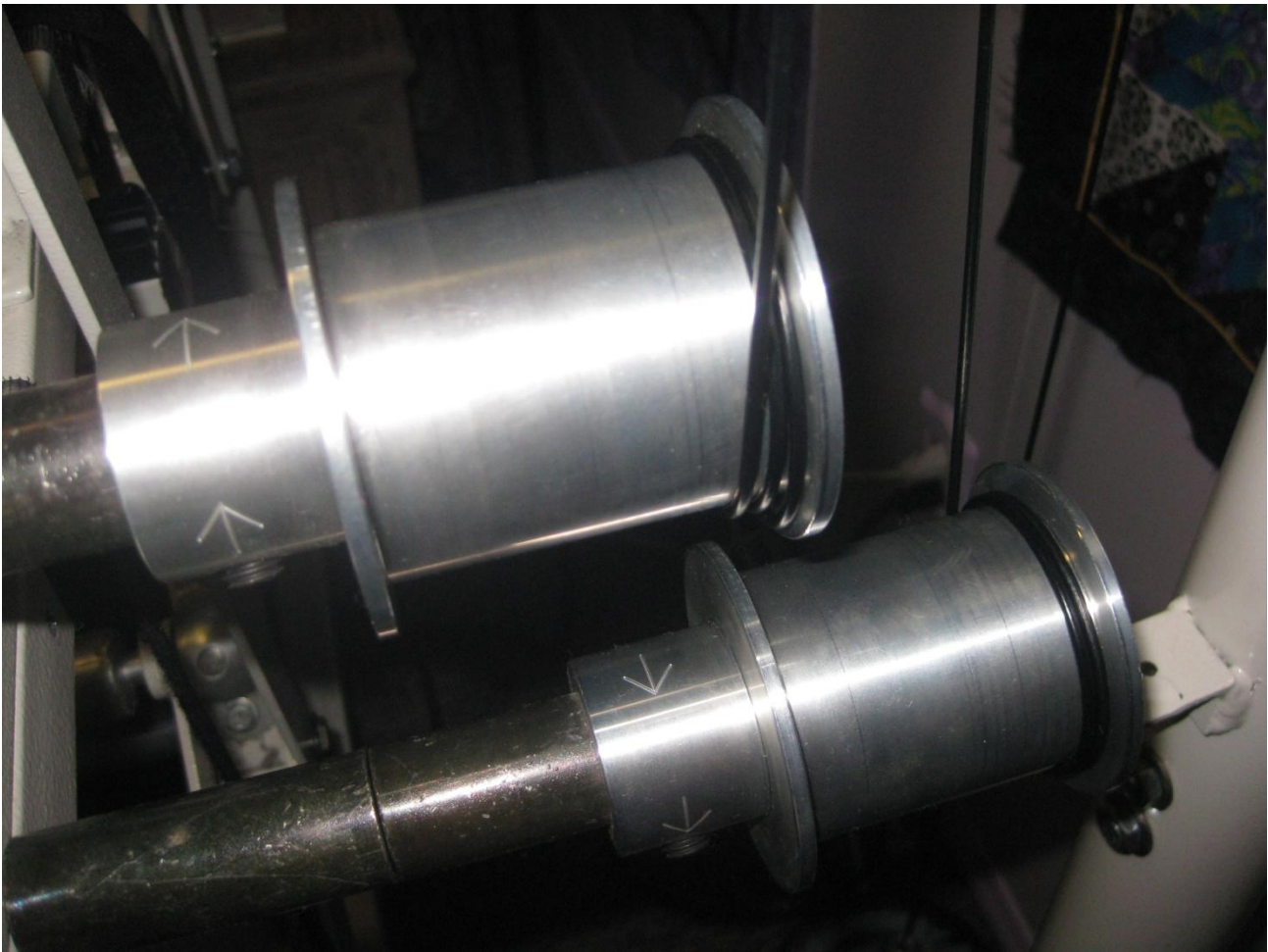


Once the batting is in place it's time to attach the quilt top. Zip the zipper leader #2 containing the bottom of the quilt top to the take up roller #2, taking care to spread the quilt top over take up roller #1.

If you notice in this photo I've begun to roll the quilt top onto take up roller #2. It is most critical that you take your time and roll smoothly. There's no 'back and forth' process as we did on the backing. This is

where you will want to make any slight adjustments due to fullness in the piecing, always maintaining a good horizontal placement of the quilt top, easing in fullness as needed. Once complete, baste the top of the quilt to the backing/batting. It is most important to do this step *before* adding Tensionology™ weights (ask me how I know!)





**This is the most important photo out of the entire tutorial on loading a quilt with Tensionology™**

The top pulley is connected to take up roller #2, the one that holds the quilt top; by the way, this photo shows the rollers in the “stacked” position, if you have the Horizon or don’t have your rollers stacked they will be slightly off-set, however, the placement of the pulleys and wires is the same. Take up roller #2 wraps clockwise using the wire on the front side of the machine and take up roller #3 wraps counterclockwise using the wire from the panto side of the machine.



Add weights and you are done!

Again, the photo is taken from the front of the machine with the Tensionology™ on the right hand side. Looking at the photo the weights on the left correspond to take up roller #3 (Quilt Backing Bottom) and the weights on the right attach to take up roller #2 (Quilt Top).

In closing a few more hints for your success with Tensionology™

If you have an extremely long quilt be sure to keep an eye out on the weights as they rise up the pole during advancing the quilt. If they get too close to the top and are in danger of hitting the top of the pole simply unwind a few links of the wire on your pulley to lower them a tad. This adjustment will have to be reversed if you advance back to the beginning. Not a big issue, just realize that really *really* big quilts can potentially outrun the length of the weight wires.

I also want to mention how you UNLOAD a quilt (grin). I neglected to photo document this, but will share some precautions and lessons learned along the way.

As you have quilted your way down the quilt top and now have the zippered leader #2 exposed you are going to want to release the quilt top bottom from that leader to be able to quilt to the edge of your quilt top - it is MOST IMPORTANT that you remove the weights before releasing the bottom of the quilt top from the leader – otherwise once you release the tension the weights are going to come crashing down! I realize this is simple science, but trust me, if you forget in your eagerness to continue quilting you will be startled by the loud crash!



This photo was taken after I stabilized the quilt by stitching all the continuous curves in the ring area of the double wedding ring. I wanted to do this first all the way down because I would be changing thread to do the background area. You can see that the take up leader #2 is no longer attached to the quilt. Now I can advance back and forth to my heart's content (grin) – the beauty of Tensionology™

Again, when the entire quilt is completed and you are ready to take it off the frame please make sure to release the tension by removing the weights from take up roller #1 before releasing the quilt from zipper leaders #1 and #3.

After a quilt or two all of the loading process will become second nature. I'm sure you will agree with me that you are soooo glad you added Tensionology™ to your A1 Quilting Machine!

Happy Quilting,

*Karen O in Texas*

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