

Tips for Embroidering on Leather, Suede, and Faux Leather and Suede

by Sue Hausmann, Host of America Sews

Whatever you are embroidering, there are many factors that play a part in producing the end result—a beautiful embroidery. On the Husqvarna Viking Designer SE, go to the Embroidery Mode and touch the exclusive Embroidery Advisor (the small sewing machine icon at the lower left of your Interactive Designer Screen). Everything you need to know to create successful embroidery on any fabric or leather is displayed. Once you select your embroidery design, view it in 3D (looks like actual sewing stitches) on the Interactive Designer Screen and change the background color to match what you will be embroidering on and change the thread colors of the design to match the ones you are planning to use. This way you see the actual embroidery in 3D stitches and can make any adjustments you desire before you embroider it on your project. What a timesaver!

Attach the Sensor Q Foot and select Sensor Q Foot in the SET menu. The Designer exclusive Sensor System actually “senses” the thickness of your fabric (this is especially important on leathers and suede) and the thickness of embroidery stitches as they sew which means the Sensor Q foot actually floats over the fabric (leather/suede) as you embroider. The Selective Thread Cutter will cut the top thread only at color changes (and of course the Interactive Designer Screen will prompt you to change to the next color). The Selective Thread Cutter brings the top thread to the wrong side and cuts both top and bobbin threads at the end of the embroidery. Wow, how easy! You will even get a pop-up message on the Interactive Designer Screen when your bobbin is running low and/or your top thread runs out.

The following tips will help you achieve the very best results when embroidering on leather.

Design Choice

For real leather and suede---animal skin:

Select designs that do not stitch a really dense amount of stitches onto the leather and suede. Too much stitching can be very hard feeling on the leather/suede. Also when the needle goes in and out of the leather/suede many times, it can actually perforate the leather around the design causing a section of the embroidery to “fall out” of the piece.

Faux suede and leather will usually support a more dense design if they are stabilized well. Many of the faux leather/suede have a fabric type backing or you can press a fusible tricot interfacing to the wrong side to stabilize. (Be sure to test the pressing on a scrap and use a press cloth when pressing onto leather/suede). You will still add stabilizer as you stitch.

Hoops and Stabilizer

Use the smallest size hoop available for the size of your design. There is more area around a design with a larger hoop and this can cause “flagging” (lifting of the leather/suede with the needle as you embroider) resulting in skipped stitches or poor stitch quality.

Do not put leather or suede into the hoop as the hoop may leave marks (often called “hoop burn”) on the leather/suede. Use the tips below to keep leather/suede taut on the hoop.

While many leathers and suede are stable enough to support embroidery without stabilizer, the stabilizer is key to holding the leather/suede taut while embroidering.

There are two ways to “hoop” leather and suede. With both of the techniques below, the leather/suede is not placed between the inner and outer hoop. Instead it is laid onto a stabilizer that is hooped.

Technique 1: Sticky Stabilizer

Hoop sticky stabilizer with the removable paper side (the paper that is over the sticky side) up. Score the paper with a pin and pull the paper off of the sticky stabilizer to expose the sticky surface. Position the leather/suede on the sticky surface and finger press in place. Sue’s tip: Invest in a second hoop to be your “sticky hoop”. Simply put the inner and outer hoop together. Place the sticky stabilizer on a flat surface and pull off the paper to expose the sticky surface. Place the hoop on the sticky and press down. Position the leather/suede on the sticky and finger press in place.

Note: There are many different brands of sticky stabilizer. Look for the ones that are less sticky and not as stiff and thick like Inspira Light & Tacky. Regardless of what sticky stabilizer you use, stop to clean your needle often with a soft cotton ball or piece of fabric saturated with alcohol or sewer’s aid. When your embroidery is finished, clean the bobbin area and under the stitch plate and change the needle. (Throw the sticky needle away or hang pictures with it!)

Technique 2: Tear a Way Stabilizer and KK2000 Temporary Spray Adhesive

Hoop a heavy Tear a Way Stabilizer and spray it with KK2000 to create a tacky surface. Position the leather/suede on the tacky surface and finger press in place. (We suggest spraying in a wastebasket or cardboard box so residue does not end up on your carpet or sewing machine. It will not hurt anything but you may get “stuck” to it.)

For both techniques it is important to hoop the sticky or tear a way very taut so it does not “flag” (lift up and down with the needle) while you are embroidering.

Tip: Do not use the FIX baste in the hoop feature with leathers and suede because when the basting is removed the needle holes will be visible on leather/suede.

Stabilizer tip for real and faux suede: Place a piece of water soluble stabilizer (Solvly) on top to keep the embroidery stitches from sinking into the nap of the suede. When embroidery is complete, simply tear away the excess water soluble stabilizer. If there are bits left around the embroidery, use a mist spray of water or a damp cloth and test on scraps first to be sure the water does not stain the suede. Then dab or spray the bits away.

Needle

The needle must poke a large enough hole in the leather and stabilizer so that the thread can pass through it without fraying or catching as the embroidery is stitching. Thread goes up and down into the bobbin area a number of times before that area of the thread is stitched into the embroidery.

Leather/suede (animal skins):

Use a 90/14 or for heavier weights a 100/16 topstitch (N) or denim (H-J) needle. Note: The needle designed for stitching leather (H-LL) (often called a leather needle) has a wedge point and actually cuts a hole as it enters the leather so it is used for straight stitching on the heaviest of leathers.

Faux leathers and suede:

Use a 90/14 stretch (H-S) needle for most faux leathers and suede. When sewing the ultra light knitted suede use a 75/11 stretch needle.

Thread

Most embroidery designs are digitized for 40 weight embroidery thread on the top and a fine weight thread is recommended for the bobbin. The type of thread depends on the look you desire. For a beautiful shine use 40 weight Rayon embroidery thread. For more strength and durability try a polyester embroidery thread, and for the duller hand look a cotton weight. If your embroidery will be seen from both top and bobbin side, thread the bobbin with the same thread you have threaded on the top.


It is always best to experiment on scraps of the same fabric/leather/suede using the same stabilizer, needle, threads, and hooping technique before embroidering the finished garment or project.

To embroider on a purchased jacket, begin by removing the lining from the front button area and the hem area. This is usually enough to pin it (to the lining only) out of the way so you are embroidering on the leather only and not through the lining. If the seam is sewn in such a way that you can't remove it without having to re-stitch topstitching or major construction seams, trim 1/4" away from the stitching. Sue had to do this on the jacket shown at the shoulder and neck edge. When the embroidery is complete, stitch seam binding over the cut edge. See Photo.



Hoop Aqua magic Plus (water soluble sticky stabilizer) with the paper side up. Score the paper and remove to expose the sticky surface. Because the Aqua magic Plus stabilizer is relatively soft, there is no need to remove it after the embroidery is complete. Just cut away the excess and leave the remaining stabilizer in place.

Attach your Sensor Q foot and select Sensor Q foot in the SET menu. The "hopping" action of the sensor Q foot reinforces the bond between the leather and the sticky stabilizer each time a stitch is formed. It also keeps the leather from "flagging" or moving up and down as the stitch is being formed. Print a template of the design, or trace it from your booklet for placement. Use your Check Size and

Placement feature  to be sure you have your jacket placed correctly. Thread with 40 wt. rayon thread on top and bobbin thread in the bobbin. Embroider your design.

When your embroidery is complete, cut away the excess stabilizer from around your design.

Hand sew the lining back in place. To make this easier, stitch along the facing edge with your sewing machine through just the leather. Then you can hand sew the lining into those stitches. Enjoy your embroidered leather jacket!

Have fun and Happy Embroidering!!