

Are You Seeing Your Patterns Drift?????

By Linda Lawson

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I just sent an e-mail to one of my customers trying to help her with interlocking patterns and thought this would be a good thing to have available for everyone. To help understand the procedure here, you might want to view my video on the Clip/Pause marker. It is available on www.blueribbonquilt.com. Click on the video page and it's one of the first videos.

You will also want to make sure you're system has been calibrated so it's measurements are correct. Please see my article on Calibration listed in the PDF download area of www.blueribbonquiltco.com.

I was doing some experimenting with some quilts last night working with pantographs, trying to experiment with what works best. They were t-shirt quilts (of course) and normally I don't care if it drifts over since the pattern I'm using isn't interlocking and I always stitch off the quilt. But I decided to really pay attention to how the alignment was behaving going across these 85" quilts. I quilted 2 quilts out last night, taking notes on both.

The first quilt I didn't fuss with the alignment at all. I was just observing that the last half of the quilt was very inconsistent in where it ended. Sometimes it would stitch as much as an inch farther than it was intended. The rows looked fine stacked on each other but I was mentally thinking that if this was an interlocking pattern, I would definitely have issues. I also was thinking about my IQ customer and what I was going to tell her to help her out. At the end of the quilt I clipped the last row and noticed that the right half of the pass was slanted about an inch below the quilt. So what started at the left edge of the quilt just fine, had drifted down as much as an inch by the time the row was complete.

So on the next quilt I quilted last night, I decided to really practice what I preach to my customers on how to stitch out interlocking patterns. Since I didn't have a quilt for an interlocking pattern to work with, I just used what I always use on my t-shirt quilts (Deb Geisler's Spirals Galore) trying to really pay attention to running the pattern straight and aligned with the previous row. Here again the pass was 85" and I was quilting it at a 14.5" height.

What worked well for me is to use my pause marker at about 50 inches from the left edge (beginning of my pass). Then when the machine paused, I could go in and realign it to the previous row. Then I made sure the pause marker was moved over to the left edge so the machine wouldn't stop again. It takes seconds to do this. After you do this, your machine will make sure it's aligning with the previous row and you won't get the drift downwards. Normally, shifting will just start to show at around 50 - 60" out. If you pause the machine at 50" or a little past the middle of your quilt, this will make the IQ line up again with the proper point and then it will stitch out the rest of the pass correctly. I used this method all the way down the quilt. When I stitched out the last row after clipping it, it stitched out wonderfully straight. :lol: So this method worked beautifully.

Not all patterns are going to give you issues....When I first started using a computerized system, there weren't all these interlocking patterns out there and so when my stitching would shift or drift down, I just sort of thought that was inherent of using a computerized system and tried to work around it. Now it seems like within the last 2 - 3 years there has been an explosion of interlocking, dense patterns that need to fit together like a puzzle. Susan Mallet

has a beautiful feather pattern out there that is probably the most dense pattern I have ever seen. ([Susan's pattern](#)) Even though hers does not interlock, it is so dense that it drifts down if stitched out longer than 50". The only way I can use that pattern is to realign it 3 times across a pass larger than 60". Because I know how this pattern behaves, I know what I need to do even on the very first pass. I have gotten so I know what patterns are fast to run and what patterns I need to spend a little more time with. I think this should be considered when we're pricing out what a particular pattern is categorized as. Even if it's a simple looking pattern, ask yourself if it's going to require an extra step to keep it aligned throughout the quilt. If so, don't forget to build that into your pricing. Like I said before, it takes seconds to realign in the middle of a quilt but you might want to keep that in mind when you're putting a particular pattern into it's pricing category.

I have been computerized for almost 5 years now. Yes, even on my previous system the same exact thing would occur. I remember years ago, I would have this happen and just justified it as just being inherent of using a computerized system. At first I thought it was happening because of the fabric draw-up and other issues. I remember having Greg spend hours trying to adjust my bars on my machine because I kept telling him they must not be straight because the rows were always stitching out at a slant. (Poor guy, what he puts up with LOL). It never really bothered me that much because I always stitched off the quilt and most of the patterns were designed well enough that no one would really know it was slanted after it was off the frame. I guess what I'm saying is that I knew it was slanted and ended at all different end points on the edges, but my customers would probably never have noticed it and so therefore I just accepted it. When I got my IQ, I noticed the same thing was happening. Here again, I just accepted it because after all, that's what my other system did.

What causes this shifting? Well Zoltan explained it to me as the inaccuracy in the system. All systems have a small percentage of inaccuracy as it goes across the length of the table or even on a complex, large motif pattern. This inaccuracy percentage (Zoltan told me what it was once but I forgot the exact percentage). These systems move in so many different directions when doing dense or complex patterns. Unless a system is gear driven, (which I've never heard of) there is no way the system will stay on it's specified path for a long periods of time. The inaccuracy percentage doesn't show up in shorter passes but the longer distance a machine moves, the more the inaccuracy rate will build up. This is why on a panto you will see issues towards the right half of the pass (if starting at the left).

Steps to Using the Clip/Pause Marker to Realign

Step 1:

When you first start the quilt and are using a very dense panto, you'll want to begin this on the first row. At the sew quilt screen you want to hit "clip/pause marker". You'll see a purple line to the left of the screen. Pull that line over to the middle of your row. Make sure you see a purple reference point (circle with cross in it) somewhere within the pattern. If you don't see it, click on the "stop" word at the top of this line. Then click "okay" and begin stitching your first row.

Step 2:

The machine will stop at where you set your pause marker waiting for you to attend to it. Here you will click "realign."

Step 3:

The IQ will ask for a reference point. Here you will select a point on the previous row and hit continue.

Step 4:

Next the IQ will ask you to move your needle to the reference point. Move the machine to this reference point and hit continue.

Step 5:

The next screen will take you to where you can continue to "sew quilt." But this is where you need to click "clip/pause marker" to move your marker back over to the left side of your screen to get it out of your way. Then click "okay" to continue.

Step 6:

To finish, you just hit the "sew quilt" and continue on your way. Do this on all the rows as you stitch down your quilt.

So it only takes seconds to hit the sequence of realign, continue, continue, clip/pause marker, okay, sew quilt. The time it took you to read that sequence is all the time that will be needed to actually do it!

Zoltan developed the pause marker/realign method and is constantly tweaking his system to compensate for when things do start to shift. I am always amazed at how Zoltan looks at an issue and attacks it head on. He has worked hard to get the IQ to be the most accurate system on the market today and is always developing features or improving the system to aid today's computerized quilter. This pause marker and realignment method is perfect example of him seeing an issue and developing a solution for us. We now have that feature to use for not only pantographs, but also it can be used on large motifs where we need the system to track perfectly throughout the design.

I hope this helps someone out there that is struggling with keeping their pantos straight and wasn't sure of the exact way to go about it. Give this method a try next time you have one of those patterns that you find your self watching constantly to make sure it doesn't mess up on the end. Start pausing it on the very first pass. Yes, it takes an extra step when stitching out but the results are well worth it. I have gotten so I know what patterns are fast to run and what patterns I need to spend a little more time with. I think this should be considered when we're pricing out what a particular pattern is categorized as. Even if it's a simple looking pattern, ask yourself if it's going to require an extra step to keep it aligned throughout the quilt. If so, don't forget to build that into your pricing. Like I said before, it takes seconds to realign in the middle of a quilt but you might want to keep that in mind when you're putting a particular pattern into its pricing category.

Update 2/09: The Intelliquilter's accuracy rate has improved tremendously since this article was writing. If you have a system that is newer than Dec. 2008, you will not experience this drift at all. Even on a long pass, you will probably not have to realign anything due to the motor inaccuracy. You still will need to pay attention to how dense your patterns are and whether or not the fabric is drawing things askew.