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What is a free arm?

The free arm is a sewing term referring to a certain part of the sewing machine. Generally all sewing machines have a free arm and it is used to sew tube items such as trouser legs, cuffs, sleeves etc. The free arm is located at the bottom of the sewing machine protruding out from the main body and just passed the needle and the feed dogs. The bobbin race, feed dogs and stitch plate are all built into the free arm. Most sewing machines have an accessory box which is moulded around the free arm and when removed will reveal it. You can remove the accessory box by simply sliding it out backwards to act as a stand alone tool box, when the free arm of the machine is not required, the box can be attached back to act as a small sewing table. Your accessory box has two functions, one is to hold all of your sewing feet, bobbins and general sewing accessories and the other, as a small table when attached to the sewing machine. Of course every time you need the free arm, you will need to remove the accessory box in order to be able to use this function of the machine.

The free arm is a very useful feature to all sewing machines as it makes sewing one layer of fabric without catching another. This is because all of the workings around the bobbin race, feed dogs and needle are housed there.



The Free - Arm of a sewing machine



Sliding a sleeve onto the Free - Arm

As mentioned earlier the free arm is used to sew tubular items with ease. So let's say that you have finished making a pair of trousers and the last part is to machine stitch around the hems. Simply slide away the accessory box to reveal the free arm. Once removed, you can now slide one of the trouser legs over the top of the free arm giving you comfort and ease to sew around the hem. As you stitch around the hem feed the trousers around with your hands, this will give a smooth sewing motion and prevent any pull or strain on the machine. Do this to prevent bulk from building up at the gap under the free arm and the table or workspace the machine is sitting on.

The free arm is used for any part of a sewing project where there is a tube like panel. The most common parts of a garment where the free arm would be used is trouser legs, jacket or shirt sleeves, shirt cuffs, the seats of trousers and small repairs.

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