

MACHINE *Knit* AMERICA

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Yes the look is here!

WORKSHOPS

with Susanna Lewis

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PATTERNS & ARTICLES GALORE!



POLISHING UP WITH STABILIZING AGENTS

An insight to stabilizing by Sharon Nani

The term "stabilize" means to make firm or to keep from changing or fluctuating. There are times when you may wish to do this to your fabric or to parts of it. An example is knitting ribs or trims with rayon or cotton. These two fibers have little resilience. Adding a stabilizing agent helps these fibers hold their shape. This is one polishing factor that gives your product a professional look. Your fabric is stabilized by the construction of the fabric or by adding a stabilizing agent such as monofil, lycra, thread or elastic. I will discuss these stabilizing agents and their pros and cons in this article.

Monofil - size 25 type EL-50

Monofil is a strong, fine nylon filament. It looks like fine fishing line. On some knitting machines, it is used for "shadow lace" techniques. Monofil has several good points: it is inexpensive, easy to knit, comes in clear, smoke and dark colors and has a good stretch factor. Stretch Factor is the term used when I am referring to its resilience or how fast, and with how much strength it bounces back to its original shape after stretching. The disadvantages are that it has a hard, scratchy feel and can become brittle with time and repeated laundering. It was a popular agent used in prior years, but it has since been replaced by the more modern 'lycra®'.

Monofil is easy to use on the knitting machine. Thread it through the tension system the same as any other yarn. It goes through its own tension disc,

which should be set at the tightest tension. If this is not tight enough on your machine, wind the monofil one time around the tension disc before proceeding to the next yarn guide. Join the monofil to the yarn at the eyelet or at the sinker plate. If you have applied too much tension, the needles will be pulled forward. You must also watch that your edge stitches do not get too tight. If they do, apply more weight under this area or gently pull down on these edge stitches as you are knitting over that area. Finally, always remove the monofil before knitting the final row of rib. This holds true for all stabilizing agents. A transfer carriage will not easily transfer a stabilizing agent.

Sewing thread (size 50-40)

An example is cotton covered polyester. Threads on cones are more efficient and easier to use. The pros are that you can easily match the color of your yarn, it is strong and easy to knit with, and it is soft to the feel. The cons are that it has only a moderate stretch factor (meaning that it will not stabilize as firmly as the other agents) and it is more expensive. For machine set up and use, see monofil.

Elastic

This comes on cones in a variety of colors, it is strong and its stretch factor is easily manipulated. I usually use the elastic in the first three rows of the tubular cast on. When elastic is used throughout a fabric, it is stiff and heavy. I

always hand feed the elastic so that I can control whether I want the elastic to pull in (apply more tension when feeding the elastic) or to simply lay in the cast on to keep the edge from fanning out during wash and wear. Sometimes the elastic is knitted in one row out of every ten rows (or whatever spacing is required for a more shirred effect). Elastic is more expensive, harder to match yarn colors, and adds more weight to the fabric.

Lycra®

This stabilizer is the 'state of the art' - the newest one on the market. It is used on the commercial knitting machines, and we are just beginning to master its use on the home knitting machines. It is soft and has the greatest amount of stretch. Lycra® only comes in clear. Some companies make a spandex that has a coating over a percentage of Lycra®. It is harder to knit with until you get your tensions on your mast system properly regulated. When I thread Lycra®, I bypass the tension disc and go directly to the next yarn guide. This agent needs very little tension. If too much tension is applied, it will break. Sometimes the tension disc is taped open so that the Lycra® can go through it as a yarn guide without having any pressure applied to it. Use this procedure if Lycra® is used throughout the fabric, such as in bicycle pants. Most knitters prefer to hand feed the Lycra® when it is used in smaller areas. Thread it in the same eyelet as the yarn and hand feed the Lycra® along with the yarn. Set the cone of Lycra® on the floor to your left and while pushing the lock

(carriage) with your right hand, use the left to guide the Lycra® along with the lock while using your thumb and index finger to apply the slightest tension on the Lycra®. You must watch the Lycra® and ensure that it spins off the cone as you knit. If it sticks under the cone without your notice, it will knit and stretch and pop.

- Always use weights when knitting with Lycra®.
- If Lycra® does not knit off the needles, you may have to apply more weight and/or increase the stitch size.
- If Lycra® "grins through" then lightly apply more tension with your fingers.
- Lycra® works well with all light colors; however, it is easier to see in darker colors. I use it with all colors, you must decide what you like by swatching first.

In all cases, LYCRA® must be steamed for it to portray the correct properties. Pass steam over the Lycra®. Notice that it will "shriveled" into a new shape. Therefore, always swatch and steam to acquire the correct stitch and row gauge.

Lycra® is used in industry and is now available for home use. It is economical, eliminates color matching, has great stretch and excellent wearability. It is used for knitting waistbands, cumberbunds and anything that requires a great deal of stretch. One can also achieve interesting effects in fabrication of yarn. Lycra® comes on large cones for easier use. It must always be steamed to get its effect - Lycra® is wavy and limp before steam has been applied.

Each of these agents has an

