

## Fabric Cutters: Which is Right for You?

August was tool month in The Quilter's Way and as part of fabric cutter week one of our members gave a demonstration of his Cricut Maker cutter in our live video meeting. The demonstration was very informative and generated quite discussion about the merits of various types of cutters. I thought that you might be interested in some of the things that we discussed so I have summarized the discussion for you.

There are two types of fabric cutters: electronic and manual or mechanical. Cutters such as the Brother Scan N Cut, the Janome Artistic Edge and the Cricut Maker fall into the first category. The AccuQuilt GO! and other products and well as cutters made by Sizzix are what I consider manual or mechanical. There are fundamental differences in these two types of cutters and you need to understand what they are before you can decide which type of cutter would work best for you.

### Electronic Cutters

Electronic cutters, such as the Brother Scan N Cut for example can cut several different types of materials, such as cardstock, fabric, thin metal, vinyl, and thin leather. It uses mats and there are several different types of these and you place the material to be cut on the mat and then feed it into the machine.

With this type of fabric cutter, you can only cut one layer of material at a time. You can't cut different types of materials at once – you can't put cardstock on the mat as well as thin metal and expect the machine to be able to cut each one out perfectly. This is because you need to adjust the pressure, speed, and depth of the blade that cuts the material.

The Brother Scan n Cut can also draw and there are several different pens This is a great feature for hand embroiderers or card makers. It is also handy for drawing the 1/4" seam line on fabric especially for shapes such as hexagons and diamonds. It is really helpful if you are hand stitching these types of shapes together, such as when doing EPP.

While the Scan N Cut comes preloaded with hundreds of designs, if you want to create your own designs you need to use the free Brother Canvas software on your computer. You can also import designs using this software and then transfer it, either by USB (older versions) or wirelessly (new version), to the machine to cut. This is great news for those of us who like to create our own designs and a perfect feature if you love appliqué. The blades, pens and cutting mats are consumables – they have to be periodically replaced.

So, when would you use this type of digital cutter?

- When you want to cut out individual intricate designs.
- If you like to create your own designs or upload already created shapes to cut out, this type of digital cutting machines works very well.

- If you want to have the ability to cut out shapes from a variety of materials, such as cardstock, thin metal, fabric, vinyl, etc. This type of machine will do that for you.
- If you like to make cards and want the drawing and embossing features.
- If you want to add rhinestones or crystals to your projects.

When would you not want to use this type of digital cutter?

- If you are cutting out several shapes of the same type and size. As you can only cut out one layer of material at a time, it would take quite a while to cut out 300 HST's for example.
- If you are a quilter who prefers piecing to appliqué, this is probably not the best cutter for you – again as you can't layer up your fabric and cut multiple layers and shapes at one time.
- If you don't like to create your own unique designs, you won't need this type of digital cutter.
- If you aren't interested in cutting out other types of materials besides fabric, you won't need this type of cutter.

## Mechanical Cutters

Manual or mechanical cutter such as the AccuQuilt GO!, for example, uses dies to cut fabric. Dies have metal blades in them and they never dull or need to be sharpened. With this type of machine, you put your fabric on the die and then the mat on top and then roll it through the machine. The roller presses down on the mat, which presses the fabric against the blades in the die and cuts the fabric. You can layer up to 6 layers of fabric on one die before running it through the cutter, allowing you to cut multiple shapes at one time and quickly. The AccuQuilt GO! doesn't need any software to make it work.

There are a wide variety of dies available with new ones are always being created and some dies include more than one shape or size on them. You can only cut fabric with this type of cutter, you can't draw on any type of material – it's strictly a cutting machine. The mats are the only consumables with this type of cutter. They can be used on both sides and you can rotate them as well to get the maximum amount of use out of them.

When would you use this type of fabric cutter?

- When you want to cut out multiple shapes at one time.
- If you mostly do pieced quilts, this cutter will allow you to speed up your cutting process significantly
- If you have physical issues, such as arthritis, that make it difficult to use a rotary cutter.
- If you only want to cut fabric and don't want to cut out other types of materials, such as cardstock or vinyl.

- If you aren't interested in creating your own unique shapes and cutting them out with a fabric cutter.

When would you not want to use this type of cutter?

- If you like to create your own shapes, you can't do this with this type of cutter.
- If you prefer to do appliqué and want a cutter that will cut out lots of appliqué shapes, you will be limited in the appliqué dies that are available.
- If you want to cut out designs from other materials than fabric, this type of machine won't do it. It might be able to, but AccuQuilt suggests that you only use the cutter and dies with fabric.
- If you want to draw on materials such as cardstock, you can't do this with this type of cutter.

## Considerations

If you are considering buying a fabric cutter, consider:

- the type of quilting you do most of the time - patchwork/piecing or appliqué
- the type of materials you want to cut - just fabric or other types such as vinyl
- the initial cost of the machine and additional expenses (mats, dies, blades, etc.)
- your budget