Fabrics 101: Embroidering on Neoprene

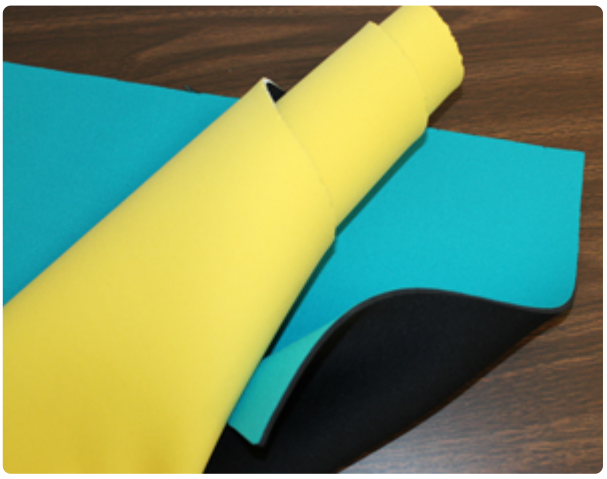
Products Used

Penguin at the Beach (Sku: ESP29522-1)

A Grand Flourish Alphabet Design Pack (6 1/2 Inch Height) (Sku: EDP13791-1)

Bass Crest (Sku: ESP30420-1)

Steps To Complete



Neoprene is a stretchy and synthetic rubber material. It's waterproof and great for insulating items -- it keeps the hot hot, and the cool cool. And, that layer of rubbery insulation also adds a bit of protection when used in laptop and iPad covers and cases, as well wetsuits for water skiing, snorkeling, and scuba diving.

Neoprene is also the material that is used to make those ever-popular can and bottle "koozies." These neoprene wraps keep your drink nice and cool, and also keep the condensation away from your hand and table.

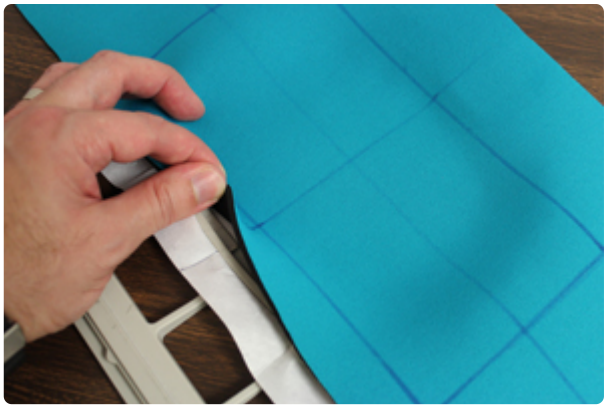
It's not easy to find neoprene on the bolt at a fabric store, so I took my search to the Internet. I ordered 3mm neoprene from Seattle Fabrics. It arrived quickly and as promised. With the rising popularity of making can koozies, it wouldn't surprise me if neoprene was found in bricks-and-mortar fabric stores very soon.

Neoprene is rubbery, slippery, and it is not easy to hoop. I found that the top hoop popped off due to the thickness of the material. I elected not to hoop the neoprene, but instead "floated" it on top of the stabilizer.

Because I'm "floating" the neoprene on top of the stabilizer and not hooping it, I am using cutaway stabilizer -- and I strongly recommend that you do the same.

The purpose of an embroidery hoop is to keep the fabric and stabilizer together during embroidery. This ensures that the stitches land in the right place, and guard against any shifting of the fabric (which results in gapping in the design's stitches).

If I don't hoop the neoprene, then I'm risking that the fabric will shift. That risk of shifting and gapping greatly increases when using tear-away stabilizer, so I'm going to guard against that increased risk by using cutaway stabilizer. Will you get good results with



I made a can koozie out of the neoprene. In the photo to the left you can see that I drew out the rectangle from the pattern, and also the horizontal and vertical axis lines.

Then, I sprayed the stabilizer with a quick shot of temporary adhesive (I like Gunold KK100). I placed the neoprene on the stabilizer, aligning the center point on the neoprene with the center point on the stabilizer. The lines on the stabilizer and the neoprene should (and did) line up with the marks on the hoop.

I attached the hoop to the machine, and moved the hoop so that the needle was right over the center point. Then, I embroidered the design.

I used a sharp needle, because it has a very fine point. Embroidery needles have rounded tips. Because neoprene is so thick, the needle needs to cut through quickly and precisely so that the neoprene doesn't flag (move up and down).

The design that I'm using is a letter from the Grand Flourish alphabet. It has a delightful combination of running stitches and satin stitches. Neoprene, being sturdy, supports both of these types of stitches very well.

It turned out great! After I stitched the design, I twisted and yanked and pulled on the neoprene to see if I could get it to rip or tear from where the needle perforations were. Nope. This is tough stuff!

I whipped up project instructions for you to make a can koozie like the one to the left. You can find that by clicking here.

However, it's as easy (and maybe even less expensive) to order pre-made and unconstructed koozies, and stitch on those.

I ordered a variety of blank and unconstructed neoprene items from TheSewphisticatedStitcher.com. At that site you can find blank luggage tags, bottle koozies, and can koozies (shown left).

As you can see, the items come in a variety of colors.

The koozies arrive flat, ready for stitching. The service and quality from The Sewphisticated Stitcher has always been excellent.

On the left is a bottle koozie, and I added the Bass Crest (small size)design. On the right is a can koozie with the Penguin at the Beach (small size) design.

The Sewphisticated Stitcher has a variety of colors available for the neoprene products. And, there are videos on YouTube that demonstrate how to assemble the koozies.

I also tested a luggage tag, and added my monogram using letters from the Bodoni alphabet set.

Designs of any complexity, and any kind of stitch type (whether it be satin, running, or fills), hold up very well on neoprene.