

Hooping 101: Embroidering on Pockets

Products Used

Horseshoe Pair (Sku: ESP19847-1)

I oftentimes think of pockets as the "final frontier" in embroidery. When embroidering on jeans, a pocket is a great place to add a little design to tie a theme together; and, on a shirt, putting a design on a pocket is a small and subtle statement. Pockets are like little spotlights for embroidery designs.

But embroidering on pockets can be a mystery. How is it hooped? Does the entire pocket need to come off, and if so, how does it go back on? How much plotting and scheming does one need to do in order to stitch onto a pocket?

I'm taking the plunge for you. I grabbed a variety of pocket-laden items -- shirts, a pair of jeans, and an apron. And then I found my favorite seam-ripper and documented every step along the way. There's a little plotting and scheming involved, but I was surprised at how simple and straightforward the process is. I think you'll agree.

Steps To Complete

The first item that I worked with was an adult-sized denim shirt. I started with this because I have a five in my closet, so if I worked on one until it was beyond hope and unsalvageable, I had easy access to more.



This shirt is an old one, so any shrinkage occurred long ago. If you're starting with a new one, launder it and tumble dry before embroidering on it.

I turned the shirt inside out, took a deep breath, thought "No guts, no glory!" and started ripping the seams along the sides and bottom. I left the top right and left corner stitches intact.

My next step was to determine placement and back the fabric with stabilizer. The shirt is cotton, so I chose a medium-weight cutaway stabilizer.



I knew that I wouldn't be able to hoop the pocket so that all the sides of the fabric were in the hoop. When I work with items where a side or two are not in the hoop, I take precautions to make sure that the fabric and stabilizer are nice and tight. In this instance I sprayed the stabilizer with a temporary adhesive (KK100) and smoothed the pocket on top.

In this photo I'm using an air-erase pen to mark the center of the design as well as the horizontal and vertical axis lines.



The pocket has a flap so I've pinned it out of the way to keep it clear of the needle.

When you're working with a pocket that is still attached to the garment, it helps to have a large surface area of stabilizer. That's why I'm using a large hoop.



I used a liberal amount of adhesive spray to make sure that the fabric didn't shift around when I was embroidering on it.

I also took great care in making sure that the shirt was folded and out of the way so it wouldn't interfere with the movement of the hoop.



After the design finished stitching, I took my time cutting away the excess stabilizer. I didn't want to accidentally cut the pocket. After all, I only have four more of these shirts left in my closet!



Then I pinned the pocket back in place, and re-sewed it onto the shirt using simple straight stitches and matching thread.



A plain denim garment has become my "good luck" shirt with the handsome [Horseshoe Pair design!](#)



Next I experimented with a pair of jeans.

Working from the inside of the jeans, I removed the pocket's stitches. This took a little longer than it did with the denim shirt, as the jeans pocket was double-stitched.



I hooped the jeans pocket so that the rest of the jeans were to the side of the hoop, instead of in the back. This helped me to get as much of the pocket as possible onto the stabilizer.

I'm using a cutaway stabilizer with denim ([you can read the Fabrics 101 article here](#)).



I also rolled the jeans up carefully to the side of the hoop, so they didn't get in the way while the design was stitching out.



And you can see how awesome the [Flaming Basketball](#) looks on the dark denim fabric!



There may be times when it's easier to just remove a pocket entirely before embroidering it. This is what I did with the small pocket of a child's cotton shirt, because the pocket is so small.



To make sure I could put the pocket right back where it was when I re-sewed it to the shirt, I outlined it with an air-erase pen before removing it.

Since I didn't have the rest of the garment to add weight and stability to the hooped pocket like I did with the denim shirt and with the jeans, I made sure to use plenty of temporary spray adhesive and to really stick that pocket onto the stabilizer.



You could also use a smaller hoop and hoop the fabric entirely.

Then, after embroidering, stitch the pocket back on to the shirt.

The [Flaming Basketball](#) stands out beautifully against the gingham!



I found that the filled design was a bit heavy for the soft cotton in children's clothing. Because the entire pocket wasn't hooped, a close-up view would show you a small amount of gapping between the border and the basketball.

Sometimes even the most seasoned professionals get less-than-perfect results. But the results are acceptable: The gapping is not visible, and a three-year-old boy won't be standing still long enough for a close examination!



I found an apron that had a pocket on it, and I used the same technique as stitching on the pocket of the adult shirt. I removed the stitches from the bottom and sides but left the top right and left stitches intact.

Then I added the [Banana Bunch](#) onto the pocket to give a tasty and flavorful look.



Stitching on pockets became like potato chips...I couldn't stop after one, or even four! I grabbed another shirt from my closet and added the [Circling Dragon \(Bluework\) design](#) to the pocket.

The fabric of the shirt is thin, so I specifically chose a simple and light design. It turned out great!

Embroidering on pockets takes a little plotting and scheming, as you can see. But in many cases, a pocket is the perfect place to showcase a design. It's well worth the extra effort to remove part or all of the pocket.

Some embroiderers will stitch through a pocket rather than remove it. I don't find that

quite as satisfying as the above methods, for two reasons: First, stitching through a pocket makes it unusable; and second, when stitching through two layers of a cotton or linen fabric (like used in the above shirts), I always see the fabric pucker. As always, use the technique or process that works for you - but I get the best and most professional-looking results when I take the extra time to remove the pocket.