

Hart Beat

From square hoops to pocket hooping attachments, manufacturers answer requests for unique hooping devices.

By Helen Hart Momsen

"If it can hold still and lay flat, we can probably print on it." This is the motto of a screen printer in my town. The embroiderer might say, "If it can hold still and lay flat, and the needle will go through it, we can probably embroider on it."

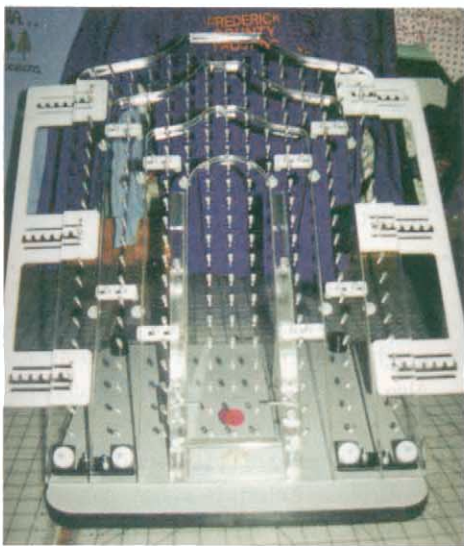
The idea of getting things to hold still and lay flat has been a challenge since the beginning of embroidery time. The old, hand-held wooden hoops graduated to freehand embroidery machines. But when pantograph machines came along, the growing industry had to take another look at how to hold the hoop on the pantograph and secure the item to be decorated in that hoop.

Hoffman Bros., Rosemont, Ill., often addresses those challenges for large production houses. Most of the company's customers are large firms with a need for clamp-

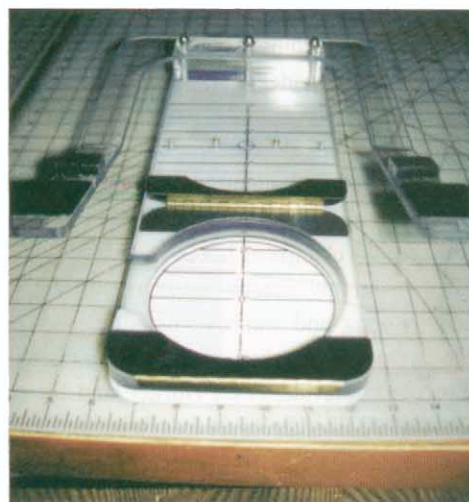
ing fixtures to secure products that are tough to hoop by conventional means. Hoffman Bros. maintains its own engineering and manufacturing departments and can accept any project for research and development, including those of smaller embroidery shops.

Scott Hoffman views his company as serving a specialty market niche. Involved with the embroidery industry for the past 15 years, Hoffman says, "We want to be known for developing custom-tailored solutions to difficult embroidery problems. Often, small embroidery shops can't justify the expense of a clamping device. There is not enough repetitive business, and they can't recapture the investment."

Solving the hooping or clamping dilemmas of large production embroiderers has brought Hoffman customers such as L.L. Bean, Land's End, Disney, and Wolverine. "We developed a



To aid in difficult placement, the All-In-1 Hooper by Tex, St. Louis, has a fold-out sleeve board and three sizes of shirt boards that nest into each other. The device also has extensions that can be used when hooping larger garments.

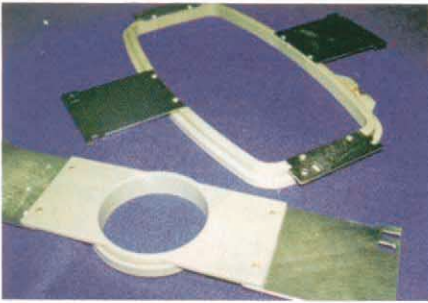


The HoopMaster, by Midwest Products, Menomonee Falls, Wis., has a pin for locating registration marks that document design placement on the garment. The shaped neck/shoulder board marks the location of the garment's neckline alphabetically, and the hoop device marks the center of the design numerically.

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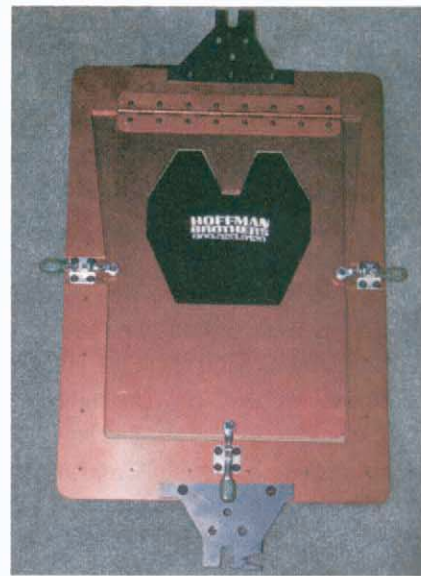
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These hoops from Durkee Enterprises, Huntersville, N.C., are made of high-impact plastic, which adds strength and reduces vibration. They open extra wide to accommodate thicker, hard-to-hold items.



Square hoops from EMS Hoop Tech, Fairfield, Ohio, allow for more stitching room when the base of a design is the widest area. They are designed to accommodate left-chest embroidery work while holding a taut grip on the material.



Solving the hooping and clamping dilemmas of large production embroiderers is the challenge met by Hoffman Bros., Rosemont, Ill. This window hoop device secures smaller fabrics needing embroidery so the needle doesn't come too close to the edge of the fabric to register correctly.

clamp for Disney for Christmas tree skirts that they also use for securing other things for embroidery," he says. "We also created a window hoop device for Wolverine to embroider Harley Davidson boots. The area to be embroidered brought the needle so close to the edge of the leather piece that an alternative solution had to be found." The window of this hoop can be cut to any dimension so it can be adapted for other specific designs.

"We can examine any difficult product and suggest alternative methods for clamping," Hoffman notes. "Most of the solutions are pneumatic, but we can create manual ones as well." Luggage clamps, window hoops, and Christmas stocking clamps are some of the clamping devices available, with prices ranging from \$850 for the window hoop to \$1,500 for the luggage clamp. For companies with large and/or repeat orders, the clamps soon pay for themselves.

Hoffman's most unusual challenge was exhibited at Bobbin World, Atlanta, in 1998. Land's End had requested a device to do finished pockets, and Hoffman Bros. developed a cylinder arm that replaces the existing one on purchased machines. The pocket slides over the new cylinder, allowing it to be embroidered without removing it or sewing it shut. "It can still be used as a standard machine after the conversion," Hoffman notes.

So far, in spite of a flurry of interested visitors at Bobbin World—many of

them machine sellers and manufacturers—the pocket cylinder machine at Land's End remains the only one in operation. "Machine companies are always looking for an edge," Hoffman says, but the need for machines with this specialized arm is limited so far.

The cost for converting a singlehead to the pocket model is about \$5,000, and this does not include shipping the machine back and forth. But for a uniform manufacturer—or a contract house that does many pockets—the price tag may seem reasonable. In a large production house, a pocket machine may be just the thing to give that company an edge over the competition.

That competitive edge is something all embroidery shops seek no matter what their size. After-market hoop developers are always looking for solutions to hooping challenges, and embroiderers are always searching for the source for those clamps or hoops.