

Colorful Rhapsody

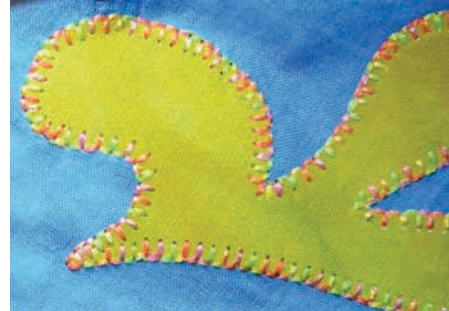
By Ricky Tims

A Three-month, Summer Block of the Month Project.

Month Two

Goal for the month:

- **Stitch the applique**



Suggested threads for appliqué (month two):

Available from Superior Threads

<http://www.superiorthreads.com>

Rainbows #841 - 500 yards

Rainbows #838 - 500 yards

Rainbows #814 - 500 yards

Magnifico #2199 - 500 yards

Any color may be used in the bobbin and one spool of Bottom Line by Superior Threads (1,420 yards) should be enough for piecing and appliqué. In this technique we will be adjusting the tension so NONE of the bobbin shows - so any color should be fine.

OVERVIEW

I have come to love appliqué and I no longer shy away from it. I use a variety of machine methods, but my favorite is a fused, raw edge technique that is stitched with a double blanket stitch. The finished appliqué is not "flat" like most raw edge fused techniques. It is not hard to master and it is simply beautiful in the finished quilt.



Many machines have a Single Blanket stitch, but the Double Blanket stitch is generally found only on mid to high range machines. Note: In this photo, stitch #1329 is the Single Blanket stitch, and stitch #1330 is the Double Blanket stitch.

The Double Blanket Stitch – As I Know It.

The main feature of the Double Blanket Stitch is that it builds up layers of threads. The Double Blanket Stitch on my Bernina uses the following sequence: Forward-back-forward-back-forward-left-right-left-right. That is the entire pattern! It takes nine needle moves to create one unit of stitching. To better understand the stitch try “air sewing” with your finger.

Emulate the sewing needle with your finger as you say the following sequence. Finger down, then: Forward-back-forward-back-forward-left-right-left-right – then repeat all nine positions of the sequence over and over to understand the pattern. Notice that the forward-back moves build up *five* layers of thread touching the edge of your applique fabric. The last part of the sequence, the left-right part, builds up *four* layers of thread that stitches into the applique fabric. It is this accumulation of layers that makes the stitch so beautiful.

Compare the Double Blanket stitch to a Single Blanket stitch which goes: Forward-left-right. If you try this sequence with your “finger needle,” you’ll see that there are only three positions in the sequence: Finger down, then, forward-left-right, forward-left-right, forward-left-right, and so on. The forward stitch is only one layer of thread and the left-right builds up two layers of thread. You can see why the Double Blanket stitch will create a heavier edge and more dynamic finish. This applique technique is meant to showcase the threads and highlight the edges of the appliqué.

NOTE: Remember, other brands of machines may have a different sequence, but in most cases you will be able to find a stitch with a similar look. Once you do, customize my guidelines to suit your situation. If you don’t have the Double Blanket stitch, try using a heavier thread and the more common Single Blanket Stitch. If you have neither of these, use a very small zigzag stitch or a small satin stitch to do the edges of your applique.

Preparations

1. Attach an open-toe embroidery/applique foot. (Bernina #20)
2. Select the Double Blanket stitch.
3. The default will be much larger than what I recommend. Set both the width and length of the stitch to 2.0mm. You can experiment with smaller stitches – 1.8mm x 1.8mm for example.
4. Top thread should be a 40wt. thread of your choosing. I like a high-shine polyester because I like the effect. You can also use a cotton thread which will give a more matte look. Use whatever threads appeal to you for the effect you like. I also prefer to use a contrasting color that will highlight the edges of the appliqué instead of blending. However, there are times matching the color might be the best choice. For example, I stitched the light green “blossoms” of my Colorful Rhapsody



with a bright green thread. For pieces of applique that have a variegated color, I often select a variegated thread.

5. In the bobbin I prefer *Bottom Line* by Superior. It is a lightweight thread and the bobbin will hold significantly more of it.
6. Loosen the top tension by at least half of normal so the top threads pull to the bottom side.
7. Use an appropriate needle – I prefer a 80/12 Topstitch needle for 40 wt. thread. If you experience any problems try a 90/14 Topstitch needle.
8. Use stabilizer under the background fabric to give stability to the fabric which will create a much more crisp, beautiful stitch. I use Ricky Tims Stable Stuff Poly

PLEASE NOTE: If you are using a polyester thread, or any other synthetic thread, remember to always press with a pressing cloth to avoid creating unwanted melting or shine on the stitching. Alternatively, press with a cooler setting on the iron.

Stitching the Project

Your applique should already be fused in place according to the instructions found in Month One of the Colorful Rhapsody BOM. As you stitch, the most important thing to remember is that the forward/back stitches touch *but not penetrate* the edge of the appliqué.

Before You Begin – Practice on a sample of scraps. Become familiar with how to start and stop, stitch sharp points, tight curves, and inside corners. (see below)

Sewing along a straight edge or gentle curve is not difficult. However, there are three critical areas that require special attention when sewing appliqué using the Double Blanket Stitch.

Starting and Stopping

I generally begin with straight stitches that touch, but don't penetrate, the edge of the appliqué. Take 6-10 small stitches then switch to the Double Blanket Stitch. Stitch the appliqué, then finish by returning to a straight stitch, stitching over the top of the forward/back stitches of the appliqué, then pull the threads to the back and tie to secure.



Turning the Tight Outside Curve

When sewing the tight outside curve, all side stitches should point directly to an imaginary dot in the center of the curve as shown in the illustration. It may be necessary to raise the presser foot and pivot. Always use the needle down feature and only pivot the appliqué when the needle is to the right (forward-back

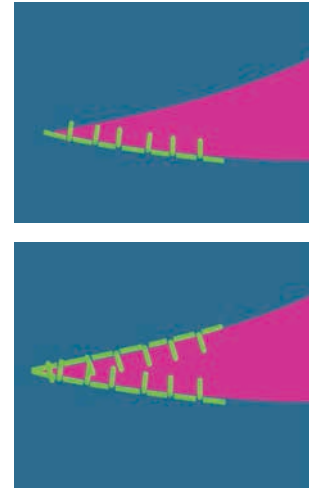


stitches), never pivot when the needle is in the left (on the appliqué) position.

Turning the Sharp Outside Point

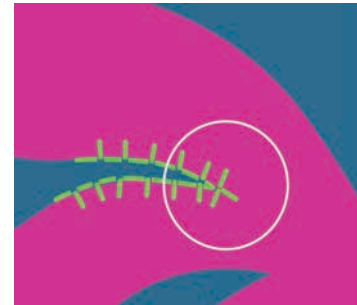
When you need to stitch around a sharp point, don't adjust the width of the stitch as you approach the point. Instead, allow the left right stitches to begin to 'capture' more and more of the fabric.

Once you complete a series of forward-back-forward-back-forward stitches and the needle is at the point of the applique, pivot (with needle down), then continue the left-right-left-right stitches. They should fall directly on top of the previous forward-back stitches. Then, continue stitching. Notice that the stitches trap the fragile point of the fabric and the result looks great.



Turning the Sharp Inside Point

I like the sharp inside point to have a series of side stitches radiating out from one spot. To accomplish this you will need to stitch right to the inside point so that the final forward stitch is touching the inside point. Then, stitch left-right left right (which creates a series of stitches on the applique), stitch forward-back-forward-back into the applique at the point, and stop. DO NOT finish the series with the last forward stitch. Instead, with the needle down in the pivot point, reset the stitch to the beginning (the pattern begin feature is very helpful), pivot, and begin by stitching left-right-left-right radiating out from the point and continue. Note in the illustration it appears as if three sets of left-right stitches are all radiating from the inside point. Resetting the stitch to the beginning allows you to tackle the inside point beautifully.



The best advice I can give to anyone who wants to use decorative stitches for appliqué is to learn the pattern and learn when you can reset the pattern to make it do what YOU want it to do. Experiment and make practice samples before ever trying to do the work on your master project.

