How-to guide:

Make Your Own Symington Corset

Reproduction from the original 1890s pattern made from drab coutil
The Symington Archive covers the period 1960-1990 and is one of the most comprehensive surveys of fashionable corsetry, foundation wear and swimwear in the world.

R. & W.H. Symington & Co. Ltd were corset manufacturers based in Market Harborough and this pattern is from the archive and dates from c1890s.

**About the how to**

This guide will help you make the original 1890s Symington corset.

It is a double layered coutil corset with internal boning and additional casings. The pattern is for a 22” corseted waist and these instructions do not include fitting to the individual or grading for alternative sizes. It is recommended that you toile this pattern first to endure a good fit.

This pattern did not come with any written instructions. Some alternations have been made to the pattern such as centralising the internal boning channels to enable a 12mm bias maker to be used for the casings. You can add a waist tape if required to add stability to the corset.

**Required Skills**

Good accurate sewing machine skills are required to complete this corset.
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Tools and materials will you need

1. 0.75m cotton coutil for top fabric, 0.5m cotton coutil or suitable cotton fabric to use as lining
2. 28cm (11”) split metal busk
3. 4 x 28cm (11”) cm Flat Steel bones
4. Boning- 5mm spiral steel and end caps OR cane cut to casing length
5. 0.5m Pattern paper
6. Embroidery scissors
7. Dressmaking scissors
8. Paper scissors
9. Eyelet hole set tool for 4mm eyelets
10. Awl
11. Rotary cutter and mat (optional)
12. Pins
13. Pencil
14. Sewing needles
15. Tailors chalk
16. Bias binder maker 12mm
17. Bias binder maker 25mm
18. Sewing machine edge foot
19. Sewing machine narrow machine zip foot
20. 4 metre long, approximately 7mm wide, flat corset lace
21. 2x100m reel of Thread to match your fabrics
22. 24 x 4mm eyelets with washers
23. Ruler
24. Pressing Ham
25. If using plastic boning for internal casing 5mm plastic boning cut down to fit. You could use cane.
26. Sewing machine
27. Iron
The Pattern

Trace off your pattern pieces and mark 1cm seam allowance around all pattern pieces. It is really helpful at this stage to number your pattern pieces 1-6.

Please note that you may need to centralise the internal casings lines depending on what size casings you use and width of boning.

1. Centre Front
2. Side front
3. Body Front
4. Side
5. Side Back
6. Back
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Step 1: Cutting out

All seam allowances are 1cm throughout.
This is a double layered corset so you will need to cut out the following pairs:
Top layer coutil: 1 (x2), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (x2) - Note that pattern pieces 1 and 6 are lined with the same top layer fabric.
Lining layer: 2,3,4,5
Casings strips top fabric: 18 x 2.5cm bias cut strips approximately 38cm long (see step number 2)
Binding Top fabric: 4x 4.5cm bias cut strips approximately 48 long

And later…..
When you have cut everything make paper labels so you know which each panel is or chalk mark on the inside the numbers. It is very easy to get them upside down so make sure you can identify each pattern piece.

Top tip: The coutil has a herringbone pattern on the right side and if you pin all your labels near the top on the right side you will know which way up they are sewn together
Step 2: Make your casings

Fold the fabric along the bias and cut 9 x 2.5cm strips approximately 38cm long from each side. This means the herringbone pattern will mirror each side. Place each bias strip with the right side facing down through the bias binder and iron the folds in place.
Step 3: Mounting the two layers together

Lay the main fabric and lining coutil together on pattern pieces 3, 4, 5, and treat them now as one fabric.

Stitch the casings in position shown on pattern, laying the casings about 1.5cm overhanging the panel and carefully edge stitch either side of the casing using an edge foot if you have one.
Step 4: Sewing the internal casings

Pattern pieces 2-5 need to be sewn together and treated as one fabric by stitching 0.5cm inside the seam allowance on each side. There might be some issues with the turn of the cloth having two layers working together so it is best to roll pin them over a ham to reduce wrinkling and create a shaped piece when it is made up. Sew within the seam allowances where you pinned so they become one pattern piece.
Step 5: Sewing in the busk (stud side)

Stitch centre front and lining centre front with right sides together along the centre front seam. Press open and then over to get a crisp edge. Now edge stitch the centre front.

**Top tip:** Use an edge foot to help you and always stitch top stitching from the topside as it will be the neatest stitch.
Place studs side of busk between the two layers pushing it up against the centre front laying the busk on top of both seam allowances.

Mark with a pencil or chalk where the studs are placed ensuring you leave about 2cm from the top.

Top tip: The two studs closest together mark the bottom of the busk.
Step 5: Sewing in the busk (stud side) - continued

With an awl make the holes by pushing through the top layer front to back. Now slide the studs into the holes. Change to a zipper foot so you can get really close and stitch around the busk. Do not reverse stitch at the ends, leave a tail of thread and secure it by hand later on. You may want to tac this in first for ease.

**Top tip:** Use your ‘Needle In’ position if you have it. This way when you pause you won’t lose your place.
Step 6: Sewing in the busk (hook side)

Lay the top fabric and lining right side together and lay it next to the stitched studs side.
Mark with chalk where the openings need to be to line up with the other side.
Stitch down the centre front main coutil and lining right sides together leaving the openings.
Remember to fasten off each time you stop and start so that the seam is secure.
Press the seam open and then press it folded over. Mark the opening with pins as shown and top stitch along the centre front edge.
Remember to stop and start each side of the openings.
Tie off the threads inside to create a neat finish.
Now sew around the busk as you did on the studs side.

Top tip: Tack this in place before sewing to save unnecessary unpicking!
Using the pattern as a guide, sew in the internal boning channels onto pattern pieces 1 and 2.
You may need to centralise these to ensure there is space for the casings to be applied.

Top tip: To mark the initial line you can use magic tape which you can easily lift off the coutil without leaving a mark.
Step 8: Back panel

Sew the top layer and lining layer along centre back seams (pattern 6).
Press open, press over and edge stitch along centre back on each side.
Sew internal boning channels as pattern indicates for the flat steeles.
Now mark the eyelet positions as shown on the pattern.
Step 8: Back panel - continued

Sew internal casing onto this panel. Insert eyelets along the middle channel.
Step 9: Making the corset body

Stitch the pattern pieces in order from 1-6 each side, wrong sides together, so that the seams are on the outside. Stitch with a 1cm seam allowance.

It is at this point you would add a waist tape if you are adding one.

Press seams open over a pressing ham if you have one.
Step 10: Sew casings

Trim all the seams back to about 2-3mm.
Step 10: Sew casings - continued

Position the casings centrally over the trimmed seams and edge stitch either side as you did on the internal casings. Be sure to make sure each side follows a herringbone line of the coutil so they match.

Top tip: Leave about 3cm each end over hanging. This will help you have something to hold when you are putting your spirals in.
Step 11: Binding the top edge

This is the time when you can alter the top edge line if necessary to create a different shape. Recut the top line making sure it is even and that each side of the corset matches.

Sew one line of sewing about 0.5cm in from the top edge to secure everything.

With a pressed 4.5cm bias binding strip sew it right sides together to the top edge to bind it.

This is the same process when you come to finishing the bottom edge.
Step 11: Binding the top edge - continued

Fold over and hand stitch in place.
Step 12: Insert boning

Having cut the boning to length and added the end caps now insert the spirals into the casings. They need to be about 3cm shorter than each casing seam.

The 5mm plastic boning for the internal channels will need to be split in two in order to fit.

The flat steel bones need to be inserted either side of the eyelets.

**Top tip:** If you are struggling to get the boning into the channels try using a flat steel bone to push it up.
Step 13: Binding the bottom edge

Recut the bottom edge ensure it matches on each side. Stitch along the edge 0.5cm in as you did along the top to seal the channels.

Bind with 4.5cm binding as you did for the top edge (step 11).
Step 14: Attaching lace

Hand stitch lace to binding of the top edge using prick stitch.
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Step 15: Flossing

Decorate with flossing using embroidery thread if desired.
Lace your corset using double cord lacing. The continuous cord is criss-crossed from the top, leaving two long loops (rabbit ears) at the middle and is knotted at the bottom. This will make it easier to get into by yourself.
Congratulations!
Come visit us on Tumblr and tell us what you’ve created http://symingtoncorsets.tumblr.com/submit