

A journey in making new covers for Scamp 13 cushions

Joan Covington - January 2019

I've searched the SOI forums pretty often in the last couple of years, trying to find out how Scamp owners have done this, but there aren't any posts. So here's my experience as a neophyte upholsterer. This is by no means exhaustive or authoritative, nor is it meant to be a step-by-step. It's pretty much restricted to things that aren't covered in the videos I've cited below, and you'll have to do a lot of your own thinking. But hopefully it will give you a starting place and answer some questions for which I really had to dig to get the info, and share tips that I only found out about through trial and error.

FABRIC: How much to get? I have a standard Scamp 13. I asked Eveland's how much cloth it would take to do this job, and was told 7.5 yards. I'm here to tell you NO WAY is that enough cloth. I ordered 8 yards and carefully laid everything out, without wasting a single square inch, and while I could get all the plates (big top and bottom pieces) out of it, I only got a little of the boxing (sides) and welting (cords around the edges).

I ordered 5 additional yards for a total of 13, and though I had about 1.5 yards leftover, I'm not sorry for the excess. It gave me room in case of errors (thankfully I did not actually have to re-cut anything), room for cutting welting covering on the bias, and there's enough left for making pillows if I want to. In short, the minimum you'll need if cutting welting on the bias, as I recommend, is 12 yards, which gives you a tiny bit of wiggle room.

I chose Sunbrella, for its stain resistance and durability. But there are other options at your local fabric shop. Probably best to go with something fairly heavy-duty. Take a look at their "outdoor" fabrics.

Design decisions: I considered making mere slipcovers, but thought it would look like a relatively obvious shortcut. I also considered making covers without welting; but was advised by a friend with experience that such covers tend to "wander" around the cushions. Welting not only adds a finished appearance, but helps stabilize the covers. I gritted my teeth decided to "go big or go home."

OTHER MATERIALS YOU'LL NEED:

Welting cord, about 65 yards (get 75, it's not that pricey and this gives you room for mistakes). A standard size is 5/32". If you think your cushions will never get soaked you can get a cotton or poly type cord, but it only costs a little more for the solid plastic type that's suitable for marine or outdoor applications. That's what I chose. https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B073RRL46V/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o05_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1. I ordered two rolls, and used just a teensy bit of the second roll.

Upholstery zipper. I ordered from <http://www.thezipperlady.com>. Lots of good advice on this site, and she also has some instructive videos. You'll be making your own zippers (easier than it sounds). Don't be afraid to make your zippers longer than the original ones. It's a lot easier to get the foam back in the covers if you do.

Upholstery batting, optional (but WORTH IT). I got ten yards of 48" wide, based on Evelands' recommendation for fabric yardage. This turned out to be enough. The purpose of this is to soften the outline of the cushions somewhat, and make them look a little more plump, without actually adding much to the volume. Scamp OEM cushions don't use this, but I do strongly recommend it, especially if you're using a fabric that's not quite as heavy or stiff as the original. Scamp doesn't use batting, but then their upholstery material is somewhat "fluffy", itself.

Spray foam adhesive. If you use upholstery batting, you'll also need to get some spray adhesive meant for foam, so it stays more or less in place when you put the cover on. More on this below.

Cushion wrap silk film, optional, for some water-proofing. I saved and re-used most of what was already in the original cushions, but some of that does get ripped when you take the foam out of the original coverings, especially if the people at the factory caught it into the zippers. If assurance of water-proofing is important to you, you'll probably have to get some more. Silk film also helps a LOT when it's time to slide your cushions into their new covers, so do at least save the old stuff, if you're not getting new.

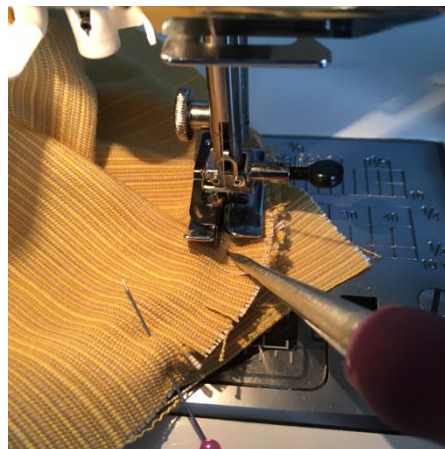
TOOLS:

A sewing machine with a zipper foot, that will handle fairly heavy duty work, depending on what kind of cloth you get. You'll be sewing through at least four layers of cloth on every seam, if you do the welting, and more when you run into overlapping seams etc. Look through your various "feet" and find one that will help you keep your needle close to the welting and be a good guide. The foot I settled on applied downward pressure on the welting, while guiding the needle close to it (see picture next page).

Strongly advised: Use a **cutting mat, cutting guide, and rotary tool** for cutting strips for welting and boxing. Maybe you can borrow this equipment if you don't already have it. The following links are just for examples. Cutting mat: https://www.amazon.com/OLFA-Double-Sided-Self-Healing-Rotary-Mat/dp/B0006SDOFO/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1523198110&sr=8-1&keywords=olfa+cutting+mat
Rotary tool: https://www.amazon.com/Olfa-Deluxe-Handle-Rotary-Cutter/dp/B000BNLLHW/ref=sr_1_6?ie=UTF8&qid=1523198110&sr=8-6&keywords=olfa+cutting+mat
Quilting ruler: https://www.amazon.com/dp/B072PTPSYS/ref=sspa_dk_detail_4?psc=1&pd_rd_i=B072PTPSYS&pd_rd_wg=CgjQF&pd_rd_r=3QWTQR6XHY1XVY51NHK&pd_rd_w=ueGls

A seam ripper. Get a decent one. You're going to be using this. I've done some pretty big sewing projects from time to time, a couple that required custom fitting and actual classes in traditional 19th century methods, etc. And the best thing I ever learned was that "frogging" (as in rip-it-rip-it-rip-it) is just part of the craft, if you want to get something right. It's nothing to be ashamed of, even though we all try to avoid it as much as possible. Don't expect to be perfect, or even "good enough" the first time; do expect to have to re-do at least a few things. It's just the process.

A “spudger”. Some kind of tool to push fabric this way and that as you feed it under the needle. I use a fabric awl for this. A very small flat head screwdriver might work. In the past I’ve used sturdy hat or corsage pins. Such a tool is particularly useful for easing excess fabric. Right: my “spudger” in use.



MEASURING:

This video is useful not only for measuring, but for understanding the whole project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-FuavPtwgQ&ab_channel=Sailrite

Sailrite recommends cutting the plates to the same size as the foam plus batt that you’re covering, with the boxing cut to the full height of the foam pad, and seam allowance added. Then when they sew the plate/welt/boxing sandwich together, they use about a 1/4” to 3/8” seam allowance. I prefer a wider seam allowance; 1/2” seems to be a safe standard width. So per Sailrite, the finished boxing is full size, and the finished plates are a bit smaller than full size.

Observations of Eveland’s measurements (and this is *different from Sailrite’s recommendations*): Eveland’s finished boxing is usually 3 1/4” to 3 3/8” wide, and rarely, 3.5”: significantly less than the foam height; whereas plates are usually finished about a quarter to half an inch shorter lengthwise than the foam, and about the same width as the foam. Clearly they’re planning on taking up any slack in the fabric mostly by cutting the boxing on the narrow side. This may seem excessively tight, but it’s not. Don’t be tempted to make anything bigger. And I would advise on the longer cushions (bunk and settee/bench) that the plates could be cut a bit shorter, especially if you’re using a fabric where any wrinkling is going to be really obvious.

(**Caution:** the bunk cushion, being mounted on wood, does not easily squash. This is one place where you’ll be particularly glad if you have made a really LONG zipper, that goes almost to the tip ends of the bunk. You can still make the plates about an inch shorter than the foam, as long as you never make them shorter than the wood itself.)

My preference for measuring is to go with the Eveland/Scamp method. It makes the cushions look puffier.

In any case, the foam is eminently compressible, so don’t be afraid to make the cloth fit really really tightly. If you get the kind of batt I linked, you’ll find that while it adds a nice bit of softness to the surface and corners, it doesn’t appreciably increase the amount of cloth needed to cover the cushions. Don’t try to compensate for it or your covers will be too big.

Personal experience observation: A really long cushion, like the front settee ones, can take a lot more compression in the length than a smaller one. I'd say that with any except the smallest cushions, don't be afraid to cut the cloth so you'll end up with a finished cover about a half inch shorter than the cushions and a quarter inch narrower. This is especially important for any cloth that is not thick and stiff (like Scamp's material), because these will show the wrinkling *much* more easily. Don't let it happen, or if you're fussy about it, like me, you'll have to take those covers apart and make all the dimensions smaller. It'll cost you about a day per cushion you have to do this with. The good news is... it can be done.

Welting: 1.5" wide strips are just right for covering the cord. Wider isn't necessary, and narrower is impossible. (Bet you can guess how I know.)

Zipper length: make it generous. You'll be glad. (**Don't place the zippers for the dinette seat backs on the ends of the cushions**, like Eveland's does. You'll never get that cushion back in there, which you will realize when you're wrestling it out. Put the long zipper on the "down" side and be content.)

Laying out: Measure twice, cut once. You'll be glad you did, if your material is one of the more expensive ones per yard. Make a big space in the middle of your floor, and lay out every piece of foam. Mark locations with a few pins, then flip the cushions to mark another plate for the other side of the cushion. Play around with various alternatives to find the most efficient placement. If necessary you can piece the belting easily. If you have stripes, like I did, be particularly careful to keep the belting all going in one direction on the cloth: lengthwise.



Before cutting I marked plate outlines lightly with a pencil, then checked measurements with a tape measure, then used a straight edge to connect the dots on straight runs. Curves were free-handed, and once a plate was cut for a particular cushion it was flipped and used as a pattern for the second plate.

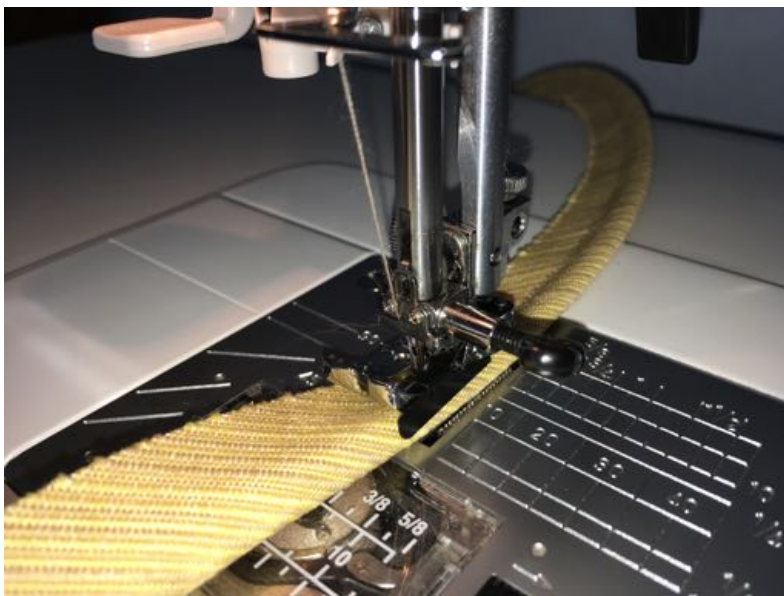
CUTTING:

For strips, like welting and boxing: You'll get much cleaner cuts and more accurate strips if you use a cutting mat and rotary tool. If you're cutting really long strips and have to keep moving the cutting guide, try doubling the fabric so you cut through twice as much at one time. See the video cited in the next paragraph for how this is done.

Welting: bias, or on the warp? Eveland's and some other companies don't cut the welting strips on the bias, thus saving a little fabric. I don't think it's worth it. Welting is much more flexible and goes around corners much more easily if it's cut on the bias. Doing this with scissors is hard, because when cutting diagonally the fabric wants to get away from you. This is where a cutting mat and rotary tool and quilting ruler are invaluable. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67j2GzKx5r8&ab_channel=Sailrite

CONSTRUCTION:

First, make a bunch of **welting**, to get the feel for your fabric and your machine. Try your various foot options at this time. If you have a cording foot like Sailrite uses, good for you! I've managed it with just a zipper foot, but it's a lot easier if you have some kind of foot that gives you a little more control. Look through your collection and make the best of what you have.



Make your welting in long *long* strips, so that you will have more than enough to go around any plate, and not have to add to it as you go, which is difficult if not impossible to do well. In fact, I made mine in one continuous strip, and added to it as necessary before starting to sew it to any plate.

Plan to start by making the **smaller cushions**, no matter how tempting it is to make the big ones and see that gorgeous expanse of new fabric. Errors you make on small cushions won't show as much as the same on large ones; this way, by the time you get to the large ones, you'll know how to avoid those errors.

Zippers: Here's another video that explained more clearly to me how zippers are installed, and how those little pockets at both ends of the zipper are formed. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bN7Ti76ls&ab_channel=Sailrite

Be sure to trim the zipper boxing (the long strip with the zipper in the middle of it) to the same width as the rest of the boxing. Also, if your zipper needs to be a precise length, cut both the side pieces and zipper a bit longer, and then measure and cut to length after the zipper boxing is constructed, leaving room for the seam allowance. The cloth may seem to pucker a bit when you sew it onto the zipper, in which case you may

need to “ease” the edges of the zipper boxing when applying it to the plates, to make up for this. Pin the zipper boxing to the plates extra carefully, and ease as necessary.

ASSEMBLY: When it comes time to actually start putting things together, be sure to **clip all curves**. That is, make a relieving cut from the fabric edges through the seam allowance, up to close to the stitching of the welting. Don’t be lazy here. Make lots of little cuts, even though most videos never suggest this. Corners will be neater, it will make your project much easier, and you’ll do a lot less wrestling with the cloth.

Sew the welting to both plates, and then add the boxing after that. Trying to assemble the layers of plate/welting/boxing as a sandwich, and sew through them all in one step, will not go well. Stiff welting is not cooperative.

Do not stretch the welting at all, when applying it to the plates; on the contrary, actively push it against the sewing foot as you go, so you’re sure it’s not stretching. If you stretch either the welting or the boxing when it’s time to sew it to the plate, it will return to its own preferred shape when you let go, and the plate will pucker! You won’t like this look.

When you get to the corners, try to set the welting in its curve in advance (your clipping of curves will make this SO much easier), and as you sew around that curve keep the welting and plate stable together with your hand, moving the assembly as a single unit. Use your spudger tool if helpful to keep things together right by the needle. There will be less weirdness at the corners if you do this.

When you get all the way around and are ready cut the welting off, especially if you’re using the plastic stuff, be sure to leave yourself an overlap of at least two inches extra cord/welting, so there’s room to turn the welting so it overlaps. Before you trim the cord to it the right size (butting the ends), take the piece out of the machine and make sure to push as much of the cord back into the welting as you can. This stuff is slick, and somehow it seems like it wants to creep out of its fabric cover. If you cut before you try pushing the cord back in, a gap may result and you’ll have a little empty spot with no cord in your welting. Uh oh.

Sewing the boxing onto the first plate:

Zipper placement: as I said above, it’s easier to get the foam into the covers if you make your zippers long. Consider which sides of the cushions are going to be hidden most of the time (the sides that are always against the walls, for instance), and then just be generous.

Start with the zipper part: Attach the zipper boxing before the rest of the boxing, leaving a couple inches free on each end. (See Sailrite video for why you need to do this.) Be sure to put the zipper pull on at this time, facing the way you want it, and once the zipper boxing is attached, *open the zipper* an inch or so to make it easy to get at when it’s time to turn the cushion cover right side out.

No stretching: Just as you don't want to stretch the welting casing to cover the welt, in the same way you don't want to stretch the boxing at any time, if there's any "give" to your fabric at all. If you do, you might end up with a lot of extra fabric to figure out what to do with, when you get toward the end of your seam. Easing a little bit is all right. Easing as much as an inch of extra fabric leads to unsightly puckers which will be very, very obvious on smooth or plain fabrics. Like all other measurements and construction issues, the bigger the cushion, the more of an issue this is. A little stretching isn't significant on a short pillow. The same amount of stretching that's carried out over the course of a six foot cushion will be quite obvious when you have to try to ease it.

Attaching the second plate: To make sure everything fits together the way you expect, take the time to pin the second plate to the boxing, matching corners so they're exactly opposite of the first plate. If possible - so much depends on your machine and its capabilities - sew from the center opposite the zipper, toward each zipper end. This wasn't possible for me because of my setup (machine foot I used only works on one side), but I found that careful pinning made up for it.

The Sailrite and other upholstery videos make it look like pinning is unnecessary. Maybe it is, for some fabrics. But I think there are few real shortcuts to an excellent outcome, and ten extra minutes spent now may save you years of annoyance, when you have to look at that pucker you could have avoided, or the way the top and bottom corners don't line up.

Applying the dacron batting, just before you wrap with "silk" and put the covers on (woo hoo!): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPQ5Zj9FUAU&ab_channel=Sailrite

This is one of the first pieces I finished. I was pleased with it, in spite of a few imperfections. Notice all the measuring tools and scratch paper. Yes, there's lots of measuring to do. But by the time you're on your third cushion, it should be pretty much routine.

And finally, I'd say take your time and enjoy even the "frogging." Your house will be a mess for a couple of weeks maybe, while you've got all this stuff strewn all over the place. It's physically a big project. But it's so worth it. Enjoy.

