

How to choose a spinning wheel:

Some tips and considerations from fellow guild member Carolyn Rivello
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Looks -

This matters very much to some people. There's no right answer to this one. It's completely a matter of personal preference. But **do not** buy a wheel if you don't like its looks. You won't get pleasure from sitting at it. Conversely, don't let good looks completely control the purchase. It doesn't matter how pretty it is if it doesn't spin well or suit your purposes.

Price -

Expect to spend between \$400 and \$800 the first time around if buying a new wheel. There are a number of very good wheels in the \$500 range. It's better to save money and get what will serve your purposes, than to buy cheap that will not do what you need it to. However, if you buy simple & outgrow it, you can sell to a new spinner. If taken care of, wheels will not lose value. Do not buy plastic wheel just because it's cheap. Better to buy one you assemble and stain yourself or buy used from someone who is upgrading. Some like them. Try for yourself, but don't let price be single controlling factor.

Style -

Castle wheels and Upright wheels - are vertical, take up less room but drive wheel usually smaller- you will have to work harder and longer- check ratios to see if wheel will suit your needs, these two types are generally more portable (not Golding's, though)

Saxony wheels - are horizontal, take up more room but drive wheel larger, produce more work for less effort, but usually less portable (but Ashford Traditional not bad at all to put in car)

Treadle -

Single or double? Double is more work but some say less strain. But if wheel a good one, there should be no "strain" in treading it, especially wheels with ball bearings. In fact, if it is very hard to treadle, *don't buy it*. Wheel should move smoothly and easily with very little effort on your part.

You do keep good posture with DT since you must sit facing front and both feet are pointed straight ahead. But if you draft to left and back some before winding on, or if you like to use long draw, you will have to twist your body since you can't angle your feet, and that can quickly get very uncomfortable.

How does the treadle work? Does your foot bend up or away? Does it matter to you? (Louet bends away (extend), most others bend up (flex)).

Size of drive wheel/Ratios -

What kind of yarn do you want to spin? Rug yarn, sock yarn? Low-twist yarns? High twist yarns? If you only want to spin super bulky, Ashford Country Spinner is made specifically for that. If you want to spin ultra-fine yarns, Louet is a good choice. Most wheels are "all-purpose" wheels and have at least 3 or 4 ratios, commonly ranging from about 6:1 up to about 17:1. For some wheels you can buy high-speed flyers or bobbins (Louet). If you plan to spin cotton or a lot of exotics- alpaca, angora, mohair, you will need higher ratios (and fat-core bobbins). Majacraft has low-speed bobbins also. The purpose of ratios is **not speed**, but **efficiency**.

Choose something that ranges between 7:1 or 8:1 as the lowest and 14:1 or 15:1 as the highest. Even 12:1 or 13:1 is probably more than sufficient for most everyone.

Drive type & tension set-up -

Double drive - most picky, hardest for beginners, but allows for very minute adjustments

Single drive - easier for beginners, drive band and bobbin tension can be adjusted separately

Single drive can be either bobbin lead - flyer is braked- bobbin keeps winding and draws yarn on- called Irish or German tension; or flyer lead - bobbin is braked- flyer spins yarn around it and on- called Scotch tension. Most wheels on market are flyer-lead. Some have all three options- Schacht, for example.

Bobbins -

Bobbin size - Is it a big bobbin? Will it take you forever to fill it? If so, will you get impatient and not want to spin so long before plying? Will you spin finer yarns? Then it will take even more time to fill. Journey Wheel is considered

small bobbin by many, but can still fit almost 150 plied yards of worsted weight yarn. Many commercial balls are much smaller than that. (Commercial sport weight 50g balls are about 110 yards, commercial 50g worsted are much less). Louet's bobbins are very large and can hold quite a lot. Most bobbins hold from 3- 6 oz.

Think of how bobbin size will affect you. If you make many small projects, a so-called "small" bobbin might work very well for you. If you have a 3oz bobbin and you fill two and ply them, you have 6oz of yarn. That's more than enough for a pair of socks, mittens, slippers or knee warmers, some hats, small scarves, small knitted purses, wrist warmers or fingerless mitts, many baby things, several wash cloths, cell phone cases, water bottle holders, cat toys, etc, etc.

Ease of changing - Do you have to take wheel apart just to change bobbin? Is it awkward to change? Do you seem to need three hands, or is it relatively easy? Do you have a tendency to drop things? You can easily drop and damage parts if everything has to come off every time you change bobbin.

Fat-core bobbins - Nice to have, but you can make yourself. If you spin a lot of fine yarns or exotics, they will be very useful, probably necessary. Make by cutting foam-type pipe insulation to fit bobbin length (find pipe insulation at hardware store).

Extra bobbins - Most spinners spin 2-ply yarn. So, you need three bobbins- two for spinning and one to ply onto. Three is the standard that comes with a wheel. Some come with more (Majacraft). Many people have more than one project going at once so want more bobbins. If you demo, it's nice to have an empty one so you can let people try the wheel without letting them try it with what you're spinning. Also, if you break one, it's good to have one more so you aren't stuck being unable to spin until you replace it. And it's good for multiple-ply yarns. You'll need four bobbins for a 3-ply, five bobbins for a 4-ply. **But-** it's not good to have so many and to leave singles on bobbins for weeks or months, because twist will set and your plying will lie to you. Most people underply as it is, but leaving singles for long periods before plying makes it worse. One or two extra bobbins is enough. Any more is unnecessary.

High-speed bobbins/flyers -

If you think you will want to spin cotton or very fine yarns, might consider this. I've spun cotton with a Lendrum very-fast flyer (44:1). It's fantastic!. Louet has up to 30:1, Majacraft has up to 45:1.

Lazy Kate -

Does wheel come with one? Is it separate or built in? Tensioned or not? If you want to spin very fine yarns, exotics, or silk, a tensioned lazy kate helps. How many bobbins will it hold? Built in not really the best, but adequate. See how it is positioned.

Orifice size -

Bigger is for larger diameter yarns. Too big with very thin yarn allows yarn to vibrate too much. Many are 1/2" for "all purpose" yarns. Country spinner is 7/8". Antique wheels usually narrower, if made for flax spinning.

Orifice type (regular, delta, Journey Wheel U-shaped) -

Regular orifice needs orifice hook-- and every time yarn breaks, you have to rethread. No rethreading on delta orifice or Journey Wheel.

Orifice Height/placement -

How tall are you? If it is too high or too low, you will be uncomfortable. Some tall people have trouble with the smaller wheels like the Ashford Kiwi or the Hitchhiker. How will you draft? To the left? The right? Directly in front of you? Is the orifice on the left? The right? In the center? Is this where you draft? If not, you may be uncomfortable. Some authorities disagree and argue that height is irrelevant as yarn will go onto bobbin whatever the angle. You must try for yourself.

Portability -

Will you take it with you or will it stay at home? Will it fit in your car? Even when you buy a new car? Does it fold down? Does it have a handle? If not, where will you pick it up? You won't want to grab it on a delicate part. Do parts stick out that can break off? It's harder to get a wheel into a 2-door car.

Weight -

Included in portability issue. Will you take wheel out or leave at home? If it stays at home, it doesn't matter. How heavy is it? Most weigh about 15-20 lbs. Can you carry it the distances you need to? Will you strap it on a dolly? Also, when spinning- does it weigh enough that it won't walk across floor as you treadle? Or want to tip over forward? Very important.

Drive band -

Cotton or poly? If poly, make sure to keep oil off of it. It will weaken band. How much are replacements? Are they easy to get? Will you have to order on line? Will shipping cost be many times price of band? Should **always** have extra drive band on hand.

Repair kits/tools -

Does it come with one or can you purchase one? Does it need special parts for small repairs? How easy are they to get? How expensive are they? Journey Wheel uses rubber bands & fishing wire for tensioning. No need to order anything else. Some others also use same. Some need special parts.

Covers -

Does it come with cover or can you buy one, or make one? Only need if taking it out.

Most well-known brands:

Ashford - Traditional, Elizabeth, Traveller, Joy, Kiwi, Country Spinner

Kromski -Polonaise, Minstrel, Mazurka, Symphony, Sonata, Prelude

Lendrum - folding wheel, saxony

Louet - s-10, s-15, s-51, s-75, Julia, Victoria

Majacraft - Suzie, Suzi Pro, Suzie Alpaca, Rose, Little Gem

Schacht - Matchless, Ladybug

Direct drive:

HitchHiker, Road Bug - can take on a plane, train or bus

Electric Wheels - Roberta, Ashford

Some Others:

Columbine - decent wheel, but ratios very low- great for softer, heavier, high-loft yarns.

Thomas Golding - beautiful but *very* expensive, spins wonderfully- not portable

Journey Wheel - can take as carry-on on plane, train or bus- folds up, protecting working parts (and your spinning)

Rick Reeves - (now made by Schacht) Several different-sized drive wheels available

Robin - several styles

Babe - no good. Too light, no stability. Every one I have seen squeaks, walks across floor (people hold down with other foot- waste of energy and awkward- makes you tense while spinning). Absolutely no resale value. (Some may argue with all that. In fact, some *will* argue. It is my educated opinion- take it for what it's worth to you.)

Hopefully, this will help you pick a wheel that is best for you. Again- much of this is personal preference- what works for one might not work for another- but if you've never bought a wheel, you don't even know the questions to ask. I tried to anticipate and hit all the usual points and more. What I have presented are my opinions based on my 10 years of spinning and my OHS education. Some may have other opinions based on their own experiences. Listen to all, try every wheel you can, and then use your own judgment.

Happy spinning to all!