



Alavnon professional dress form

Body Double

Once used almost exclusively by tailors and clothing designers, dress forms at a variety of price points are now readily available for home sewers

BY BETH BAUMGARTEL

How often have you wished for a twin to try your projects on while you pin and tweak? Beginners and experts alike find that a dress form can make sewing easier and more pleasurable, helping out with fitting, design changes, and more. Once you've worked with one you'll wonder how you ever got along without it.

Even the most straightforward sewing projects can benefit from a dress form. Take fitting, for example. It's always tricky to make fitting adjustments to a garment while wearing it. A knowledgeable assistant to help with pinning and marking is ideal, but can be hard to find or inconvenient. Put your work in progress on a dress form and you can make all the necessary adjustments yourself. Even when sewing from your tried-and-true patterns, a dress form can help you adjust for differences in fabric weight and drape.

Dress forms can also help with your creative ideas. If you enjoy adapting patterns to your personal style, a dress form allows you to see your design changes in action. You can baste seams or details, alter the garment length and circumference or the shape of a sleeve or skirt, raise or lower a hemline, and see in an instant what works and what doesn't work. You can also use it to help determine the best cutting arrangement for printed fabrics, especially when working with large scale or border prints, and for choosing and placing trims and embellishments. The dress form allows you to see the whole garment as it comes together, so you can envision how your finished piece will look.

Finally, if you like designing your own clothes or you have a design or tailoring business, the dress form is a natural aid to the design process. You can arrange the fabric on your form to see how it hangs, and you can use draping techniques to create your own patterns.

TIP: Even the best dress forms have their limits. Every body has slight irregularities, and your dress form may not replicate all of your particular idiosyncrasies. It won't show you how the garment moves, or whether it's comfortable when you bend or stretch. Make sure you still try your garments on before finishing.

DRESS FORM SIZES

A dress form is a serious tool. In order for it to be the most useful, you need it to be as close to your body measurements and proportions as possible. Unless you are willing to pay extra for a custom-made form, you will more than likely have to make adjustments to any form you purchase. It will take time, but in the end it will be well worth the effort, and you normally only have to do it once.

Typically your commercial dress size will give you a starting point for the right size dress form, but you should always check the measurement chart provided by the company from which you order your form. And take accurate measurements of your own body. You will need to take basic body measurements such as height, back neck to waist length, high bust, full bust, waist, hips, neckline, back width from shoulder to shoulder, and back neck to shoulder end. Depending on the dress form you wish to purchase, you might need to take additional measurements, but these basic measurements will get you started. The company from which

you order will indicate any other specific measurements if they are needed. Make sure your measurements are as accurate as possible, and remember, compare them to the charts provided by the company from which you are buying the form.

You can always expand an adjustable dress form, and add padding to customizable and professional forms, but you can never make them smaller. So buy a form on the smaller side of your body measurements rather than the larger side.

Since most garments hang from your shoulders, it's best to purchase the size that most closely matches the width of your shoulders and then pad or adjust the rest of the dress form as needed. For instance, if you have small shoulders and a large bust, buy the form that best matches your shoulder width and then pad out the bust or put a padded bra on the dress form.

TYPES OF DRESS FORMS

Dress forms fall into three basic categories: Professional forms, Customizable forms, and Adjustable forms. All dress forms are suitable for fine-tuning flat pat-

tern designs, tweaking garment shapes, and perfecting fit, but there are many things to consider that may make one type of form more suitable for your sewing needs. Here are a few:

- Do you mostly sew for yourself, or do you sew for clients and family members? If you have a variety of bodies to fit you may prefer an adjustable form.
- Do you sew close-fitting clothing? If so, you may prefer a form with collapsible shoulders to get garments on and off easily.
- Is the dress form on a sturdy base with rolling wheels? Does it have a height adjustment pedal? Does the form rotate on the pole?
- Does the form have a hem gauge or removable cage for easy hemming?
- Is the form pinnable and steamable?
- Do you need shaped legs or thighs to fit pants and shorts?
- Are there add-on accessories such as padded arms and maternity bumps?

Adjustable Dress Forms are sold in size ranges such as Petite, Small, Medium, Large and Full-Figure. A series of dials at the bust, waist, hips, neck, and back

HOW MUCH BODY DO YOU NEED?

Half-body, or torso dress forms are most common, and less expensive than full body forms. Torso body forms are perfect for designing and fitting blouses, skirts, and dresses. They are supported by a central metal pole and sturdy floor stand, making them easy to work on. The base may have a pedal that adjusts the height of the dress form along the pole. Some have a removable "cage" on the bottom of the torso for better garment hang and to serve as a reference point for hemming. Some half-body forms do have special shaping on the lower portion to fit pants.

Full-body forms include legs and are used for designing shorts and pants, as well as dresses and tops. These forms hang from a pole that allows them to move freely, which can be difficult when you are trying to pin fabric in place, but they are very versatile.

Legs professional forms can be found for women, men, and children, and are used for designing and fitting pants and skirts.

Padded arms are a relatively new feature and are available for use with professional forms that have magnetic fittings in the armholes. They are an additional cost, but you can buy either one or two arms depending on your needs.

Half-scale forms are sometimes used by designers and design students, and can be convenient and economical for developing new patterns. The resulting designs must be scaled up for human use.



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can be adjusted and finessed to expand at those specific areas to customize the measurements. While these forms can be made to match your circumference and height measurements, they do not always allow for nonstandard variances or very curvy figures.

Adjustable dress forms tend to only be available as torso models, not full-body, and are most common in Misses' size ranges, although with a little searching you can find children's and men's models on the Internet. The newest adjustable dress form from Dritz®, My Double Deluxe, features an offset center pole with shaped hips, bottom, and thighs for fitting pants.

Choose adjustable dress forms when you want to quickly and precisely adjust circumferential and height measurements, but not necessarily body shape. Best for garment fit, not draping.

Details:

- Generally the least expensive option, \$75-\$150
- Adjustable proportions and height; good for sewers who make clothing for different size people or who find their weight fluctuates frequently
- 10-13 dials for accurate adjustments in increments as little as $\frac{1}{16}$ "
- Adjustable back-waist length
- Do not adjust for shape, so they do not easily duplicate rounded shoulders or swayback. Best where a tailored fit is not essential.
- Lightweight
- Pincushion at neck
- Newer versions feature a foam-backed fabric exterior so you can pin directly into the dress form
- When dial adjustments are expanded the forms open up, leaving gaps that need to be taped or covered to allow you to pin fabric directly to the form; consequently not the best choice for draping
- No collapsible shoulders

TIP: To add padding to this type of dress form, fill any gaps or specific areas with polyester batting and then cover it with a thin layer of bias-cut fabric secured with pins.

Customizable Dress Forms can be configured to replicate a particular body shape and posture, and can accommodate asymmetrical bodies and other fitting challenges. As a result, they tend to be a good choice for difficult-to-fit shapes. These are best for home sewers and designers who sew primarily for themselves, since the dress form will be customized to their specific bodies. They are suitable for design, draping, and garment fit.

Two different customizing processes are currently available, each with different advantages.

Uniquely You provides a squishy foam form and a zippered cover that you fit to your figure. Put the cover on over your best-fitting undergarments and have a friend pin it to fit as closely as possible. Take it off and sew the pinned adjustments so the cover matches your body. Try it on again, and when you are sure it exactly matches your shape, place the cover on the dress form. The cover compresses the foam form to your exact measurements.

It is important to pick the correct cover size. Take careful measurements and order the cover that fits your largest measurement, then take it in everywhere else. Order the form size according to your hip measurement.

Details:

- Price range around \$150
- You can order extra covers and alter them for a variety of different dimensions
- Perfect for long- and short-waisted figures.
- Pinnable and steamable
- Bust string included to obtain natural cleavage
- Can be challenging to fit the cover so that it duplicates your body exactly
- No collapsible shoulders

Fabulous Fit® sells a patented system of contoured pads that can be used to customize a standard size dress form for a specific shape. To use the pads, which can increase the size of a dress form up to 4" (10cm), start with a dress form that is smaller than

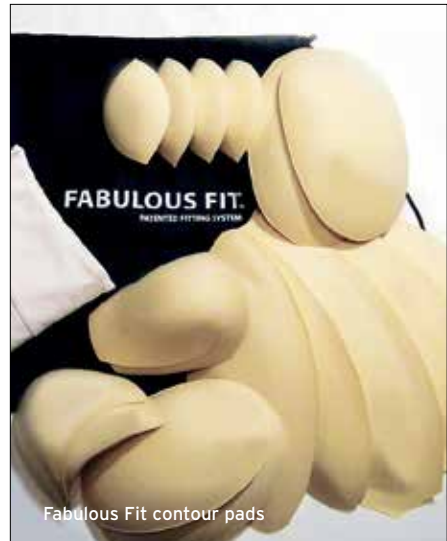
your body measurements. The pad kit includes 17 contoured, pinnable pads and two stretch cotton body covers to hold the pads in place. Pad placement is key. For example, a person with rounded shoulders would position the shoulder pads slightly forward on the form to create a round shoulder line. For straight broad shoulders, place a "filler" pad under each shoulder pad. There are also pads to address a wide or small back, high rib cage, high bust, large bust, large stomach, high and/or full upper hip, large thighs, and large hips. The company also offers a range of professional dress forms that can be used with the fitting system.

Details:

- The patented fitting system costs around \$127, and can be used with any separately purchased dress form.
- Sizes S, M, L, XL; allows customizing for petite and tall frames.
- Pinnable and steamable
- Weight fluctuations are easy to match by repositioning or removing certain pads.
- It can be challenging to arrange the pads so that they duplicate your body exactly.

Professional Dress Forms are the most expensive forms. They are single sized, typically ranging from sizes 0-16 and up to size 20 for full-figure forms, and are used for both designing and fitting clothing. The forms have a hard inner shell, usually made of several layers of papier-mâché or fiberglass, covered with a thick layer of foam or cotton wadding and an outer linen or canvas fabric layer. They are usually mounted on a central pole that runs from the neck cap to the base and adjusts with a foot pedal to control the height. A heavy base gives the form stability, and rolling casters allow a degree of mobility. The casters can lock to secure the dress form in place.

Choose professional dress forms for designing, draping and pattern alterations. These are used commercially by tailors, clothing designers, and manufacturers, and have a clear advantage in durability. Available in a full range of standard sizes, they can also be ordered to custom measurements if your budget permits.



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Details:

- Generally the most expensive option, \$300-\$1000
- Handmade
- Fixed size; ideal when you sew primarily for yourself
- Usually constructed with collapsible or removable shoulders, which make it easier to put on and remove close-fitting garments
- Attachable padded arms available for some models
- Construction layers allow you to pin directly into the dress form
- Bump-out side seams can be felt through fabric or garment to assist with fitting
- Seamed with industry grainlines, so you can locate the center front, center back,

side seams, princess seams, and bust apex.

- Some forms offer realistic-looking buttocks and other shaping details
- Available in half, full-body, and legs-only forms; misses, women, men, bridal/lingerie forms, infants, juniors, children, girls and boys, pregnant forms
- Also available in custom sizes; see company websites for measuring instructions
- Cast iron wheeled base for stability; heavy if you need to transport

TIP: Since these hand-made dress forms are expensive, you might try to find one at tag sales or Goodwill. If you find one that is slightly smaller than your size you can add padding, but if it's too big it won't be of much use to you.

DIY: MAKE YOUR OWN DRESS FORM

Adventurous sewers who like to do it all themselves can make their own form with duct tape. The wonderful thing about making your own dress form is that it will be an exact duplicate of your body, not just your body measurements, accounting for your posture, shape, and weight distribution. There are several ways to make your own dress form, and most of them are covered on the Internet with step-by-step photographs and even video demonstrations. You can also make a dress form by creating a plaster cast of your torso, or by sculpting a body form from papier-mâché.

Vogue Pattern V1004 fitting shell is a pattern designed to help determine your personal fitting alterations for patterns with waistline seams. It includes seven pages of fit guidelines to help adjust patterns for problems such as a swayback, a flat bottom, broad shoulders, etc. Once the shell fits you perfectly, you can stuff it with foam to hold its shape or use it as a guide for padding out a commercial dress form. ☞



The Shop Company professional forms with extended shoulders, collapsible shoulders, and magnetic arms



PGM dress form with flat hip or shaped with realistic buttocks



Clone Yourself a dress form double DVD, see page 93.

RESOURCES

Adjustable Dress Forms:

Prym Consumer USA Inc
dritz.com/search/results.php

Singer®
singerco.com/accessories/dress-forms

Professional Dress Forms:

Alvanon
alvanon.com

PGM
pgmdressform.com

Ronis Bros., Royal Dress Forms
www.ronis.com

Roxy Display Form
roxydisplayinc.com

Superior Model Form Co.
superiormodel.com

The Shop Company
theshopcompany.com

Wolf Form
wolfform.com

Customizable Dress Forms/Kits:

Fabulous Fit
fabulousfit.com

Uniquely You
allbrands.com
amazon.com
sewtrue.com
wawak.com