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Edgy Cap Embellishment

Use different placements for a variety of looks and options.

By Steven Batts, Contributing Writer

C aps are a staple of the embroidery business, so it makes sense to take the time to learn how to sew them well.

This type of headwear is all about variety. If you look at a cap catalog, there are hundreds — if not thousands — of choices with regard to color combinations, materials, crown height, type of bill, back closures … the list goes on and on. For this installment of the *Impressions* Tech Tips Newsletter, we will be working with American Apparel's foam-front trucker hat (style CT509).

It stands to reason that embroidering on caps presents a variety of placement options as well. While some options, such as the bill, are limited to being explored before the manufacturing process, other embellishment placements can be considered. Most embroidery machines can handle the front, sides, back and most places in between.

The most common embroidered area on caps is the front. Even the most basic cap frames are designed for this. Most commercial embroidery machines use wide-angle cap frames, which are designed to go most of the way around the cap, typically with 270 degrees of rotation. This will handle not only the front of the cap, but also the sides. That leaves the back, for which most embroiderers use a traditional round hoop.

Following is an evaluation of each location and tips on how to get the best results. While the cap's construction plays a big part in framing, the basic principles will work regardless of the style you choose.

FRONT AND CENTER
The front of the cap probably is the easiest place to sew. The main variance involves whether the front panels are structured or unstructured. Structured caps typically have a

The CT509 Trucker Hat is a mid-rise, five-panel twill cap featuring a foam crown, polyester mesh and an adjustable snap-back closure.

—CT509
Trucker Hat

Ivory   Red   Navy   Black

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fused buckram backing inside, making the crown of the cap stand up. Unstructured caps do not have this and tend to be more floppy.

For unstructured caps, it is important to use cap backing or stabilizer, which is a stiff and heavy tearaway. It provides not only stabilization for the fabric, but also helps hold the cap's shape during embroidery. Structured caps don't need this, as the fused buckram acts as the stabilizer. For in-between styles, such as soft buckram or foam-backed styles, cap backing is recommended.

When hooping caps, remember to keep them straight. Ensure the hat band is folded out and the material underneath is pressed in firmly into the cap frame's teeth. Then, when the cap frame band is pulled across, be certain the edge of the band is seated into the seam between the cap's bill and its front or crown. This is the only way to align caps, so it is important to make sure it is done properly.

When embroidering front-only placements on structured caps, it is not always necessary to put the back clip onto wide-angle caps frames. For larger designs, it often is advantageous to leave the back clip off for these types of caps. It provides flexibility and prevents distortion at the top of the design.

SIDE TO SIDE
For side placements, the back clip must be used. Wide-angle cap frames vary from brand to brand, and the main difference between them is the back clip. Some have one large clip for the back. Some have a clip on each side of the back. Most brands use multiple clips that look similar to binder clips found at an office supply store.

Before putting the clip in, ensure the side panel has been pulled tight from the back of the cap. There should be no wrinkles in the sewing area. To keep the design straight, pull the bottom edge of the cap so it is even with the cap frame. Otherwise, the design will be sloped downward.

While backing may be optional for front placements on certain cap types, it is a necessity for side placements. There is no fused buckram or anything of the sort at these placements, so they must be stabilized. For normal twill caps, a single piece of cap backing will work just fine. "Stretch-to-fit" caps require at least two pieces of backing, if not a cutaway backing.

The same goes for mesh caps. The backing provides the

necessary material to hold the stitches together. For this reason, a cutaway is recommended.

It sometimes can be tricky to get the backing to stay in place on the side while the cap is being hooped. The tendency is to tuck it under the frame. While that holds it in place on the framing device, the backing will fall out afterward, as it is not being held in place by the frame. The cap must be hooped with the backing on top of the frame.

One way to overcome this hassle is by placing a piece of double-sided tape on the side of the cap frame. Then, peel the backing paper off and stick the cap backing onto the tape. This will secure it long enough to get the cap hooped, but it still will easily pull off from the frame.

EVERYTHING IS ALIGNED
To avoid hooping the cap twice to sew the front and sides separately, it is best to combine the designs for both placements into one design. To do this, first measure the distance from the center seam to the center of the side panel. It typically is about 14cm (5.5 inches). Open the design for the front of the cap and then merge the side placement design. Space the side design so that it will be centered on the side panel. Ensure the bottom of the side design does not go below the front design, as it may hit the frame.

The key to this is centering the design on the front placement. The combined design should not be centered. If the overall design is centered again after the side placement is merged, the start of the design will be somewhere between the two, making alignment almost impossible.

Fleece Hats

—F509
Dark Heather Grey

American Apparel®

BRINGING IT BACK

Placements on the backs of caps are relatively straightforward. Several attachments will assist with this, but a simple solution is to use a conventional small round hoop. Most machines come with a 12cm or 4.5-inch round hoop. This is the perfect size to fit the back of a cap, especially one with an opening. The back of the cap even can be hooped on the corner of a table if necessary, eliminating the need for special hooping devices.

To align the back, use the marks that typically are molded into the hoop. The center seam aligns with the marks at 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock. The edge of the opening aligns with the other marks.

To stabilize the back, be sure the piece of backing covers the entire hoop for ample stabilization. However, remember that the cap back will not cover the entire hoop.

With all the cap varieties available, it is good for your shop to be able to provide options for embroidery placement. Using the sides and backs of caps provides coverage all the way around. That should satisfy even the most demanding customers.

STEP-BY-STEP
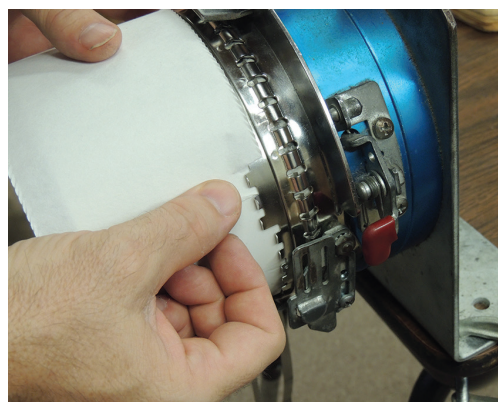
STEP 1 When working with unstructured caps or foam-backed caps, use a piece of cap backing to stabilize them.


STEP 2 Make sure the hat band is folded out and the material underneath is firmly pressed into the cap frame's teeth.


STEP 3 Pull the cap frame band across the cap, making sure the edge of the band is seated into the seam between the bill and front or crown of the cap.
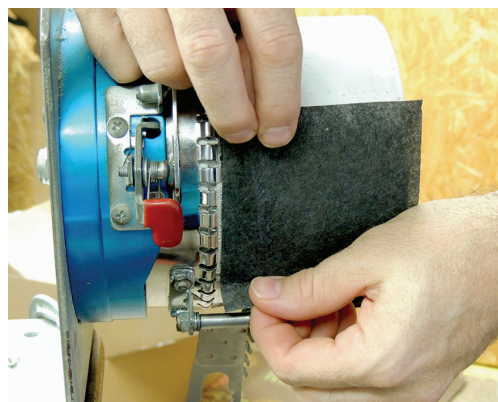
STEP 4 To hold the backing while it is hooped, place a piece of double-sided tape (such as carpet tape found at most home improvement stores) on the side of the cap frame. Then peel the backing paper off and stick the cap backing onto the tape.
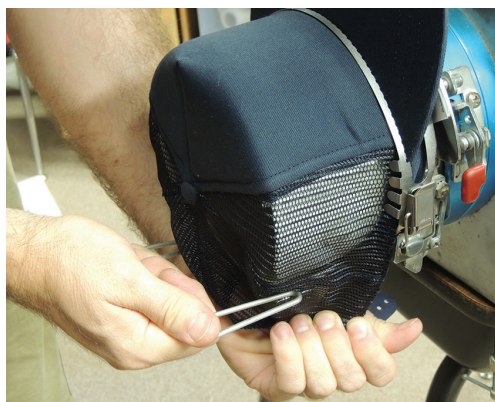

STEP 5 Be sure the side panel has been pulled tight from the back of the cap. Make sure there are no wrinkles in the sewing area. Then, put the back clip in to keep it held tightly.
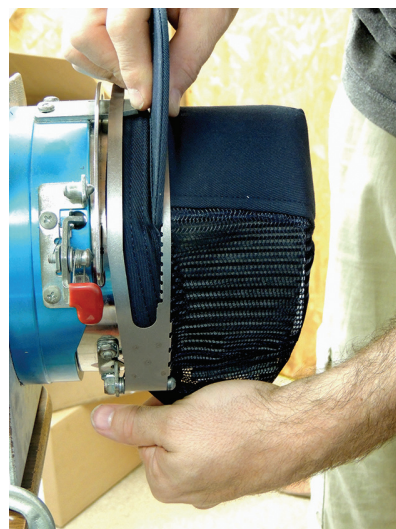
STEP 6 To keep the design straight, pull the bottom edge of the cap even with the cap frame.

STEP 7
To combine the front and side designs into one, measure the distance from the center seam to the center of the side panel.
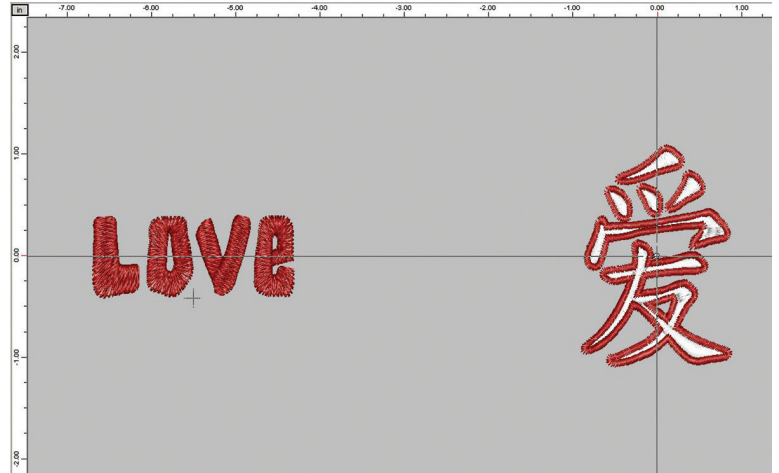
STEP 8
Merge the side design with the front placement design, spaced to distance measured. Center the design to the front placement.

STEP 9
On back placements, make sure the stabilizer covers the entire hoop.

STEP 10
Use the marks that are typically molded into the hoop to align the seam of the cap and edges of the opening.

*Steven Batts, a consultant with more than 20 years experience in the embroidery industry, owns Righteous Threads, Greensboro, N.C., which offers digitizing, embroidery and machine maintenance services. He regularly leads seminars at ISS shows and is an industry speaker and consultant. For more information or to comment on this article, email Steven at **righteousthreads@gmail.com**.*