Susitna

by Linda Lanz

Machine-knit string shopping bag

This string shopping bag is knit in the round on a flatbed knitting machine with ribber attachment. A closed-end circular cast on allows the bag to be knit in one piece with minimal seaming for the handle. A wide tubular-knit handle makes for a comfortable, less stretchy knit handle than most, especially if done in cotton or linen.

The finished bag is quite large and can hold a lot of stuff. The bag in the picture at right is holding six large cones of yarn and there's still room for more.

Materials

- standard gauge (4.5mm) knitting machine with ribber
- 100 g fingering or sport weight cotton, linen, or hemp yarn. I used yarn from a thrift store sweater that I unraveled, so unfortunately I don't have a yarn name to suggest. As long as you get gauge, it'll work out just fine. I only used 80-90 g of yarn for the bag in the picture.
- latch tool transfer tool (I used an adjustable one so I could transfer more than one stitch at a time, but at a minimum you just need a single transfer tool.)
- 1x1 needle selector (optional but definitely easier)
- tapestry needle (for weaving in ends)

Gauge

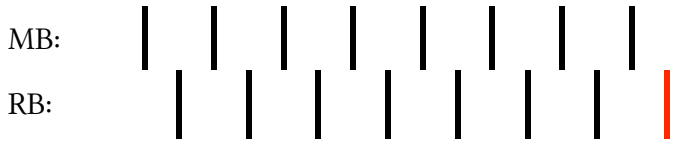
8 stitches and 11.5 rows per inch in stockinette stitch at T6 on main bed

Abbreviations

CO	cast on
EO	every other
H	half pitch
MB	main bed
P	(full) pitch
RB	ribber bed
RC	row counter (RC000 means row counter set at 000, for example)
T	tension (T6 = tension dial set at 6 ; if two numbers, the second indicates ribber bed tension, so T2/1 would mean the dial on the main bed is set at 2, but the ribber bed dial is set at 1.)

Method

Push 100 needles on each bed into working position (total of 200 needles). Set machine pitch to H, racking to 5. The needles on the ribber bed should be aligned rightward to the needles on the main bed like so:



In order for the closed-edge circular cast on to work properly, it's very important that the right-most stitch on the ribber bed—the one in red print—is further rightward than the right-most stitch on the main bed.

Thread yarn, knit zig-zag row at T0/0. Hang cast-on comb, then hang three weights on the comb. **IMPORTANT**: when you knit the first two rows, hold onto the yarn tail at the right end to make sure it knits like it should. Set machine to knit circular if not already done (press Part button on main bed as well as ribber carriage; see the manual for your particular machine to be sure. What you want is for the needles on the MB to knit when carriage moves to the right and slip to the left while the needles on the RB knit to the left and slip to the right.). T0/0, knit two rows. Set machine to full pitch (P), then knit two rows at T3/3. RC000, T6/6 for main body, knitting in the round until RC020 or desired length. This is going to be the bottom of the bag.

Starting with the RIGHT end of the main bed, transfer EO stitch leftward to adjacent needle. When finished, put empty needles back into working position, including the rightmost needle. On ribber bed, starting at the LEFT end, transfer EO stitch rightward to adjacent needle. When finished, put empty needles back into working position, including the leftmost needle.

Put empty needles (the ones you just transferred stitches *off* of) back into working position.[1] Once again 200 needles in total are in working position. Don't forget to have an empty needle at the rightmost and leftmost edges of the main and ribber beds, respectively. If you don't, the bag will unravel entirely when you try to drop stitches later on.

After transfers on both main and ribber beds, *no two adjacent needles should both have stitches on them!* If they do, it's a problem because that area of the bag won't stretch as much as the rest of it.

Knit even until RC150. Now drop stitches off EO needle—*make sure it's the same needles you left empty before!* Like forgetting to put the end needles back into working position earlier, if you get this wrong, the entire bag will unravel when you drop the stitches. At this point, you can unravel the dropped stitches if you choose, but it'll be easier if you wait until the bag is off the machine.

[1] Another option would be to leave the empty needles out of work, since you're just going to unravel the dropped stitches at the end anyway. I find it works better, especially at the edges, to put the empty needles back into work and just unravel at the end, so that's how I've written the pattern.

Put dropped needles back into working position (don't forget ends!). Once again 200 needles in total are in working position. Knit even until RC179. Change to T8/8 and knit one more row (RC180). Drop ribber down one notch on each side to give you room to work. Starting at right end of main bed, cast off 80 st using latch tool. 20 st remain on main bed. Hang two cast-on combs on these 20 stitches so they'll stay put.

Now cast off all 100 st on ribber bed. Put 20 needles on ribber bed into working position right beneath the 20 needles already holding stitches on the main bed. Total of 40 needles in working position. Now you'll be knitting a new selvedge for the handle, so you'll need to do another zig-zag row like you did for the circular cast-on. Set carriage for regular, non-circular knitting (i.e., no part buttons should be pushed) and T5/5. Knit one row and hang cast-on comb. Here you might want to add one small weight to the comb, but I found that the comb itself was enough weight.

Set Set RC to 000. Set carriages to knit circular and knit until RC250 (or desired length). T6/6, knit 2 rows. Transfer ribber stitches to main bed. T10. Knit one row. Cast off with latch tool. Cut yarn, leaving 10" tail for finishing handle. Sew end of handle to top of bag, opposite the other end of the bag. Weave in end securely. Weave in end at cast-on edge. Now's the fun part: pull on the bag to unravel the dropped stitches.

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