

About Soft-bodied Dolls (used for wigs and soft Vincent & Catherine dolls)



Fig.1: Ty dolls, scalp piece with hair, internal wireframe



Fig. 2: Ty doll scalp, back



Fig. 3: Ty Beanie Kid

Pictured above (Fig. 1) are two soft-bodied, wool-haired, Ty Dolls. Ty dolls are available in a range of sizes, hair colours, body styles, eye colours and costumes. With the smaller dolls, it's important to be sure the doll has a full head of hair, as shown, not a "punk" hairstyle or partial hair piece. Dolls with headgear may not have a full head of hair. There is also a "Beanie Kid" Ty doll (Fig. 3) which is about the same length, but has a wider body and a head about twice the size. Ty "Groovy Girls" (Fig. 4) and Ty "Beanie Boppers" (Fig. 6) can also be used.

I find all these dolls in thrift stores. They're older models, so are no longer available in retail stores.

The dolls are partly stuffed with polyester fibrefill and partly with nurdles in net bags. I prefer the dolls with open shoes (Fig.1 and Fig. 6) because they have actual feet, making them easier to make Vincent boots for. Other Ty dolls have footwear filled with nurdles.

I buy dolls that have blue eyes, if possible. The small Ty dolls (Fig1) have embroidered eyes, as do the Groovy Girls (Fig. 4), but the Beanie Kids (Fig 3) and Beanie Boppers (Fig. 6) have glass-like acrylic eyes.

Since the stuffing in the legs is often minimal, more can be added via a torso seam. The torso often has a nurdle bag, to make it more solid. Be careful how you open any seam where there are nurdles. Nurdles are very tiny and translucent (Fig.7). The bags are strong, but can be poorly stitched closed.

Cleaning up escaped nurdles is a onerous task because they blend in with any surface. They also float, and billions are now polluting the Pacific Ocean, washed from loading docks in Asian and West Coast ports.

The hair shown (Fig. 1) is the hair colour I prefer for Vincent's hair, a golden blonde. The doll in Fig.3 has hair the same colour. The scalp on Ty dolls is of darker fabric than the flesh tone of the face and limbs, and is stitched to the head separately (Fig. 2). The hair is two strand polyester yarn. Each strand of hair is actually one long strand doubled and stitched at the bottom with a chain stitch.

Pick out the scalp stitching with a seam ripper to remove the scalp and hair in one piece. If not using the scalp immediately, cut the scalp off outside the dark area because the hair is held in place at the end of the rows by the scalp seam. When removed, a few stitches will reinforce the chain and prevent the hair from falling off.

The wire form (Fig. 1 right) is inside a Ty doll and allows them to be posed. It can be left inside the doll being used.

Once the hairpiece is removed, the work begins. Some hair has be removed from the scalp at the sides, as Ty doll heads are larger than those of the 12" dolls I use (GI Joe or action dolls). Place the hairpiece on the doll head you are going to use to determine how much to remove.

Next, each length of two strand wool hair must be separated along its length. Then hold the hairpiece with tongs over a steaming pot or kettle until the kinks straighten out. Comb it out carefully with a wide tooth nylon comb to remove the excess wool. Steam it again and comb. Repeat until the hair hangs well, and is not too full. Keep the wool that you comb out. This can be used for the doll's facial and hand hair - or even body hair, if wished. If wig does not lie reasonably flat, keep combing it. Most dolls have bangs, which also need to be carefully combed and steamed

Attach the wig to the doll head with hot glue. The hair will be too long, once attached to the doll head, so will have to be cut using a razor or scissors, a bit at a time. It's important to give the wig a slightly uneven look. Once cut, comb or brush the hair until it lies reasonably flat.

There is enough hair on Ty dolls to make an excellent Vincent wig for a 12 inch doll, such as a GI Joe body. A Beanie Kid Ty doll will provide enough hair for two 12 inch doll wigs, but the scalp must be cut in half and the hair repositioned. The wool hair can also be carefully removed from the scalp and woven, with a wool needle, into a net matrix as described in the "About Dolls" article. Create a part line on the matrix and weave the wool through alternate holes, then gradually weave hair in from this point. If done carefully, the matrix will be invisible and the wig will look natural. It should be glued to the head with hot glue.

At the end of the process above, you will have a doll body, partially stuffed with polyester fibrefill and partly plastic "nurdles" in small net bags (Fig.7). I keep the nurdles (some in their bags, some not) in a plastic mayonnaise jar. The net bag can be used as a matrix to weave a wig from the yarn hair for other dolls. The fibrefill is very soft and can be used to stuff other dolls or toys. Nurdles in bags can be used to fill out the bodies of the dolls where needed.

A large Vincent doll can be made from an 11 inch 'Groovy Girls' soft-bodied doll (Fig 4). I replaced the whole top facial area, including the eyes and hair, with that from a Ty Beanie Kid (Fig. 3), then pulled transparent nylon beading thread (which is like fine fishing line) through the face area to approximate the leonine Vincent look. Then I glued on some of the hair combed from the wig. The boots were

adapted from those on a Ty doll.

There is also a slightly larger and chunkier Ty “Beanie Bopper” doll (Fig 5), which could be adapted to a Vincent or Catherine doll. The scalp piece has the same construction as the other doll types and can be removed with a seam ripper.

Since the filling in the dolls legs is minimal, a wire frame and extra fibrefill may be desired. I save all the spare filling and nurdle bags from other dolls. Clothing and footwear can sometimes be adapted to Vincent or Catherine costumes. Vincent (Fig. 5) is wearing footwear adapted from a Ty doll.



Fig. 4: 11” Ty Groovy Girls



Fig. 5: 11” Vincent



Fig. 6: 12” Ty Beanie Bopper



Fig. 7: Nurdle bags and nurdles

Small Ty dolls and other soft dolls can also be used to make unique Vincent and Catherine dolls. Below (Fig. 8), a “Fairy” soft doll, without an internal wire frame, was adapted into Catherine (Fig. 9). Hair, limbs, feet and body required considerable work and a wire frame from a Ty doll. The resulting doll is about 7” tall.

A Vincent doll was made from a Ty Doll with feet (Fig. 1), using the scalp and hair from another Ty doll (Fig. 1). The pants of the left Ty doll were easily adapted into Vincent pants. The resulting doll is about 8” tall, and the correct height for the Catherine doll.



Fig. 8: Fairy doll



Fig. 9: Catherine



Fig. 10: Ty Vinnie



Fig. 11: Vincent & Catherine soft dolls

Crocheted or Knitted Dolls

It is also possible to make B&B dolls from scratch, using yarn. There are several Amigurumi doll (crochet/knit) patterns available free online. The size of the finished doll body will depend on what size hook/needle and weight of yarn you use. If a very small steel crochet hook and sock yarn is used, the result will be a tiny (4" tall) doll body which can be adapted to various characters (Fig 12). A basic Amigurumi doll body pattern was used here and then clothing made separately. Knitted items (coats/ vests/sweaters/scarves) were made with the same yarn. Boots and some pieces of clothing are leather.

The Treasure Chambers Museum's Dolls category shows close-ups of these dolls.



Fig. 12: Amigurumi Tunnel Family