

# DCC - The Way Ahead

**PHIL GRAINGER** checks out a tender drive Hornby model with DCC socket, concludes his review of Zimo decoders and test drives an impressive new budget-price DCC system from the USA.

**PHOTOGRAPHY: PHIL GRAINGER**

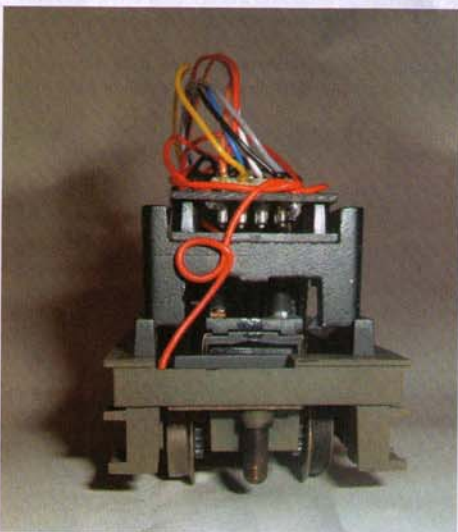
Just as I was trying to decide where to test those Zimo decoders I was looking at last month, a box from *Model Rail HQ* dropped onto the doormat. It was the revised Hornby 'Patriot' 4-6-0, with a newly added DCC socket.

This is a graphic demonstration of Hornby's new commitment to DCC. It's pretty much the same 'Patriot' model as before (reviewed in *Model Rail* a couple of issues ago) and still has a Ringfield motor in the tender but it now sports an 8-pin standard decoder socket in the tender as well (the first British outline tender drive model with a decoder socket).

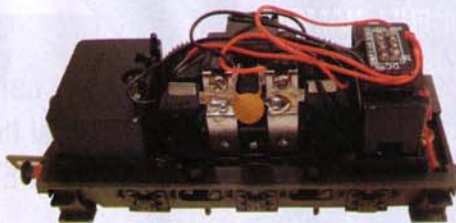
I had a little concern about this set-up initially, as I wasn't sure what the current draw of this older style motor might be and whether there would be enough room in the tender for a decoder and its wiring. As it happened, I needn't have worried. The stall current of the motor is under 500 milliAmps (mA), so almost any modern decoder will suffice.

In this case I chose the Zimo MX62 - a simple matter of plugging the decoder in place of the blanking plug. There is even enough space to replace the tender body (I am making a point here, as there are 'DCC ready' models that really do NOT have enough room for a decoder - just adding a socket is not enough!)

I wasn't sure what to expect, these tender drive, Ringfield motor models don't have a great reputation for fine performance, but I needn't have worried. I did notice that Hornby have also added extra pick-ups to this model so both the locomotive



It is nice to see that there is plenty of room UNDER the socket so that the decoder pins have no chance to short circuit against the chassis (and it's also nice to note that with a decoder in place, the tender body DOES fit back on!).



With the tender body off the 'Patriot', the new DCC socket (and 'birds nest') are obvious.

and tender collect current from both rails - this means there are as many wheels as possible helping the power collection, which is good for DC use as well as DCC.

It's fair to say I was pleasantly surprised and pleased by the performance of this model. It would be a backwards step if Hornby had just added decoder sockets without considering how to make the performance of the model as good as possible. To be ultra-picky, it is still not as good as the newer models with better motors, but certainly much better than average.

## Zimo Decoders

As I mentioned above, I used the MX62 in the Hornby 'Patriot', and I also tried an MX63 in a Heljan Hymek. I really have only one word to describe these Zimo decoders - AMAZING.

The slow speed performance just has to be seen to be believed, and these decoders are so silent you almost imagine they are running on DC not DCC. As a test, I ran the Hymek on speed step 1, with the decoder exactly as it came out of the box, and it literally crawled along - and unlike some other decoders' slow speed running, there was NO sign of any jerkiness whatsoever. It was as smooth as the proverbial silk without any tuning of the myriad of CVs that are available. Amazing stuff.

One thing I was unable to test was the provision built into Zimo decoders to support its extensive range of layout automation options - if you are intending to look into computer control of your layout, I strongly suggest to take a look at the Zimo brochure before making any other decisions.

Taking the decoder performance together with the high level of Zimo's instructions, there is really very little to complain about. The only black spot on the horizon is price, but then perhaps that only underlines the comment that you "get what you pay for".

If you want the best decoders for your models, then it would be hard to find anything better than Zimo. It will really be up to you to decide whether the additional price is worth paying - at least I now know why many people say that it is.



## NCE Power Cab DCC System

Thanks to Bromsgrove Models, I have a new DC system from NCE - the Power Cab. This promise one of the most exciting new items in 2006. (It 2006 will be the best year yet for DCC in the UK

For some time I have been hearing other N users raving about the useability and simplicity of DCC systems. I'd been meaning to take a look at them, and when I found out that they were all to release a new entry-level DCC system, I took opportunity.

The Power Cab is essentially a cut down version of NCE's Pro Cab systems. It uses the same sty handset but with some limitations in the features that are available. It also offers a smaller power supply effectively limiting the number of simultaneously operable locomotives, but more on that later.

At first glance, there is much similarity between NCE's hand-held controllers and the Gaugerr MRC Prodigy Advance I reviewed a couple of months ago. This is hardly surprising as the NCE cab design is widely regarded as one of the best. It fits in the palm of one

The PowerCab really is a DCC system that fits in the palm of your hand. In addition, it sports both buttons AND a thumbwheel for speed control - the best of both worlds. As well, a plethora of other buttons, but all clearly labelled.

