

Review of Powerline Models Radio Remote Controller

Available from Powerline Models, PO Box 2100, North Brighton, 3186

Recommended retail price under \$200

When asked to review this train controller my first thought was Oh No!! Not another one!!!

The system is presented in a standard black ABS plastic control box that is similar to what Jaycar Electronics has been selling for years. Measuring 200mm long by 112mm wide and 60mm high, it is fitted with a 1.6 metre power cable. On the business side there are four screw terminals, two for AC power to accessories and two DC power which supply the track. The only grievance at this point, although small, is that the AC and DC are reversed to convention.

The second part of the controller is a small white remote handheld controller comparable to a remote control unit for audio-visual equipment. This handheld controller is 125mm long, 38mm wide and has a thickness of 20mm and is powered by four AAA batteries. There are four soft feel plastic grey buttons, two round and two ovals, there is also a small LED that indicates when a signal is being transmitted. The two round buttons are for stop and start and should not need any further description. The two oval buttons are a form of rocker switches, indented at one end so that you can feel which side is which (even if it is in your pocket). These oval switches are used to control the speed and direction of the train. To use the controller it is necessary to push the start button, which in turn causes the train to move slowly forward indicating that power is being applied to the track. To increase the speed of the train one must momentarily press the fast (+) end of the speed button, if the button is held down too long it causes the train to accelerate to maximum speed in a very short period of time. To stop the motion of the train it is necessary to operate the top oval button and press the slow (-) side (which is the side with the indentation). The other oval button is purely for forward or reverse.

There is one draw back to this simple arrangement of the switches is that it is possible to accidentally press the forward/reverse button which will cause the train to go in the opposite direction at the speed it is currently travelling, which in some cases might be excessive causing the train to derail.

The handheld controller is very easy to use and only takes a few moments to accustom one self to being proficient.

During testing all types of locomotives were tried ranging from N scale to LGB, and it was found that in most cases the locomotives responded perfectly to the train controller, whether the locomotives were fitted with can type motors or open frame type motors 3-pole or 5-pole skewed armature or not. In most cases it is not recommended for Z scale as they operate on 8 volts and the coreless Portescap type motors, as these require a very pure DC. The controller can supply continually 2 Amps at 12 Volts without any problems occurring or any increase in AC ripple.

It must be understood that this is a very easy and simple solution to the problem of walking around a layout following your train and not being tethered to the train

controller as it does not matter where you are in the room as the controller does not work on line of sight, as audio visual remote controllers do. This proved to be a great bonus when two teenagers were using the controller while operating a LGB layout in another room. However, It must be remembered that there are no overload or short indicators on this system, if a short circuit occurs no permanent damage takes place providing the offending short circuit is removed quickly, this is not to say that it is completely foolproof, because it can be burnt out so, as with any other types of train controllers, care should be taken.

The manufacturer has indicated that up to four different frequencies have been allocated to the handheld controller and these can be switched via switches in the battery compartment although it is factory set to match the individual base unit. Each frequency requires the use of another controller and handheld controller thereby making it impossible to run more than one train at the time on each controller unless you don't mind that all run in the same direction.

Yes, there is a need for another train controller for it does allow you to follow a locomotive around the layout without the danger of running out of cable. It also fits in the gap between a conventional controller and the Digital Command Control System. All in all, a very innovative solution.

Gerry Veldwyk