A few thoughts about choosing your DCC system

OK - Here we go…. These are MY comments based on experience…

I'm sure some of you may disagree with me so tell me so if that is the case. (Feel free to Email me and debate it – I'm happy to listen, learn and adapt my recommendations to include ANY well-presented argument).

I'm also sure that there will be the odd modeller out there that has bought a unit listed in one of my "don'ts" and may be wondering about his or her purchase. Don't stress it – if you're happy that's fine, really! If not, and I really have worried you – sorry. Email me and let's see if we can make the next step or overcome any shortfalls in your system.

On the "Upside", if you agree with me, have a "positive" story about any brand, or just want to tell the world about how you use DCC and how it has changed your modelling or the way you operate, tell us and I'll add your story to our site.

Finally in this "preamble" – I'm neither "all knowing" nor "always right" but I DO say it like I see it – always. So if I offend you or any manufacturer with what you see as an unfair negative comment don't get mad – get on the phone or email!

Write or call to tell me why I should change my mind or recommend that product. Show me how I am wrong… I'm AL-WAYS delighted to learn – or be able to provide GOOD news about anything… and will feature any corrections or improvements in our "News & New items" page.

OK, what's the next step?

Before you spend your hard earned money, we suggest that you take a good look at what is available, talk to DCC users and find out more about the potential of DCC… After all, it's how well you plan that will set your direction for the future, and we hope that you and your DCC system will be working together for a long time! Here are a few suggestions on planning your change to DCC:

Remember that while there are entry level and up-market control systems available, their cost difference is not necessarily a significant part of the whole system – as you add decoders and accessories the control becomes the core of your operations for everything, and "under-specifying" this may lead to compromise later.

1- Think and learn about the main differences between DC and DCC: With DC you are tied to a control panel mentality and your operating position is "at the controls".

You can also do this with DCC, but advanced systems use "hand-held" control units and can even be radio equipped, and therefore totally wireless, so you can "follow" and walk the layout with your trains. This is a BIG step, and a whole new way of operating, so spend some time thinking about it, and it's potential for improving the pleasure you can get from your layout!

2- Define your need – or at least try to: This is important as larger or smaller layouts have different needs. For example, if you will only ever have a few (less than say ten) locomotives and a small layout (say, less than 36sq feet) then a smaller system may be adequate. However, if you can, think also about your eventual use of the system – a higher feature main unit may initially look like overkill for simple loco driving but its added features and control ability may make it ideal for complex accessory control.

3- Visit friends, clubs or layouts with DCC equipment: There is nothing like "hands on" to let you develop your own concept of "where can I go" with this exciting new control method.

No matter where in the world you are, if you can't find anyone local, email me and I'll see if I can locate a DCC user close to you who can share his or her experiences and advise you.

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In my opinion, you should avoid the following:

1- Untested Second-hand units & second hand units that don't carry a real guarantee.
The price may be good, but are they REALLY fully functional? Is E-bay really your friend?

2- Units from a "Model Train Set" brand unless you're SURE they are fully compatible with DCC standards.
For example, early Hornby Digital controllers were to say the least, bad. Early (and some current) Marklin, Fleischmann, MRC and other similar units are functionally OK but are be limited in potential or unable to utilize all benefits or "functions" on modern decoders.

And…They MAY contain "proprietary" non-standard features and MAY not be as adaptable to improvement or as flexible as a "full DCC brand" of controller).

3- Beware Entry level "starter packs" from any Train-set brand. New modellers or "my first train set" people will buy these, and that is who they are targeted at – new modellers – but YOU are modeller with a bit of DC experience aren't you"… so it is best to avoid this "gentle trap".

I speak from experience here – I bought my first system from a "famous brand" but it was the bottom of their line. I soon found it was frustrating to work with and as boring as setting a clock radio to use – within the first month I relegated it to my test bench and bought a new full-feature system.

I later gave it away. Not a total loss I suppose, but a cost I wouldn't have had if I'd planned and thought a little more!

4- Avoid units that will NOT accept at least 4-digit loco numbers. This allows you to use loco cab-side number as the loco number. This really is important… perhaps some people are happy with a small set of loco's and don't mind remembering that loco number 2318 is really loco 56 etc… However, will it really suit you when you have guests who don't know which loco is which?

I strongly recommend that where possible numbers on smoke-boxes or cab-sides are the address numbers of each loco on your control system. Easy to remember – easy to use – hard to forget! A simple thing that makes life easier!

5- Think twice about units that require "scrolling" to change between locomotives or set up decoders (CV's). It sounds a small thing, but it is SO much easier to peck out a number with a finger on a keypad than it is to scroll back and forth to choose a new loco!

"Scrolling" units are usually entry level, and as tedious as setting the clock after a power cut!

6- Beware of Units with limited address availability. Again, these are mainly train-set or "starter pack" brands, but believe me, if you get to loco 11 and have only ten available places on your controller you WILL regret the purchase, or quickly covet a new, more expandable unit!

7- Are you SURE you want a DESKTOP unit? I don't like to exclude ANY innovative brand from your shopping list but handset controls can be more versatile especially for larger layouts.

This might eliminate some other-wise unique products but it really can be very nice to walk around following your trains!

DCC control
DCC wiring
DCC Accessories

Every system we sell does what it should!
To take a look, just click on the picture please.

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Continued….

All in one" products that contain both the controls and the "base station" electronics will tie you to a single operating position and they MAY alkso limit potential for upgrading. In reality too, they are a "DCC-habit" - and are really a "change without changing" in operating style. Think carefully!

8- Also - One of the BIG advantages of the full-feature "handset" products and better "console types" is the ability inter-face with other digital devices… (for example, iPad, Android pads or smart phones).

If you already own such things then for very little more (perhaps a wireless router connection and an "app" from apple or android markets you can gain a really nice additional control ability.

Then… You can control or program ANYTHING, from ANYWHERE in the layout.

But - Be very sure that your chosen system CAN be interfaced easily and will allow easy interconnection. Dot it before you get out your wallet, because while they might not say so on the box - Some brands, surprisingly, do NOT… and this includes one of the UK's favourite brands. A real shame!

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Need more information? There is LOTS more information on our website at www.dccconcepts.com

OR

Just call us or email us for a quick, honest, simple answer!