



# DCC SYSTEMS COMPARISON

updated 01/06

	Digitrax Zephyr	Digitrax Super Chief	Lenz SET-90	Lenz SET-100	MRC Prodigy Advance	NCE PowerPro	NCE PowerCab
Max number of cabs	10	120	31	31	TBD	63	2/4
Number of Locomotives per Consist	Unlimited	120	256	256	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Max number of loco addresses	4 digit	4 digit	4 digit	4 digit	4 digit	4 digit	4 digit
MU capabilities	Same address	120	256	256	128	506	136
Speed Controls	1 knob	2 knobs or keypad	Knob	Keypad	Knob or Keypad	Th. Wh'l or K'pad	Th. Wh'l or K'pad
Total Functions	10	13	9	13	20	13	13
Feedback	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Max. current (AMP)	2.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	3.3	5.0	2.0+
Software Upgrades	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Operates Stationary Decoder	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Read/Write Programming	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ops Mode Programming	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Direct Mode Programming	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Wireless Option	IR/Radio	IR/Radio	yes	yes	no	Duplex Radio	Duplex Radio
Mfg Warranty	1 yr	1 yr	10 yrs	10 yrs	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr
NMRA Conformance	TBD	no	yes	yes	no	yes	pending
Sound Support	Full	Full	Full	Full	Full	Full	Full
Positioning Reporting	Xpending	Xpending	NMRA	NMRA	no	Pending	Pending
Basic System Cost (MSRP)	\$199.00	\$449.99	\$290.00	\$349.00	\$329.98	\$499.95	\$179.95

*Ironically, the complex appearance of the North Coast, System One throttles ultimately provides for an easier, intuitive operating format than the DT100. Digitrax's release now of the more user friendly DT400 closes the gap.*

# OFF THE CUFF DCC COMPARISON

If you have been reading all the magazines and surfing the Internet trying to decide which DCC system to buy, here is a non-serious evaluation for your consideration.

The **Atlas Commander** is an introductory DCC system that is perhaps best used or intended for the recreational user. It is both performance and power limited. Max power out is 2.5 A DCC, about three average HO locomotives, 99 DCC addresses, 7 throttles. The Commander has only one accessory function therefore is not viable to operate the DCC sound units that are available. If you think you're going to be in Model Railroading for the long haul then you should consider other DCC offerings.

A step up from the Commander in both price and performance is the **Digitrax Zephyr**. The Zephyr features a 128 speed step control, a 2.5 Amp DCC output it is a stationary throttle that can address all locos and a system capability of 10 operators. As a starter set, the most beneficial aspect of the Zephyr is its upgrade potential to the other Digitrax systems. The Zephyr has a list price of \$199.95 and is the lowest level system a long-term user should consider. The Digitrax Zephyr does have ability to operate DCC sound and program decoders. If you step up to one of the larger Digitrax DCC systems the Zephyr can be programmed to be used as 2.5 amp booster. The Zephyr uses the LocoNet and can support up to 10 users. It can be used with wireless throttles. This is the best bang for the buck in the low end DCC systems. The intermediate level for DCC offers great price and performance for the average user.

The next step up is the new **MRC**

**Prodigy Advance**. This system comes with a full function handheld cab. There are 20 functions available, more than any other system at this time. No booster has been announced for this system, I do expect they will add one to the line. The system can be expanded up to 99 cabs, but only the larger hammerhead type handheld is available now. The system uses an 8 wire connector for cab connections. The 8 wire connections and cables are not as easily found as the 4 and 6 wire and connectors. This is a full featured system, but the lack of a booster and only 2.5 amps power can limit the number of locomotives that can be run at one time.

The **Lenz Set-90** and the **Set-100** Starter sets use the same command station/power station. The difference between the two is the throttle that is supplied. (See the previous page for more info.) The Set-90 has the knob control and the Set-100 the push button operation. The Lenz operates up to 31 throttles. This system can be set to respond in either German and English. Lenz has the unique wireless operation using a conventional wireless telephone as a throttle.

The **Digitrax Super Empire Builder** and the **Super Chief** use the same DT400 throttle with the LocoNet. They do have a different model command station/booster. The Super Empire Builder comes with the DB150 command station and the Super Chief comes with DSC100 command station. The DB150 supports 22 throttles, the DSC100 support up to 120 throttles. The 120 throttles is the highest number of operators allowed on any DCC system. The DT400 throttle has 32 keys and two knobs. It has a custom LCD display using both icons and alpha-

numeric characters. There are smaller utility throttle available for operators. One limiting item on the Super Empire Builder is the lack of the program track feature. Digitrax systems can be interfaced to a personal computer thru the LocoNet with an adapter.

The **NCE Power Pro** has one basic command station that comes in two versions. One is combined with a 5 amp booster and the other is stand alone used with the 10 amp booster. The command station has a built-in serial interface for connecting a personal computer. The system can support up to 63 cabs. The NCE system has been called the user friendly system because of the information displayed on the cabs two-line display. Smaller cabs without the LCD display are available for operators. The wireless cabs uses duplex two way communication.

## System Comparison

When you are comparing the systems the most important aspects of comparison are the throttles or cabs. The newer models of the Digitrax throttles are comparable with the NCE cabs. The NCE and Digitrax systems are about comparable in price. The operational format of the NCE cabs are significantly different from the Digitrax throttles. The NCE ProCabs are larger and feature an eighteen character LCD display and about 20 operational buttons. These cabs are often described by users as dog bones, because of the shape. Ironically, the complex appearance of the cabs ultimately provides for an easy, intuitive operating format.

These systems are generally comparable and they offer some specialized features

not found in the intermediate systems.

Use of a personal computer to work with the DCC system is becoming popular. There are a number of programs available and work with most systems that can connect to a computer. The free Decoder Pro (over the internet) is used by many.

One word of caution. *Sound is contagious!* Once you have run a sound equipped locomotive you will have a hard time living in the world of silent locomotives.

If you would like more information on a DCC system most of the DCC system manufacturers have the system manuals available on their website. You can either view or download and print out the manual.

Most prospective DCC users I talk to seem to want a specific recommendation. Our job is to tell everyone the facts and then help them to make decisions based on those facts. The most important aspect to consider is the system master throttle/cab, that's what you as the user are going to be spending the most time operating. So, based on the pictures, the descriptions, and what you may have had the experience to work with, and whatever you feel you're going to be the most comfortable with, is what you should choose! Many of the clubs that have converted from dc to DCC only say "Why did we wait so long!"

My experience has shown that all the major systems are good systems and that the respective manufacturers are dedicated to their products and provide good product support. I also think those manufacturers are stable enough so that your investment is protected.

Finally, we guarantee your satisfaction so don't sweat it.