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# Railroad Report

## Bachmann E-Z App Santa Fe

*The biggest innovation since DCC*

**N**ot that many years ago probably the most innovative introduction to model railroading was the DCC system. Totally revolutionary, it was and still is, the mainstay of today's model railroad control. There have been a number of wireless options for DCC introduced in the past few years as well as PC applications for layout and locomotive control. But with the proliferation of tablets and phones controlling everything from residential locks, garage doors, heat and more, why not a Bachmann Santa Fe Locomotive?

It's already been done for the railroad fan, and it is called the E-Z App HO Locomotive in the Santa Fe scheme. Although I prescribe to the KISS (Keep It Simple yet Safe) philosophy, I do think this is a great idea. If you are wondering why, ask yourself how many kids today have a phone or tablet permanently attached to their hands? By using a familiar device they can explore model railroading on their terms, not yours. That's how you get kids interested. Dealers have an opportunity to work with parents to help get their children away from the latest game or constant texting. Perhaps they'll even use their devices to our advantage so they can show their friends how they are able to control their dad's or granddad's railroad with a phone or tablet.

What exactly is E-Z App? It is a standard design HO locomotive (complete train sets are also available) that has a Bluetooth-4 receiver and decoder in place of the usual DCC circuit board. It is not an add on circuit or plug in



device; the Bluetooth-4 receiver is integrated into an E-Z App locomotive's control board.

We have all seen the many variations of the Santa Fe locomotives over the years, but I especially like this one. There have been releases that used chrome plating to simulate the aluminum skin, and these renditions were way too bright. Others were painted in an off shade of red, which destroyed the look completely. Bachmann's Santa Fe is the correct color and finish. It's all in the details, and this loco has a realistic mild shine to the overall aluminum finish, and based on my reference material, the red is spot-on. Removing the shell to see the inner workings, one quickly notices the location of the Bluetooth-4 receiver. Looking further under the control board is a good sized motor with dual shafts and flywheels. All of the drivetrain is mounted on a massive cast metal chassis.

Now that we've talked about the eye candy and inner workings, let's see what the E-Z App is all about. The specs to operate the E-Z App are extensive and available on the box and Bachmann's website. The app to run the locomotives is available as a free download from the Apple App Store (Apple only it is not compatible with Android). It only takes a few minutes to download and install, and the end user is ready. There is no technical configuration for him to do to start running the loco, as everything is done via the download.

To begin, activate the app and it immediately starts looking for a locomotive. Once one is found it will be displayed and ready for the user to select. After selecting the loco a touch control screen will appear. From the touch screen the operator can do everything he can do from a standard Bachmann DCC wired controller.

Not only is speed and direction controlled from the



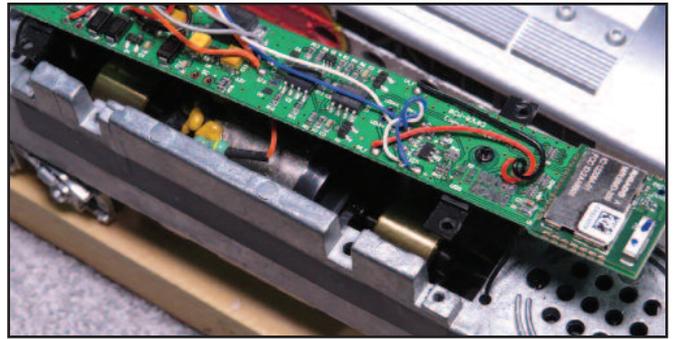
*There are different control panels available for the user to select from each working exactly as a standard hard-wired controller.*

device, but there are icons for lights, bell, horn and stop. Controlling a train from the app is exactly like a hard-wired controller. In every instance the train ran smoothly and braked realistically. One thing that is different than a Sound Value DCC locomotive is when operation a loco using E-Z App, the sounds will emit from the control device, not the loco.

If this sounds confusing, it's not. E-Z App is extremely simple in operation. Most likely though the best advice you can give a new user is to explore the configuration pages. Even though no configuration is necessary to run an E-Z App loco out of the box, there is an icon for personal settings. This page allows the user to tailor various parameters. As an example, items like the maximum speed and the volume of sounds are but a touch away. And lastly, another unique feature of E-Z App is the ability to update the program or firmware within the locomotive wirelessly. When there is an update available the app will let the user know to load it.

Exactly like hard-wired DCC, E-Z App has the ability to run multiple trains on one set of rails. And just like wired DCC, the last settings on the model will be used until these are changed. E-Z App provides three different control panel, or skins as they are called, options. These can easily be changed to satisfy the user's personal tastes.

Currently Bachmann Trains is offering four locomotives and a Christmas Set with E-Z App control, but this is expanding continuously. Even though it is off-season, the urge to experiment with the E-Z App Christmas system



*The heart of the system is the Bluetooth-4 receiver mounted to the control board as shown on the far right of the photo .*

couldn't be pushed to the side. I can see where this set will be a popular holiday sales item. When running in the Christmas mode the control device will play a holiday song and modulate the speed and light of the loco to the tune. It's really quite entertaining in operation.

To use a bit of slang, the E-Z APP is a piece of cake and lives up to its name. It's easy—from loading the app to running the locomotive. All of about five minutes was used to get the Santa Fe running, and the majority of that time was spent downloading and installing the app. This is a great system to get our younger generation involved as it will attract the millennium generation; those who wish to control the world from their mobile device. Although at the time of this writing nothing was mentioned by Bachmann Trains I suspect there will be much more to the E-Z App system in the future. It is that expandable. **HM**



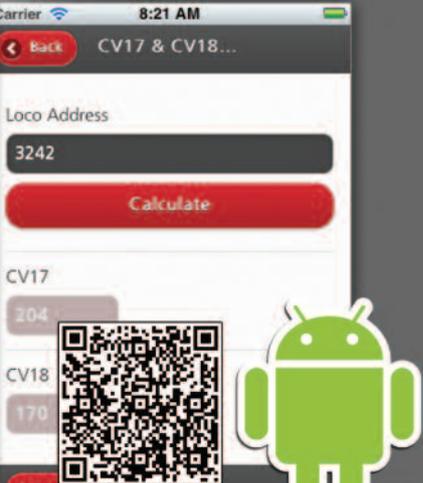
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