



September 20, 2006

“NINCO” BOB SAYS:

Last week I visited NINCO in Barcelona, Spain for the sole purpose of “playing with” NINCO’s new N-Digital system. I was blown away by N-Digital’s many features and innovations, including vibrating signals through the hand controllers, its really simple, Plug ‘n Play, no soldering, no modification installation of the control chip in each car of any make, its 1-button programming of the car, the accuracy of the lane changing, its complete compatibility with existing products, and so much more.

But most of all, as hard as I tried for many hours, I could not get the N-Digital system to fail. It’s “bullet proof”!

From test tracks with the Conversion Kit, Pit Lane, Control Tower and other accessories in place, to the out of the “Suitcase” 42-foot Digital MasterTrack set, it just wouldn’t quit! Other manufacturers are still introducing modifications to their systems to improve reliability.

NINCO waited.... **It wasn’t important to be first, it was important to deliver the best digital system possible. The wait is over! NINCO has done it!**

I wish I could have stayed in Barcelona longer, not just for N-Digital, but also for the wonderful hospitality shown by everyone at NINCO.

Here’s my hands-on look at the NINCO N-Digital system...

N-Digital is being released in two ways; as a big 42 foot Digital Mastertrack set in a red suitcase, and as a conversion kit for those who already have NINCO track and just want to add to the pleasure of NINCO reliability. Unlike other manufacturers, NINCO does not consider N-Digital to be a “new” product. It doesn’t require new track or special cars and simply connects to existing layouts. Of course it’s new because its never been released before, but it’s really an addition to the entire NINCO track system; fully compatible, and giving racers the opportunity to expand their racing pleasure with additional race modes and professional racing accessories like the control tower, pit lane, fueling, etc. And unlike other systems, you can race up to eight cars simultaneously, and by adding multilane kits, an eight-lane layout with lane changes is possible. Wow!

The Digital Mastertrack (40101) is “big” with twice the track you get elsewhere. Designed to fit on a 4x8 board, it spreads out to a fantastic racing layout of about 8x8. I was really impressed by this. Naturally you can add it to any existing track that you have, or with NINCO’s Chicane (Adapter Track) pieces (10110) turn a Scalextric Classic layout into N-Digital. There’s 42 feet of track, guardrails, bridge support, power supply, control console, four lane change sections, three controllers and three chips to convert any three you choose, so you’re not limited to cars you don’t really want or only cars from NINCO. All NINCO Lane Change sections are on a straight 40mm track piece.

The Digital Conversion Kit (40202) is all you need to convert any NINCO track to N-Digital. It comes with the Control Console, power supply, three controllers and three chips and two lane change sections (R-L and L-R). Everything's there. You can't use any other controllers and you'll have to remove the analog power track, and pop the Digital Console track piece in its place. The lane change sections can be placed wherever you want, and you can add as many as you want as you grow your system.



Almost forgot... racing on N-Digital is always in a clockwise direction, just like Formula-1. Now, here's how it works...

The Digital Control Console certainly made me "Think Red". It's the feature packed control computer that gives racers complete control like never before. There are eight, RJ-11 type jacks on the console, for eight controllers. An accessory socket for a control tower (more about that later), two transformer input jacks and an output port for connection to a PC. The 3-amp transformer that comes with the set or conversion kit is designed for up to four cars, so a second transformer is needed when you're racing 5-8 cars... or you can use a single transformer of six amps or above that can supply a regulated 14VDC.

I mentioned the PC port. Early next year NINCO will have software available to display info on a monitor and be able to create files from race results.

The Console is really intuitive... four buttons for menu selection and scrolling. The display shows all the information, either for the race selected or for status of each car. There was a choice of Amateur or Pro mode. Naturally, I went for "Pro" mode... but went to Amateur after a few laps. I wasn't used to the response of the controllers... yet! These modes adjust the sensitivity of the trigger pressure. I needed more movement of the trigger on the layout I was using... so "Amateur" mode was naturally less sensitive. The selection is universal so it affected all the controllers.

Cars with lights are no problem at all. The Console has a light/no light function. It's not car specific. A single car cannot be selected. If you set the function to "on" and there are cars that have lights installed, then all the cars will run with lights on, providing you connected the lights to the chip as required. Not just NINCO cars with the 80907 light kit, other cars like SCX's lighted cars will work too, and in the near future, we will be seeing new NINCO cars with lights already on board.

I said that N-Digital is designed to give racers additional pleasure by expanding the type of racing they can do. N-Digital has seven race modes, including a mode for the racer to race against the Console. Races start with a typical "Christmas Tree" countdown, both visually and with sound. One lap to go and final laps, etc have sound signals as well.



I had lots of fun with all the modes... and was challenged by racing against NINCO's top management and the designer of the system... So let's see what the console had to offer...

The Console displays the mode across the top of the screen; GP, WR, FL, NS, PS, AG and AS.

GP (Grand Prix). You Choose: race distance in laps that you select, or total time that you select. You'll be able to see each driver's info including top speed, lap speed, fastest lap, and position.

WR (World Rally). Think of a single rally point to point stage... with individual times for up to eight racers. Laps or time, your choice. The display will give you finishing positions plus individual information for each driver.

FL (Fastest Lap). Just like it says... This is the mode for selecting qualifying times for race positions, etc. Used for qualifying-style competitions, you get personal info for each driver.

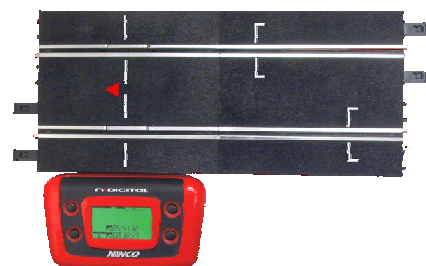
NS (Non Stop). Endurance racing! It can run indefinitely and continually maintains driver info for fastest lap plus race positions.

PS (Pit Strategy). You have to have the 40203 Pit Lane Kit installed for this mode to work. It's just like the GP (Gran Prix) mode, but like real GP racing, let's say Formula-1, you can set a race strategy that must include pit stops for fuel. For me, this is what racing is all about! If you want a 5 minute race with four pit stops, that's up to you! In PS mode, your car is given a given a gas allowance. Just like the real world, race fast and use more gas, slow and use less. The next thing "blew me away!" When I began to run low on gas, my controller vibrated twice to warn me to enter the pit lane to refuel. That was great! I didn't have to look at the Console to remind me. The controller did it! By the way, I found out that not making a pit stop reduced the power to my car. As soon as you enter the pits, the car begins to refuel...it only takes seconds and you can see the time on the display. If you're near the end of the race and don't need a full tank, you can hit the Lane Change button on your controller and override the refueling and get out of the pits. A really neat feature.

AG (Arcade Group). This is a staged event for up to eight drivers that will knock out the slowest car after each stage, leaving the final two racers for the main event.

AS (Arcade Single). No friends, bad weather, nobody coming over to race... This mode is for you. Program the time or laps and race by yourself against the Console. At the end of each race, the system resets itself with a lower time and will continue to do so until you reach a point where you can't beat the system...I couldn't, but I don't consider myself to be a good racer.

Now that I knew what I could do, it was time to stop, take the bodies off a few regular cars and make them digital by installing the heart of the system, the N-Digital chip. Any car (that has the space available) by any manufacturer can be N-Digitalized. I chose one of my favorite NINCO cars, the Red NSX "Autobacs".

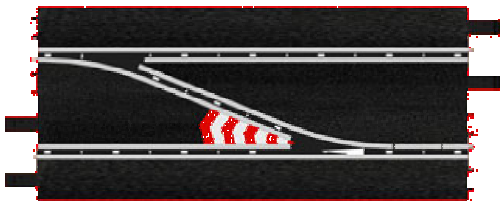


I was amazed at the speed of this. It's incredible to watch. A car on my rear bumper could not make the change with me unless the other driver had his button pressed. No accidental lane changes here.

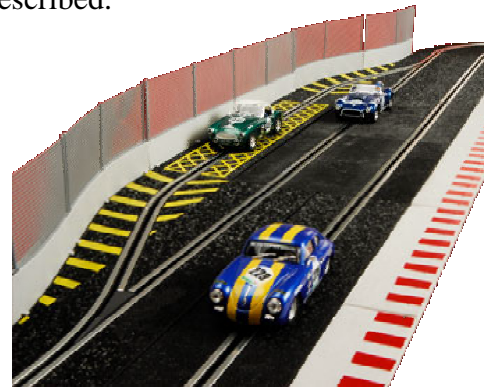
The trigger pressure felt really smooth with good feel. I was really surprised when I set fastest lap in my first race, but I think the Export Manager and System Designer let me do it. The Controller vibrated telling me that I just set fastest lap! Then there was more... It vibrated to warn me that I was on the last lap, (it works for last minute too), and when I was running out of gas and needed to make a pit stop in PS mode... yep, it vibrated twice. How cool is that?



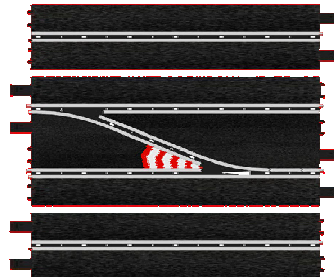
Lane Change Tracks (40201) make it possible to change lanes. Located in a standard NINCO 40mm track section, you can simply remove a standard straight and replace it with a lane changing section without changing your layout. They're available in sets containing a R-L & a L-R section. As I mentioned earlier, racing is always clockwise, and NINCO has printed red & white directional stripes on the operating ends of each piece. Like on a model railroad switch track, there's a "flipper" that causes the direction of the car to change. Activated by a small, super fast solenoid beneath the track, the flipper that is normally in the straight (non-lane change position) moves to allow the car to change lanes. It's unbelievably fast. There are two small slits in the rails that break a 2 inch section of the track about 2 inches from the flipper that actually sense the presence of the pickup braids. If the lane change button is pressed when your car rides over this section, the flipper flips and the car changes lanes. The flipper neutralizes itself before the rear of your car goes past the flipper... that's why another car can't follow you unless the other driver has his lane change button pressed. It's fast and I couldn't get it to fail. There are no other sensors required; no new or special slot guides, no LED's, mechanical triggers, Infrared or anything. It's all done through the rails.



The N-Digital Pit Lane Kit (40203) is really nice. It's a single lane and comes with a turn-in and a turnout, two 40mm pieces of single lane track, and is printed with yellow racing stripes and lines. There's a cable that must be plugged into the accessory socket on the Control Console that read the sensors on the track. The pit lane is designed for the direction of travel and there are no additional single lane pieces available at this time. You can go in and out of the pits at any time by pressing the lane change button on the controller as for any other lane change, but you must be in the PS mode to be able to use the pit lane for regulated fuel stops. as previously described.



The Multi-Lane kit (40204) takes N-Digital to new heights, and can really make racing fun. This kit makes possible that four, six or eight lane layout that people have dreams about. Racing eight cars together on two lanes with N-Digital is certainly impressive, but add many more lanes with a pit stop kit and you can really have the type of racing that dreams are made of... being able to go from lanes two to three and four to five, etc. The Multi-Lane kit contains a pair of lane change pieces, and some straight single lane track. NINCO's standard "Easy-Clip" connection lugs that clip normal pieces together are reversed, because they connect only on the opposite lane, being able to allow lane two to switch to lane three.



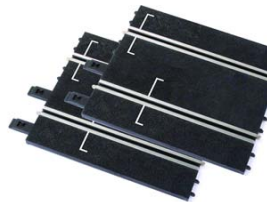
I really liked the **Control Tower (40205)**. Just like at Indianapolis, it has a large digital readout that vertically shows the race position of up to eight cars. At the top of the display, either the number of laps remaining or the time remaining is shown. A quick glance shows all the race positions. If #3 is on top, then car #3 is in first place. If #5 is in the second position down, then car #5 is in second place, and so on. As each car crosses the starting line, it's race position is immediately updated and displayed, and it's always accurate. The Control Tower is mounted on a special 20mm track section and gets its power through the track, so it doesn't have to be plugged into the Control Console. It rotates a full 360 degrees so you can place it anywhere on your layout for best visibility. Not only that, but you can put as many Towers on the layout as you wish, and they will all instantly and continually update as each car individually crosses the start line.



That brings me to the **Sensor Track (40206)** sections that plug into the accessory socket of the Console when using the multi-lane sections. These special Sensor Tracks transfer power to the additional two lanes. They're directional, so it's important to remember that all racing is clockwise with N-Digital. You position these two-lane sections directly opposite the Console/power section so laps can be counted as the car passes the start line. Like the power section (Control Console) these Sensor Tracks have starting grid markers painted on the surface. Do not confuse them with the Grid Tracks or you won't be able to count laps on lanes 3-8!



There's a **Grid Track (10114)** that has grid marks painted on them that you use to evenly space cars at the start of a race. These are different and are not Sensor Tracks. They don't have a cable that plugs into the Control Console. These Grid Track pieces can be used on standard analog layouts as well.



The **Digital Controller Extension Cable (40305)** gives you plenty of room to move around, rather than being restricted by the short Controller cable. I didn't find the standard length Controller cable to be a problem, but four or more drivers need to spread out a bit, and this accessory makes that possible.



NINCO designed a new **Digital Power Supply (40303)** for the system. One comes with the Digital Mastertrack Set and with the Digital Extension Kit. This 3-Amp, 14V power supply is made to handle four cars, Control Tower, etc. If you're going to run more than four cars or are using high revving motors, NINCO recommends a second power supply. There's a 2nd input jack on the Control Console.

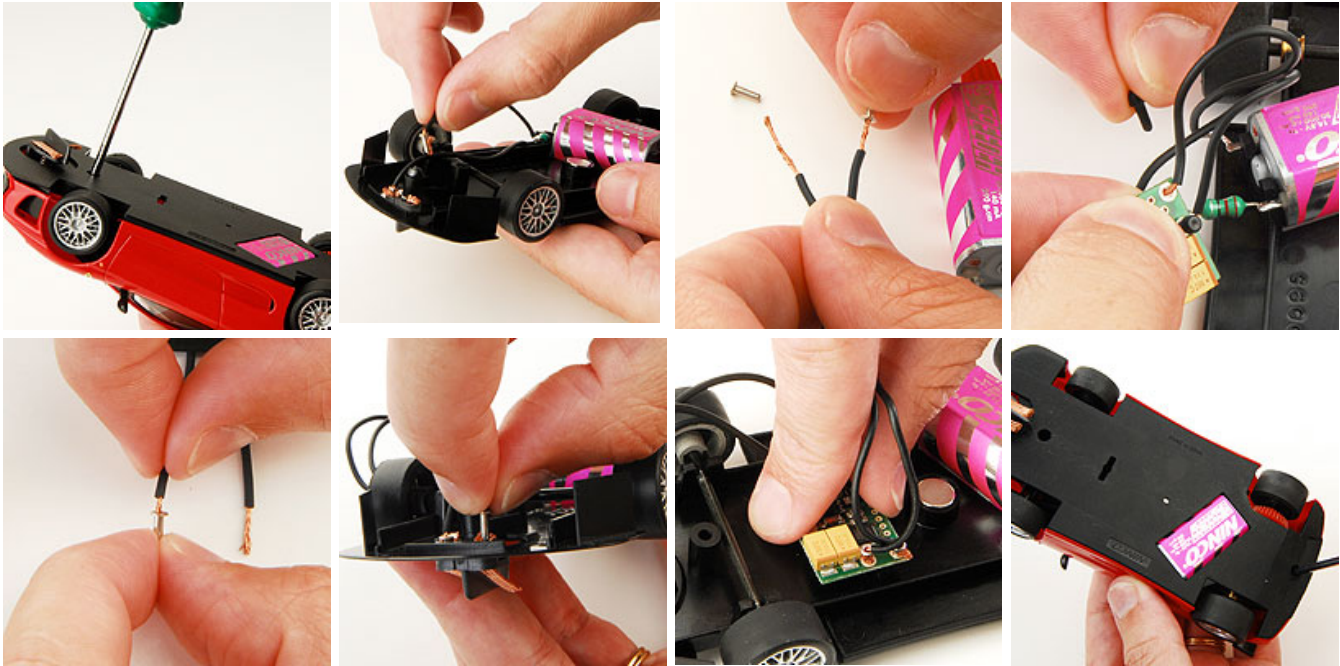


The **Multi-Connector Jack (40306)** is needed when you add an additional two lanes or a secondary pit lane. The Control Console has a single input socket. This accessory doubles the input sockets that you have. If you have multi-lane system with more than one pit lane and more than one Sensor Track, the Multi-Connector Jacks can be "daisy-chained" for as many inputs as you need.



It wasn't easy spending all that time in Barcelona working my fingers to the bone for hours... but somebody had to do it!

Let me show you how easy it is to “chip” a car...



That’s my rundown of N-Digital, and not from third party talk, rumors or other reviews. My time in Barcelona went by too quickly. Since the announcement a couple of years ago that NINCO will produce a digital Slot Racing system, I’ve talked about N-Digital to USA dealers, hobbyists, Internet Groups, magazine editors and publishers, and many marketing directors. I firmly believe the delays were worth it. You can be confident that NINCO’s N-Digital system will perform as promised from the first day, as the most reliable, compatible, easy to use, digital slot racing system available.

“NINCO” Bob Lewen

**There’s no doubt that it’s time to
THINK RED!**

