

MEGATECH

Junior

Model Cars reviews Futaba's latest
steer-wheel radio outfit

Why is it that almost no-one in this country uses pistolgrip radios?

After all the Japanese and the Americans hardly use anything else (except of course current World Champion Masami Hirosaka who drives by divine guidance).

In this country we seem happy to hang onto our twin-stick radios while the rest of the world gets itchy on the trigger and drives from the hip.

Ray gun radios are purpose designed for

R/C car racing with all the features and functions you could want - so why don't we use them?

Back in the old days when cars were made of iron and electric motors were 3ft. wide the only radios available to control the new toys had to be

ripped out of model aeroplanes. These were not really suited to cars (turning round took ten yards) but they were the only thing available so the old-timers had to make do.

So we just got used to using 'joystick' style radios which is why when foreign drivers visit us for a race with their hi-tech, all singing - all dancing ray gun radios they think us quaint, weird even.

The Megatech Junior (FP-T2PBK) comes with a neat BEC receiver and two servos. Power to the transmitter is "loaded" via a magazine.

When pistolgrips were finally introduced in small numbers model shop owners became suspicious. If it couldn't fly an aeroplane it didn't belong on the shelf - this is because most model shop owners are old aeromodellers.

The Americans go a bundle on pistolgrips for a simple reason. In the early days of R/C cars most of the drivers moved over from slot car racing so they were used to the trigger action of the throttle. It didn't take long for some bright spark to lash a slot car hand controller to the back of an ordinary transmitter, link it to the throttle function and the boys were happy. Next thing you know another whizz kid invents the wheel - sticks it on the front and the pistolgrip was born.

The Americans refused to use anything else so *Futaba* began producing a conversion of their old 'M series' radios for the US market. Over here we remained oblivious to the technological advancements being made on the other side of the Atlantic. Which is a shame because the Yanks are convinced that ray guns work best.

The reasoning behind this is that the trigger action is more natural than pushing a joystick back and forth. Because it is more natural it follows that it must be much quicker. There is a certain logic to this which can be tested just by trying each type of radio. For me the trigger action seems quicker and easier - and I am used to driving with sticks.

Who invented the wheel?

The wheel action for steering is slightly more difficult to analyse. Although sufficiently different to make me actually think about the movement the wheel action doesn't take too long to get used to. It is a fact that given a choice most first-time drivers, who have never picked up a transmitter before, will choose a pistolgrip because they find it more natural. Without having used a stick for steering they invariably find the wheel quite easy to get along with also. This is why more and more ready-to-run 'toy' radio control cars are being supplied with mini ray guns. After all if the batteries run out, little Johnny can always play *Battlestar Galactica* instead.

The world's largest manufacturer of radio control systems, *Futaba* have been making ray guns for some time now. Their first truly designated pistolgrip was the *Magnum* but now there is a new series under the title *Megatech*.

There are three models to choose from depending on the depth of your pocket and the number of functions required.



They are as follows: FP-2PB, FP-2PBK, FP-2PBKA.

Please don't ask me what the letters mean because I don't know. All three radios incorporate a battery eliminator circuit which allows the onboard receiver and servos to be powered from the main *Ni-Cad* drive battery. This means there is no messy wiring to worry about and the car will be lighter. Another feature common to all is servo

reversing switches for throttle and steering. These are hidden in the groove moulded into the top of the transmitter for the aerial. Switching the direction of travel of the servos through the switch does not affect the previous trim settings.

Apart from the throttle and steering trimmers that is all you get with the basic FP-2PB model.

The photos show the middle of the range 'Megatech' which

is also known as the Junior. This is ideal for drivers of electric Off-Road cars because it has the basic necessary functions.

Behind the trigger is a steering rate adjustment which can be altered even when you are actually driving the car. Without stopping, the amount of steering movement can be increased and decreased just by moving the adjuster with the thumb. Pretty handy if you think there is no way the car is going to get round the hairpin.

For the trigger action there is also an adjustment, mechanical this time instead of electronic. The amount of trigger movement for forward and reverse can be altered according to personal taste. Some drivers prefer hardly any movement between neutral and full throttle, others like quite a bit. On the pistolgrip, reverse is selected by pushing the trigger forward with the forefinger. This is probably the most unnatural movement of the pistolgrip so it makes sense to make it as small as possible.

Changing the position of the trigger is simple. By loosening a small Philips screw the desired position can be selected and then locked in place.

The throttle and steering servo trims are on the control panel behind the steering wheel. On the top model (FP-2PBKA) there are two further knobs set underneath; these are known as ATV

trimmers which stands for Adjustable Travel Volume. The ATV function allows you to set different amounts of servo movement either side of the neutral point. For example if you want more movement for forward then this can be made without changing the reverse setting. Neat. You can use this function for either mechanical or electronic speed controllers and engine powered 1/18th scale cars.

The only other difference between the three sets is the installation of a charging socket on the top model. The battery pack slips into the body of the 'gun' just like a cartridge into a handgun. You need eight AA size pencells to make this gun fire.

In the instruction it says, "Easy to use and design based on human engineering." Presumably this means the transmitter has been designed to fit easily into the hand and be well balanced. Ergonomics is probably the word they are looking for but I'm not sure I know what it means let alone an English/Japanese interpreter.

However the 'Megatech' has great space-age ray gun looks and feels very nice in the hand. Getting used to actually driving with one would not take too long even for someone brought up on the old twin-sticks. You never know the American and Japanese drivers could be right; ray guns might have the advantage after all.



The radio outfit comes supplied with two "FPS148" indirect drive servo units.