

## **MERG – MODEL ELECTRONICS RAILWAY GROUP**

MERG members are model railway enthusiasts who are interested in applying electronics to the operation of their model railways. The Group enables members to exchange ideas and information and provides kits covering a number of interests including DC operations, DCC and computer control. Members have a wide range of knowledge and capability and include beginners and those who work in the electronics and railway industries.

### **HAS MERG BEEN AROUND LONG AND HOW IS IT RUN?**

MERG started in the UK 1967 and is now 40 years old. In the early days just two or three simple MERG kits were made available.

The advent of the Internet enabled the group to expand rapidly and geographically and today we have more than 800 members across all continents. All gauges, from 'Z' to at least 7" (passenger-carrying) have made use of our expertise and kits.

MERG only has one Committee and the members of that are elected each year at the AGM. The Committee divides the work up into functional areas and each area is the responsibility of an individual Committee member.

We are always pleased to welcome new members and this leaflet will explain the benefits of membership.

### **WHAT'S ON THE WEB SITE?**

The **MERG Web** site ([www.merg.org.uk](http://www.merg.org.uk)) has two parts; the public area and the members' only area.

The contents are always being adjusted but in mid-2007 the topics covered included train control (with and without computers), route setting ideas, controllers, DCC, turnout and signal control, and a glossary. The glossary is under

development and is intended to cover a simple explanation of the many shorthand terms used in model railway electronics. There is also a very extensive set of links to other web sites covering electronics manufacturers and suppliers, computer software, DCC, Memory wire, MERG member's pages and non-commercial pages providing model railway and/or electronic information.

The Members Only area is accessed using the current ID and Password. This is the most valuable resource because it is the archive of all MERG documents going back many years. Copies of all past and current Technical Bulletins (see below) and the MERG Journal can be downloaded from here. There is also information about the kits available (see below). The site is used for Members news and information.

### **WHAT ARE TECHNICAL BULLETINS?**

Technical Bulletins (TBs) are formal records of information relating to MERG designs, solutions and the theory behind the kits. The Technical Bulletin Editor strives to ensure that TBs are error free and written in a straightforward manner avoiding as much "jargon" as possible. As new TBs are prepared they are issued to all members with the next available Journal.

The TBs cover a wide range of topics but there are three large sections. The RPC System (Remote Panel Control) provides a range of kits for controlling/monitoring different elements of a model railway. These can be used with or without a computer and can apply to large club layouts or a small home layout depending upon the elements used and how they are put together. There are TBs dealing with the software that can be interfaced to the RPC system. The RPC system contains one approach to train detection but this subject is also covered under the sections on Signalling and Traction.

The SuperBloc concept provides a model railway controlling/monitoring system that does not involve computers but the individual control of block sections and the passing of information from one block to the next.

These TBs can be found in the Traction section. There is a separate section dealing with DCC.

It is worthwhile considering the various control options before implementing a strategy on your layout.

### **WHAT KITS ARE AVAILABLE AND HOW DO I GET THEM?**

Kits usually come as complete packages with the circuit board and all the components needed. To achieve this the Kitmaster is supported by a small team of Kit Producers who select the components and pack them up.

Full instructions for making the kits are available and our experience is that anyone who has reasonable skill with the soldering iron can build them successfully. It is not necessary to understand how the kits work in detail to be able to build and use them successfully.

For overseas members it may be possible to just provide circuit boards or partial kits to reduce their weight for shipping purposes (e.g. you can source a transformer locally). The Kitmaster is also able to accept payment by Paypal.

### **HOW DO I GET SOME HELP**

The **MERG Mailing List** (a closed email user group on Yahoo) is the place to raise queries and questions. It is a friendly and civilised list but naturally it is appreciated if new members have made themselves fully conversant with the contents of the MERG website since that may often contain the information you need. Instructions for getting on to the list are in the Members Handbook.

New members are invited to introduce themselves when they make their first posting. Do not be afraid to ask basic questions and do not be surprised if these result in a multitude of responses and if opinions are not always fully convergent. If you have particular technical expertise in a relevant area please make it known and contribute as soon

as you can. Fresh blood and fresh ideas are critical to the success of MERG.

The mailing list does not permit direct attachments but there is a files area and a pictures area that can be used to upload material supporting a particular question, statement or answer. The files area contains a wealth of information and “off the top” ideas that have not been formalised into Technical Bulletins. Any member can post items to the files and pictures area. New members are particularly encouraged to review the files area, as it is an often-overlooked resource. It is not formally organised and the descriptions may be sparse but do not be afraid to contact the person who posted the file if you want further information.

If you run into problems during the building or testing phase of building a MERG kit post a question on the email group and you are almost guaranteed a response from another member, the original kit designer or the Kitmaster.

### **WHAT IS THE MERG JOURNAL AND HOW DO I GET IT?**

The Journal, usually published four times a year, contains short technical articles that are either development of topics discussed on the email group, additions to previously published ideas or Technical Bulletins or ideas that are not yet developed to the point to warrant the more rigorous approach of a Technical Bulletin. The Journal is a very appropriate medium for recording member’s experience with the practical application of MERG kits and any other matter relating to electronics and model railways.

The Journal carries notices and information about the group, changes to the Committee, papers relating to the AGM, membership list updates, information about new kits and the availability of old kits and news about some of the regional based groups of MERG.

Until 2006 the MERG Journal was called the MERG Newsletter but the scope and content is the same. As a new member you can access old copies of the Journal (and Newsletter) on the MERG web site and you are encouraged to do this. Indexes are available for some periods.

The Journal Editor is always looking for material to fill each issue and is particularly interested in practical articles that illustrate how members make use of MERG resources. Do not feel that as a new member you have nothing to contribute because the reverse is more likely to be the case. You do not need to be an expert in electronics to contribute.

The Journal is sent to every member by mail (airmail for non-UK members) and a mailing house handles the distribution. Any new TBs are sent at the same time together with any administrative documentation – AGM papers, subscription renewal etc.

### **CAN I MEET OTHER MEMBERS?**

About five times a year there is a members meeting in central London open to anyone who can make the journey. Where possible a copy of the presentations made is posted on the website and we also try to video proceedings that can then be obtained by purchasing the DVD.

We encourage members to get together locally and at present there are three established local groups based on Poole in Dorset, Wales and Aberdeen in Scotland

### **TRAINING AND COURSES**

New members are often interested in the basics of electronic circuits and a series of 12 articles appeared in the Journal between 2004 and 2006.

MERG also participates in a weekend course on model railway electronics at Missenden Abbey and from time to time an all day course in central London is organised.

Announcements about these are made in the Journal, on the website and on the email-group.

### **CAN I HELP?**

MERG is entirely run by volunteers and no member of the group receives any financial remuneration for the time and expertise that they contribute to our activities. This applies to those who provide the administrative support, to those who design the kits and to those who write Technical Bulletins and provide advice on the E-Group.

MERG can only function if we have volunteers to help with the work. Most jobs do not require you to be an electronics expert (generally their time is better used designing new things for us) and you do not have to be in the southeast of the UK

MERG attends National and local exhibitions and we are always seeking help to man the stand for a few hours-it is a good way to meet other members and some of the Committee. Members can also buy kits at these exhibitions and discuss any matters relating to them with knowledgeable people.

### **WHEN AND HOW DO I PAY MY SUBSCRIPTION?**

The annual subscription covers the direct costs involved in the running of the Group (e.g. printing, postage and out of pocket expenses). Members who buy the kits cover the costs involved in sourcing the kits and making the circuit boards plus a small mark-up that also provides some funding for new kits.

All subscriptions are due for renewal on April 1st each year and can be paid in a variety of currencies and by cheque, Standing Order, bank transfer or PAYPAL.