

Totally Hidden Uncoupler System is an attractive solution for uncoupling needs

Review and Photos by Phil Scandura

N Scale Starter Set, MSRP: \$6.50

HO Scale Starter Set, MSRP: \$6.95

Set of Eight Additional Magnets, MSRP: \$10.50

Additional Mounting Plates, MSRP: \$1.00 - \$1.50 each

S&L Enterprises

5806 Miriam Dr • Sykesville, MD 21784

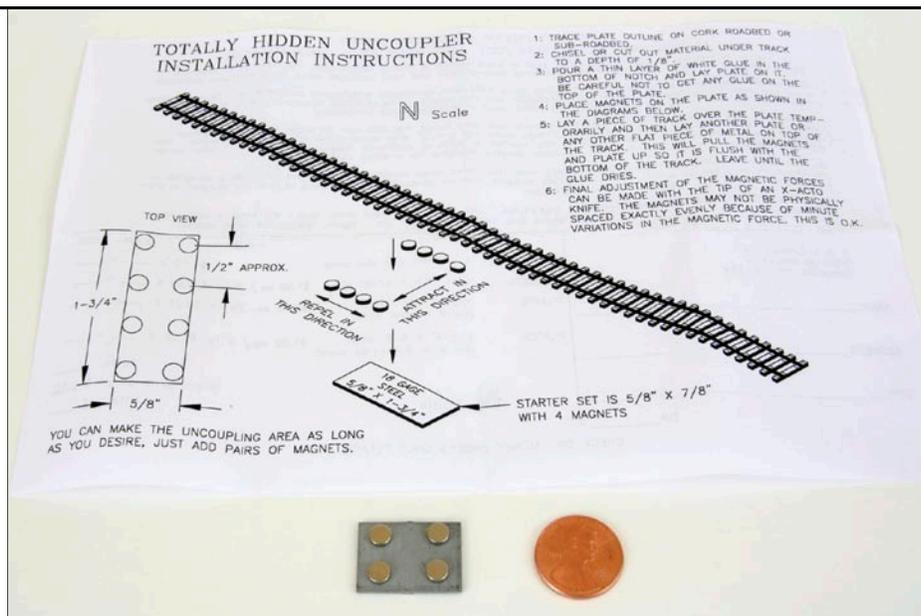
410-549-2937

www.gardenmetalmodels.com/magnets

WHEN I first started using Micro-Trains operating couplers, I experimented with hiding the rather large and unprototypical uncoupling magnet beneath the tracks, rather than between the rails. I can remember trying this in both N and HO with mixed results. Eventually I gave up, resorting to manually uncoupling cars using a long metal pick. Some time later, I learned about the Totally Hidden Uncoupler system from S&L Enterprises, but never had a chance to try it until now. I refer to it as a “system” because unlike the typical uncoupling magnet, the Totally Hidden Uncoupler isn’t fixed in length and can be extended if desired. Furthermore, it can be adjusted by moving the magnets to provide optimal uncoupling; something you cannot do with a solid chunk of magnetic material.

Available in both N and HO, the Totally Hidden Uncoupler is packaged as a starter set that includes four rare-earth magnets, a steel mounting plate, and complete instructions. As shown in the photos, these magnets are very small, yet they are extremely powerful. This becomes apparent as you try to pull them apart and place them on the mounting plate!

In addition to the starter set you can purchase additional magnets and mounting plates, as well as extended length plate, which is about twice the



Shown here are the components of the N-scale mounting plate, and instructions. As you can see the magnets are very small!

1. Arrange all four magnets on a smooth surface so that the sides Attract one another. They should end up looking something like this:
2. Use a permanent marker to mark the tops of all four magnets. They will then look like this:
3. Before placing them on the Mounting Plate, flip two magnets over two ensure the polarities are aligned as shown below left.

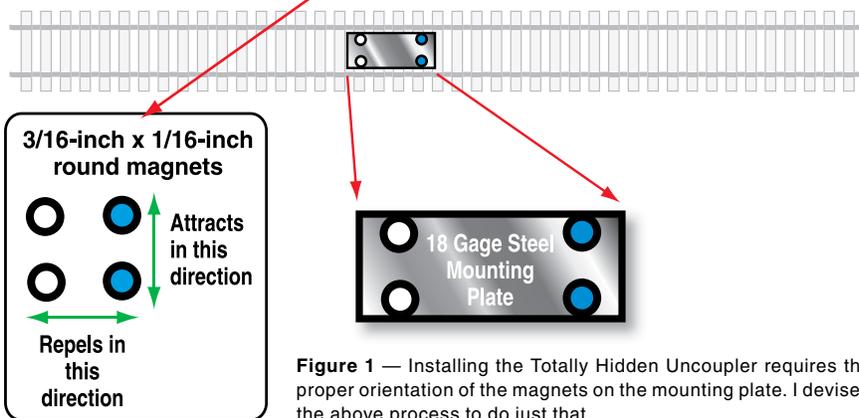
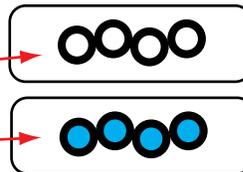


Figure 1 — Installing the Totally Hidden Uncoupler requires the proper orientation of the magnets on the mounting plate. I devised the above process to do just that.

length of the starter plate. This comes in handy if you want to extend the length of the uncoupling zone.

Installation

The installation instructions are fairly straightforward with one exception, which I will get to shortly, and even explain how to retrofit the uncoupler under existing track. The overall thickness of the plate and magnets is approximately 0.125 inches, just a bit lower than most N-scale roadbed products. This means it can easily fit under the track without needing to chisel out any sub-roadbed.

The one challenging part of the installation, at least for me, was getting the magnets oriented properly. The picture in the instructions shows how the magnets should attract in one direction and repel in the other, but I wasn’t sure how to accomplish this. With a little experimenting I devised the process shown in Figure 1 (above). Once I had the magnets placed properly, the rest of the installation was easy.

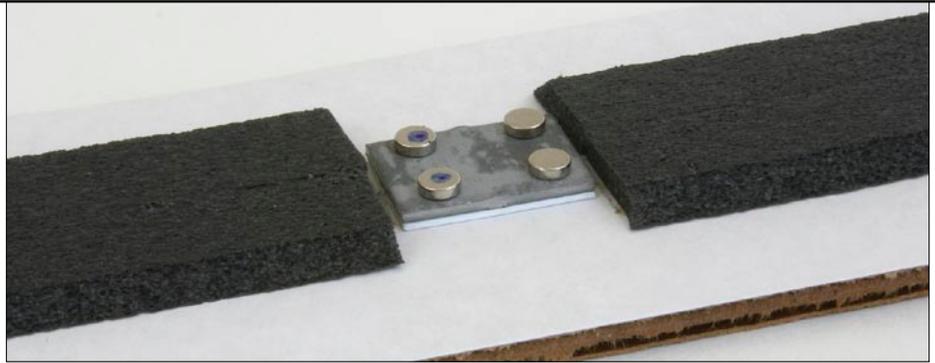
Fine-Tuning

After installing the uncoupler, you’ll need to adjust the placement of the magnets to get the best results.

This can be accomplished by using the tip of a hobby knife to gently nudge them into position. My first inclination was to align the magnets with the centerline of each rail, but I found it worked better if they were a bit off center towards the outside of each rail. The installation instructions give suggestions as to approximate spacing of the magnets, but you'll still need to adjust them for yourself. Once you settle on the correct position of the magnets, I suggest adding a small drop of white glue to affix them into place before ballasting.

I tried mounting the uncoupler under both Code 55 and Code 80 track. My particular brand of Code 55 has a lower overall profile than the Code 80 (both the rails and ties are lower), so the uncoupling operation seemed to work better with the Code 55. Again with some adjusting I was able to get the Code 80 to work also.

Realizing that use of the Totally Hidden Uncoupler had been published before, I reviewed those articles and found that the authors had used two starter sets (i.e., eight magnets and two mounting plates) placed end-to-



At a thickness of about 0.125 inches, the *Totally Hidden Uncoupler* is low enough to fit under most

N-scale roadbed products without needing to chisel out sub-roadbed.



Once the track is installed over the uncoupler, it already becomes hard to see. Apply your favorite ballast product and it completely disappears! You'll

want to add a trackside marker (such as a signpost, barrel or other item) so you can remember where the uncoupler is located.

end as suggested in the installation instructions. When I tried this approach

it seemed to work more reliably with less fine-tuning.



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I briefly experimented with mounting the Totally Hidden Uncoupler under a stretch of Kato Unitrack by shimming the metal plate with styrene to raise it high enough. While this is possible, the challenge becomes fine tuning the position of the magnets without easy access; you have to remove the track to adjust them, then put the track down and see if the change worked. Based on this, I wouldn't recommend using the Totally Hidden Uncoupler with Kato Unitrack.

Closing Thoughts

The Totally Hidden Uncoupler does away with the unsightly magnet between the rails approach, providing reliable uncoupling hidden away beneath the track. Based on my experience I would recommend using two starter kits for each uncoupling zone, to minimize the amount of fine-tuning needed.

REVIEW DCC

Zimo's Large Scale DCC decoder poised to take sound conversion market

Review and Photos by John Sipple

MX690S (3A, 8 functions, 4 servo outputs),

MSRP: Can \$210.12 (*US \$178.60)

MX690V (5A, 14 functions, switch inputs (as reviewed); servo outputs,

low voltage supply (1.5V - 15V),

MSRP: Can \$241.02 (*US \$204.87)

LSFRS5 2 inch speaker,

MSRP: Can \$16.99 (*US \$14.44)

LSFRS7 2.75 inch speaker,

MSRP: Can \$18.54 (*US \$15.76)

SPEIGOMP capacitor kit,

MSRP: Can \$13.90 (*US \$11.81)

*Based on an exchange rate of 0.85

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Phone/Fax: 250-765-7017
www.mrsonline.net

back for a rebuild and then it was a honey. It had never been a candidate for conversion to DCC until they came up with their conversion trucks, the ones with the cast truck boxes and the improved truck pickup system that could be separated between pickups and motor contacts, the fundamental of DCC wiring. At the time, I installed a silent motor decoder.

Now I had a chance to have sound in my Nine Spot, one of the few locos to actually wear the proud logo of the Oregon Pine Belt Railway. So in a way, I was risking one of my favorite locomotives, but then I had heard good things about Zimo, so I was in a trusting mood.

The Zimo decoder comes with the decoder, a pair of ribbon cables with the 0.100 cable punchdown terminals, and a very thorough instruction manual. The MX690V is the sound version, which is rated at 5 amps continuous.

Making the Change

There isn't a lot of spare room inside of the bunker shell of Shay, especially with the weight installed. One always toys with the notion of removing it, but then you come back and deny that, because your performance is tied to the weight on the wheels. I'd be working with my Xuron nippers, first taking off some of the circular speaker-mounting site so the speaker's square base would sit down squarely and the mounting tangs could hold it in place. That really only took a few minutes, but it had to be done first and left a limited amount of space above.

This is the first generation Shay,

Block Detection & Automation

• Works with any type of track power! (DC, DCC, AC)

• isolated input & output.

| | |
|---|----------|
| standard detector.....Trak-DT* | \$ 24.95 |
| with time functions.....Trak-DTT*, Trak-DTT2* | \$ 29.95 |
| with latch function.....Trak-DTL* | \$ 29.95 |
| Starter set (3 -Trak-DT's, 1-12VPS)..... | \$ 84.95 |
| Expansion Set (6 - Trak-DT's)..... | \$139.95 |
| * req. 12VPS power (1-12VPS powers 12-DT's).... | \$ 14.95 |

Automatic Back-N-Forth for DC track power.

| | |
|--|---------|
| Single.....#561.....1 ampere load..... | \$39.95 |
| Dual Unit..#562.....1 ampere load..... | \$54.95 |
| Single.....#563.....5 ampere load..... | \$44.95 |
| Dual Unit..#564.....5 ampere load..... | \$59.95 |

Units feature:

- only 2 wires to the track.
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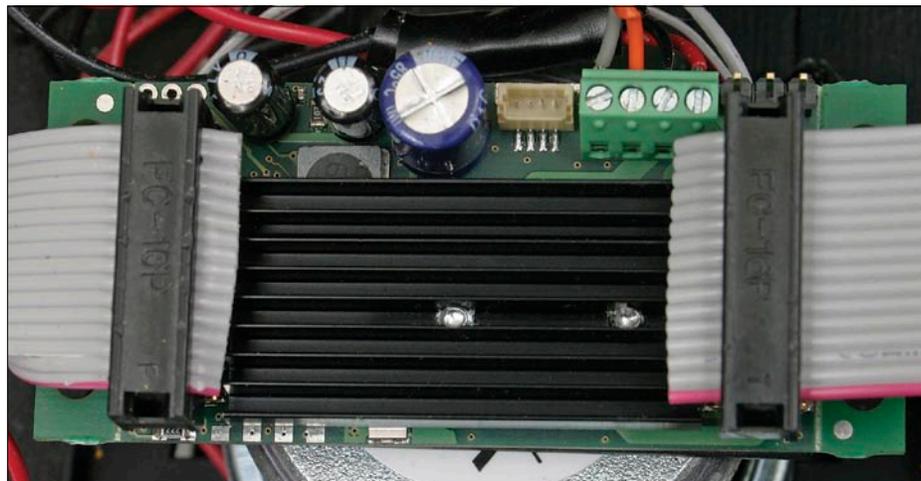
www.dallee.com

both \$15.00or FREE from our web site!

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WHEN I had an opportunity to review one of Zimo's new MX690V sound decoders with a five amp motor output, I jumped at the project, but what locomotive was I going to convert? I looked over my roster and my pulse began to accelerate. Did I dare? Number 9 beckoned to me.

Way back in 1998, I bought my first major Large Scale locomotive, a Bachmann Shay, and oh was it a honey! Well, sort of. I had to send the trucks



I probably should have shot the decoder before I installed it, but I'm like a kid at Christmas! So here it is, with the ribbon cables going out both sides,

very easy to install and use. The screw terminals make your basic four red, black, orange, and gray connections for motor and track.

