

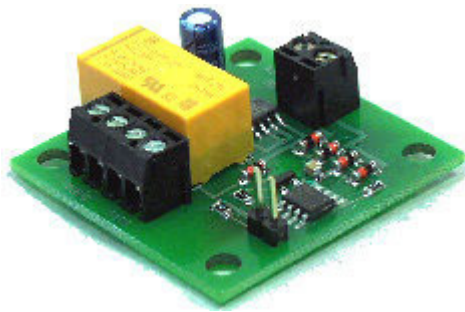
NCE Auto Switch Review

by Don Fiehmman

The Power Cab's Added Features

The low-cost Power Cab from NCE is a very flexible DCC system designed to meet the needs of a small layout. Another use of the Power Cab has been as an auxiliary system with modular layouts and club layouts. As an auxiliary system the Power Cab can be used to program and test locomotives without affecting layout operation.

Its popularity has been the reason behind the addition of a number of accessories for the Power Cab. The Power Cab has a power output of about 2 amps, NCE has developed a 3-amp booster as an accessory for the Power Cab. Another accessory is the Auto Switch.



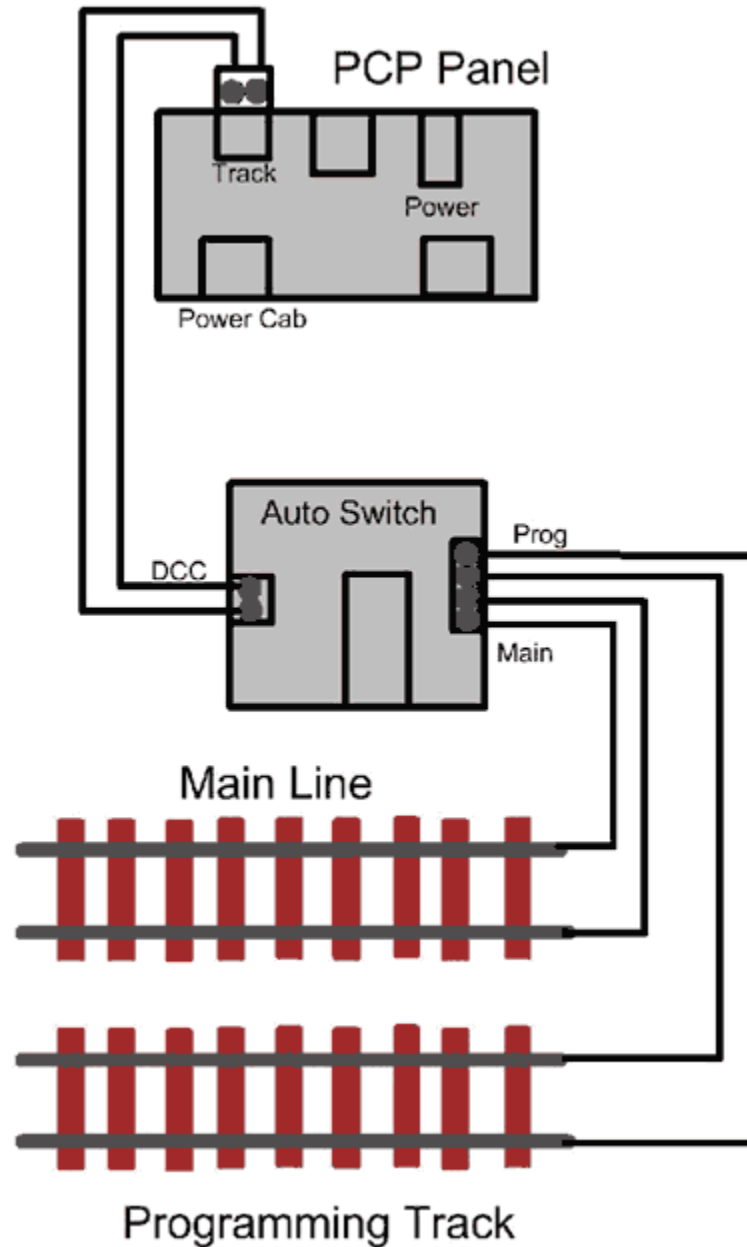
The Auto Switch

Normally with the Power Cab, when switched to the programming track, there needs to be a toggle switch to turn off the main line. Failure to turn off the main line may result in all of the locomotives on the main line programmed the same way as the locomotive on the programming track. You could end up with a fleet of locomotives that all have the same address! The reason that there is not a separate programming track output from the Power Cab is the limited number of wires in the cord from the Power Cab to the PCP panel. The Auto Switch fixes this with the addition of a separate output for the programming track.

The Auto Switch

The Auto Switch is contained on a small printed circuit board with an input from the Power Cab and separate outputs for the main line and programming track. The solid-state electronics on the Auto Switch control a relay that turns off the main line

output whenever it is in the programming track mode. This prevents sending out program commands to the main line. The program-on-the-main mode does not turn off the main line.



Test Installation

I was able to obtain one of the Auto Switches before they were released to check it out for this review. The Auto Switch is easy to install, just a matter of cutting the wires to the main line from the Power Cab and installing the Auto Switch between

the ends of the wires. Then wire can be added from the programming track to the program output on the Auto Switch.

I found a small problem with the yet to be released Auto Switch. It seems the labeling on the output of the Auto Switch printed circuit board was reversed. By the time I discovered this, so had NCE. This will be corrected on the released version. Once the wires were reversed, the Auto Switch worked with no problems.

Operation

The way the Auto Switch works is to cut off the power to the main line connection when in the programming track mode. Normally on my layout when I use the programming track, a toggle switch needs to be changed from main to program. Forget it and you will not read from the program track. With the Auto Switch, there is no need to toggle from one mode to the other, it is automatic. You can go into program track mode on the program track, change a CV, then go back to main line op and test the change. This eliminates one step and saves time when setting up a decoder.

If you do not have a dedicated programming track on your layout, the programming track output can be connected to a section of flexible track for test purposes. This section of track will switch back and forth from program to run mode making it easy to check out a locomotive without affecting locomotives on the layout.

Conclusion

If you have a Power Cab and do much programming, the Auto Switch is a good investment to keep from accidentally programming all of the locomotives on the layout.