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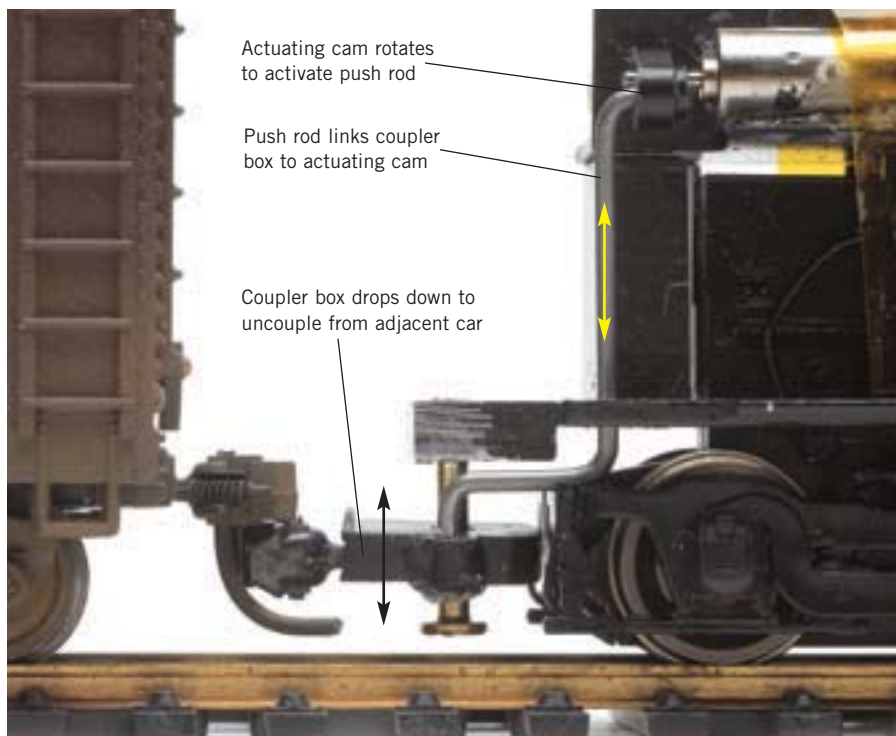
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## Product Reviews



Installation of the Digital Direct Coupler system is fairly straightforward, but involves complete disassembly of the locomotive to make the necessary frame modifications. It also requires some very careful calibration to make sure the couplers raise and lower to the correct heights for proper operation.

For an additional fee, Tony's Train Exchange offers several options for modelers who don't feel comfortable tackling some portions of this project, including milling the locomotive frame or completely installing the Digital Direct Coupler system.

Tony's Train Exchange sent us an assembled test sample; it worked quite nicely. The coupler heights matched our Kadee coupler gauge, and the Digital Direct Coupler system functioned properly when put through its paces switching cars on several of our DCC-equipped layouts. The couplers are activated using DCC function 1 for the front coupler and 2 for the rear.

There are, perhaps, only three real drawbacks of the Digital Direct Coupler system. One is esthetics. To uncouple a car from the locomotive, the system lowers the engine's coupler until it disengages from the car's coupler – rather than opening the knuckle as on the prototype. This is a problem for use on locomotives with snowplows or other pilot details below the coupler.

Also, removing weight from the switcher reduces its tractive effort

about 29 percent from 38 cars (stock engine) to 27 cars (as modified).

Finally, the device works fine spotting single cars in an industrial area. However, most yard switching involves uncoupling cars from each other, while the need to uncouple a car from the locomotive occurs far less often. As nice as this feature is to have on the locomotive, you'll still need some way to uncouple cars elsewhere in your trains.

Despite these concerns, Tony's Digital Direct Coupler system is innovative, works reliably, and offers yet another exciting use for DCC. – *David Popp, associate editor*

### HO DCC couplers

#### Price:

\$99.95 kit, \$159.95 installed (does not include locomotive, decoder, and Kadee couplers).  
 \$9.95 frame milling fee

#### Manufacturer:

Tony's Train Exchange  
 57 River Rd. Box 1023  
 Essex Jct., VT 05452  
 1-800-978-3472  
 www.tonystrains.com

#### Description:

Retro-fit Digital Command Control operated uncoupling kit for Life-Like Proto 2000 SW-style locomotives.