



TRAXA Rocketry RLB, RLBx & Yagi Kit

Price: £29.95 for RLB and RLBx : £10.95 for the Yagi kit

Contact: <http://www.traxa.co.uk/uk.html>

RLB & RLBx

The first thing to say about these 2 wonderful little gadgets is that the only difference between the RLB & RLBx is the size of the circuit board that they live on. They both transmit the Morse Code identifier of your choice on the frequency 433.92 MHz and Paul of Traxa will program up to 50 characters as the identifier. I ordered 2 of each type and had MALK1 through to MALK4 programmed into the PIC. They arrived very promptly and were carefully placed in bubble wrap inside a cardboard tube.

Taking the RLB out of it's electrostatic bag it looked very simple in design, having a wire antenna and a battery connector tailing from the very small circuit board. Plugging in a 9v battery gives no indication that the device is actually turned on and a simple LED would have been good but not essential. The only way you'll know that the RLB is working is by tuning a scanner to the desired frequency of 433.92 MHz. At which point you hear the dash, dash, dot... music to a rocketeers ears ;-)



As mentioned above, you will need a radio scanner and a Yagi to get the full benefit of your new toy. I was fortunate enough to have an old scanner lying around in the loft, buried amongst an assortment of electrical items collected over the years. Having dusted the thing off, found a suitable power supply and put myself through a quick self teaching exercise I managed to find the desired frequency. A simple piece of wire in the back of the scanner was all that was needed to pick up my Morse Code...great. However, in the field you will need a directional antenna so that you can find your RLB and ultimately your rocket. You can buy one of these from radio ham suppliers but TRAXA produce a kit that will do just fine.



YAGI Antenna

The TRAXA Yagi Antenna kit is a set of brass rods, one of them with a particular bend in it, and a set of detailed instructions for building your own antenna. The instructions recommend you use a piece of 25mm x 16mm electrical cable trunking, which you can get from B&Q for £3.95. You'll also need a BNC connector and some coax cable in addition to some basic soldering skills ;-). The instructions tell you where to drill your holes, what size hole to drill and the order in which you place the differing lengths of rod. However, one key point is that it also mentions the use of a bench drill, which I do not have, so that you get perpendicular holes.

Anyway, I thought I'd give it a go with my Bosh and chance it! The holes drilled and the rods in place and by and large it looked sort of ok... one or two of the rods weren't quite right but I

carried on regardless!! The important rod, the one with the bend, needs to be soldered to the coax, which was simple enough, with the other end of the coax being soldered to a BNC connector. In total the whole thing took about ¾ hr to build and on testing (in a large open field) it seems to do the job. However, I cant help feeling that a piece of wood would have been much stronger as the trunking does flex quite a bit! Also, the lack of a bench drill means I've ended up with a slightly odd antenna. Maybe TRAXA could supply the trunking or wood pre drilled as part of the kit for a little extra, which would ensure that the antenna turns out perfectly. ;-)

To summarise, the RLB's are well and truly great! Simple, small and invaluable if you are sending your rocket to the extremes. The Yagi kit is good and the instructions are excellent but be careful not to build unless you can be sure that the holes you drill are well and truly perpendicular! You may also want to think about substituting the cable trunking for a piece of wood? All in all your money is well spent with TRAXA. I just can't wait for UKRA 2003 to test out my new toys...

Malcolm
