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XRAY XB8 EC

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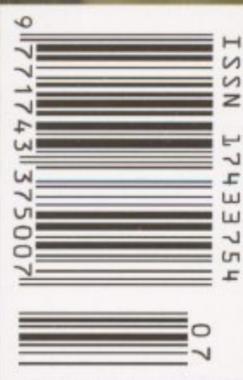
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The Daily Bash

Xray XB8 EC

The Daily Bash, July 2007

Issue 41

XRAY XB8 EC KIT REVIEW

Xtra, Xtra



By Dan

In many ways we're quite lucky with this hobby, I mean if you want to get yourself a rallycross buggy, you can be up and running for just over two hundred quid but on the other hand, if you want to get serious, you can spend loads of money. Five years ago, it was easy to identify the brands that produced "pro" kits, nowadays though you have the likes of Kyosho, Mugen, Team Magic, Losi and Xray that all expect you to pay out close to £400 for the kit alone. Add an engine, servos, transmitter, receiver, plus the other parts you need and you're not far off a grand for a toy car, so spending this sort of money requires some serious thought, unless your name is Neil McRae of course.

You lucky.....

I must admit when I decided to launch this magazine all those years ago, I didn't quite appreciate the amount of kits that would pass through our doors and while I'm happy to acknowledge my complete lack of racing ability, seeing such a huge variety of kits does allow you to spot the icing on the cake when it comes in.

It's for this reason that I nabbed myself the new Xray XB8 EC, yes I know that's very greedy, I only built and tested the Team Magic M1B a couple of months ago, life's hard like that though – just be grateful you don't have to live on my wages!

BUILDING THE ANTICIPATION

Before we continue, I'll just clarify that EC stands for European Champion and like a lot of other companies, Xray have released this upgraded version of the XB8 in celebration of the fact that Yannick Aigoïn (he's from France) won said race with the XB8 in 2006. While this version of the buggy has only just hit the shops, I actually first clapped eyes on it in Nuremberg back in February so I already knew how smart it looked. Add to that I've heard nothing but good reports on previous versions of the XB8 and that fellow MaxBasher, Matt Ross, has sworn to me (and at me of course) that it's the toughest kit he's ever driven.

The XB8 is actually three years old now and as such was out before manufacturers opted into the current trend of trying to redesign the wheel. For this reason I'd consider Xray's offering more of a clone of older, established brands like the Kyosho and Mugen kits. In normal Xray style though they've added their own tweaks like HUDY spring steel, Ferodo brake pads and as a company devoted to racing, a huge variety of set-up options!



HELPING HAND

So begins the job of building the buggy. Xray provide a very good set of instructions to help you through - actually they provide two sets! You get the original instructions and then an additional build guide with tweaks and set-up changes that have been fed back from their team drivers like Yannick and Jon Hazelwood. This is great stuff but it's a right pain remembering to check two lots of instructions all the time, add the set-up sheet you should be referring to and all of a sudden you've got more paperwork than a government official.

I dug in though and soon found that once you get into the swing of things it's a pretty easy build. I say it's easy but they don't exactly help you out a lot, OK the CVDs are all

pre-built but that's it, the rest is down to you; diffs, shocks and all those other tedious little things need building from the ground up. On the plus side, there's a bag for every section which contains all the screws and parts you need, so if you finish a section and you have parts left over, you missed something (I must admit this happened to me a couple of times).

The process of the build doesn't really deviate too much from the norm, so it's a matter of building the front and rear ends and slapping them on the chassis. Adding the centre diff, engine, clutch, radio gear, fuel tank and Bob's your uncle, you're up and running! Man I wish it was that simple.



A top tip to get ball ends in is to use something like the engine mount and screw them in

SOMETHING EXTRA?

Releasing a kit after a big win with a new name isn't exactly an original idea - manufacturers have been doing it for years. Sometimes it's a great idea as new features are ram-packed in the latest edition, but other times it's a poor attempt at a brand extension and can alienate people who have just shelled out for the latest kit, only to find it's not the latest anymore (that really bugs Mr. McRae!).

Fortunately, while Xray are of course milking their Euro win, this new EC has a shed load of new parts and the majority of them are fundamental to making the buggy a heck of a lot better (although I'd still be gutted if I'd bought their TQ model six months previously!).

Some of the new features on the EC include improved weight distribution and remoulded steering blocks (C-hubs) which promise greater steering and also benefit from steel bushings moulded in where they mount to the suspension arms. In addition the blocks form part of Xray's Integrated Suspension Settings (I.S.S.), which basically means you don't need to swap parts to change the set-up. These blocks, for example, can be moved to give you a different caster angle without the need to buy new hubs. All this doesn't escape the fact that they still use plastic knuckles, although I've not seen any reports of this being a problem and it does decrease the un-sprung weight on the suspension which is all good, so I'll let them off.



Plastic knuckles decrease the un-sprung weight and the C-hubs feature steel bushings moulded in for extra strength

The hinge pins are captured throughout but we added an extra washer to the rear hubs for added security

Xray's Integrated Suspension Settings mean there's no need to use different hinge pin retainers in order to change things like the rear toe

STIFFENING UP

Chassis flex is always a conundrum; there needs to be a certain amount to give grip on loose traction surfaces but too much and the Weebles are going to start getting jealous. Xray seem to think the composite plastic braces are the answer to this so the EC kit includes them for the front and rear. At the front this is an upgrade over the old ball-end ones and both ends are firmly attached to the chassis with three nuts and bolts at the back and two at the front.

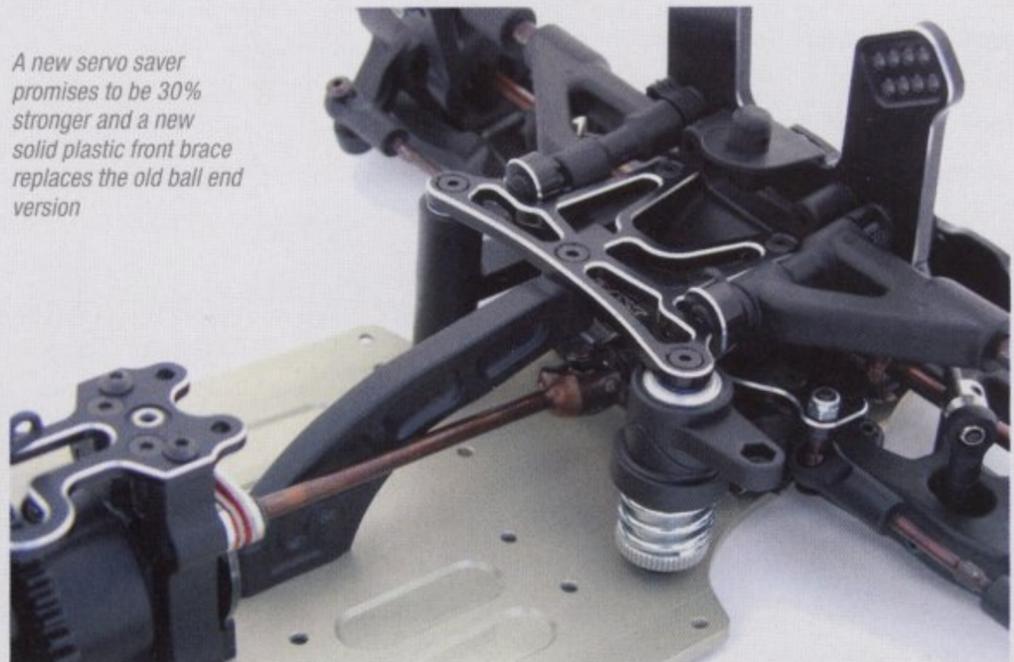


HUDY spring steel CVDs are used throughout and the composite rear brace is firmly attached with three nyloc nuts

The servo saver has also been beefed-up and promises to be 30% stronger but still malleable enough to flex and protect your steering servo. You'll also find groovy new steering pivot balls, these are a one-piece design and the back-stop means the turn buckle will never pop off. This seems very clever although I always thought there was meant to be a degree of toleration in this to prevent something else from breaking.

While we talk about strengthened parts, the diff gears have also been given an overhaul, which is good to hear as they were the only parts on which I've seen bad feedback. Xray say the gears are now manually ground for extra precision and are made from pressured steel which is then heat treated. All sounds very impressive, but will they last a season of racing though?

A new servo saver promises to be 30% stronger and a new solid plastic front brace replaces the old ball end version



All three diffs require building and are made from heat treated, pressured steel for extra strength

The biggest and most obvious difference is the new super-size shocks that are almost meaty enough to give Losi's 8ight a run for its money. Now I've heard on the grapevine that if you're a good driver, the consistency of the pack rate in a shock is very important and if you're running in a long final, you want the same shock action throughout. Sounds fair enough to me, I'll take their word for it as my E finals never last longer than 10 minutes. Fatter shocks obviously hold more oil and this all helps to keep the consistency, add to this Xray have also redesigned the inside of the shock body and added new pistons, rod ends, O-rings and some funky boots which cleverly just cover the bottom of the shock body whilst not clogging up the whole shaft and you've got some top-spec big-bore shocks on your buggy.

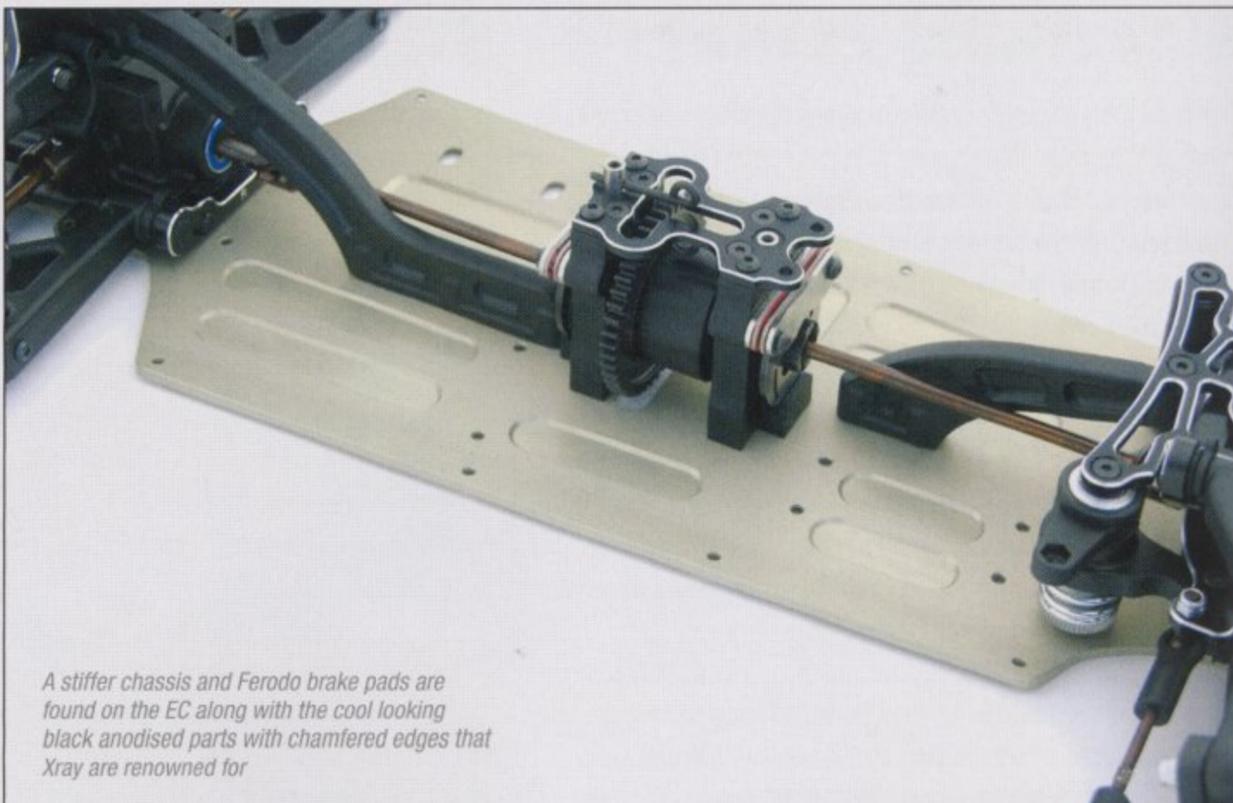


Huge big bore shocks are a serious advantage over the previous version and look awesome

RACY OPTIONS

Toughening the kit up is all well and good (especially when I'm going to be driving it) but for most people buying this kit, the set-up and adjustability is a big factor - it is a pro kit after all. Fortunately Xray are dedicated to racing so they take these things into account too. On the EC you'll find some lovely touches like the Ferodo brake pads (made in the UK no less!) and things like a new lightweight aerodynamic body shell which includes re-enforcing around the sides and front of the body. Having said that, I ditched the stock shell in order to try out one of Pro-Line's new Crowd Pleazer Quik Lids, this obviously has nothing to do with the fact that our usual shell-painter, Jim at Absolute Control, has such a backlog of work that it would never have been done in time, anyone would think he was good!

You'll also find front and rear anti-roll bars, plus all the lovely 7075-T6 aluminium parts that are anodised in black and the edges chamfered off to give a "luxury" silver finish. Of these, the shock towers are a mighty



A stiffer chassis and Ferodo brake pads are found on the EC along with the cool looking black anodised parts with chamfered edges that Xray are renowned for

4mm thick and the new extra stiff EC chassis, which also benefits from a hard anodising finish, is 3mm thick. The fuel tank is a normal 125cc but includes a built-in stone filter and then there's a more normal fuel filter, which incidentally the additional instructions get you mounting to the side of the tank to reduce vibrations (due to the fact that the tank is mounted on rubber grommets to prevent this).



The fuel filter now attaches to the side of the 125cc fuel tank which reduces vibrations as it's mounted on rubber grommets



This XB8 EC even go setup properly on a HUDY setup station

SETTING UP

When it comes to picking a set-up for this buggy, you're certainly not limited on options; in the instructions are guides for both European and US-style tracks. Knowing this XB8 will spend most of its time on the MaxBashing track, I opted to follow the US set-up which leans more towards lots of jumps. This meant I used 10,000 weight oil in the front diff and 7,000 in the middle and rear, it also recommends using 60 weight oil in all the shocks while the Euro set-up suggests 35 for the shocks and this is actually supplied with the kit. I went for a happy medium here with 45 in the front and 50 in the rear, mainly because I didn't have any 60 and only

enough 50 to do the rear shocks! What, did you think I was a professional or something?! All I want to know is "will this buggy take shed loads of abuse?" Still pretending for a moment that all these set-up options will make a difference, I continued to follow the US-style set-up sheet and applied two degrees of caster, four degrees of anti-squat, 1.5 degrees of toe-out and minus three degrees of camber on the front, then minus five degrees of camber on the rear and I know this is all exact because I got really anal and did it all on my HUDY setup station, Nobby still can't believe it!

Having done all this, plus a lot more, I chatted to Tony Bolwell who runs the EC as well at the Clanfield track down in Portsmouth. He's got the hang of this set-up stuff and in addition, was kicking butt at the last MaxBashing race day. Unfortunately for me he said he was running 5K, 7K, 1K oils in the diffs (front to rear), 25 in the rear shocks with the medium (blue) springs and 35 in the front shocks with the hard springs. Great, that's completely different to mine, although Tony does like to be different, you only need to check out his dress sense to suss that out!



ABOVE: The front end is set up with three degrees of camber

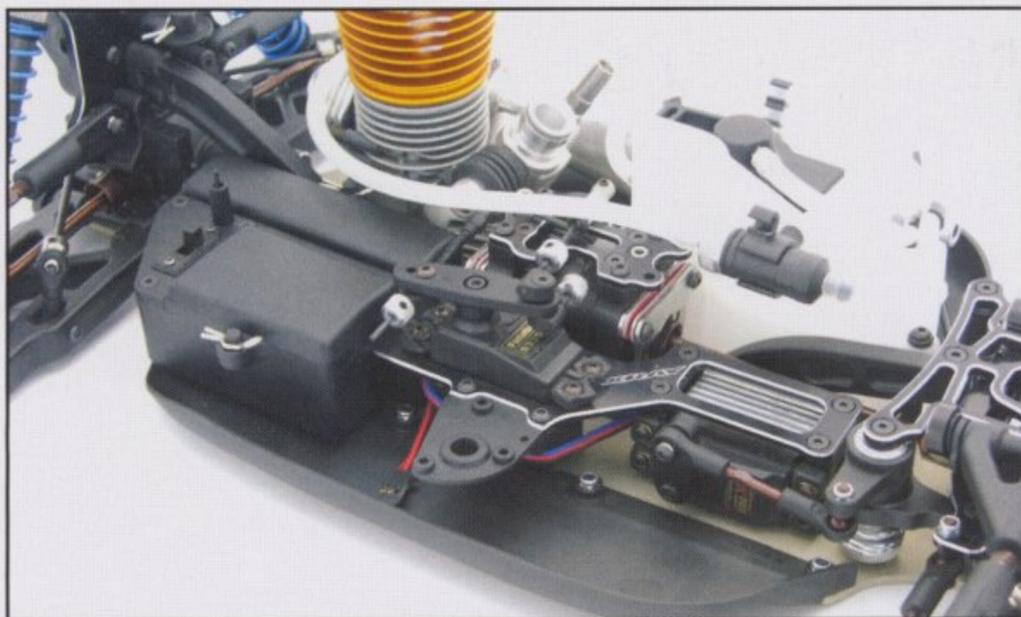
BELOW: And there are 1.5 degrees of toe-in



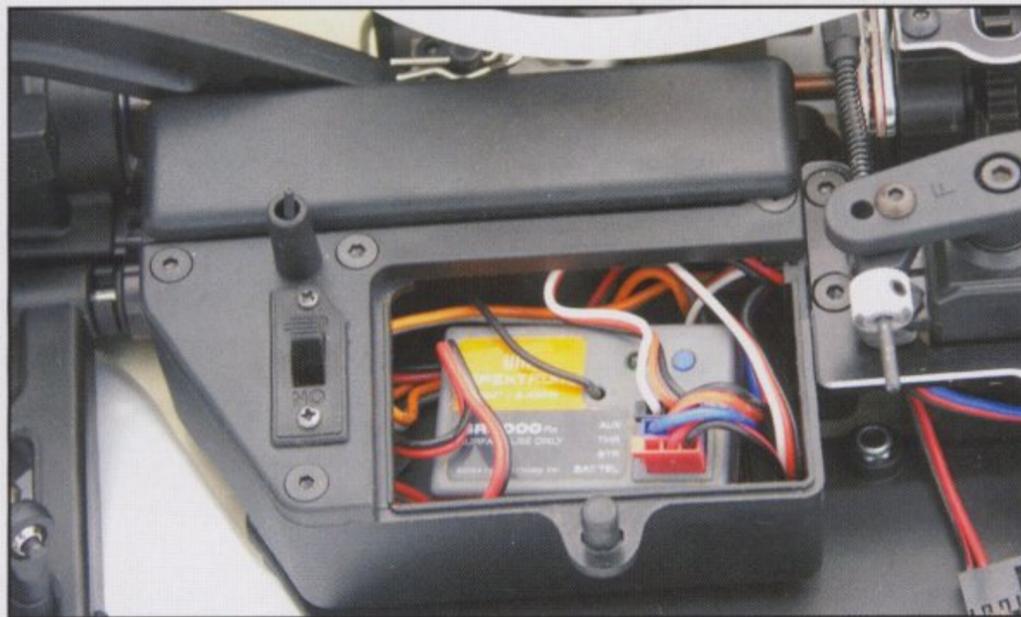
ADDITIONAL PARTS

With this being a pro kit, you're left to get the extras for it yourself, so I chose to use a Sanwa ERG-VZ servo for the steering and Futaba S3305 for the brakes and throttle. To give it power I used the awesome Falcon .21ci engine which was drinking Tornado 30% fuel and to control it I opted to use my faithful Futaba 3PK and Spektrum DSM system. For tyres I used some called Hammers simply because I had them lying around but they look a lot like Crime Fighters so should work well.

There's a new black aluminium radio tray to hold the servos



The Falcon M1B engine with the aluminium clutch shoes and 13T clutch bell which are supplied with the kit



There's plenty of room in the radio box for any type of receiver and the flat pack battery sits behind it to keep the weight close to the centre line

TESTING TIME

As the Falcon engine had been used previously, I was able to skip the running in procedure and plough straight into testing, which makes me almost as lazy as our new designer, Elroy. So out on to the track we went for some pictures and a spot of action. When doing this, we start off by taking things easy, some kits we test will break if we push them too hard straight away. Fortunately I didn't have to worry about that with the XB8 EC and it was lapping up everything I threw at it and was happy to work its way through tank after tank.

I have to admit I'm not great at analysing my setup but I wasn't getting much grip out of the rear end so a lighter diff oil here will probably be called for but aside from that, the overall handling and response of the buggy was simply amazing and far superior to anything else I've driven recently. I had no doubts it would fly over the jumps well but it was sailing through the air smoother than Rupert Maxwell ever managed and dug into the corners quicker than Gordon Brown jumping into Blair's shoes!





FINAL THOUGHTS

Wise cracks aside, the EC has seriously impressed me and I thought I'd lost interest in buggies! I would in fact go as far as saying it's rejuvenated my interest in rallycross and I'm quite keen to get to a race meeting and put it through its paces. I've run over a dozen tanks through it now most of which are on the MaxBashing track and not suffered a single breakage despite getting carried away a few times and trying to clear all five of the whoops (no I didn't quite manage it!). I have had a few screws come loose but Nobby tells me that's not a problem, he's lived with it for years. Overall though Xray have done themselves proud with the XB8 and more importantly with this new EC version, it boasts some essential and worthwhile parts that must surely make it one of the top kits currently available and a serious contender for anyone looking for a new pro rallycross buggy!

MB

SPECS

XRAY XB8 EC

RRP PRICE

£394.99

TYPE

Rallycross buggy

SCALE

1:8

POWER PLANT

Falcon M1B

LENGTH

482mm

WIDTH

306mm

CHASSIS

3mm hard anodised ally

SUSPENSION

4 x ally dampers

DRIVE TRAIN

4WD



WHAT WE USED

ENGINE

Falcon M1B

FUEL

Tornado 30%

SERVO

Sanwa ERG-VZ

RECEIVER

Spektrum

TRANSMITTER

Futaba 3PK

TYRES

Go - Hammers

