

116 PAGES STUFFED WITH GREAT GIFT IDEAS

Model Railroad News

The All-Scale News Monthly

Special
Holiday
Edition!

Trains, Structures, Tools & More!

Get the gifts you
want this year!



Super Starters

Six sets for beginners to experts

Tools for Yule

...And all year long

Making the Scene

Little details that make all the difference

Volume 16, Issue 12 • December 2010

\$5.50 US/CANADA



0 74470 24091 4



HO scale

Piko Offers High-Speed Passenger Train Travel for the Novice and Expert

Review and Photos by Dave Otte

ICE 3 Starter Set DB Era VI
(#57194), MSRP: \$199.99

Piko America, LLC
4610 Alvarado Canyon Rd., Suite 5
San Diego, CA 92120
619-280-2800 • Fax: 619-280-2843
www.piko-america.com

If you, or the aspiring model railroader for whom you are seeking out a gift this holiday season, has an affinity for the most modern, state-of-the-art transportation on rails today, look no further: Piko has just the ticket with their ICE 3 Passenger Train Starter Set. It represents the third generation of Inter City Express trains that are currently serving rail passengers in Germany. Unlike the ICE 3's predecessors, these new passenger trains are not pulled by a locomotive, but rather are designed as electric multiple units with traction motors powering all axles of the train and are supplied with alternating or direct current via pantographs and overhead lines.

In turn, the ICE 3 trains provide riders with a maximum speed of 200 miles per hour and the ability to climb grades as steep as four percent. As aesthetics go, the end result is a sleek, rail-hugging, aerodynamic consist that's been captured perfectly by Piko in their Hobby line HO-scale starter set, which includes everything the budding rail baron needs to begin building their empire.



When contemplating the purchase of a new train set, Piko may not be a brand name with which you are familiar, but they have been producing model trains for the European hobby market for over 60 years. Sets such as the ICE 3 Passenger Train Starter Set are now available in the US and offer potential model railroaders a unique entry-level layout that represents state-of-the-art rail transportation.

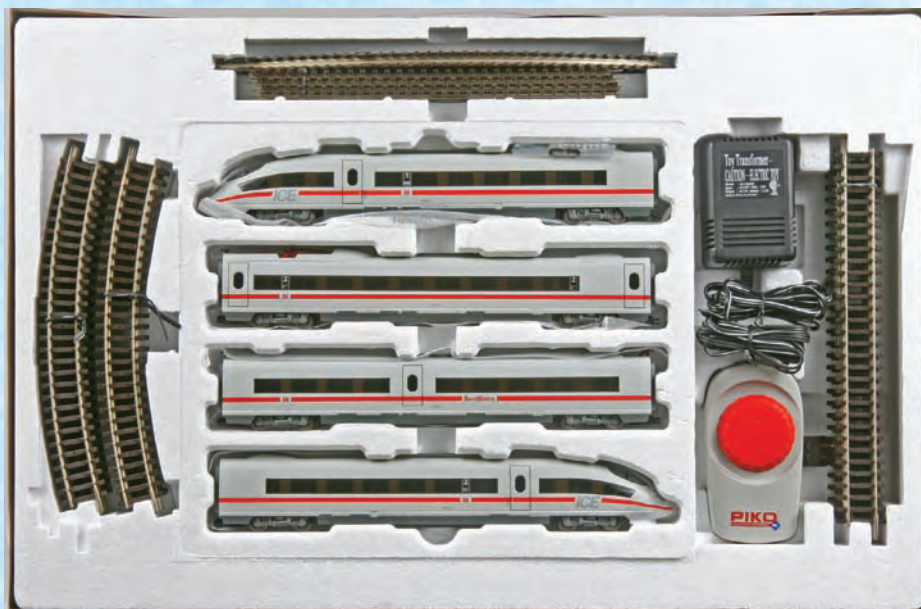
The Set

Upon removing the lid of the compact Piko box, your eyes are immediately drawn to the ICE 3 train set in its two-tone gray paint and full-length bright red racing stripe — no doubt the universal sign for speed. Unlike the prototype, which was delivered in eight car sets, the HO-scale version has been shortened to only four cars to maintain its affordability and manageability within the confines of a beginner's layout. Included are: end coach number 1 with its first-class seating, observation compartment, and control cab; the transformer coach with its second-class seating and positionable rooftop-mounted pantograph; the "BordBistro" or lounge car with its snack bar area; and end coach number 2 with

more second-class seating. An add-on transformer car is also available for separate sale.

All the one-piece injected-molded carbodies are well detailed with separately applied undercarriages, interior partitions with the appropriate seating/tables for car type, see-through tinted windows, car end diaphragms, plastic trucks with molded-in features and metal wheel sets, various rooftop insulators and cables, and even a hand-painted operator is seated in the cab of end car number 1. In addition, the modeler is given nine small plastic antennae to press fit into the pre-drilled openings along the car roofs at their discretion. Superbly applied graphics, which include tiny, but readable car data along the side sills and the "DB" herald of the Deutsche Bahn AG, round out the visual highlights of the Piko ICE 3.

Like the real deal, the HO-scale ICE has a rather unorthodox electrical and mechanical system powering it as compared to more traditional starter set train designs. Departing from the prototype's all-axle-driven design, the Piko train has a horizontally mounted, dual flywheel-equipped can motor situated in the middle BordBistro car with hidden dogbone-style drive shafts extending out to the ends of its trucks. Only the inside axle of each truck is geared with their wheels outfitted with traction tires. Current from the track is picked up via the eight wheels beneath the number 1 end car only and trans-



Inside the compact Piko box one will find everything needed to begin their journey into the world of model railroading: the four-car ICE 3 train set, sectional track, which builds into a 37.5-inch x 72-inch pike, transformer, hand held controller, and a re-railer — all packed safely in a reusable Styrofoam tray.



Assembly of the included layout is quite simple as traditional sectional track is being utilized here connected together with slide on rail joiners. It's recommended the track be fastened to the layout surface for best performance. In turn, both the transformer and controller come pre-wired so all the operator needs to do is to plug the transformer's wiring harness into the back of the controller and insert the exposed wire leads of the controller's two-wire cable into the spring clips on the special terminal track section. The novice model railroader will have a train up and running in no time!

Despite its starter set nomenclature, the ICE 3 train components are excellent scale models of the prototypes with a number of separately applied details parts, as evident here on the number 1 end car and transformer coach. Each car includes an accurate interior partition with individual seats and tables as appropriate, tinted see-through windows, car end diaphragms, and injection molded trucks with blackened metal wheel sets. Equally noteworthy are the positionable sprung pantograph on the transformer car and the hand-painted operator figure seated in the cab of the end car. The clever inter-car coupling device as visible on the transformer coach provides both an electrical and mechanical connection and is a simple snap fit, which held up well to my numerous train assemblies and disassemblies.

mitted throughout the train by way of a rather clever inter-car coupling device. It supplies not only a five-pin electrical connection, but also a sprung physical connection, as well, providing the lateral motion necessary for these individual 11.5-inch-long cars to negotiate sharp radius curves.

Furthermore, the motor circuit board includes an eight-pin connection for the future upgrade of a digital command control decoder. Finally, while the car interiors do not have interior illumination, the miniature ICE 3 is equipped with directionally controlled bright white LED headlights with the rear facing end car always displaying the red end-of-train warning lights.

In order to experience the ICE 3, though, the new owner of this starter set will need to first assemble the accompanying layout and power supply. While most starter sets we've sampled in recent years utilize a snap-together, roadbed incorporated sectional track system, Piko relies on traditional sectional track featuring plastic ties, nickel silver code 100 rails, and only simple slide on rail joiners connecting the sections together.

Lacking an interlocking system, this style of track is best suited for a more permanent layout where it can be fastened to a flat surface with glue, screws, or nails; pre-drilled holes in the track ties are provided for the later. When the included 14 curved, 11 straights, 1 terminal straight track, and two curved turnouts (a left hand and a right hand) are assembled as depicted in the illustrated, multi-lingual instruction booklet, the modeler will have a 37.5-inch x 72-inch-size oval pike with an outside run-through siding. I would recommend a 4 x 7 foot flat surface area on which to construct the layout, as it should provide ample space for scenery and maybe even additional sidings. Piko catalogs a large assortment of matching track for future expansion while other brands of code 100 rail track sold by your local hobby shop can also be combined with this starter set, although tie spacing and curved track radii may differ from Piko's system.

Operation

With the layout built, the model railroad apprentice is left with the simple



High-speed rail travel never looked so inviting! The 2-rail analog DC operated HO-scale ICE 3 includes two end cars, a transformer coach car denoted by its rooftop pantograph, and the BordBistro snack bar/lounge car, which contains the horizontally mounted, flywheel-equipped can motor that powers the consist. Well detailed, these cars are modeled after the 403 Class intercity express passenger train prototype as designed and built by Siemens for the Deutsche Bahn AG (German National Railway Company) beginning in 2000. Fifty eight-car train sets have been built to date having a passenger capacity of 441 passengers each, a weight of 409 metric tons, and a top service speed of 205 miles per hour. An additional 17 train sets, designated the 406 class, are designed to operate Europe-wide under four different electrical systems.



job of connecting the power supply. A wall-outlet-style transformer rated at 7.2 watts is provided and features a six-foot-long cord that plugs into the receptacle on the underside of the handheld train controller. In turn, the controller boasts a 6-foot-long, two-wire cord with pre-stripped leads that are to be inserted into the spring-clip connectors on the special terminal straight track section — the novice will certainly appreciate the simplicity of this system. The ergonomically shaped controller fits comfortably in your hand, and the large red throttle dial offers both smooth forward and reverse operation outputting 0 – 12 volts with a definite indexed position for neutral. Furthermore, the starting speed of the train may be fine tuned on this controller by adjusting the speed regulator found on the underside of the handheld device.

When it comes time to place the cars together on the track, the manufacturer has thoughtfully included a large plastic re-railer, which makes the task of getting all the wheels of each car on the rails a

breeze. Then it's just a matter of lining up the cars and their coupling devices on a straight section of track and snapping them together. Not much force is required to make the connection and it's just as easy to pull them back apart without damaging the connectors. The resulting 45-inch-long passenger consist is now ready for high-speed service.

Our particular sample operated perfectly out of the box with a good range of speeds. The drive train was quiet and, with the power car basically in the middle of the train, provided consistent, smooth performance in both forward and reverse. No operational anomalies were experienced at all. And despite the fact that I had assembled and disassembled the train consist a number of times, those unique coupler connections remained solid during all of my operating sessions.

Overview and Final Recommendation

Frankly, I didn't know this company even made 1/87-scale trains until I

was invited by Piko America to sample the ICE 3 set and, I must admit, my experience thus far has left me with a very positive first impression. From what I understand, Piko brand trains have been very popular in the eastern European countries since the early days of the Cold War and the affordable Hobby Line starter sets and accessories are now introducing model railroading to a whole new generation of hobbyist throughout the world.

These starter sets are being manufactured in China at Piko's own facilities where a high level of quality is strictly maintained, to which I can attest, having played well with our review sample, and they back their products up with a two-year limited warranty to boot. Bottom line, the Piko ICE 3 Passenger Train Starter Set rightfully joins my list of recommended HO-scale sets that not only will encourage the beginner in the hobby, but also offers something a bit distinctive for the experienced modeler's passenger equipment roster, as well. 