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LostModelAlarm.com Active and Passive Alarms Review

8 Attachment(s)

INTRODUCTION

There are certain things in life which you hope you never have to use, but you can't help but feeling glad they are there waiting to help.

Fire extinguishers, burglar alarms, automotive airbags, you get the idea.

It's no secret that it's disheartening to crash or dead-stick a model in a remote and/or overgrown area and then have to traipse through heaven knows what kind of overgrowth to find it.

Enter the aptly named Lost Model Alarm from LostModelAlarm.com. It won't prevent a mishap, but it can help to recover expensive equipment by audibly alerting the pilot to its location, either actively or passively. The active version is activated by an otherwise unused switched transmitter channel while the passive versions sound after inactivity on a given channel after one, three, five or ten minutes, depending on the version. It's a sound one hopes never to hear in practice, but it's a relief to hear as it guides one to a downed model.

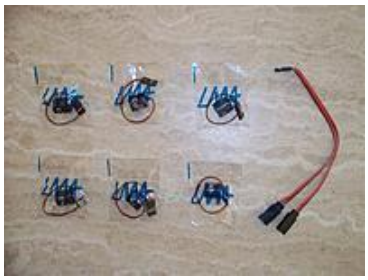
Best of all, it does it with a price tag under ten bucks and a weight of around three grams.

This simple yet profound idea and device are the brainchildren of Nik Dobreiski, owner and operator of LostModelAlarm.com out of Simi Valley, California USA. Home to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, Simi Valley and neighboring Chatsworth hearken back to the early days of the San Fernando Valley; lots of beautiful open range, horse ranches and vistas beckon a short drive north from the mass of humanity and perpetual traffic jams atop the Sepulveda Pass. It's also near the Sepulveda Basin, one of the few areas in the greater Los Angeles area set aside for model aircraft.

The question is: Will the Lost Model Alarm prove to be in the same league as some of the other protection systems I mentioned?

Let's take Nik's idea and put it into practice with a test of both versions!

KIT CONTENTS



The complete contents of the package I received from Nik, including the Y-harness

Lost Model Alarm	
Dimensions:	14 x 14mm
Connector Length:	100mm
Weight:	3.5g
Power Consumption:	Less than 1mA in silent mode, less than 20mA when sounding
Sound:	2500Hz @ 90dB at one second intervals
Audible Range:	50m (164')
Manufacturer/Distributor:	LostModelAlarm.com, Simi Valley, California USA
Price (USD):	$7.99

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that one of our RCGroups.com review crew already weighed in on the Lost Model Alarm, but not here on the website.

The gentleman we know by his "DoctorWho" screen name is none other than Jay Smith, editor of *Model Aviation* magazine. Jay reviewed the Lost Model Alarm in the November 2011 issue. LostModelAlarm.com has uploaded a .pdf of the review to its site and it's available here.

As far as the packaging goes, it's pure simplicity. Each Lost Model Alarm comes in a clear plastic bag imprinted with the LMA logo. A label on each unit identifies it as either the active or passive versions and clearly states the voltage range as well.

Not too much to see here other than putting the alarms to the test.

TIME FOR THE TESTING

I certainly wasn't going to lose a model in order to test the Lost Model Alarm, but I did want a model in which I could easily swap the units for testing. I figured electric over nitro for added simplicity.

After a bit of searching through my hangar, the perfect choice turned out to be the MyRCDesigns 44" 9mm Depron P-40 I reviewed for RCGroups.com in March 2012. The review can be found here.

Originally tested with an Airtronics SD-6G radio and full range 92224 receiver, I'd since swapped in an Spektrum AR6110 park flyer receiver and I'm now flying it with a Spektrum DX6i radio. That 92224 is going to be used in a future review.

In any case, the receiver was easily accessible and even though the ailerons were mixed on two different channels, channel number five for retractable landing gear was unassigned. Perfect.

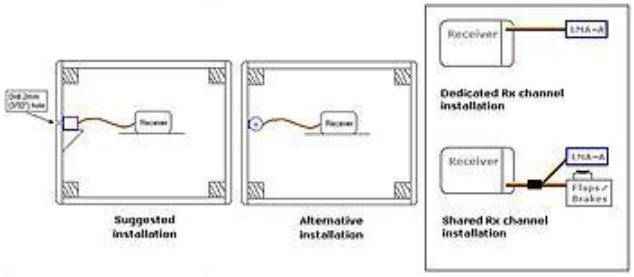
Beauty shot of the P-40 prior to its maiden flight. I'm pleased to say it still looks pretty much the

same today with the exception of the spinner and a change from wooden wheel collars to off-the-shelf metal collars.

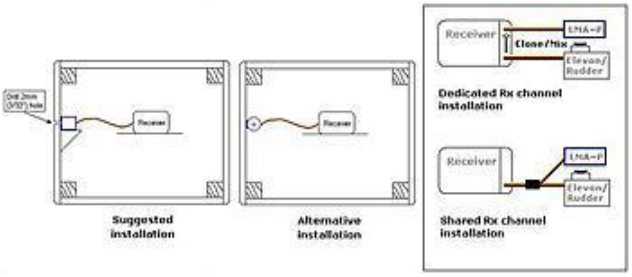
I simply plugged in one of the three active alarms Nik provided to me, taped it to the underside of the fuselage and fired up the system. The alarm came on immediately, but a flick of the transmitter switch immediately turned it off.

A 90dB, 2500Hz tone at about one second intervals is pretty darn loud. What's more, it is a frequency that should, in my estimation, prove to carry well in an open space. LostModelAlarm.com claims an audible range of 50 meters, or a little more than 164 feet when the alarms are properly mounted. A full-fuselage model requires the alarm be mounted internally opposite a 2mm hole drilled in the fuselage.

Only one way to find out if that 50m claim is true.



Installation instructions for the active alarm show how simple the installation really is.

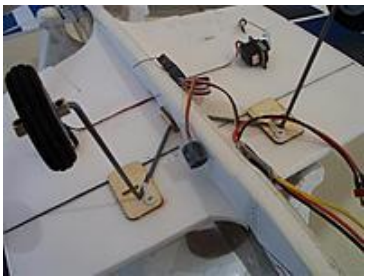


Here are the instructions for the passive unit.

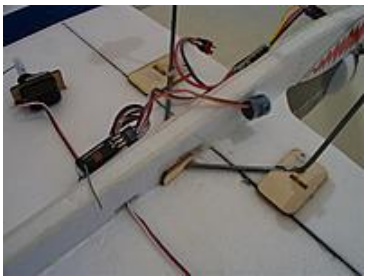
THE ALARMS PROVE THEIR WORTH

My plan was to fly the P-40 a bit to bring down the battery voltage, land the model a distance away and sound the alarm to see how well it would work.

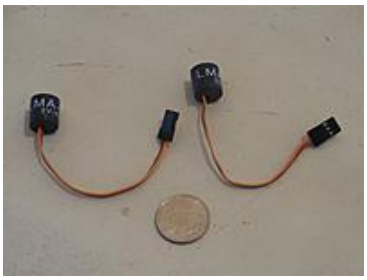
That plan brought me once again to the Coachella Valley Radio Control Club field in a remote patch of desert near Thermal, California.



Underside view of the left side of the P-40 profiler showing the active alarm temporarily taped into place.



Right side view just prior to getting the model ready for flight.



These are the alarms used in the flight tests, shown here next to a quarter which I'd borrowed from a club member. They're small enough to be used in all but the smallest models with virtually zero weight penalty. No worries about the quarter...I gave it right back.

The club has a simply beautiful 600' (183m) paved runway at exactly sea level down the center line. It's surrounded on three sides by mostly open desert dotted by a lot of sage and creosote bushes. Many a model has gone down in that desert and proven hard to find later. While relatively uncommon, an encounter with a rattlesnake is a possibility.

Mercifully, I have never had the pleasure at the club. In more than twenty years of desert dwelling, I've only encountered one live (and rather sleepy) rattler in the wild and no, it didn't try to bite me. It buzzed me off and believe me, I obeyed.

Up went the P-40 for a relatively uneventful two-minute flight. After I landed the model, I taxied it about 150' (46m) away from me and toggled the transmitter switch.

Beep...beep...beep...just as loud and as clear as if the model were next to me.

I sent the model up for a second time both to drain the battery a bit more and to see just for fun how audible the alarm would be in the air.

The Lost Model Alarm, though slightly drowned out by prop noise and model orientation, worked perfectly once more. I admit that it was rather amusing to hear the model beep in the air as if lost.

Upon final approach, it literally almost was.

The alarm began beeping on its own as the receiver experienced a momentary loss of signal. I regained the signal a second or two later, landed the model without incident and checked the receiver.

Sure enough, the red LED was flashing. The culprit turned out to be one of the aerials; I had accidently sandwiched it between the Velcro on the receiver and fuselage! A quick trip around the pattern proved uneventful after I realigned the aerials, but the Lost Model Alarm had really earned its paycheck by alerting me to the loss of signal while the model was airborne.

A test of the passive version was now in order, but rather than simply send the model up once more and wait for the alarm to sound, I simply plugged it into the aileron channel with the aid of the Y-harness. As I mentioned earlier, the passive version is available in the modeler's choice of one, three, five or ten minute inactivity timeout values. I wasn't sure which one I'd chosen, but finding out would be easy enough.

Once I fired up the model, I simply flicked the switch on the DX6i's countdown timer and waited.

That now-familiar beep arrived three minutes later and was easily shut off simply by moving the aileron stick.

What could be simpler?

CONCLUSION

The Lost Model Alarm, whether active or passive, is a literal must-have for almost all flying models. It will more than pay for itself after just one dead stick landing in a place where the model isn't readily visible. One flick of a transmitter switch or a brief wait will lead one right to his or her downed equipment.

Two thumbs way, way up for this brilliant invention. I simply can't recommend it highly enough.

My only problem is figuring out on which models to mount the three active and three passive alarms I received for the review!

Thanks a-plenty to Nik Dobrieski of LostModelAlarm.com for providing this fine product for review. More thanks go, as usual, to Angela Haglund of RCGroups.com who works tirelessly to arrange these reviews.

You, our thousands of readers, is why we're here and on behalf of everyone here at RCGroups.com, thanks for stopping by!

PLUSES AND MINUSES

There are a whole mess of pluses to list:

- **Low cost**
- **Easy to install**
- **Will most assuredly aid in retrieving one's equipment**
- **No weight penalty**
- **An important breakthrough all modelers should consider having**

As for the minuses:

- **None noted**