



Maverick Atom 1/18th RTR Micro Buggy and Truck

Magazine : Radio Race Car International
Issue : 05/08
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The 1/18th micro scene is truly taking off, with nationals in the UK, US and Europe so more manufacturers are wading in with new cars and UK distributors Mirage has brought the Maverick Atom range to the party. The Atom XT Stadium Truck and Atom XB Buggy share a common chassis that answers the prayers of Micro Racers everywhere!

ATOMIC WEAPONS

MAVERICK ATOM 1/18TH RTR MICROS

BY ROB CHALMERS

DESIGN AND BUILD

Don't be fooled by the chunky bodywork, Maverick may have come late to the Micro scene, but they've done their homework. The chassis seems to have taken inspiration from the main protagonists on either side of the Atlantic. The Atom X-chassis uses the concept of a moulded tub chassis to partially enclose the radio gear and incorporate the lower diff halves at each end. The little Atom also uses a separate pivot pin hold as well as a bumper at the front. I know from experience combined bumper/pivot pin holders can cause more problems than they are worth!

The lightweight symmetric lower arms mean wishbones can be swapped front to rear or left to right reducing the need for different spares! The chassis is divided by the alloy centre shaft that transmits power from the mid-rear mounted 370-size Maverick MM21 motor to the front and rear adjustable ball diffs. The motor mount is an alloy component to offer some heat sink potential and keep the motor cool, and the entire driveline is fully ball raced to minimise losses and maximise speed and efficiency.

The tub itself offers only a little bit of twist, hinting at a stable suspension platform, which will generate extra grip, yet resilient enough to absorb the odd knock. Fully wired with batteries installed the buggy and truck both weigh in around 600 g, amazingly lightweight! Steering uses a robust double pillar system that reduces the slop but lacks any form of bearings so a liberal coat of Teflon spray or WD40 on the pivot pins can help prevent any binding. The servo saver too is a work of simple effective logic. Instead of a plastic U-clip absorbing the knocks the Atom uses a coil spring arrangement that works effectively and reliably without wear induced play creeping in.

SUSPENSION

Those symmetric lower arms front and rear are matched by, fixed length top-links and solid looking uprights. It may sound like I'm over playing the need for strong components but Micros tend to be quick, so you'll need that strength when you miss judge the first few jumps at racing speed! Most of the National BRCA Micro rounds have jumps that would unsettle some 10th off-roaders so it's always best to have strength on your side.

Each corner of the Atom chassis is suspended by, a damper filled with oil, the weight of which isn't mentioned in the otherwise clear and handy instructions. Each one has a silky smooth action and allows the car to be dropped from huge heights before it bottoms out. In standard guise both cars sit very high at 20 mm with the lower arms just above level, but this can be, fine tuned using the shock pre-load spacers provided.

POWER AND CONTROL

Once again it's the details that grab you, the kit comes with a pistol grip 27 MHz transmitter, not only does this have your standard trims for steering and throttle but it also has end point adjustment on the steering allowing you to dial out any excessive turn-in from the rostrum! The ESC also has a cunning trick up its sleeve, on top of the case is a tiny switch with the letters 'S' and 'R' printed either side. 'S' is the standard Forward, Brake and Reverse calm settings, but flick the switch to 'R' and race mode is selected, this cuts the Reverse and gives you more kick to the can! Supplying this cool little ESC is another bonus – an 1100 mAh cell pack. Most RTR's I've come across give you an 800 mAh pack if you are lucky, but with this you have the punch from the word go. The kit's instructions offer a brief set-up guide with a 'what affects what' hints and tips section which is very useful.



Brothers in arms, the buggy and truck share the same chassis but wear different tyres

Oil filled shocks gave a great ride



Warning! ESC suffers from split personalities thanks to the 'R' or 'S' switch



FIRST BLOOD

The main idea behind RTR's is the theory that you get it, charge it and drive it, hence the shell is pre-cut and pre-painted, all the mechanicals are ready built and the radio gear installed. Plug in the charger and a couple of hours later it's playtime! I was expecting the Atom to be a bit slow and geared for the beginner. Wrong. It was only when I squeezed the throttle for the first time that I remembered that this thing weighs nothing! The kick is instant and amazing. The Atom runs super smooth ball diffs but there is no slip, the tyres just scabble and launch it forwards. On tarmac the buggy tyres scabble for grip and will wear out prematurely but they are designed to run on grass where the Atom feels at home, darting around soaking up imperfections in the ground that would have other lightweight micros pogo-ing.

The chassis was amazingly neutral, there was no front-end scabble or lurid oversteer out of slow corners. For such a softly sprung car I was also glad to see it didn't squat violently under acceleration and dive under braking. It's a great confidence inspiring chassis; even back on tarmac with a little less grip the balance remains and it flattered my lack of talent allowing me to practise power sliding out of corners. I even tried stuff like Scandinavian flicks – they worked!

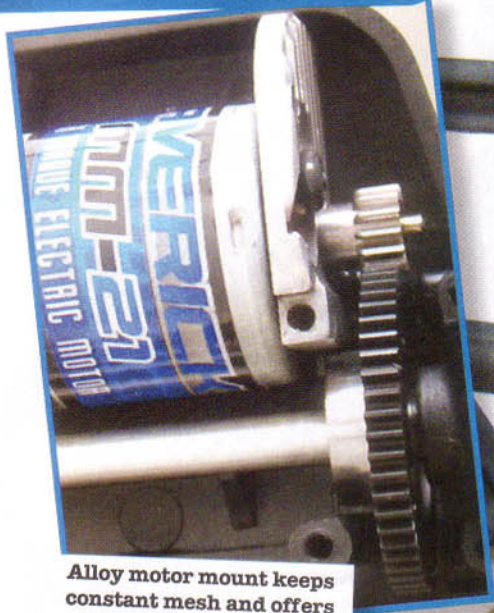
The regular micro scene just got a BIG rival. Is it fast? I don't own a radar gun but suffice to say in a straight line it easily matches my other micros point to point. Whereas the extra ground clearance helps on the grass, on tarmac it become a hindrance when the grip is higher, like on a carpet track as the car tends to lean, lifting the inside wheel and spinning away the power. Being an identical chassis the truck handles much the same except for its wider, chunkier tyres offer a little less bite on the grass allowing me to play to my hooligan side and indulge in a

bit of grass drifting, and being blockier had more grip on the asphalt. I had endless fun chucking the XT at corners and watching it cock the rear inside wheel in the air! The soft set-up gives the Atom a predictable nature, go into a corner too hot and you'll start to push wide, pick up the throttle early enough and you can hang the tail out. Nothing dramatic but definitely fun. The next step seemed obvious, it was time to take it to my local micro club, Ellesmere Port Off Roaders and try it out on some carpet and jumps at a round of the Winter Classic Series.

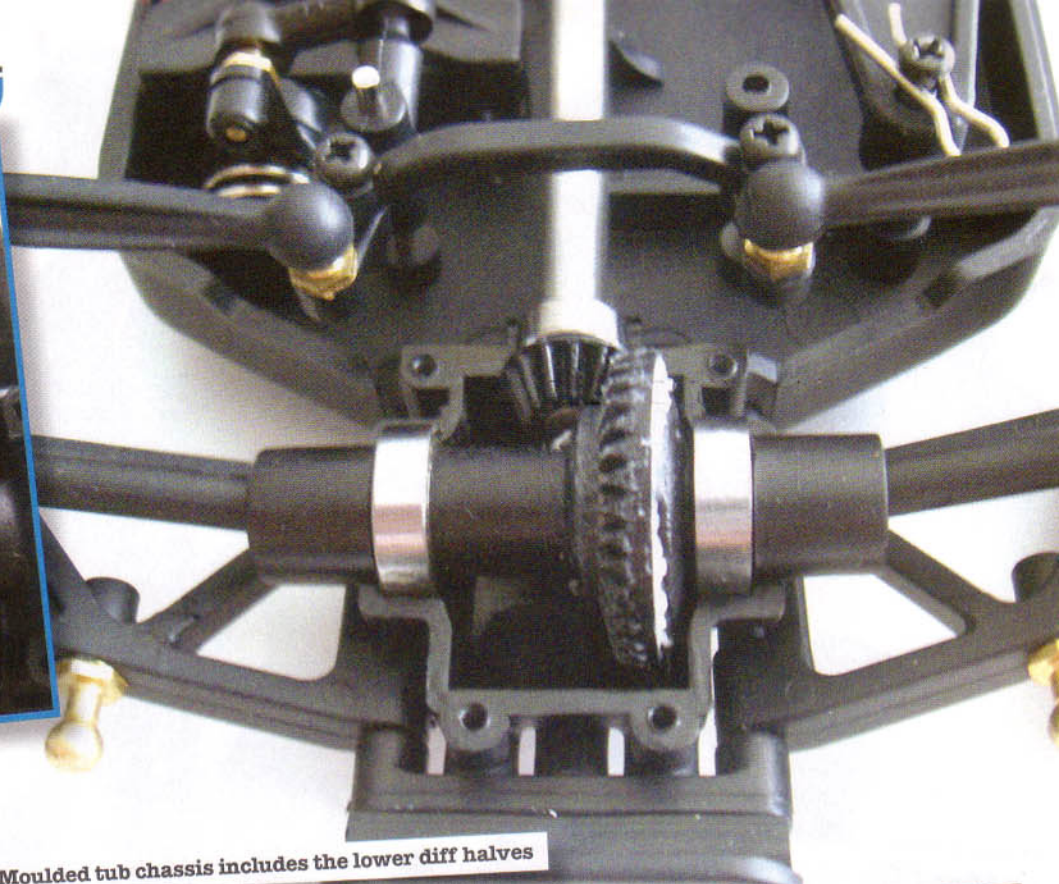
REAL WORLD TESTING

The Winter Classic was meant to be a shakedown for my regular micro mount, and to be honest I was only going to run the Atom between heats just to see how it faired with the jumps. I took the XB out with the permission of the race director to try a couple of jumps. It was instantly clear to me that this was one of the best handling and damped chassis I've ever driven, right out of the box. Whereas most suffer with HUGE grip roll, this was planted with just a slight hint of chassis roll on the faster corners, and a touch of nose lift under full-bore acceleration due to the soft chassis set-up. Off the biggest jumps the EPOR guys had laid out saw the Atom fly over without drama, no po-going, no chassis slap on landing just a flat attitude in the air and a perfect landing every time.

Seeing that the car seemed so good I decided to put it in the heats and give it a direct comparison to the rivals it would face. Knowing that I would be pushing that bit harder, and the track grip was going to increase, I decided to remove all the spring preload spacers except a 2 mm spacer in the back, in order to lower the car and reduce the risk of grip roll. ❄️



Alloy motor mount keeps constant mesh and offers a heat sink



Moulded tub chassis includes the lower diff halves



Front and rear diffs are connected by an alloy propshaft



Simple C-hub with captured pivot pin

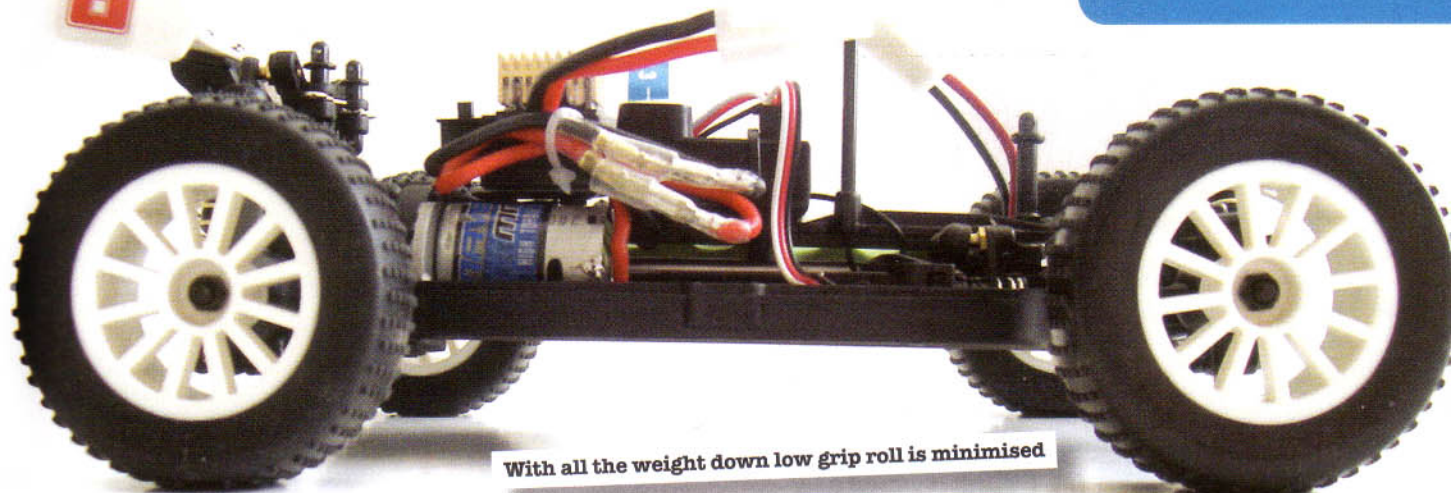
AMAZED

To give the standard RTR a fighting chance I used my normal race charger instead of the kit supplied wall charger. The cells come rated at 1100 mAh, but on their first charge they took 1242 mAh, so once again this car was delivering more than I bargained for. On the grid the Atom didn't look out of place and as the heat started the pace wasn't out of place either. On Ellesmere long top straight the kit gearing was a little low

but the chassis more than made up for it on every jump and around each corner. I could see the car taking a chunk of time out of the car in front over every corner and jump. Even with the inserts out the shocks still did an amazing job. The car kept its fluid ride over each jump and still didn't bottom out. Through the corners the chassis was even more confidence inspiring, there was a great balance of turn-in and neutrality coming out of a corner. I was just waiting for the car to start lifting an inside wheel and spinning the power away but that never came.

The most impressive bit was Ellesmere Port's infamous washboards, whereas most rattled over them with the backend kicking about the Atom just floated over serenely. At the end of the heat the most frequent question was 'Is that Stock!!!' No one could believe the little Atom was untouched! To top it off against cars that have sat in 'A' and B-Finals in the BRCA Championship the Atom would have been 8th on the grid for the A-Final after that round. I was stunned.

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With all the weight down low grip roll is minimised

The simple twin post steering benefited from a drop of lube



CONCLUSIONS

Put simply, I have never been so impressed by an RTR car. Having such a talented chassis and pace out of the box it sets a new standard of what to expect from a micro RTR. Granted the bodies on the XB and XT do make them look basic, but just think of it as lulling everyone into a false sense of security! The Atom has one trump card left to play. If this before didn't tempt you how about if I told you the RRP was a penny under £70...that's around half the price of its major rivals. Shocked? I was!

A range of hop-ups will be available through Mirage including turnbuckles, alloy shocks and alternate gearing sets. Like the cars themselves, spare parts are very competitively priced, a front suspension kit comes with lower arms, c post and knuckles for about the same price as a set of lower arms for my regular car and a full ball diff kit is under a fiver. Whether you'll be heading to nationals or just enjoying some backyard bashing you need to get one of these! **RCI**

QUICK SPEC

Class: 4WD 1/18th Micro
Type: RTR Electric
Manufacturer: Maverick
Price: £69.99 RRP

LIKES

Price, pace, performance
 Clever design elements
 Great dampers
 Plug and play ease
 Standard set-up
 ESC race mode

DISLIKES

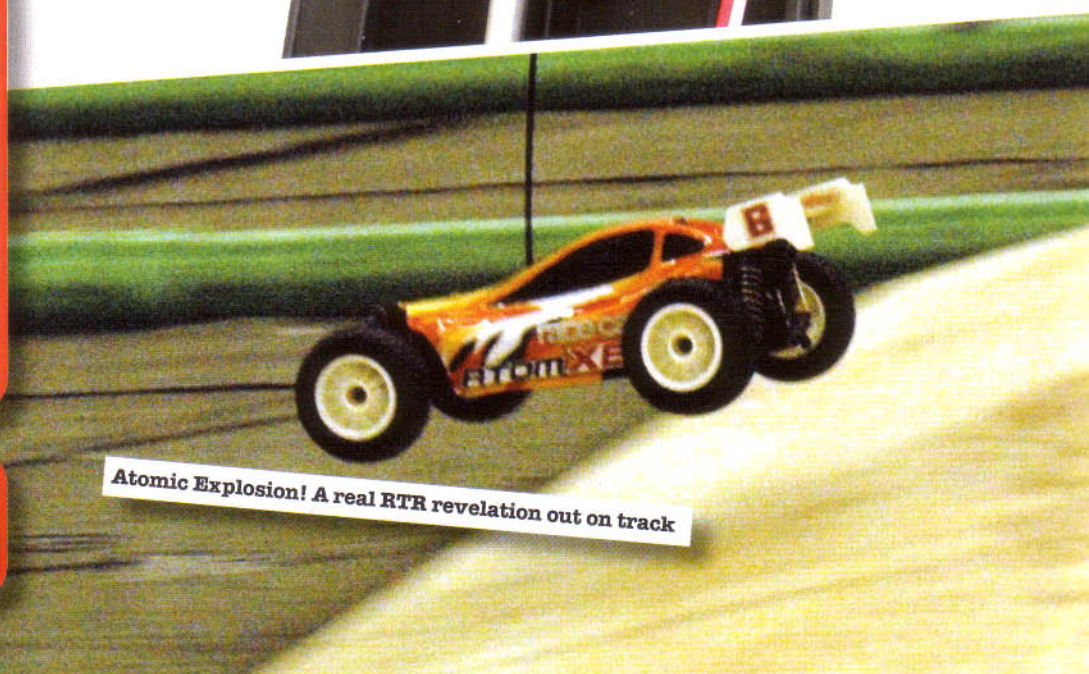
Bushed steering posts

REQUIRED

8 x AA transmitter batteries

CONTACT

Mirage RC Enterprises
 01283 226570 or visit
www.mirageracing.com



Atomic Explosion! A real RTR revelation out on track