RCU Review: Red on: Converting your NiCad charger to Lipoly

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AN ADAPTER TO MAKE YOUR TRUSTY NI-CD CHARGER COMPATIBLE WITH LIPOS.

You jest! Not really. A prototype device from Sid Kaufman (SLK Electronics - the ElectriCalc people) that found its way to the Battery Lab that does just that. We found some minor glitches in the pre-production sample and worked them out with Sid. Sid replaced this with another unit; making some code adjustments, and the problem was resolved.

The LiPoDapter, as it is called, is connected between your LiPo pack and just about any charger with output voltage and current needed for the LiPo you want to charge. It conservatively counts the number of cells. While you are setting it up, the green LED blinks number of cells. Should the number of cells indicated be low you simply tap the programming button to add a cell.

Once you have verified the number of cells you then hold down the program button for 5 seconds until the red LED comes on, blinking the number of cells to confirm your setting and indicating you are connected to the charger. Then you set your charger to the desired charge current.

As the cut-off voltage limit (4.15-4.2 volts/cell) is reached the red LED stops blinking and the green LED comes on indicating the charge is complete and the charger is disconnected.

I found it worked on any Ni-Cd/Ni-Mh charger I had in my collection - even the Alpha 4 (on N function). The unit is packaged in 6-mil clear heat shrink and is available in either a single unit or a dual unit for charging two LiPos at once.

The units tested do have a drawback. The LiPoDapter has what we could call a hard cut off once it reaches the cutoff voltage. If you are charging at higher rates, such as 1C recommended by most manufacturers, the LiPoDapter charges the pack only about 70%. Most Lipo chargers employ a tapering current as they approach cut off, what we would term as a soft cut off. If you use a lower charge current you will get to a higher level of charge, but that will take some time.

For more information see http://www.slkelectronics.com/lipodapter/index.htm

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