

Futaba 8FG

SENSORTOUCH MAKES IT EASY TO ACCESS TONS OF FEATURES

By John Reid | PHOTOS BY HOPE McCALL & JOHN REID

An 8-channel radio has just the right number of channels for a plane with flaps, retracts, the usual number of control surfaces and any other extra controls—it's perfect for both small and large aircraft. This particular 8-channel radio is also available in a helicopter version, and it comes with plane, sailplane and helicopter programming. It's jam-packed with features, has Futaba's proven 2.4GHz FASST technology and—best of all!—it has a SensorTouch navigation pad that lets you move quickly through the menu with just a light touch of your finger. It's just like the "click wheel" interface of your iPod! Let's take a closer look at this radio and see what it has to offer.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first thing you notice when you pull the transmitter out of the box is how comfortable this radio feels in your hands. The transmitter weighs in at only 1 lb., 14 oz. and has a thinner body than the other transmitter cases. This allows your fingers to wrap around in a relaxed position, but still gives you a firm grip on the transmitter. Other noticeable things are that all of the switches are within easy finger reach, and the side sliders face towards the back, allowing your index fingers to get a firm grip when adjusting. The trim tabs are located close to each other, allowing for easy access to make adjustment with your thumbs. The data screen is large enough to read all of the vital information, even with a quick glance while flying.

MOVING AROUND THE TRANSMITTER

On the left side of the transmitter there

is a slider switch along with two three-position toggle switches on top and at the front top left are two more three-position toggle switches. The upper right of the transmitter case has the same array of toggle switches and slider except that one is a positional momentary switch (perfect for a kill switch). Top center has two variable rate knobs and between the sticks is the power switch and two monitoring LED lights. Bottom center is a nice-size data screen that displays all the pertinent information and to the right of that is the SensorTouch control knob that allows for all the data entry and movement on the screen.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

The 8FG 2.4GHz transmitter is available with a default airplane or helicopter setup. When powered up, the airplane version will default to airplane settings and has a ratch-

SPECIFICATIONS

MODEL: 8FG
MANUFACTURER: Futaba (futaba-rc.com)
DISTRIBUTOR: Great Planes (greatplanes.com)
RECEIVER: R6008HS
FREQUENCY: 2.4GHz band
MODEL MEMORY: unlimited
OPERATING VOLTAGE: 6.8-7.2V
PRICE: \$480

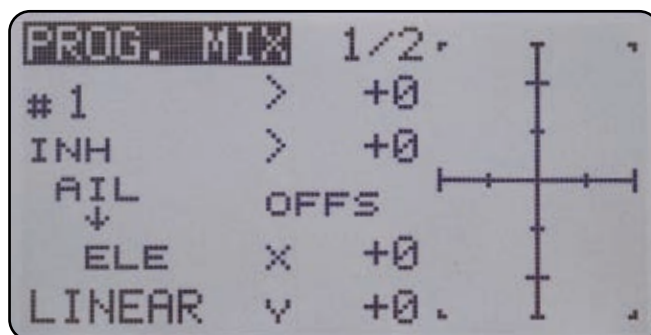
HIGHLIGHTS

- Easy-to-reach slide levers
- SensorTouch control pad for moving from menu to menu
- Balanced case for neck strap users
- Large backlit LCD display; easy-to-see information

eted throttle stick. The helicopter version defaults to heli settings and has a spring-loaded throttle stick. Included in the box are the transmitter, R6008HS 8-channel receiver, 1700mAh NiMH transmitter battery, neck strap, charger and switch. The 123-page instruction manual gives great directions on using and programming the transmitter.



The SensorTouch navigation pad makes it very easy to navigate from menu to menu.



One of the five program mix screens. Each one has two different screens (this is the first one) that allow you to set up a master and slave channel.



Digital Proportional Radio Control System

Futaba 8FG

NEW FEATURES

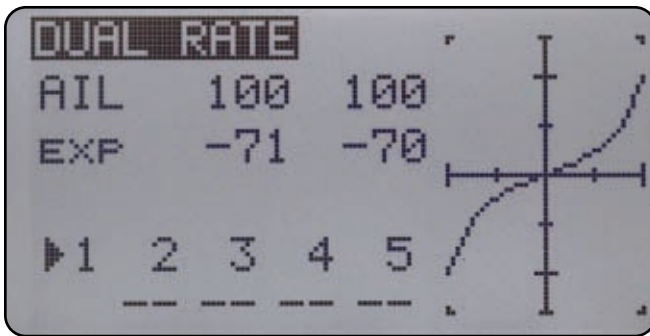
The 8FG 2.4 features the FASST (Futaba Advanced Spread Spectrum Technology) system, which virtually eliminates signal conflict and interruptions. The new SensorTouch pad makes it easy to quickly navigate through the programming menus. I found it easy to use and did not have any problems with the SensorTouch pad not recognizing my finger movements. There is a double-tap requirement to get into the transmitter programming and this prevents



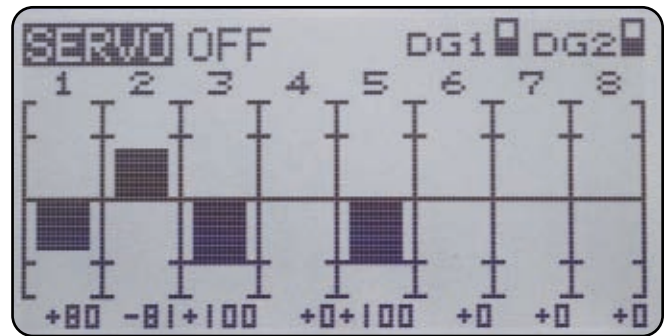
The Futaba 8-channel R6008HS 2.4GHz FASST receiver that comes with the 8FG is truly as fast as it gets! Its high-speed operation allows digital servos to operate at peak efficiency for lightning fast control, but it can also be used with standard analog servos. The R6008HS is 1.8x0.9x0.5 inches and weighs in at just 0.48 ounce.

delay, aileron differential, aileron to rudder mix, rudder to aileron mix, butterfly mix, airbrake mix, gyro mix, v-tail mix, ailevator mix, dual elevator mix, rudder to elevator mix and snap roll mix just to name a few. Now, if that is not enough and you need a very specialized mix, well, you still have five more programmable mixes that you can use to create any mix your plane needs.

As I mentioned, the new slimmer case makes it easy to hold the radio for longer periods of time and all the buttons and switches are within easy comfortable reach. The 8FG offers 2048 resolution that allows the servos to pick up even the slightest stick



The dual rate screen allows you to set throw, expo and switch selection.



The servo monitor screen allows you to see which channels are moving with stick or switch input.

any accidental opening of the programming menus from your hand resting on the pad while flying. I know I never had any menu open while flying with a transmitter tray and the palm of my hand was always resting on the pad. If you're wearing gloves, you'll have to remove them to work the SensorTouch pad.

The transmitter will accept a 32MB up to a 2GB SD memory card in the bottom opening next to the battery. This card is used for two different things. The first is for programming updates will be offered in the future. Futaba continually offers new releases and updates for its computer radios—for free download!— that you can take advantage of. You'll just place the memory card in your computer and download the programming update from 2.4gigahertz.com, then install the card in your transmitter and follow the directions for updating it. In the meantime, that card is used for unlimited aircraft memory storage. Actually, there is a limit and it is somewhere in the 2,000 model range; this all depends on the programming for each aircraft.

THE NICE THING ABOUT THIS IS THAT THERE'S NO NEED TO SEND THE TRANSMITTER IN FOR UPDATES WHILE NOT BEING ABLE TO FLY FOR A WEEK OR SO

One of the truly amazing things about this radio (at least for me), is the predefined mixes that are included for easy programming. I find that this radio, while having a mid-level price range, offers many, if not all, of the programming features of a top-of-the-line radio. For starters, you have 13 different wing types along with three different tail types and six different swashplate types that are predefined.

Some of the other predefined mixes include fuel mix, throttle curve, throttle

movement with a very low latency. For the average flyer, this may not be that noticeable, but anyone who does aerobatics, precision flying or helicopters will quickly notice this feature.

OFF TO THE FIELD

I installed the radio into two different aircraft, one was a large aerobatic plane and the other was a pylon racer. Both planes require precise control and a fair amount of programming. On the aerobatic model, I found it really easy to program in all of the extra functions that were needed such as dual elevator, rudder to elevator mixing, throttle curve, multiple servos on different channels and throttle to elevator/rudder mixing. The complete conversion took just a little over an hour to program everything in and make the final adjustments. The pylon racers required a lot less time for programming, but that was mainly due to the fact that there was very little mixing to program in.

Once at the field, I decided to range-check everything since the 8FG transmitter has a special range-check mode built-in. In this mode, the RF power output is reduced

so you can get a proper range check. The LED light on the front of the transmitter will start blinking and give a warning beep every three seconds. The range check mode lasts for about 90 seconds, after which time it returns to normal mode. If you need more or less time, it's just a simple matter of pushing another button. After finishing the range check, it was time to put the planes in the air.

The aerobatic plane performed as if it was still programmed to a much more expensive transmitter. The ball-bearing-

THE NEW SLIMMER CASE MAKES IT EASY TO HOLD THE RADIO FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME

supported gimbals allowed me to make me very precise inputs—impressive! They also centered very well. The transmitter and receiver performed flawlessly for all three flights.

I installed the radio in the pylon racer and took it out to the flying field the next day to check it out. As with the aerobatic plane, the radio performed flawlessly in the pylon racer. At first, the feel of the sticks was a little sensitive, but after dialing in some expo, the controls were smooth and precise.

On both my trips to the flying field, I forgot the manual at home, but it was very easy to navigate through the menus to find the programming that I needed. And no worries about accidentally making inputs on the screen while flying; you can lock the screen to prevent menu activation.

FINAL TWO CENTS

I really enjoy flying and programming the new 8FG and it's hard to believe you get so many cool programming features in an intermediate radio. This is a radio that an intermediate pilot could afford and easily grow into. With so many model memories, you never have to worry about deleting old aircraft and the programming is very deep. Add the free downloadable updates and you have a radio that will stay current for an extremely long time. It's nice to have something you don't have to replace within a year or two—unlike my cell phone! ✚



An interview with **Steve Kaluf**

We had a chance to talk with Steve Kaluf from Futaba who helped with the testing of the 8FG. Steve has been in the industry since 1982 and flying since the mid-1960s. He has been an assistant marketing manager at Hobbico (the parent company of Great Planes) for two years. Steve said he likes to fly pretty much everything, with IMAC-type of planes and helicopters being his main source of enjoyment right now. During the winter, he turns to indoor foam and helicopters. "I'm not good at any of it, but I enjoy it all," he said.

Is the SensorTouch going to be the standard way of accessing programming for all of your new radios?

SK: The new SensorTouch is only on the 8FG right now; it is a basically a touch sensor just like what you see on an iPod. This makes it really easy to get in and out of menus with just a click or two. One of the cool features I like on the main screen is that with one click, you have two large timers that are great for electric pilots or sailplane contests.

What is it that makes this radio unique when compared to other radios?

SK: One thing that is unique about this radio is that there are no other radios out there in this class that have the sheer number of features that this one does. Many of these features are ones that the average pilot will use and not the type of programming that only a select few will have a need for. This radio has some pretty extensive programming features available to it for airplanes, gliders and helicopters. The function menu can assign any switch to any channel or function.

I was impressed with the location of the sliders, can you tell me about them?

SK: The sliders that are on the back top of the transmitter are in a great location. I come from the old FG series where the sliders were on the front of the case. You would have to take your hands off the sticks to move the flaps. But now with the sliders on the back I really like how easy it is to use them for flaps. You can work the flaps while still effectively flying the model.

How hard was it to incorporate the SensorTouch into the case and programming of the 8FG?

SK: I don't know if I can answer that 100% because the radio is obviously done in Japan. But I would say that incorporating the SensorTouch into the radio was not too hard to do. But we did go through several generations of testing the radio here in the U.S. They would send us radios here to test to determine how we wanted to access the programming. We used the radio at the field and changed the way to access different menus until we found a system that made all the programming very intuitive. The result of that is the final version of the 8FG.