



TESTED

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Are you worried when laying flexible track or, indeed, building your own, that you'll make curves that are too tight for your models? Or do you want to mimic the flowing curves of the real railway, rather than having tight train set corners? In both situations, this new plotting tool from 3CP will be useful.

The premise is extremely simple: selecting one of the ten radii pulls the tool to the correct shape. Lock the tool in place and you can either plot the curve of your railway with a pencil or, as the tool fits between the rails, form curves in 16.5mm gauge flexible track. The radii go from 457mm (18in in old

money) to 1,828mm (72in) and there's even a 'straight' option.

My first impression was that this is a solidly engineered tool that's almost beautiful to look at. You also get an HB pencil and an equally solid-looking pencil sharpener. The device couldn't be easier to use, although it takes some practice to get the best from it. You simply select the curve you want - 457mm is slightly shallower than the 438mm of a 2nd radius curve - to the almost 'flat' 1,828mm and secure it with a small, threaded knob.

This tool can be used to plot straight track, spirals and all manner of curves, from one fixed radius to transitional curves (ones that get tighter as you progress). This is a great innovation and a boon to layout planners who want a little more realism from their railway.

HOW TO DO IT: USE A 3CP TRACK PLOTTER



Use a steel rule to mark a straight datum point with a pencil. A pen is being used to demonstrate here, for clarity.



Here's the track plotter in straight form. Unscrew the threaded knob, move the arm to your desired curve radii and screw in place.



Each end of the plotter will fit inside 16.5mm gauge track. There's a small notch in each end to fit a pen nib or pencil.



Align the straight end with your datum line and the mark - an inverted 'T' shape is suggested - and the central pivot point shown.



Align the outside edge of the sleepers with the marks you've just made - job done!



Alternatively, place some flexible track onto your baseboard and pin one end to make your datum straight point.



Set the plotter to the radii you require and place it inside the running rails. This will pull the track to the curve you want.



You can make the curve as tight or as shallow as you want. The slots in the plotter enable you to secure the track with track pins.