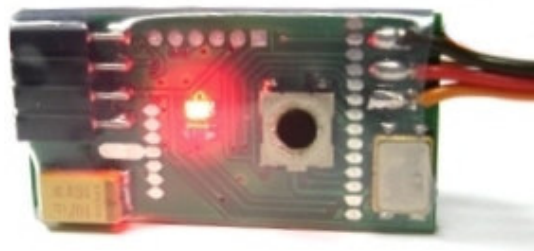


RC *Altimeter #2 BASIC*

Altitude data recording and monitoring system



Manual version: 1.3

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Introduction

RC Altimeter #2 BASIC was designed to provide a lightweight, compact device for measuring and recording altitude over time. It was designed specifically for use onboard a radio controlled (R/C) aircraft, but should be useful in other applications. RC Altimeter #2 BASIC provides live maximum altitude information and battery voltage at the field via flashing the onboard LED, and recorded altitude data which can be downloaded to a PC through a USB interface.

How it works

The RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module uses a high-resolution barometric pressure sensor system to detect small changes in air pressure that occur due to changes in altitude. It is sensitive enough to detect altitude changes of less than one meter. This also makes it sensitive to changes in local weather and air pressure variations. The intended use of this device is for measuring short-term altitude changes in R/C aircraft. Long-term altitude readings will vary considerably due to the varying atmospheric conditions. It is best used to measure relative changes in altitude.

Key features

- Lightweight at only **9 grams with JR cable**
- Small size: 37 mm x 19 mm x 7 mm
- Onboard LED to flash out maximum altitude achieved in flight, and Rx battery voltage
- Records altitude data for later review
- Integrated **FXJ switch** function
- PC **USB** interface for configuration, loading firmware updates and downloading recorded data
- Export data in *.txt format or as JPG image
- Wide range of input power: 4 – 20 volts DC. Power it from your aircraft receiver.
- Every unit is tested in a pressure chamber up to 950m
- Future upgrade to PRO version is possible
- Supports RC GPS module to record all GPS data in order to see your flight in 3D with Google Earth with an airspeed graph.

System requirements

- PC with one of the following operating systems: Win98, Windows ME, Windows NT, Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows Vista.
- Available USB port.

- 2 megabytes of Hard Drive space.

Hardware

Figure 1 shows the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC hardware module. The module includes an onboard LED for flashing out maximum altitude and battery voltage. A pushbutton is used to select one of three options (maximum altitude, battery voltage and creating new flight while setting altitude to zero). The JR cable is used to connect to a radio-controlled aircraft's onboard receiver, which powers the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module. The 3-pin connector serves as servo pass-through or as output for the FXJ switch function. A modular connector is used to interface to a PC for configuration and data download.

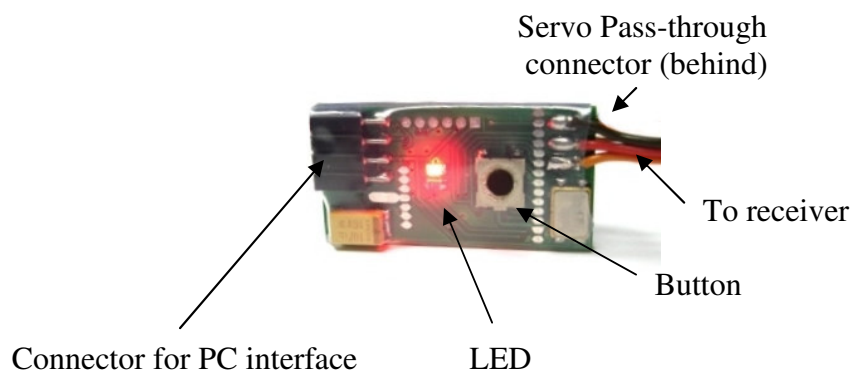


Figure 1. The RC Altimeter #2 BASIC Hardware

Specifications

Board Dimensions	1.46" x 0.75" x 0.28" 37 mm x 19 mm x 7 mm
Weight	9 grams
Temperature Range ¹	-10°C...+60°C
Input Voltage Range	4.0 – 20.0 volts DC
Input Current	13 milliamps
Measured voltage	4.0 – 18.7 volts DC
Maximum altitude ¹	Recorded: 3100.0 meters/feet/yards
Minimum altitude ¹	Recorded: -3100.0 meters/feet/yards
Memory capacity	16000 samples.
Displayed altitude resolution	1 meter, 1 yard or 1 foot.

¹ Specifications are taken from component ratings and system limits and may not have been tested to the full extent of the specified ranges.

Using the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module

Powering the module

To power the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module plug the 3-pin connector on JR cable into a spare receiver channel on the R/C aircraft receiver. If you do not have an open receiver channel, you can plug the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC into the receiver, and then plug that channel's servo into the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC servo pass-through connector. Be sure to observe proper polarity when plugging the connector into the receiver. For non-R/C use, attach a battery to the servo pass-through connector. A JST style connector can plug directly into the 3-pin pass-through connector. Again, be sure to observe proper polarity or damage may result. The 3-pin pass-through connector is oriented with the same polarity as the adjacent servo wires.

Mounting the module

The RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module can be mounted in one of two ways:

- Inside the fuselage of the aircraft. There should be an opening of at least 0.5 sq. cm to allow air pressure inside the fuselage to equalize with the atmospheric pressure. For many aircraft, the fuselage is not airtight and is sufficiently vented to the outside air.
- On the outside of the aircraft. The pressure sensor should be at a right angle to the airflow for maximum accuracy. This means the air stream is flowing across the hole in the pressure sensor not directly into or away from it. If possible, mount it away from the prop wash, because the measured altitude can increase by over 60 meters due to airflow from the prop.

The module can be mounted using double-sided tape, cable ties, or Velcro. Velcro is recommended so that the module can be removed and interfaced with the PC for downloading altitude data.

Be sure that the module is not touching any metal surfaces. Shorting the metal contacts on the module could result in a radio system failure.

Don't mount the module on top of power batteries when using electric planes because they get hot and this can affect the altitude readings by up to 30m.

Also be sure to keep the module away from water, fuel and other liquids.

Always range check the aircraft's radio system before flying with the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module installed to verify that there is no system interference.

Operation

If the pushbutton is pressed and held while the module is turned on you will erase all stored data and the LED will flash 3 times with 1s long flashes and delays. Then when you turn on the module it will set zero altitude and create a new flight. While setting zero altitude the LED will be on. The module is ready to use when the LED goes off.

After your flight the first press of the button will flash out the maximum altitude achieved in that flight, the second press will flash out the battery voltage and the third one will set zero altitude and create a new flight. When the module is setting zero altitude you must make sure that the module stationary on the ground.

Examples:

Max altitude: 132.6m -> flash --- flash flash flash --- flash flash

Battery voltage: 4.0V -> flash flash flash flash --- flash flash flash flash flash flash flash flash flash flash

PC USB Interface

The PC USB interface connects to the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module's 4-pin connector. RC Altimeter #2 BASIC gets power from the USB interface so no external battery is required. USB drivers can be downloaded from www.rc-electronics.org under Downloads -> Software. After installation a virtual COM port will be created. Please be sure that this virtual COM port is number 1...10.



Figure 2. USB interface

PC Software

Installation

No installation is required for the RC Altimeter PC software. You can download the software from www.rc-electronics.org. After downloading run the RC_Altimeter_Logger.exe file. RC Altimeter #2 BASIC will work with PC software version 1.3.0 or higher.

Startup

When you run RC_Altimeter_Logger, the following screen will appear:

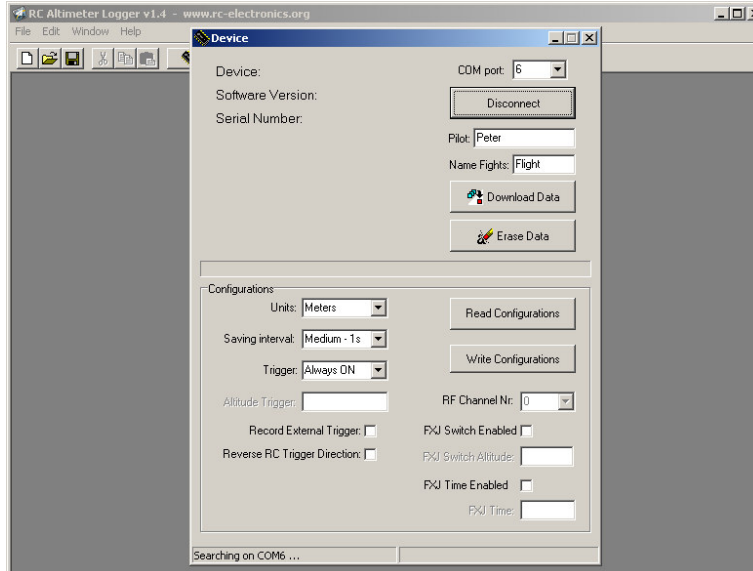


Figure 3. RC_Altimeter_Logger startup screen

Connecting to the hardware

After you start the software it will start searching for the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module on all free COM ports up to COM 10. When it has found the module, or when you press on “Device” button, the “Device” window will appear.

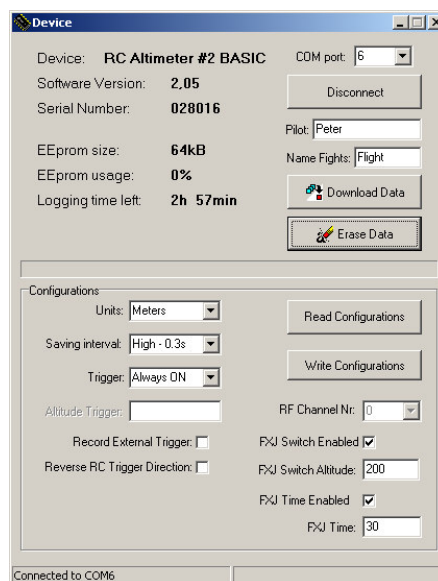


Figure 4. RC_Altimeter_Logger Device window

If the connection was successful the status line will indicate “Connected to COMx”. Once connected, module information and configuration data will be read from the module. You can download recorded altitude data by clicking on the “Download Data” button, you can erase the data by clicking on the “Erase Data” button, or configure the module with new settings. In the “Name Flights” window you can give a name to all saved flights and in the “Pilot” window you can enter the name of the pilot. You must do that before you click the “Download Data” button.

How to configure the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module

Units

This sets the measurement units for the module’s recorded altitude – meters, yards or feet.

Interval

You can select one of three options: High, Medium or Low. If you chose High, data will be recorded three times per second, if you chose Medium data will be recorded once per second and if you chose Low data will be stored once every ten seconds.

Trigger

You can select one of four options: Trigger OFF, Always ON, Altitude Trigger or RC Trigger.

- Trigger OFF: Logging function is turned off and no data will be stored. This option is good if you only want maximum altitude or when if you use RC Altimeter #2 BASIC with the RC GPS module in order to store GPS data only.
- Always ON: After power on, the module starts to record altitude data until it is full.
- Altitude Trigger: Recording will start after the altitude measured exceeds the altitude that you entered in the Altitude Trigger box.
- RC Trigger: You must connect the module in a spare receiver channel and then via this channel you can start recording altitude data from your RC transmitter. Tick the Reverse RC Trigger Direction check box to reverse the direction of your selected trigger.

Read Configurations

Click the “Read Configuration” button to download the module’s current configuration data to the screen.

Write Configurations

Click the “Write Configuration” button to upload any new configuration data to the module. The module will store the new configuration in non-volatile memory.

Record External Trigger

If checked a marker will be recorded with the next altitude record when the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC detects a change from min to max or max to min on the channel it is connected too (eg your throttle). This function can be used for aerial photography to know from what height the photo was taken, or when your sailplane is being towed to know at what altitude you released. It is also useful to mark a point in your flight for later review so you can see what was happening at that time (eg. what height, were you sinking or climbing, ...).

RF Channel Nr

This function is not supported with RC Altimeter #2 BASIC.

FXJ Switch Altitude

If you want to use the FXJ switch function you must check FXJ Switch Enabled and then you can enter the FXJ Switch altitude. In order for proper use of this function, when you power up RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module, the channel to which this module is connected must be at it's minimum position (example: throttle off) or in the position that you want it to be set to when you reach your selected altitude. The module will remember this position and after exceeding this altitude it will mimic the same state on this channel (example: when your e-sailplane reaches the set altitude the motor will be shut off). The FXJ switch function has control over that channel for 10 seconds and it is reset by the model flying below 20m.

This function is useful for towing your sail plane when you want to un-hook at the same altitude every time. To do this connect your tow release servo to the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module.

It is also useful for practicing with electric version of F3J or F3K sailplanes.

FXJ Time

In order for proper use of this function, when you power up RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module, the channel to which this module is connected must be at it's minimum position (example: throttle off) or in the position that you want it to be set to when you reach your selected altitude. The module will remember this position and after exceeding this motor run time it will mimic the same state on this channel. The FXJ switch function has control over that channel for 10 seconds. Time starts to count down when you apply change to this channel (throttle) and will reset to preset value if you have channel position at the same position as at power up for 4s.

Working with the data

Description of all flights

All flights graph

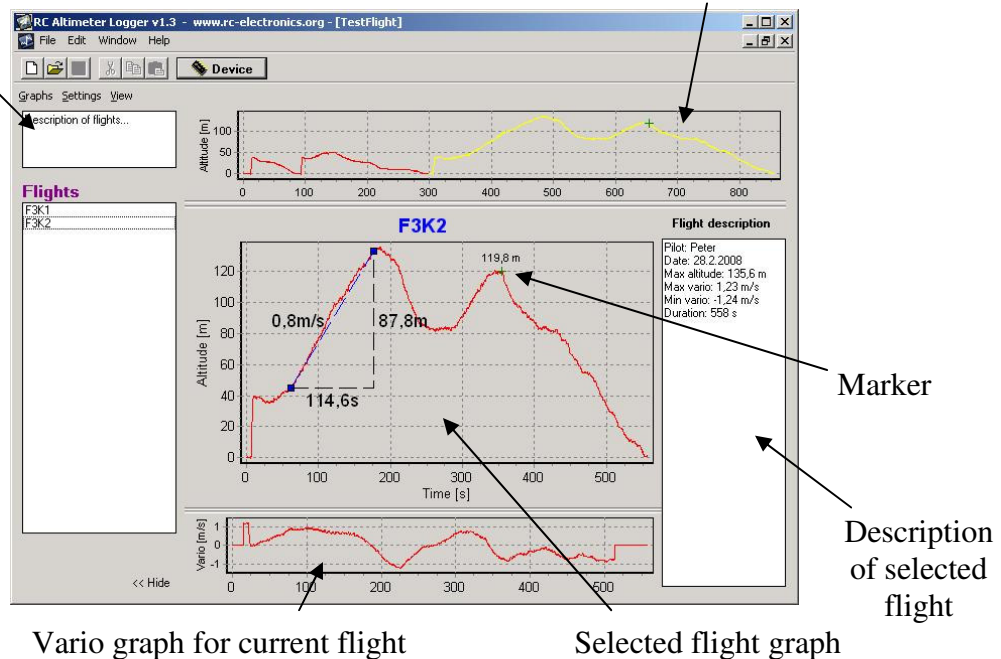


Figure 5. New Flights window

The selected flight is colored yellow in the all flights graph and is displayed in the selected flight graph. If you click the right mouse button on the graph you can move it. To zoom it click the left mouse button on the graph and highlight the area from upper left to lower right.

To restore the graph click on it with the left mouse button and pull from lower right to upper left. If you click on two points on the graph you will get details of the time difference, altitude difference and average vario between these two points. Recorded markers will be shown as green crosses with marked altitude. The “Flight description” window shows the pilot name, the date of the download, the maximum altitude of the selected flight and its duration. You can add any text in this description or the description of all flights.

Flights

Here is listed all the flights that were stored in the RC Altimeter module. The name of those flights starts with word inserted in “Device” window -> “Name Flights”. Flight can be deleted (select the flight and press Delete button on PC keyboard or right click on flight -> “Delete”). If you create new flights it is possible to drag and drop flights from one window to another. Double-click or right click -> “Rename” on flight to rename it.

Graphs

Here you can print an altitude graph or export the data. You have three options for exporting:

- Export ASCII: Current flight will be exported to *.txt file
- Export Image: Current flight with flight description will be exported to *.jpg file
- Export GPS data: If an RC GPS module was connected and GPS data was recorded, it will be exported into *.kml file for Google Earth review.

Settings

Here you can set/choose the measurement units for the altitude graph or a speed graph (if GPS data was recorded) and set the vario interval. This vario interval setting will affect the vario graph.

View

Select if you want to swap between the vario and speed (if recorded) graphs.

Firmware upgrade

The RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module provides the ability to upload new firmware to the module. No installation is required for the Firmware Upgrade software. You can download it from www.rc-electronics.org. After downloading run the Firmware Upgrade.exe file. Select the correct COM port and then specify the new firmware file (RC_Altimeter_v2.xx.hex). After you have selected the firmware file click the “Upload” button. After pressing the “Upload” button, **quickly connect USB interface to RC Altimeter #2 BASIC** and the upload of the new firmware will start. You should only use a firmware update file specifically provided for the RC Altimeter #2 module. Using an incorrect update file will render the RC Altimeter #2 BASIC module inoperable.

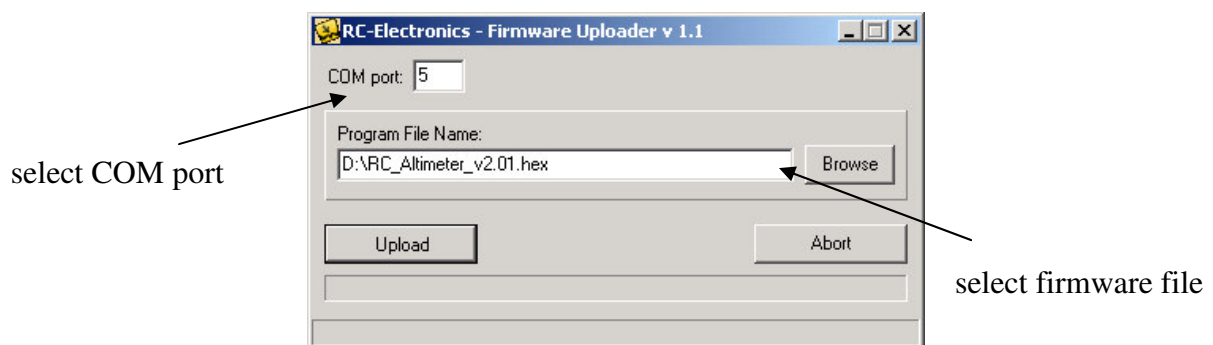


Figure 6. Firmware uploader