

Project Overview - Force Feedback Flight Controls

SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF THE BFF CL SYSTEM DEPENDS ON CORRECT MANUFACTURE, ASSEMBLY, INSTALLATION AND SETUP WORK BY THE BUILDER. IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED THAT YOU HAVE THE TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIRED TO DO THIS WORK THEN PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT THIS PROJECT.

The BFF CL system is NOT a Plug 'n Play system. It is very important that you read ALL the documents and study the ALL the plans before starting the project.

If you just buy the cards, apply electrical power and fiddle with the software there is a good chance that all you will succeed in doing is blowing up your expensive hardware.

You will need to undertake and complete the following overall steps:

1. Mechanism Design

If you are NOT using the mechanical plans available on the web site then you must first design the mechanics of your yoke, column or rudder controls. This is NOT a trivial step, and it needs to be done correctly. Your controls must incorporate the correct transmission (gearing) ratios to connect the FFB motors to the control wheel/stick/peddles. And the mechanisms must be designed to be smooth and friction free. They must be completely free of play (backlash) and must be stiff enough to carry the considerable system loads induced by the motors WITHOUT undue deflection or stressing.

Poor mechanism performance can NOT be corrected by the CL software.

2. Build the control mechanics carefully and accurately to the designs, including fitting the electric motors and transmissions.
3. Fit and electrically wire the FFB driver/controller cards.
4. Prepare the power supply for the driver cards. READ THE DATASHEET COMMENTS ON THE POWER SUPPLY.
5. Install the PICAXE download cable and the BFF CL Software.
6. Test the individual FFB channels using the BFF Driver Test application. This is IMPORTANT, damage to the equipment can be done if a step by step approach to the system set up is not taken.
7. Set up and calibrate the joystick card to be used for trim inputs. (This document assumes the CL system will operate in pot-less mode and will provide the position input for the control axes to FS.)
8. Run with the full BFF CL Software and flight sim active to test the FFB in flight and to tune the force settings using the Configuration Manager to your requirements.
9. From here on only the BFF CL Software is used to run the system in its normal operational mode. On each system power up a simple movement calibration procedure is undertaken, following which the system is ready for use.

PLEASE FOLLOW CAREFULLY THE STEPS DETAILED BELOW.

Detailed Commissioning Steps (Assumes Pot-less Mode)

1. Make and assemble the mechanics of the flight controls (with brushless motors fitted). Ensure that the movement of the control axes is smooth and friction free – sticky and/or rough mechanical performance CAN NOT be improved by the CL control system! Make sure your mechanisms are completely free of play (backlash) and are stiff enough to carry the considerable system loads induced by the motors WITHOUT undue deflection or stressing.
2. FAMILIARISE yourself with the BLDRV-12/24 data sheet! It contains important information.
http://bffsimulation.com/FFB-Yoke-2/BLDRV-1224_Data_Sheet.pdf

LOCATE THE DRIVER CARDS

3. Mount the BLDRV-12/24 cards in a location close to the control mechanism (within range of the motor and encoder cables). Ideally the card LED's should also be visible from the pilot's seated position as they will indicate the initialisation and running status of the CL system. The driver cards should NOT be enclosed – they require a free flow of air over the heat sinks for effective cooling (see the card data sheet for more information on card cooling, and see item 7 below).

However the card position should be out of reach during normal flight operations – to prevent physical contact by personnel whilst the cards are in operation. The card heat sinks may become hot to the touch.

4. If you intend to operate the FFB system under sustained loaded conditions – eg for flying with simulated systems failures which require large control forces to be sustained, then force air cooling MUST be used. Fit PC case or similar fans over the BLDRV-12/24 card heat sinks. In these circumstances the operating temperature of the drive motors must be carefully monitored – motors are less effectively cooled by external airflow.

POWER SUPPLY

5. Set up and position the power supply and wiring to the BLDRV-12/24 cards. See the card data sheet for important information about the choice of card power supply. **THE USE OF AN UNSUITABLE POWER SUPPLY CAN DAMAGE THE DRIVER CARDS OR PRODUCE POOR FORCE FEEL.**

A visually prominent and accessible power cut-off switch should be located close to the pilot/operator's seating position to enable rapid power-down of the CL system should the need arise.

However DO NOT connect power to the driver cards at this stage.

Note the cable type recommendations on the [wiring diagram here](#).

DRIVER CARD WIRING

6. Wire the BLDRV-12/24 cards to the BLDC motors (phases, hall sensor and encoder).

Motor phases 1, 2 & 3 are the main power cable cores Black, Red and White respectively for the recommended MB082 brushless motors.

Hall Sensor signal is black logic cable core Yellow (Hall A) unless otherwise specified, and 5V and 0V are Red and Black respectively.

You MUST refer to your encoder data sheet to correctly identify the A & B encoder channel cables and the 0 & 5V cables on your encoder to connect to the driver card. Even so it may be necessary on testing to reverse the A & B encoder connections to obtain smooth motor commutation; this is because different encoder makes can give different directions of +ve rotation even with the same A & B connections.

Make sure all connections are secure – faulty logic connections to the hall sensor and encoder will disrupt the system operation. The motor and encoder connections are located at the heat sink end of the driver cards.

7. Connect each card to the serial data "daisy chain" (CN3-1) – ie link together S-in on each card, and link together S-out on each card. If you are using dual PICAXE cables then one card will not be on the daisy chain but will instead be connected to the 2nd PICAXE cable.

Set the correct address for each card (JMP-1). Elevator is address 1, Aileron is address 2, Rudder address is 3.

Note the cable type recommendations on the [wiring diagram here](#).

CL SOFTWARE INSTALLATION

8. Download and Install the BFF CL Software.

Check out the Configuration Manager folder – the Configuration Manager app will be used first – to set up the COM port and other hardware settings.

9. Install the PICAXE AXE027 USB download cable drivers on the PC and connect the cable to the PC and one BLDRV-12/24 card.

For drivers and installation instructions for the AXE027 cable see -

<http://www.picaxe.com/Software/Drivers/AXE027-USB-Cable-Driver/>

Once the AXE027 cable has been installed a virtual COM port will be created on the PC. Find and note the COM port number of the virtual COM port (view in Device Manager).

Run the **Configuration Manager**, select a default config file closest to your type of

aircraft, and then set the COM port in Tab 6 Item 1. Check that it opens properly using the Check button.

Go to Tab 9 Item 4 in the Configuration Manager and use the Update button to copy your COM port setting to the Driver Test Application configuration file.

If dual PICAXE cables are to be used then the COM port number of the second cable must be set in Tab 6 Item 15. Please note that this 2nd COM port will need to be used in the BFF Test app when testing the card attached to it. You can change it manually in the DRV_Test.ini file in the Test App folder.

DRIVER CARD TESTING

10. FAMILIARISE yourself with the BFF Driver Test Application user guide. It contains important useful information. It is in the Documents sub-folder of your CL Software folder.
11. Use the Configuration Manager Tab 9 Item 5 – Test_App button to start the Driver Test Application.

This can also be done manually from the Driver Test App folder.

12. Ensure the power supply voltage selector jumpers (JMP-3 and JMP-4) on the BLDRV-12/24 cards are correctly set for your supply voltage (24V), ensure the power supply voltage is within range AND THE POLARITY IS CORRECT.

Connect power to each of the cards ONE AT A TIME AND SEPARATELY - monitor the cards for correct LED operation (if the Test App software is running and the serial comms are good the Yellow LED should flash rapidly until the power-up movement calibration of that axis is completed. Power-up calibration involves moving the control axis back and forward at a steady pace **end stop to end stop** until the Yellow LED goes out on that card.

NOTE that the voltage regulator heat sinks (the small ones) will become hot to the touch (approx "hot radiator" temperature), this is normal. However if there are any other signs of overheating immediately power-down the cards and double check the power supply and other wiring.

13. Use the BFF Driver Test Application to check the operation of each card / FFB axis individually. Note the power-up calibration procedures and LED sequences described in the driver card data sheet.

I suggest first loading should be with a modest "Constant Force" loading – say 50 (out of a max 255). This should produce a light but significant steady load on the axis.

Check each axis for smoothness of force feel and monitor continuously the temperatures of the driver cards for signs of overheating. If they are operating in a high ambient temperature or are loaded at high levels for periods of several minutes there is a danger of overheating and damage – in these circumstances it is strongly recommended that additional forced air (fan) cooling is provided for the cards.

Test initially with light loads and then increase the loading by steps to check the integrity of the electrical and mechanical systems.

If calibration completes and gives smooth response, but on the application of a "constant force" test loading the control axis feels "coggy" then power down the system and reverse the encoder A & B channel connections to the driver card concerned. Repeat the power-up sequence and calibration and re-check the force feel under the constant force condition.....

14. Power down the cards.

JOYSTICK CARD SETUP FOR TRIM

15. Set up and connect the trim input potentiometers or buttons to a USB joystick card.

Remember to calibrate the joystick card as a Game controller in Windows.

Once you have set up your pots or buttons go to the Configuration Manager Tab 6 Item 7 and set the joystick card as the Primary Joystick. Use the Sel_Joy button to do this.

Go to Tab 7 and set Items 1, 2 & 3 to specify pot or button input for each axis. Then set the pot or button inputs below as required.

SAVE your settings....

USING USB JOYSTICK CARD INPUTS FOR POSITION

16. In the default "pot-less" operating mode the CL system will feed control axis positions to the flight sim based on the drive motor encoder data.

If you instead wish to use your own joystick card pots to control axis position in the flight sim then go to the Configuration Manager Tab 5 and select check-box Item 2, click Apply and then SAVE.

This will stop the CL software position feed to the flight sim. You will then need to assign your own position inputs in FS/X-Plane as normal.

NEARLY THERE

17. You can now run the main BFF Control Loader software with the saved configuration file and commence to tune the settings for your system.

Note that the flight sim can be placed in a particular flight situation and then paused to maintain specific flight conditions for loading; for example pausing during straight and level flight at a slow speed will allow the main control centering force behaviour to be checked at low force levels. Pausing the flight during takeoff whilst on the runway will allow runway vibrations to be checked etc

Please refer to the CL software on-line user guide for information on system tuning -

<http://bffsimulation.com/Manual-CL/Introduction.php>

Normal System Operation

For normal operation of the BFF CL system use the **BFF CL Software**. Further details of the software are available online – see

<http://bffsimulation.com/Manual-CL/Introduction.php> .

Please review this user documentation fully before using the system.

Typical steps for normal system operation are:

1. Start Flight Simulator, load a flight and place the aircraft in the required situation. Check all FS internal trims are initially centred (done automatically by the CL software for FSX/P3D & X-Plane but not FS9).
2. Start the BFF CL Software and select the required configuration file.
3. Power-up the BLDRV-12/24 cards.
4. Complete the CL system power-up calibration by cycling each control axis over its full range of movement at a steady pace until the flashing Yellow LED for the driver card goes out.
5. Engage the control loading by clicking the ENGAGE button on the BFF CL software window or pressing any programmed joystick ENGAGE hot-button (Tab 6 Item 8).
6. To release the control loading click RELEASE on the software window or press your RELEASE joystick hot-button.

Many loading settings can be adjusted whilst the system is active, to allow adjustments to be made to the force feel.

To do this start the **Configuration Manager** and load the working configuration file. Make any settings changes you require and then click **MAKE_ACTIVE** – this will save the changes and instruct the **BFF CL Software** to load the new settings. The CL software will RELEASE loading when it does this, so you will need to re-engage the loading. It is wise however to check the force level output in the progress bars before re-engaging the loading.

Data and error logging is provided in the files in the Logs sub-folder. Log files BFF_CL.log and BFF_Pry.log are of most use and should be consulted for error messages in the event of disruption of system operation.

The PING button on the CL software GUI is used to request status data of the BLDRV-

12/24 cards, this data is written to the BFF_PRY.log file. If a card error occurs (regular flashing of both green and yellow LEDs at 1 Hz) then use the PING button to read the card status before powering-down the card and then inspect the BFF_PRY.log file for details.

NOTE the log files are over-written each time the CL software is started.

V2.0 August 2015

Ian Hopper (BFF Design Ltd)