

FS Flying School

Fly under the watchful eye of an instructor



Don't use throttle and brake during taxi - make gentle turns on the ground

The main difference between (most) simulator pilots and real world pilots is the accuracy of their flying. Quite naturally this lack of efficiency can be attributed to two main factors - firstly a lack of any real procedural instruction and secondly there's no penalty for getting it all wrong. If you happen to drop the aircraft just short of the runway, or stall it out of the sky, no-one dies and

you don't get a visit from the AAIB (Air Accident Investigation Board) either. Also, if you taxi around the airfield like Michael Schumacher, no irate controller is going to phone the flying club. As a result, simulator pilots tend to be a little more relaxed about the whole thing. If you fall into this category, which most of us do, and would like to vastly improve your performance, this latest

development from FS Inventions may be just what you're looking for. It was conceived by two avid flight sim fans - Jeff Preston and John Jones - who wanted a program that would evaluate their own flying skills. As they were both programmers this presented a challenge that was well within their capabilities, as Jeff is also a PPL with his own Piper Cherokee.



This is the FS Flying Club Welcome screen which contains enough formation to get you started



The FS Flying Club interface is fairly straightforward with tabs for each menu option. This is where you assign a new pilot and the voice for your instructor



Before you launch FS Flying Club you need to load a flight simulator flight plan, set your transition altitude and choose which runway you wish to land on

However, at this juncture I should point out that although this is an instructional product, it's not designed to teach you how to fly. It's designed primarily to simulate the job of an instructor who will sit alongside you and assess your flying skills; the assumption being that you already know how to fly the aircraft and have a good knowledge of instrument flying. Without this you will not be able to successfully complete a flight under instruction and, to be honest, you'll get much more satisfaction from your simulated flight once you acquire these skills.

Installation and set-up

The FS Flying School program is quick and easy to install and has very little impact, if any, on the performance of your flight simulator. As with many other FS (Flight Simulator) add-ons FS Flying School communicates with FS via Peter Dowson's superb program - FSUIPC. (FSUIPC is a module that allows external (third-party) programs to communicate and at certain levels control Flight Simulator). This is installed automatically for you and does not need to be registered in order to work perfectly. The main interface of FS Flying School consists of a row of command buttons below which is a large window displaying the current menu option. Initially this screen displays a list of tips to get you started, which is useful for those who refuse to read manuals! In fact, you can complete your first flight by simply following the steps under the 'quick start' heading. For example in a typical point-to-point flight, you first need to create and load a flight plan in flight simulator and position your aircraft at the departure point. This is quite straightforward and the planning utility in FS will offer to do this for

you anyway. With flight simulator still running in the background, you then load the same flight plan into FS Flying School and hit the 'connect' button. Once you return to flight simulator the instructor will inform you of your current NAV1 setting, which should ideally be set to your first way point, or if not your destination ILS. From there, it's simply a matter of putting your best foot forward and trying to complete the flight without incurring any complaints from your virtual instructor. At the destination airport you'll be given a breakdown of your performance, together with appropriate scores for the various stages of the flight, followed by any suggestions he may have for your improvement. This is where you begin to realise how sloppy your flying has become, (well I did anyway). The information is automatically stored in your logbook after every completed flight.

Raising the bar

So that's basically the idea behind FS Flying School, although it has quite a bit more depth to it than it might initially seem. It's also surprising how quickly it raises the professionalism of your flying when you know you're being scrutinised; to the point where it becomes quite a challenge not to get any in-flight criticism. And I suppose that's what makes FS Flying School so exciting, it's the challenge of doing it right and getting confirmation in the form of a written appraisal that makes the effort worthwhile. Once you've got the hang of the program, I suggest you take the time to read the manual, because you'll get much more from it if you do. For one thing, it explains how the scores are awarded, so you can see just where you need to concentrate your efforts. As I mentioned earlier, your performance is assessed and marked accordingly for each



If you're using one of the default aircraft, FS Flying Club will automatically identify it, although you have the option to create your own aircraft configuration files



The program connects to Flight Simulator via Peter Dowson's FSUIPC and the settings page determines whether the FSUIPC module has been detected.



Whoa!... use smaller adjustments to your pitch



At the end of the flight you can check your performance from the logbook page. If you want to compare this with previous flights you can open the full logbook using the appropriate button



flight. A bonus feature offered to registered users is the option to upload your scores to the FS Flying School website (www.fsflyingschool.com/), where they are included in a league table showing the high scores and the names of the pilots. Naturally, you don't upload your worst scores, but the incentive is to try to get your name as near to the top of the leader board as possible.

To assess your performance, FS Flying School needs to know where you're flying from and the type of aircraft you're using. This because the V1, V2 (speeds that define certain performance and limiting characteristics of an aircraft) and stall speeds for each aircraft



is different, as are the approach and landing speeds. This data is provided in dedicated aircraft configuration files covering all of the default aircraft. In addition, the FS Flying School website has an ever-increasing list of data files for third-party aircraft. In fact, if you have a particular favourite, you can create your own configuration file from within the program in a couple of minutes. The only difference is you have to upload this file to the FS Flying School website for it to be checked before you can upload any scores derived from it.

Improving Your Flying Skills

There are a number of ways you can use the program to improve your flying skills. I've already talked about a simple point-to-point flight, but in fact the flight can be as complex as you want to make it. For example, you can plan your route to intersect up to 99 VORs (VHF Omni-directional Radio Range). This not only makes it more interesting, but as long as you pass within one nautical mile of each VOR it will increase your score. The same applies to the type of aircraft you're flying, where larger, multi-engine aircraft

“
There are a number of ways you can use the program to improve your flying skills
”

score more points because they are naturally more difficult to fly. You also get more points for flying in bad weather, with low visibility and crosswinds naturally needing far greater skill to stay on course.

You can also incur penalties. For example, you'll immediately lose 33 per cent of your score if you switch your autopilot on for more than 10 seconds. You also have to fly in real-time. Any deviation in simulated time or switching to slew mode will immediately result in a disconnection from FS Flying School and drop your score for the current flight to zero. However, don't get the impression that it's not fun to use, because it is! Once you've got a few flights under your belt and have achieved a landing score of 70 or above, combined with an overall flight score above 80, you can elect to fly circuits. This is possibly the most challenging part of the program and I would say also the most demanding part of real flying. In this exercise, the instructor is a lot more vocal, often giving timely prompts for each leg of the circuit and there is a separate score table for you to subscribe to.

Modes of flight

The program has specific modes of flight, so it's important that you let the instructor know which one you're currently in, otherwise you may, for example, be penalised for high speed taxiing when in fact you were taking off! So, before starting a new phase of flight it's wise to press the key combination Shift+Crtl+Z - this will inform the instructor about your intentions. To be fair, after a few flights you get to know how to indicate this to your instructor by your method of handling the aircraft. For example, when you're taking off, as long as you level off for a few seconds without allowing the VSI (Vertical Speed Indicator) to enter the descent arc, the instructor will announce that you

are now cruising. The same applies to the landing phase where, once the aircraft is in a controlled descent, he will announce that you are now landing and tell you the runway heading currently set on your NAV1 OBS.

Silence is Golden!

When you're doing it right, for the most part, the instructor is silent, although there is an option in the menu where you can get him to throw in the odd humorous quip; or prompt you with occasional snippets, like telling you to scan your instruments regularly. Or if you fancy a quick challenge you can simply press Ctrl+Shift+C and the instructor will set a task for you. This is normally something like holding a heading, or maintaining a specific altitude; which is fine in good weather but not so easy when the aircraft is buffeted by high winds or when you have to make a turn at the same time. FS Flying School comes with a choice of three instructors, with a promise of more to come from the authors. In fact, the manual explains how you can record your own, providing you have the time and patience to record all the possible sound clip combinations.

The program can also be configured to create mechanical or instrument failures, even to simulate a loose wire, resulting in an intermittent fault; which certainly adds to the challenge. So, if the idea of FS Flying School appeals to you, you can try it out using the demo version on this month's cover CD. This is a fully operational version,



the only restriction being the area you can fly within and you can't upload your scores to the FS Flying School website. Other than that you can try all phases of the program before investing your cash.

Conclusion

Overall this is a brilliant idea and one that works very well, I enjoyed the challenge of "getting it right", I'm sure that you will too. Incidentally the video I made while using Flying School was done to show what happens when you get it wrong - I don't normally fly like that.... no really I don't!!

Joe Lavery

Review Score



Publisher: FS Inventions
Price: Download Version \$44.95
Website: www.fsflyingschool.com
Developer: FS Inventions

At a glance: If you want to improve your flying skills and get nearer to the professionalism of real pilots, join the FS Flying School

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.0 GHz Pentium/Athlon or equivalent, FS2004 or FSX, 512Mb RAM, 440MB hard drive space, 3D graphics card with 64 MB RAM

RECOMMENDED: 3.4 GHz Pentium/Athlon or faster, Windows XP Pro, 1GB RAM, 256MB 3D graphics accelerator card