

AVSIM Commercial Scenery Review

German Airports 2 - Hannover



Product Information		
Publisher: Aerosoft		
Description: Add-on Scenery of Hannover (EDDV) for Flight Simulator 2004. Will be updated to run in FSX.		
Download Size: 69 MB	Format: Download	Simulation Type: FS2004
Reviewed by: Fred Clark AVSIM Staff Reviewer - January 29, 2007		

Introduction

The German Airports team seem a secretive bunch. One of the finest sceneries ever produced came courtesy of them – Mega Airport Frankfurt. And yet they find themselves referred to as a subdivision of Aerosoft. Never have I heard anyone (apart from Aerosoft themselves) refer to Frankfurt as being developed by this team.

But that doesn't mean they should be ignored. They have practically coated Germany in glorious scenery, as any owner of any volume of 'German Airports' will know. Volumes 1, 3 and 4 are available in the Aerosoft shop. However, recently Volume 2 has begun its production. And the first in the set comes courtesy of Hannover.

Hannover airport first opened in 1952 with 2 new terminals (A and B) opening in 1973. These became archetype for the Sheremetyevo International Airport in Moscow. The 2 terminals were joined in 1998 with terminal C. This gave the airport the capacity to serve 33 aircraft at any one time, with 20 being served with a jetway. All three terminals can handle up to a 747.

General Aviation aircraft are served well, with many hangars for parking, and 2 GA areas (GA1 and GA2). The RAF also has a strong presence at Hannover, and uses a little known Terminal D. It was originally created as a HUB for Condor's charter operations, and is little more than a refurbished hangar. Helicopters of the German police have a station at the airport, with 2 helipads.

But that's the real thing! All I have told you so far is what you can fly into the airport. You probably want to know how well the renowned German Airports team lives up to their expectations.

Installation and Documentation

After applying for my copy of the airport download, I received an email saying that the product was ready. On getting to the page, I found the link to come up with an error. Shortly after however, all was fine, it's just the way Aerosofts download system works. Either way, I felt it worth mentioning. Perhaps in the future Aerosoft could make the "your product is ready" email come when the link is active.

I didn't mind the short wait, and downloaded the product when it was ready. 69MB flew by on my 8MB connection, and certainly seems an average for most current download add-ons. A boxed version will be available eventually as a complete German Airports 2 set, however, when has not been published yet. The GA2 box will most probably be fully FSX compatible.

Installation was one of the most painless procedures I have ever had. Throw your email address and serial code into a couple of boxes and let it do its thing. No internet connection is required (which used to be the way with Aerosoft add-ons). You are also given the option to install static models. It's great that these are included; however, I would have liked to have seen a separate program to add/remove static models after install. Basically, if you need to install statics, or find you don't need them anymore, you have to completely reinstall the product.

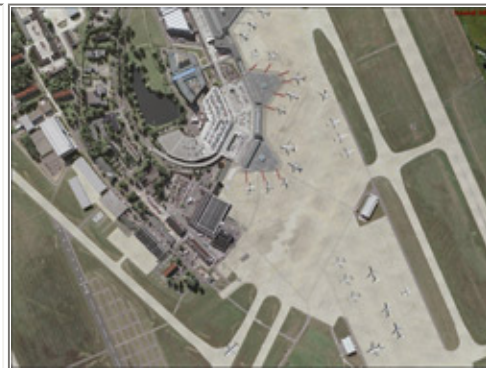
I always believed that scenery wouldn't require much of a manual. But they seem to change in page numbers from developer to developer. The manual that comes with GA2 – Hannover is in PDF format at a total of 26 pages in length. Only 10 (not including cover) are in English, but it covers everything you would want to know.

It includes a brief history of the airport, its traffic, nav aids, frequencies and runways (of which there are 3, all parallel) through to how to optimize your system and change some scenery visual settings.

To accompany this manual there is a 24 page PDF file full of airport charts, which would print in A4 size. They are clear and very easy to read.



Overview of Hannover, showing the blend between the Scenery and surround.



Top down view showing the excellent ground textures.



Hannover City with parks, rivers, roads and railways placed more accurately.



Across Hannover again, with the airport in the background. Notice the railways layout in the centre right of the image.

Setting up the Scenery

I loaded FS and went directly to the settings menu. The way that the German Airports team program their scenery, in particular the ground vehicles, is fairly unique. They use a system called Dynamic Airport enhancement services, utilizing a special module created by Maurizio Gavioli. This allows ground movements that are far more advanced than what FS itself can offer. One of the best results is that it allows the end user to change how much road traffic they see scooting around the aprons, or turn it off completely, all within FS (using the dynamic scenery settings). However, this feature may come at a cost to users of other sceneries that require the dynamic scenery feature to be off. (For example UK2000 Gatwick when an older version of UK2000 Gatwick is installed).

Test System

Pentium 4 3.2ghz
 ATI Radeon X800GTO -
 128mb AGP
 2MB (4x512MB) Nanya -
 DDR2 RAM
 Realtek AC'97 Audio
 Windows XP Home SP2

Flying Time:
 15 hours

You may find yourself wanting to turn this feature off anyway. Certainly one thing that could become frustrating were the areas that the vehicles drive. They have a tendency to drive straight across your path. Aerosoft says in the manual, "that the cars cannot 'detect' your aircraft and stop". However, the simple solution is to just not put the cars where they could collide. In a number of places, the vehicles are beside the position they should be, and drive on the dirt or the wrong side of the road.

Performance

After playing with the settings to optimize my 'rig', I clicked fly now and braced myself for the expected slide show. But it never came. What I was greeted with, were frame rates comparable to non-detailed default airports. Obviously a lot of time has been spent getting this just right, and the result is high frame rates even when using highly detailed aircraft. Personally, my setup is not exactly slow and user's performance will alter system to system. But apart from a slight stutter when the scenery loads (including panning around in spot view) frame rates were extremely good.

Buildings and Surroundings

The high frame rates are required. Not because of visual approaches, since all except the centre runway have ILS, but they are required because the surrounding area has also been reshaped, and can be flown VFR. This seems to be a common trait of Aerosoft releases. You will instantly notice that the rivers and hills seem to be more accurately placed and have more defined lines in comparison to default scenery. By extending the landclass out further than the airport, there are no cliffs around the airport.

The research done by the German Airports team is evident. Because of restrictions nowadays, they rely a lot on airport staff. Aerosoft have developed quite a good relation with the airports, and the end result is highly detailed sceneries. As you get closer to the airport, you start to see more and more specially placed buildings. You could spend quite a lot of time trundling along the dirt roads around the airport, following the service vehicles, and exploring the structures that define the boundary.

One structure certainly worth taking a look at is the German Police Helicopter station. Not because it is stunningly modeled, but because it adds yet another type of aircraft to fly at Hannover. When selecting your start position in the FS menus there are 3 helipads to choose from. Strangely though, none of these are at the Heli station. One (no.3) is opposite, but all 3 are on taxiways – not quite your expected start position.



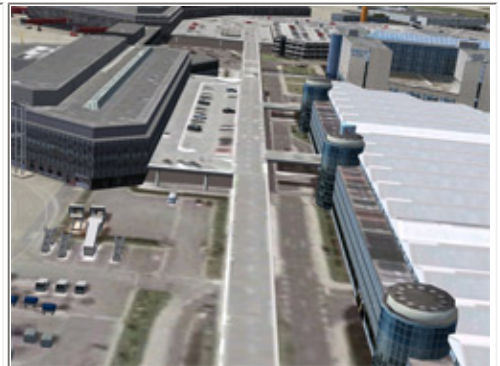
The hotel, with the terminal in the foreground.



Some more of the buildings on the outskirts of Hannover.



Police Helicopter station form ground level, with the fire station behind.



<p>Hanger 1 belonging to Hapagfly (TUI). Note the 737 that is apparently in for servicing.</p>	<p>Fuel and catering plants, between the 2 runways.</p>	<p>The centre of the airport, including car parks, roads and terminal entrances</p>
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Textures

Hannover is built onto of 1m/pxl ground photos and they look superb. It's become a standard feature of add-on sceneries now, and really adds a tremendous amount of realism because you no longer fly from one generic field to another generic field. Because of the ground textures, when you land you will really feel like you are landing on German soil. Best of all, it blends into the surrounding area so well that you won't notice where the sewing machine ran.



The changing faces of Hannover. Left to right; Spring/summer, autumn, Night and winter.

Another feature that finds itself in the Hannover scenery is the seasonal textures. As with all sceneries, this is programmed according to date rather than the weather. But as it hardly ever snows in the summer you shouldn't have a problem. The seasonals are superb though. I'm using Ground Environment and was expecting clear divides, but they just don't exist. Only 3 seasonal variants are programmed. Summer (which doubles to create spring) winter (snow) and autumn. There is no 'hard winter' (winter non-snow textures) because they are not required at Hannover; in FS it snows the moment winter arrives.

This is further assisted by the stunning custom textures on buildings. Colors are exactly what you would expect of an airport of this nature and none of the textures come across as garish. The windows are particularly worth paying attention to, as depending on the style, you will find hints as to what's inside. Giving an impression that the inside of each terminal is modeled in as much detail as the outside, the older buildings find themselves with dirtier windows, and grayer in colour.

The same technique of hinting at what's inside was applied on the open Hapagfly hangar, where an aircraft can be seen undergoing maintenance. Even though the actual hangar side is flat!

The tree textures sometimes glitch and you are able to see other things through them, such as clouds, buildings and vehicles. I feel that these textures should have been rectified, or should be rectified in the near future, but it is only the screen shooters that will have to avoid the see-through trees as it won't actually affect you once you're flying.

The attention to detail is certainly not reserved for the daytime. While you may want to fly into the airport more during daylight hours, arriving late will not disappoint. Just as much time has been spent on night lighting. The first time I flew into Hannover airport in FS, it was dark. I arrived on stand, switched off and sat in the dark for a bit. The German airports team has done a great job of recreating that empty feeling that airports tend to get at night.

However, nice as the night lighting was, I did from time to time think that it was too dark. I don't know how the aprons are lit in real life, but the night textures only seem to reflect the glow from the terminal buildings onto the apron. This can also make the airport hard to spot when flying VFR at night. Of course, that is entirely down to personal preference.



The Maritim Hotel at night. A loud place to stay!

The terminal lighting is suitably subtle, but the apron could be brighter.

The other, newer control tower.

Parking at the Airport (AFCAD Design)

With Mega-airport Frankfurt, the German airports team introduced a system called the Automatic Docking System, or

AGNIS, as it is referred to. This system also finds itself at Hannover. Don't let this fool you. What it does is tell the aircraft exactly where to stop, and park properly. It does not make the jetways move and lineup with your aircraft.



Gate 1. One area where cars should not drive on the main apron.



Another excellently detailed static jet way at Gate 11.



The AGNIS in action. The system counts down in increments of 5m from 30m, until you get to 5m, where it counts down in sets of 1m.

The German airports team (and many other top design teams too) decided that until the gates could align perfectly with every aircraft, then it would always be unrealistic, and/or detract from realism. Whether this is true or not still remains in debate, but the good news is that Hannover is compatible with Aerosoft's new Airport Enhancement Services, and so moving gates can be added, at a small cost.

I was very impressed with the way that the runways were programmed. Normally when you request taxi clearance, the ATC sends you to the nearest runway. In almost all cases here, the nearest runway would be 9C/27C. Far too short, and hardly used anyway. However, it always sends you to 9L/27R regardless of where you request clearance. The only problem being that GA AI traffic will not change their runway to 9C/27C, and always join in with the main commercial traffic on 9L/27R.



Looking down the runway and across the terminals. Fantastic details all the way into the airport.



Looking out toward runway 9L/27R across the GA1 Airpark.

Runway 9R/27L is only ever used for landing. Although this increases initial queues when you first load up, (especially if you are using a high number of AI Traffic, such as Just Flight Traffic 2005, which I am using) the traffic flow is greatly increased, and you will hardly see long lines of traffic. All runways are available for landing on, and if you choose 9C/27C, the AI aircraft that taxi across your final approach path will be told to hold position so that you don't careen into them.

The Future of German Airports for FS

Before I go on to summarize, I thought it was worth noting that the scenery is not one of the 'Mega Airport' series. And because of this, it lacks a lot of the finish we see with Frankfurt, Vienna and hopefully the forthcoming Heathrow. For example, the terminal buildings seem to be created flat, with ridges being added using textures, rather than 3D. The jetways occasionally seem a little 'glued on' rather than an integral part of the terminal building and the textures can sometimes be a little lower than possible. The GA Series only takes around half the time to develop, taking around 3 months, whereas somewhere like Mega Airport Frankfurt could take more than 6.



The bright orange control tower, at the centre of the airport.



No active gates, but can be rectified using Aerosoft's new AES.



Excellently modelled, static, ground services fleet.

But that finish that it lacks does not cause the product to be any less than brilliant. As I said, textures make up for the lack of 3D ridges. So much so, that I didn't notice it until I was looking back at the screenshots. The lowered resolution roads and roofs are pin sharp where they need to be, and lower where only the most critical of us would want them to be higher.

A service pack for the scenery was also released recently, showing that the German Airports team and Aerosoft are certainly willing to give the customer the best possible product. I have also found that in the past, Aerosoft's support service (in particular their 'ticket' system) has been reliable, and I have always received answers to my questions.

From looking at the German airport team's website and an email full of information from Aerosoft's Mathijs Kok, which I have used throughout out this review, the next German Airports 2 release will be the nice smelling airport EDDK, Cologne/ Bonn and I very much look forward to it.

Summary/Closing Remarks

I have always been a firm believer that the feel of a product makes or breaks it. Regardless of whether an aircraft flies exactly by the numbers in the book, or whether you can park your car in the same spot you do at work with photographic scenery, it is how it actually feels to use the product that makes that final choice; good or bad.

Hannover certainly feels right. From the first day you leave your tire marks on a runway, to the moment you call 'rotate', you will feel immersed in Hannover's beauty, and will be willing an engine to fail so that you can declare an emergency and land again.

I would completely recommend this scenery, especially to those living in Europe. If you enjoy flying real schedules in heavy aircraft or even small, regional jets, Hannover will provide you with a perfect hub. Similarly, if you love GA, then Hannover and its surroundings will give you plenty of land to flutter over. Even military pilots are catered for! This scenery is perfect for all your virtual flying needs.



My Just Flight Seneca takes off from runway 27C at dawn. Notice the ground vehicles rushing to their required positions.



Banking to fly parallel with the runways. All high points are marked with red lights, which seem to stand out from the scenery

What I Like About German Airports 2 - Hannover

- The frame rates!
- Free FSX version/update as soon as the scenery can be updated.
- Definitely The right 'feel' (see summary)
- Runway programming and the resulting lack of traffic queues.
- Blends with the surrounding scenery.

What I Don't Like About German Airports 2 - Hannover

- Cars taxing right into your aircrafts path.
- Static aircraft can only be installed when scenery is installed.
- General Aviation AI does not use 9C/27C.
- I now have to wait for the next GA2 airport.

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