

AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Package Review

RealAir Decathlon-Citabria-Scout



Product Information		
Publisher: RealAir Simulations		
Description: Package of three light GA add-on aircraft		
Download Size: 60 MV	Format: Auto-installer	Simulation Type: FS 2004
Reviewed by: Bert Pieke AVSIM Senior Staff Reviewer - 30 May 2006		

The Premise

If you like to fly VFR, hop from one little airstrip to another, and throw in some aerobatics along the way just because it makes you feel good, this RealAir package is for you. And if you already own the earlier version of either the Decathlon or the Scout, the upgrade is worth the money.

OK, now before I lose all of you who only fly the big airliners, I'd like to mention that I personally know airline captains who love to go out on the weekend and fly a "seat of the pants" aircraft, made out of wooden spars and covered in Dacron, and rediscover what made them want to fly in the first place!

I have many airplanes in my virtual hangar and even more that did not stay on my hard drive, but few that I really like to fly again and again. The Scout and the Decathlon are two of my favorites.

The real world Scout, Decathlon, and Citabria are built by American Champion Aircraft. American Champion Aircraft (ACA) is a company that prides itself on producing FAA certified light acrobatic and utility aircraft for pleasure, work, training, and true excitement. Their company web site explains that the long-standing design has proven stable and comfortable for over 50 years. ACA has owned the type certificate to the Model 7 and Model 8 Champion Line (Champs, Challengers, Citabrias, Decathlons, Scouts, etc.) since 1988, but has been supplying parts from the very beginning. New aircraft manufacture began in 1990 and has continued to grow since.

ACA's line of "Champs" is centered around the design change of metal spar wings, offering a more stable and sturdy platform than before, and is still the most versatile and affordable two seat tandem tail-dragger in its class. The privately owned company that produces the Champion Line today assures that the planes are built right, and not under the pressure of corporate cost / profit / production projections.

As you can see, these are aircraft built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts!

Installation and Documentation

The package comes as a 60 Meg download, complete with an auto-installer which worked flawlessly on my system. You will end up with six distinct models: 3 Scouts (standard wheel, tundra wheel, and floats), a Citabria, and a Decathlon, each with multiple paint jobs. Also included with this package is some specially made scenery — "Bear Gulch", set in the rural outback of Washington State in the U.S.A.

This scenery is automatically installed with the aircraft. It consists of a small bush airstrip beside a lake. There is a house, a barn which serves as a hanger for your Scout aircraft and a pontoon for operations on the lake. Flying in and out of this airstrip is a challenge in itself, since the strip is short and you have to clear a power line that inconveniently crosses not far from one end. The package can be purchased at the [RealAir web site](#).



The documentation is professionally put together and includes not only a Flying Guide with all the information you need to be able to fly these aircraft, but it also includes a detailed Pilot's Operating Handbook with specifications and checklists for each model. By the time you've finished skimming through the manuals, you'll realize that you are looking at a high quality package... and you'll be itching to take one of the aircraft for a ride.



Decathlon red/yellow



Aerobatics



Head-on view

Internal and External Views

Quoting from the documentation: "Since the critically acclaimed release of the RealAir Simulations Spitfire and SF260 aircraft, RealAir has stuck to its guns in continued development of the Virtual Cockpit-only approach to new aircraft, especially GA aircraft of the type we are known for. Our philosophy is this: 2D (static) panels were only made because the technology to build smooth and clear panels and gauges which you could see in a three-dimensional, dynamic environment in Flight Simulator were simply not of a worthwhile standard."

Now, I am a self professed high resolution 2D panel fan, and this concept flies in the face of my favorite addiction which is to modify panel layouts with new and different gauges and mess around with bitmaps in an effort to create a more realistic viewing experience. My first introduction to the new RealAir design philosophy came when I first flew their Spitfire – and was blown away by the degree of realism that had been achieved with that design.

I am happy to report that this design works equally well in these aircraft – the combination of crystal clear, totally smooth moving gauges, the view of the spinning propeller, and the subtle movement of the panel in reaction to changes in flight direction, make for a superb simulation. It is easy to forget that you are flying in your basement, and instead just get lost in the sheer joy of flying, period!

Once you get used to the cockpit, you come to realize that you can choose to display the panel a bit higher or lower and zoom in and out at will, which allows you to find your favorite position, just like arranging your seating position in the real plane. If you like, you can return to the 2D view which provides you with a functional mini-panel, and the ability to use the W-key to hide the panel for a full screen scenery view.



Decathlon pane



Scout panel 1



Scout panel 2

Flying the Decathlon / Scout

The three aircraft are similar in size, but differ in their intended use. The Decathlon is a fully aerobatic capable

aircraft, the Citabria is a basic trainer, and the Scout is a ruggedized "bush plane" workhorse.



Since the Citabria is essentially a Decathlon-lite, I've focused on the two stars in the review: The delightfully agile Decathlon and the rugged and very useful Scout.

Starting with the Decathlon, this is a true pilot's airplane. Light and powerful, it is very responsive and the RealAir flight model does a great job of making you feel you are up there with the birds. You have to take some care when coming in for a landing, for this is a tail dragger without flaps and if you are coming in fast, you will float for a long time. For that, you can practice all your favorite rolls and loops, and just generally fly around and enjoy the scenery.

The Scout is better for more purposeful trips. You can choose wheels or floats and the cockpit includes IFR instrumentation and an autopilot, and yes, very functional flaps for those short field landings. Either way, these airplanes are a blast to fly and the interior of the airplane has been finished to a high standard, including details like the fuel gauges that are mounted high up on either wing.



Sounds and Effects

The sounds are well done and add to the overall feeling of being there. The movement of the cockpit in response to flight direction changes is a really nice effect which I first saw in the simulation "Jetfighter" and have liked ever since.

To match this, the outside view has the pilot scanning his instruments and the scenery in a life like manner. The paint jobs are nicely done and the red and yellow Decathlon and blue "Bear Gulch" Scout, shown above are particularly impressive. Hard to see how this could be done any better!

Test System

P4 - 2.8 GHz
768 MB DDR Ram
GeForce4 Ti4200 128MB
Video Card
17" LCD monitor 1280x1024
resolution
CH Products joystick w/throttle
WindowsXP Professional

Flying Time:
30 hours

Summary

As you can tell from the above, I really like this package. In keeping with the real world airplanes that are modeled, this package was built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts. The outside models are lovely, and the feeling in the cockpit is unequalled – except for the earlier Spitfire, but that is not an airplane which you would take for a quick ride with a friend, which is exactly what these planes were meant for.

If you like flying, and have maybe tried the Piper Cub and want to take it “up a notch” these planes have much to offer.

What I Like About the Decathlon-Citabria-Scout package

- Great flight models, the aircraft handle well and realistically
- Nicely detailed inside and outside views
- Innovative cockpit design with fluid instruments
- Professional finish throughout, including excellent documentation
- Great “seat of the pants” flying experience

What I Don't Like About the Decathlon-Citabria-Scout package

- Nothing

Printing

If you wish to print this review or read it offline at your leisure, right click on the link below, and select "save as"

[Decathlon-Citabria-Scout](#)

(adobe acrobat required)

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