

AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Review

Commercial Level Simulations Airbus A300-600R



Rating Guide		
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Description: Airbus A300-600R Aircraft Add-on		
Download Size: 40.1 MB	Format: Zip File with Auto-installer	Simulation Type: FS2004
Reviewed by: Brian Fletcher AVSIM Staff Reviewer		
The AVSIM Commercial Rating System: 1 Star to 5 Stars (with 5 stars being exceptional) <i>Please see details of our review rating policy here.</i>		

Introduction

When it comes to trend setting innovation, perhaps no aircraft can fill a resume quite like the Airbus A300. Glass cockpit designs, supercritical airfoil sections, winglets, and center of gravity control features can all trace their roots back to the Airbus A300. Even the economic advantage of twin engines, as opposed to the tri-jets of the 1970's, can be credited to the early success of this aircraft. Certainly an aircraft with this much historical value deserves a place in Flight Simulator 2004, and thanks to Commercial Level Simulations, the A300-600R model is now available to fill that void.

The story of the Airbus A300 dates as far back as 1966 when American Airlines executive Frank Kolk was searching for a replacement for the Boeing 727 on short to medium range routes. His requirements were demanding for that time in history as he insisted on a twin jet aircraft with twin aisle seating for up to 300 passengers. Initially, he was presented with tri-jet aircraft such as the Douglas DC-10 and Lockheed L-1011 Tristar. This was due to the fact that the Federal Aviation Administration had restricted the use of twin engine aircraft on many domestic routes. Finally in 1972, the Airbus Industrie, in cooperation with Hawker Siddeley, which would later take the name of its successor British Aerospace, had developed the Airbus A300B1. This aircraft met and exceeded the demands of American Airlines by providing seating for 300 passengers, with the ability of short range domestic to long range international flights. An added bonus was the fact that this aircraft had a 30% better fuel economy than the tri-jets of that era. Airbus chose to use the American made General Electric CF6-50 engines as an added enticement for potential U.S. sales. However, the decision to use these engines instead of the British Rolls-Royce RB207 created hostility between Airbus and the British that eventually led to the withdrawal of Hawker Siddeley from further development. A few years later, however, they would return, in the form of British Aerospace, to develop the wings for future A300 models. And through negotiations, the Pratt & Whitney 4000 engines became an option for A300 orders.



A300-600R

Actual Cockpit

Actual interior

Though Airbus is based in Toulouse, France, the concept of “just in time” manufacturing techniques have spread the development of the Airbus A300, as well as other aircraft, throughout Europe. This industry leading type of construction allows certain parts of the aircraft, such as the wings, engines, and tail assembly, to be manufactured in other countries and shipped to France for final assembly. By the time the A300 entered into service in 1974, it already possessed some of the most technologically advanced features of its time. These features included aerodynamically advanced wings, airfoil sections, and surface controls. The aircraft also led the industry in efficiency by using metal billet structures, advanced automation, and wind shear protection. In fact, the A300B2 model was the first aircraft in the world with an autopilot capable of flying the aircraft from climb-out to landing.

The most recent model of the aircraft was introduced in 1988 as the A300-600. This model comes in three versions, including a passenger transport, cargo transport, and convertible variation. The convertible is designed to allow the aircraft to operate as both a cargo and passenger transport plane. This model, while serving the commercial aviation industry well, has also been utilized by many European Air Forces for troop and cargo transport. But after 30 years in production, the Airbus A300 is reaching the end of its market life. However, this aircraft will continue to serve for several years to come, mostly in the cargo transport business. It is interesting to note that both Federal Express and the United States Postal Service have both acquired a handful of these aircraft projecting a 15 year service life.

Certainly the A300 helped to pave the way for modern aviation. With incredibly advanced technology for its time, and over 30 years of serving the aviation community, it truly is a historical part of the first “Century of Flight”.

Installation and Documentation

Installation of the Airbus A300-600R is quite simple and straight forward, as the download includes an auto-install file which will do all of the dirty work for you. After double clicking on the auto-install file, your only task is to tell the program where you want the aircraft installed, which it has already figured out for you anyway. Just to be sure, you will want to verify that the auto-installer is using the main Flight Simulator aircraft folder for the installation directory. To do this, simply ensure this directory is selected when you are prompted to choose the installation location. The installation process will create two folders within your main FS aircraft folder. One will be for the model with the General Electric engines, and the other is for the model with the Pratt & Whitney engines.

Once the auto-installer is finished, the aircraft is technically ready to use, but there are a few additional steps to take if you wish. First you may want to download the liveries pack from the Commercial Level Simulations website at www.commerciallevel.com. This pack includes the textures for some of the liveries included with the aircraft. Failing to install these textures will prohibit a few of the variations from displaying properly. If you choose to download the textures, you will have the convenience of another auto-install file which will place the files in their proper location.

Again, you simply need to verify that the auto-installer is placing the files in the main Flight Simulator aircraft folder as prescribed above. Additionally, Commercial Level Simulations has listed a repaint kit on their website which can be downloaded for those of you who would like to add a personal touch to your aircraft. This file does not include an auto-installer, but two out of three isn't bad. Installation of the repaint kit may seem somewhat complicated if

Test System

Compaq Presario SR1232
 AMD Athlon 2.2 GHz
 2 GB Ram
 NVIDIA Ge Force FX5500
 StarLogic Flat Panel 21"
 Monitor at 1024 X 768
 CH USB Flight Yoke and
 Rudder Pedals
 Saitek X52 Flight Control
 System
 FTP 290 Throttle Quadrant

Flying Time:

75 hours

you don't have much experience in this area, but the download does include a fairly comprehensive instructional document to help you through the process.

As far as the aircraft documentation is concerned, virtually every aspect of the aircraft has been covered in full detail through a series of PDF manuals contained within the aircraft folders. The information is separated into four different files including panel and virtual cockpit operations, sound settings, repainting and door control keys, and aircraft flight operations.

The panel and virtual cockpit operations manual provides in depth details of the layout and functions of the panel. This manual will especially come in handy for those of you who are unfamiliar with wide body cockpits, or even for those of you who might like a refresher course. The sound settings manual includes the recommended volume levels for the Flight Simulator sound settings menu. The repainting and door control key manual gives you a full step by step process for installing additional liveries for the aircraft and displays the key commands used to open the passenger and cargo doors. The final manual, titled aircraft flight operations, gives you complete instructions on the proper manner in which to fly the aircraft. This manual covers all aspects of flight from taxiing to takeoffs and landings.

After reading all of these manuals, you should be ready to go get your Commercial Pilots License. But just in case you want more help, the Commercial Level Simulations website has provided a forum with helpful information and tips.

The Exterior Model

Amazing, excellent, outstanding. All of these words can be used to describe the fine attention to detail of the Airbus A300-600R model. From nose to tail and everywhere in between, this aircraft represents the Airbus A300-600R with precision. As you should expect from any payware aircraft, all of the surface controls are animated, including the rudders, ailerons, elevators, flaps, and spoilers. Naturally, the nose and landing gears are fully retractable, and the wheels rotate with the realism of well worn tire textures.

But what really places this aircraft in a league of its own is the aileron animation and tug pushback feature. The ailerons are made up of eight separate surface panels that extend independently from each other. These panels do not move in unison, but rather play follow the leader with each other. After the first panel is completely extended, the next will follow, then a series of four will follow suit. Finally, the inner two panels extend, assuming you have sustained the bank angle long enough. This may seem like a long process, but in reality, the ailerons function just as swiftly as any other aircraft. This feature truly highlights the fine detail of the exterior model.



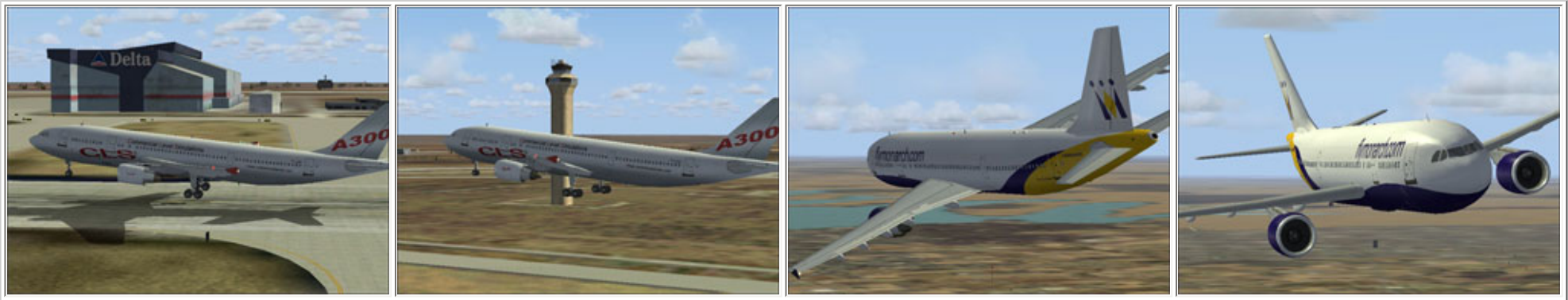
The tug pushback feature, included with the aircraft as built-in dynamic scenery, is perhaps the most innovative and enhancing feature of the aircraft. By

pressing the "shift" + "P" keys while on the ground, you would expect to see the monotonous routine of the aircraft magically moving backwards away from the gate. This is intended to represent the process of having a tug push the aircraft back, but there is one thing missing... the tug. Well, Commercial Level Simulations has filled the void of this neglected detail by including a tug during pushback operations. With the Airbus A300-600R, you will now see a tug appear in front of the aircraft when you begin pushback, and remain there until pushback is complete. I might add that the details on the tug are also very impressive.

All of the passenger and cargo doors on the aircraft open and close with the realistic addition of "longbar" hinges, which allow the doors to separate slightly from the fuselage when opening. This, while providing a nice touch of eye candy, also provides a larger entrance and exit, as well as more room for loading and unloading cargo. Even though you won't actually see any cargo being loaded, it is nice to know that Commercial Level Simulations chose not to overlook this industry leading feature. As far as the reflections are concerned, it would be a tall order to find an aircraft with more realism. I especially applaud the manner in which the fuselage reflects light without creating a glaring effect. From any angle, you will notice that the impact of light on the aircraft is absorbed just right to display a nice shine without disguising the detailed texturing.



Speaking of light, with little exception, the Commercial Level Simulations Airbus A300-600R has one of the most realistic and brilliant lighting effects I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing. Each wingtip contains a forward and aft steady light with a fair amount of residual lighting. These are complimented by several flashing beacons on the top and bottom of the fuselage as well as the rear of the horizontal stabilizer. The tail is highlighted by an accent light, which is especially pleasant for liveries with creative tail artwork. The forward light from the nose gear adds a nice touch of realism by providing the pilot with ample illumination that fades as it widens. This is done by creating the brightest light straight forward and lessening the effect as it extends forward and to the sides. The one exception to the magnificent lighting is the fact that the nose gear headlight appears to come from nowhere. The light bulb itself does not express any glow, or forward lighting. The cockpit also neglects to display any light when looking in from the outside, but I found neither of these absences of light to be much of a concern.



As aforementioned, the Airbus A300-600R package comes complete with two models representing the General Electric and Pratt & Whitney engines. The differences are only slightly noticeable to the untrained eye. Between the two models, the liveries of Air Paradise, Iran Air, Lufthansa, and Monarch Airlines are provided. In addition to these, an Airbus Industries and Commercial Level Simulations livery has been added, both of which are as finely detailed as the rest. In deed the detail of the exterior model is second to none, but I do most of my flying from the cockpit, so let's go take a look inside.

The Interior Model

If you find yourself spending a lot of time in the virtual cockpit, you will be pleased with the detail and functionality inside this aircraft. All of the gauges on the instrument panel are fully animated, and the autopilot and radio buttons, knobs, and switches are functional in this view as well. Complimenting these features are fully animated rudder pedals, flight yoke, throttle levers, and parking brake, flap, and spoiler controls. The view from the virtual cockpit is very panoramic, and provides a great view on approach from any position.

The configuration of the flight deck is very comfortable and easy to navigate. All of the primary instrumentation is centered directly in front of the pilot, and the throttle controls can be accessed by a slight turn to the pilot's right. The autopilot controls are easily utilized without the need to adjust your viewpoint. The opposite side of the panel is also fully functional, allowing you to fly from the co-pilots position if you choose.



When you enter the virtual cockpit, you will find the default viewpoint to be exceptionally close to the panel. As you zoom out (by use of the "minus" key), you will find that while the panel becomes more available, the instruments only remain vivid for the first few zoom settings. I have found the best view to be at .50, which makes the gauges readable, and still gives you a good view of the left 2/3 of the panel. The autopilot digital readouts will also be clear at

this zoom point, but will require a slight turn to the right in order to see them all.

As with most aircraft, flying from the virtual cockpit can provide an adverse affect on your frame rates. In this case, however, I found the frame rates to decrease an average of only 4 frames per second, making this view much more frame rate friendly than I had anticipated. I also noticed that the virtual cockpit view is enabled with little or no delay when switching from the panel. The virtual cockpit and panel are virtually identical, with the panel being larger and displaying the left side only. This feature makes the virtual cockpit much easier to navigate, and prevents the pilot from having to relearn where everything is when you switch views.

The Panel

Though initially intimidating and complex in appearance, the panel in this aircraft is actually quite user friendly. The panel is divided into four sections, including the primary flight display, secondary flight display, autopilot, and overhead panels.

The primary flight display contains the most essential instruments, including the airspeed, heading, and vertical speed indicators as well as the altimeter. These instruments are in the form of both dial and electronic (or glass) gauges. The primary flight display is located directly in front of the pilots view providing clear and legible readouts. The right side of the panel contains the secondary flight display, containing the remainder of the instrumentation necessary for flight. Here you will find two large electronic displays providing fuel and door information. The fuel levels of each tank can be monitored throughout the flight by use of the display to the far right. The display on the left shows you the status of the aircraft doors, and allows you to open and close them with a simple click of the mouse.



Above the secondary flight display is the autopilot panel. This panel is an all inclusive location for controlling every aspect of the autopilot feature. Conveniently, the digital speed, altitude, heading, and vertical speed readouts are fairly large. In fact, there is no need for squinting to view any of the instruments on the panel. Finally we come to the overhead panel, which contains the toggle switches for the lights, pitot heat, and anti-icing. There are also rotary knobs for engine start-up and shutdown located here.

Unlike the default wide body aircraft, this overhead display can not be closed, but it is not obstructive in any way. In fact, the forward view is relatively unrestricted and quite panoramic. As for the rest of the viewpoints, anything to the left of the pilot is fairly wide open with the exception of a small section of the frame to the pilots forward left. Looking across the cockpit, you will have a great fixed view of the right side of the instrument panel, and the co-pilots seat, which is empty.

The three additional pop-up panels include a default radio stack and Garmin 500 GPS, as well as a throttle and engine control panel. The radio stack and GPS fit perfectly over top of the secondary control panel without restricting the view of essential gauges. The throttle panel, however, is a bulky and relatively unappealing pop-up that is probably best hidden. The lighting on the panel is very appealing though. The entire panel has a soft white backlight

that provides just the right amount of glow over the dial gauges, and the electronic gauges are lit with a multitude of different colors.

Day or night, everything on the panel is very clear and functional. An added benefit of this panel is the fact that it is a mirror image of the virtual cockpit. This is especially nice when switching between the two views so that you do not have to re-familiarize yourself with the location of the gauges and indicators. Add this to the fact that every control necessary for flight is available for use with a simple click of the mouse and this makes for a very impressive panel.

Sound

Recorded from actual CF6-50 engines, the sound set for this aircraft is unbelievable. In fact, I have found the 36 individual wave files used in this sound set to form the most realistic sounds that I have ever heard emitting from Flight Simulator. From the exterior or "spot" view, the deep roar of the jet engines is complimented by the slight "hissing" sound common to the larger General Electric engines. Now would be a good time to note that both the General Electric and Pratt & Whitney models of this aircraft utilize the same sound set. However, I have been informed by Commercial Level Simulations that the sounds were recorded from actual General Electric CF6-80 engines.

Stepping inside the cockpit, the engine sounds are lowered just enough to allow for the distinct and identifiable sounds of the control surfaces deploying. From this viewpoint, the pilot is treated to the traditional "clanking" sounds familiar to this style of aircraft. An added bonus is the wheel roll sound which was also taken from a real aircraft. And of course you can expect to hear all of the "clicking" sounds associated with flipping toggle switches and push button controls.

All in all, I have found every aspect of the sound set to be extraordinary and as real to life as Flight Simulator will allow. It is important to note that the sound file manual included with the aircraft may request that you adjust your in game sound settings in order for you to fully enjoy the sound package. I found myself having to adjust the sliders significantly from the default settings in order to match the recommendations within the manual. However, this suggested setting not only makes the Airbus sound fantastic, but I have found it to work well with most of my other aircraft too.

Airfile

Obviously, it is difficult to judge the accuracy of an airfile without having actually flown the real aircraft. But in this case, it would be hard to imagine the real aircraft performing any different than this one. This is due, in part, to the fact that the designer of this airfile actually flew in an Airbus simulator to assist in the creation of the flight dynamics.

As you would probably expect, this aircraft is not going to do barrel roles and break the sound barrier. On the other hand, it is not exactly sluggish either. On ascent, the aircraft handles well on climbs up to 3000 fpm, and will descend at 2000 fpm without any adverse affects. The aircraft will cruise steadily at 350 nm/h, and can reach speeds of almost 400 nm/h before becoming unstable. During banks, the aircraft responds swiftly to aileron commands and performs a smooth rollout from any bank angle.

Takeoffs and landings are both a pleasure in this aircraft as well. During takeoff, the aircraft accelerates expediently, and with flaps, can operate from short airfields. The transition to climb is considerably smooth with little or no fallout. Landing this aircraft is anything but a "cross your fingers occasion". With the reverse thrusters and a strong braking system, I have found that little more than a couple of thousand feet is required for a safe arrival.

Taxiing is a little more complicated in this aircraft than most. With a radius of only 60 degrees, turns must be coordinated in advance. While taxiing at certain airports with tight taxiways, I found myself in the grass on a few occasions. This can also make it difficult to line yourself with the runway centerline if you overshoot your turn. However, this does not indicate an error in the construction of this aircraft, as the real A300's had a similar turning radius.

For those of you who would prefer a more novice airfile, I have been informed that Commercial Level Simulations will be releasing an alternate airfile for download. This is not to suggest that the file included with the aircraft is inaccurate, but instead will simply give you the option of using the realistic version, or switching to a more ground friendly airfile.

Let's Take A Flight

Thus far I have concluded that the aircraft looks and sounds fantastic, and the flight dynamics seem to mirror those of its real life counterpart. Now I think it is time to put it all together and go take a flight. For today's adventure I will be using the "Airbus Industries" variation with the Pratt & Whitney engines to travel from Francazal Air Base in Toulouse, France 482 nm to London's Heathrow airport. Of course I will want some free time to step outside and admire the aircraft, so I will just set up a direct GPS flight and let the autopilot do most of the work.

The fun begins parked on the cargo ramp listening to the engines spool up. Surrounded by the awesome rumble of the CF6-50 engines, I began pushback and immediately switched to the "spot view" to watch the tug go to work. This part is so much fun that I wish the tug could take me all the way to the runway. But instead, I will have to try get there by myself, though the wide turning radius does make it a little difficult.



After making it to the runway (only touching the grass once), I received takeoff clearance and was on my way into the wild blue yonder. A steady 2000 fpm climb and a few heading corrections later I reached 10,000 feet and decided to let the autopilot take over. Naturally, the autopilot does its job just fine and gets me to 30,000 feet straight and level. Now it's time to go get some nice screenshots.

Of course I spent so much time looking at the plane that I failed to notice I was only 50 nm from Heathrow, and still at 30,000 feet. It looks like I will get to see how well this bird handles on a steep descent. Though my passengers will surely file a complaint, the aircraft performed well all the way into the traffic pattern. After a couple of hard banks, I can now put my landing abilities to the test.



Aligned with the runway, I have the flaps set, landing gear down, and am ready to land. Of course after descending almost 30,000 feet in just a few minutes, I am going just a little too fast for this operation. Luckily, the spoilers responded quickly and I made it safe and sound. Now I have to try to get this bird to the gate, hopefully staying on the concrete this time.



Finally, I made it all the way to the gate without mowing the grass. Unfortunately, I kind of overshot the jetway just a little bit. I'm not sure if it was an accident, or if I really just wanted to see the tug again. Either way, it makes for an interesting screenshot. So with another successful flight in the books, it's time to conclude this review, after just one more flight of course.

In Closing

After having flown this aircraft for almost 75 hours in a variety of scenarios, I now wonder how I ever enjoyed Flight Simulator without it. To be fair and honest for all readers, I would normally use this section to mention anything negative about the aircraft, or to suggest reasons why some may not like it. But in this case there is absolutely nothing that I can find wrong with this aircraft, or any reason that I can imagine somebody not liking it.

Every detail of the aircraft has been designed with the utmost precision, and has been researched in depth to recreate the actual A330-600R to perfection. In fact, the only noticeable difference between this model and the real aircraft is that you don't have to have your commercial pilot's license to fly this one.

So what makes this product worth your hard earned money? The excellent modeling, realistic sound set, great flight dynamics, and the opportunity to explore a piece of history every time you step into the cockpit. And don't forget the repaint kits for those of you who want to add your own liveries. This add-on is more than just another aircraft for the collection, it is an addiction. Even after all of the flights I performed while reviewing this bird, I still find myself in the cockpit for one more before I go to bed.

In conclusion, I believe that this aircraft could be the best \$22.75 that you ever spend for an add-on. From the immaculate detail to the ease of operation for all pilots from novice to expert, I give this product two thumbs up. As for my favorite part of this aircraft, it would probably be all of the hard drive space I saved by getting rid of all my other wide bodies.



What I Like About the Airbus A300-600R

- Excellent exterior modeling
- Outstanding sound set
- Highly detailed and functional virtual cockpit
- Thorough and informative documentation
- Wide selection of realistic liveries
- Very frame rate friendly
- Accurate airfile

What I Don't Like About the Airbus A300-600R

- There is nothing to dislike about this product

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(adobe acrobat required)

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