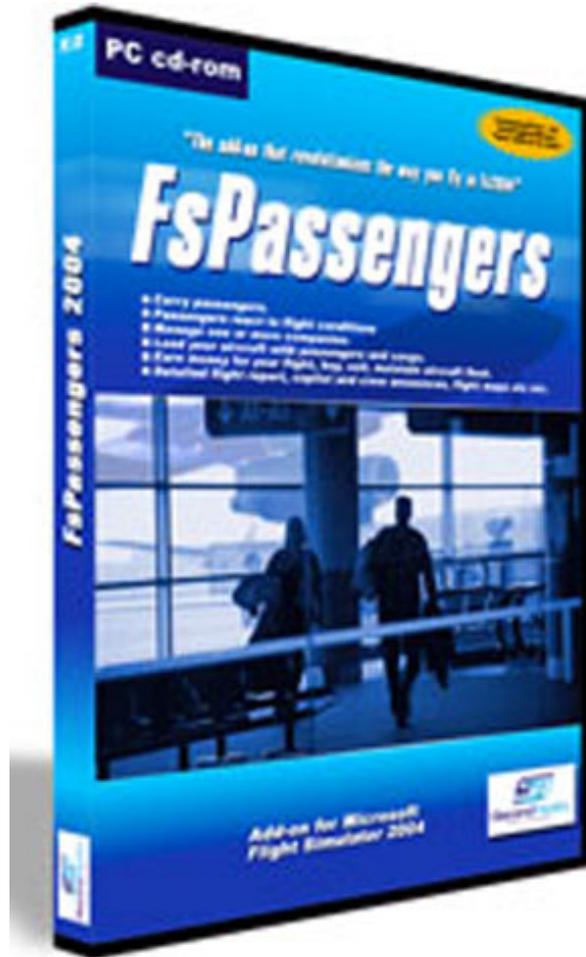


AVSIM Commercial Utility Review

FS Passenger 2004



Product Information		
Publisher: FS Passengers		
Description: Flight Utility		
Download Size: 26.7 MB	Format: Executable	Simulation Type: MSFS 2004
Reviewed by: Alexis Esquerra AVSIM Staff Reviewer		

Introduction

Chances are that if you have ever taken one of MSFS' airliners up for a spin, you have at least once wondered what it's like to be an airline captain. It'ss okay; I honestly don't think you're alone in the world in that respect. All you have to do is search on airliner add-ons available for MSFS and you'll find that there are legions of 'armchair

captains' that love to emulate this respected profession.

Unfortunately, I have found that the experience is a touch incomplete when one considers the full scope of an airline pilot's duties and general responsibility to those who choose to fly with him or her. Don't get me wrong; there are many excellent programs and organizations that virtually allows you to fly the machines and the routes, but when it boils down to the essentials, one is mostly left to his or her imagination as to the concepts of 'what-is-right?' and 'what-is-wrong?' flying and service wise. Short of overstressing or crashing, MSFS does not provide much else in regards to setting the standards to adhere to.

Enter Fs Passenger 2004. Daniel Polli, creator of Orbiter, decided to address this issue in the form of Fs Passenger 2004. For those of you who spend any respectable amount of time investigating the life and times of commercial aviation, it's time to strap yourself in, break out the checklists, plan ahead, and please the flying public.

Installation and Documentation

FsP is downloaded directly from the manufacturer's website, www.fspassengers.com, and installation posed no problems whatsoever. For those of you who may fall under the 'hesitate-I'm-going-to-wait-until-my-friend-gets-it' category, you may rejoice, for the FsP's installation file also doubles as a demo. Unlike every other demo I've ever gone through, you are allowed to completely experience first hand everything that this program is about. Yes, there is a restriction about where you can fly from with the program running (namely the first region that you fire it up in), but every facet of it is available for your investigation to ultimately decide whether or not it is for you.

If you decide that it is indeed what you want, it becomes a matter of purchasing the unlock code (31.90 Euros (\$38.38 US) at time of review), which instantly unrestricts the program for world-wide use. Oh, if only everything else in this world was this convenient!

The included documentation is thorough and should answer any and all questions you may have about FsP's internal workings.

General Overview

Once active, FsP primarily thrusts the user into the role of Professional Pilot and you get a taste of what it's like to fly like the big (or small) boys and girls of commercial aviation. But as a side-result, you are also expected to create and maintain that company as well. Yes, there is a secondary role akin to being CEO that has to be dealt with as you go. And since there's no getting out of it, we may as well get covering those bases over with.

The CEO realm is where FsP begins. It is here that the user gets things started by creating the company and it's associated pilot(s). It is also at this point that difficulty levels are selected, options are set and company goals are defined. It is the latter that is worth noting here, as FsP allows one to explore some of the interesting scenarios contained within.



You can create multiple companies.
Pick which one you want fly that day
from here.

Once your company is up and running, it's time to start running it and the 'Company Manager' is the window of choice for this task. This is the place where you can check up on your roster of pilots, set service price & quality levels, monitor the oil price index, and so forth. But the single biggest reason for the 'Company Manager' Window is the aircraft, plain (bad pun) and simple. You are allowed to purchase aircraft as you see fit (limited to scenario and available funds) and maintain them, mechanically speaking. Please note that the program does not restrict one the 'heavy metal' realm – GA aircraft can be brought into play as well.

Speaking of aircraft, it goes without saying that there are a wide variety of add-on aircraft out there that you may wish to import to your fledgling company's fleet. I am happy to report that FsP seems to be able to support a rather wide variety of them. I found that purchasing and using such machines as DM Flight Sim's HS-121, Dreamfleet's 727, PMDG's 737/747-400, RFP's 747, and PSS's Concorde went without a hitch (yes, I tend to lean towards the airliners). The program fully recognizes these planes by type, making minor tweaks to the airfile for weight and balance purposes (backing up the original in the process). This does nothing to harm the add-on itself.

A few tested add-ons that the program seemed to have a problem with were Aerosim's L1011 and Eaglesoft's SR-20. Bboth remained quite usable with the program resorting to a 'based-on-weight' profile. Countering this, is that users are given the opportunity to define any profile that isn't included with the utility. Naturally, FsP was designed to handle MSFS's default aircraft, so there's no need to worry about those machines.

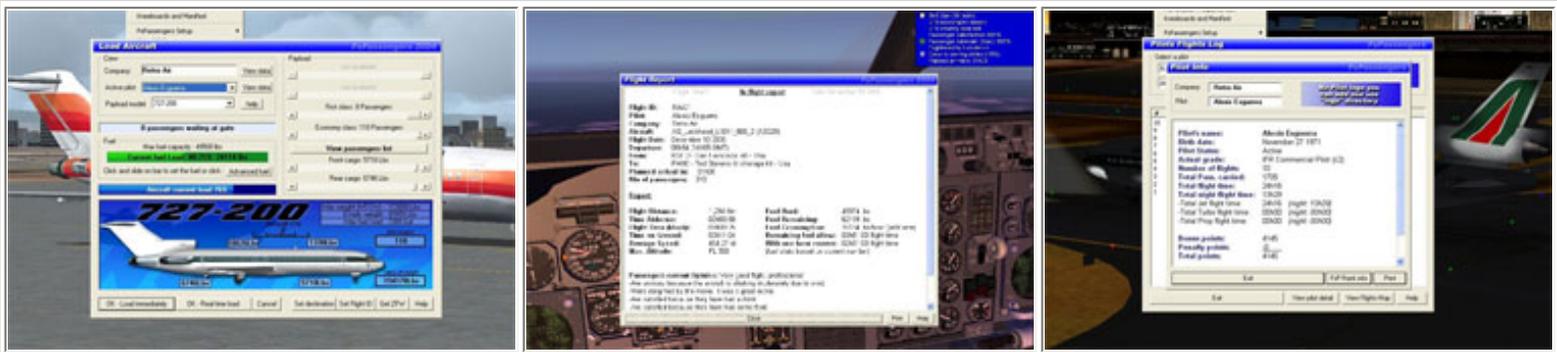


Purchase the aircraft you want.

The program may need to make some harmless modifications

Once all the preliminaries are completed, it's time to earn your company some capital. This boils down to flying around with a planeload of passengers and cargo, getting them to where they need to go... or more correctly, where you want them to go. Outside certain scenarios, the program does not assign routes (those aforementioned scenarios may ask you to fly from or to a general area, but nothing more), so you have a lot of latitude in choosing that final destination. Heck, technically, you don't have to declare a destination, but doing so and nailing your arrival time may garner you some extra kudos.

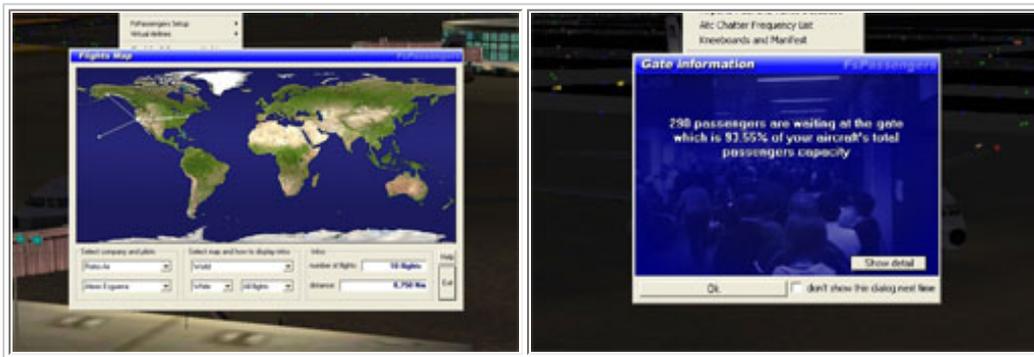
The very core of FsP lies in the sudden presence of passengers. Quite suddenly, you'll notice that you have X amount of people in the back of the plane, and from the moment you start the flight, you are tasked with getting them safely to their destination. While enroute, you might want to keep them happy, both with your superb flying skills (keeping it smooth), and superior inflight service (movies, drinks, and food). A status window keeps you apprised of their general opinion while an available inflight report lays out the specifics (Hey! They're getting hungry!). A helpful GPWS, virtual copilot, and a virtual cabin attendant are also provided, handy little optional tools to lighten the load if so desired or required.



Some of the various windows: Load Aircraft, Inflight Report (with Status Window in upper left), and Pilot Detail

Once landed, a full blown critique becomes available for your review. Outlining a lot of details such as flight parameters (speeds, altitude, times, etc), what-went-rights, what-went-wrongs, any income you might have earned, and an overall rating. Whatever they may be, the results can or will be recorded in the program's own independent flight log, a nice touch.

A high enough rating earns your company the flying public's confidence (while a low rating will lose some of it). This translates into higher (lower) passenger loads, which ultimately earns you more (less) capital. If enabled, you might find your pilot rising (or declining) in rank as well. Needless to say, you might want to be at the top of your game if you want to grab that shiny new jet you so badly want. Piece of cake, right?



Maybe not...

Big Brother

What sets FSp apart from the rest of the wannabe ATP crowd, was the level of enforcement it imparts on the neophyte Captain Left Seat in regards to basic safety. Being responsible for the transportation of X number of passengers means possessing the requisite skills and mentality to do it safely and consistently. Let's face it, an airline wouldn't hire the services of a pilot who couldn't prove he had what it took to safely operate a 737 chocked full of passengers. Let alone, retain one who had a panache to barrel roll one on a whim. This is the meat and potatoes of FSp; to monitor for and catch any and every little thing that you do to violate those accords.

The add-on is very good at this edict. It's looking for infringements on the basics, namely anything that might make a passenger's eyes go wide like quarters. Can you remember the last time your trusted pilot rolled his machine past 50 degrees in a turn?

In our post-Kai Tak Int'l world, you're probably drawing a blank, because it isn't supposed to happen. Do you prefer to fly around with only fumes in the fuel tanks or slam the plane down on landing like you're trying to bury it? Bad bad pilot. In addition to watching for the don't-descend-like-you're-a-brick violations, the inflight service routine is also monitored. Did you dare to flying 200+ people clear across the Pacific without so much as putting on a movie to help pass the time? Or cut short your meal service and not get food to those last 15 or so passengers before landing? Just think of the add-on as an NTSB investigator, a flight data recorder, and a 1-800 customer service rep

all rolled into one.

While FsP was generally good at doing what it is designed to, admittedly I found it lacking in a few areas. A zoom climb that pegged the VSI off the scale could be done without penalty, as could taking off and landing without ATC clearance (or any radio contact for that matter). Still, enough is contained within to where you definitely get that sense of being kept in check and to get things right. Which is pretty much the whole point.

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!

If the aforementioned was all FsP had to offer, it would be doing a good job. But we've only covered half of it's potential. Keeping you in check may be the meat-n-potatoes of this program, but its ability to test your mettle as a professional aviator is truly the sweet icing on the cake. I've heard that ATP salaries aren't based on their flying passengers around the globe, but for successfully dealing with the occasional emergency that might endanger the lives entrusted to them.

Be prepared to deal with those emergencies, because FsP will bring them to you're PC. A host of problems are ready to plague your mount, ranging from the modest (minor engine fluctuations) all the way to the severe (cabin decompression). Such potential for disaster means that the plane and its systems now require constant monitoring by you (as in real life), be it a hop around the block or that long trans-oceanic flight. The chances of a malfunction (and it's severity) is fully scalable from the add-on's options (either fixed by scenario or altered at will), but when enabled, you'd better be on your toes.



A sample of an inflight emergency. Note the Status Window, telling me how 'happy' everyone was at the time.

How these problems can occur vary. If you happen to be careless enough, you might bring it upon yourself. Like the time I lost track of a situation and left my flaps hanging out in the wind. Sure enough, I heard a loud BANG when I exceeded their maximum rated airspeed and they remained jammed for the rest of the flight. Other times, external forces may thrust it upon you. Like that dumb bird that was ingested into the engine of my beloved 727 on takeoff (I'm not making this stuff up!).

Then again, it may just happen out of the blue. The electrical system may just decide to give up the ghost at FL330, no matter how well maintained your plane is. Lastly, some yahoo on the ground may do unto you what occurred to a cargo plane not too long ago – fire upon you (yes... as in attack your plane) with weapons heavy enough to cause serious harm – PING PING, no more hydraulics!

Needless to say, when it does hit the fan, it really factors in a whole new dimension to the sim. Sure, other add-ons have done this kind of thing before, but the whole passenger factor adds a flavor of the dramatic. Thus placing a touch more pressure on your shoulders to bring the bird back down in one piece. And yes, once alerted to the emergency, they do react as passengers do; opinion drops off the scale while their fear factor virtually explodes right through it. And if the situation is particularly grave enough, you just might pick up the sounds of their screams too.

Performance and Stability

Because FsP runs concurrent to MSFS and is constantly analyzing what is going on within, there is a bit of a performance impact. On its own with the default aircraft in use, it is marginal at the very worst, but as more complex aircraft are thrown into the mix, the framerate can - and in my case did - get progressively worse. The

Test System
CPU: P4 (Intel) – 3.2 GHz
RAM: 1.0 GB
Video: ATI X300SE (128 MB)
Sound – SB Audigy
Flying Time: 25 hours

hardest hit I saw was a 10-12 FPS drop, but on average it seemed to hover in and around a 3-5 FPS decline. Translation – FsP should run fairly well on any machine that comes even remotely close to my rig's specs. Anyone with a better PC system (which at this point is probably a lot) should have zero problems

As to the stability of the program, no bugs or anomalies were detected. Overall, it's a very solid piece of software.

Shortcomings?

It's hard to address the shortcomings of any program that covers such a broad scope. After all, we're talking about an add-on that goes so far as to promote turning on some cabin music when the plane is on the ground just to please the

virtual passengers.

If the issue was pushed, I would have to say that I was disappointed by the lack of a repaint utility for the aircraft you add to your fleet. But I have to emphasize once again; given what else is provided, it's a small trade-off to be sure.

In Closing

I could go on and on about what makes FsP an excellent utility, but I'll leave it at "I have never encountered any software for MSFS that has given me such an overall sense of what it's like to fly as a profession."



I have yet to experience that life, but I'm fairly certain that this add-on has covered the general basics, and it seems to have done so very well. And if that doesn't fit your bill, keep in mind that it also provides for establishing/maintaining flight proficiency, not to mention the occasional challenge when things go awry. It's a brilliant piece of work, at least from my experience, that has been long in coming.

What I Like About FS Passenger
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Great basic flight discipline enforcement. ● Challenging inflight emergencies. ● Good overall immersion factor.

What I Don't Like About FS Passenger

- Other than my nitpick about a repaint utility, absolutely nothing.

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