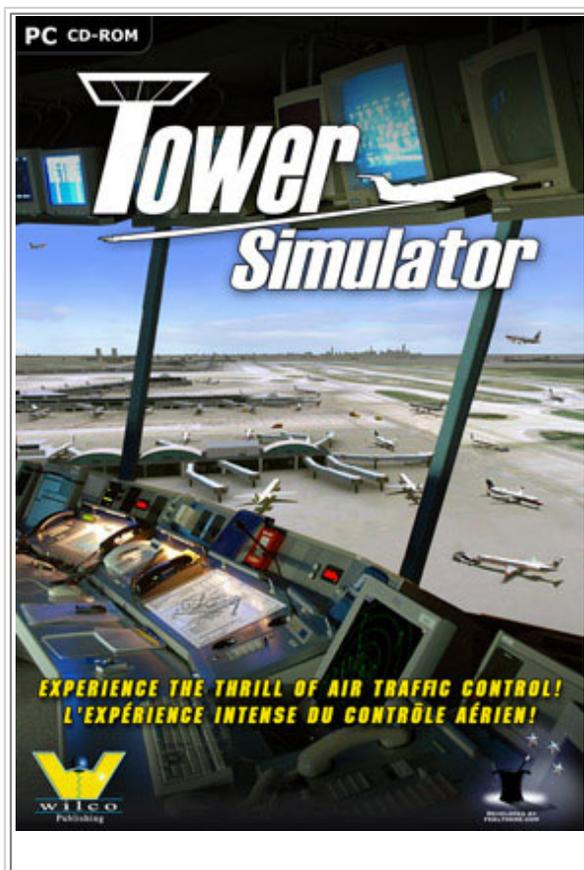# AVSIM Commercial Simulator Review

Tower Simulator

| Product Information |
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| **Publisher:** **Wilco Publishing** |
| **Description:** Stand-alone air traffic control simulator. |

Download Size: 700 MB	Format: Download or DVD	Simulation Type: Stand-alone
Reviewed by: **Gene Davis** AVSIM Senior Staff Reviewer - October 3, 2008		

Do you remember the older days of the Tower and ATC simulation titles? I do, I think I owned them all and usually bought them without thinking. What I remember most were the BAO titles, they literally put you in the tower and allowed you to look out and watch as the planes you guided landed and takeoff all at the click of a mouse button.

When I saw that FeelThere and Wilco were releasing a Tower Simulator I was somewhat anxious, but a little apprehensive. When release day came, I was quick to latch onto a copy of Tower Simulator and with great anticipation I was off to join the ranks of the air traffic controller.

Tower Simulator

Tower Simulator comes with 5 different airports and a long list of air traffic ranging from commercial airliners to general aviation aircraft, as well as realistic airline schedules to each of the 5 different airports. Each controller is graded on his or her performance and how well he or she handles certain types of situations after each scenario has ended. Weather can be set prior to each session, as well as the time of day and the number of runways one wants to handle during one setting.
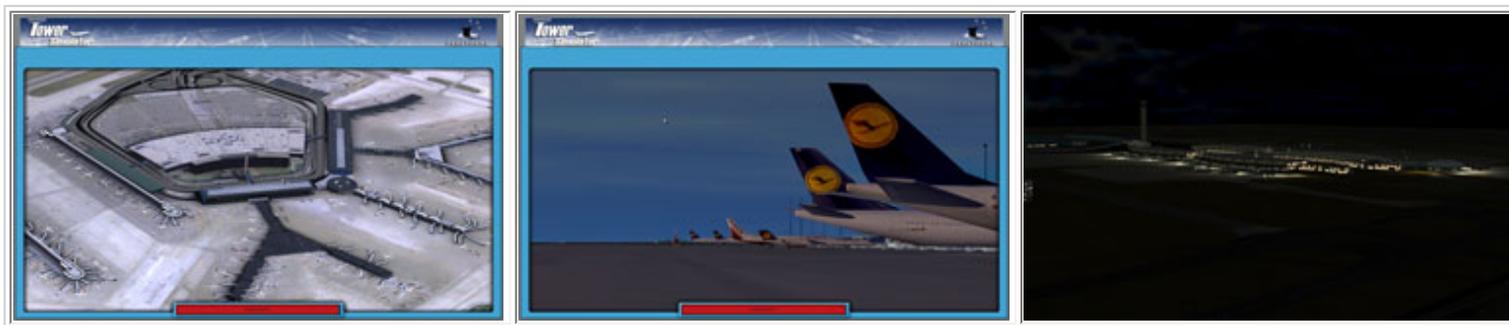
The five airports that are included in the Tower Simulator game are: Orange County (KSNA); Chicago O' Hare (KORD); Princess Juliana (TNCM); Paris Charles de Gaulle (LFPG); and finally Munich (EDDM). Graphical layout of each airport is accurate and based on actual photographs taken from each location giving the controller about a 180 degree field of view from the tower.

Each airport includes not only aircraft, but airport vehicles like fuel trucks and luggage carriers. I cannot stress how important it is to watch where you are sending aircraft, because if the path is not clear, it will result in a small pileup and put a complete snag on your entire operation and your grade!

My First Impression

Upon booting up Tower Simulator I found myself at an old favorite and that was TNCM, and what I first saw was really disappointing. The graphics looking out onto the landscape looked pre-FS9. It was choppy and did not really reflect the

beauty of TNCM, at least the beauty that I have come to expect and see often in FSX, or FS9 for that matter!

Figuring I didn't have something setup correctly, I went off into the menu to change some settings. Ultimately, I was able to run Tower Simulator at its highest resolution, and this did help improve the overall appearance. I recommend cranking up the AA and Anisotropic filtering for best results, that way the choppiness will not stand out as much.

The next step is learning the displays and what each one accomplishes. The first is the ATC window that displays the aircraft in your specific area in flight, the other is a display that shows a diagram of the airport and the third shows the a tape board that illustrates the arriving and departing aircraft and the relevant flight information for each. The other display is actually the control menu, or text command window as I like to call it, and this is where you will spend most of your time!

The biggest element in a Tower type of simulator is control, how does one control the aircraft coming and going to the airport. Tower Simulator controls these flights and communication through a series of key functions, or hot keys, that often resemble that of an old text adventure game, remember Zork? Luckily, you can't really mess it up too bad and it will tell you if a specific key combination is incorrect. Control is achieved by clicking on the specific tape pertaining to whatever flight you want to control, and then in the text menu, it will add the aircraft designation to the first part of your text, KLM123... Etc.

The next part of control, is telling what the aircraft needs to do in whatever phase of flight it is in, such as KLM 123 Cleared for takeoff Runway XX for example. The other big issue I had, was telling landing aircraft when and where to taxi to park or to gates after landing as there is no real visual reference to tell them where to go.

The first real test I did was at TNCM, and after clearing one aircraft for takeoff and another to land, I found myself stuck as the 747 I cleared to land was stuck on the runway and was waiting to be cleared to taxi to the gates. Easy enough right? Wrong! There is no visual guide for you to tell the planes where to go once they are on the runway and from what

I can tell, there are no taxi signs at any of the airports for the user to use as a visual reference. Unless you are overly familiar with that specific airport, you will find yourself pulling your hair out as I was, and I don't have that much hair!

Figuring I would try another airport, I decided to end my career at TNCM and go to Chicago. After loading the new scenario I was met with a CTD! I found that if you are attempting to go from one area to another without resetting the sim, it usually crashes. On several other occasions, I found myself with a frozen screen and was not able to do anything but reset my computer!


My Second Impression

A couple of weeks after doing the above, it was all I could do to even want to get back into Tower Simulator. But curiosity did get the best of me when I saw that there was patch released and I was quick to jump back in and give it another whirl. After reading a blurb somewhere about how Voice Buddy would work with Tower Simulator, I found myself on the Voice Buddy Site and downloading the newest version of that particular add-on.

The patch seemed to have corrected the problems with the program crashing and the overall program was a lot more stable. Control is still an issue, but it is a matter of learning and just getting used to what you have to work with. The biggest problem with the control aspect of Tower Simulator is that if you get more than 5 aircraft at any one point, it gets really hard trying to stay on top of each plane as typing the commands is rather time intensive and when a matter of seconds count, you can't afford spending those seconds typing commands.

Tower Simulator had a savior for me though and that was in the form of Voice Buddy. How easy would it be to say those commands rather than type them? Could Voice Buddy give me the ATC experience that I wanted? After going through the voice-training portion of the Voice Buddy software, I was ready to get into Tower Simulator and try it.

Once in Tower Simulator I decided to try out the Orange County airport instead of going back to Chicago or TNCM. Almost immediately I had 2 aircraft waiting for clearance to taxi and one already showing up on my air radar. Voice Buddy, once active, remains in the background and will actually try and translate anything you say into a command, so don't turn it on until you need it.
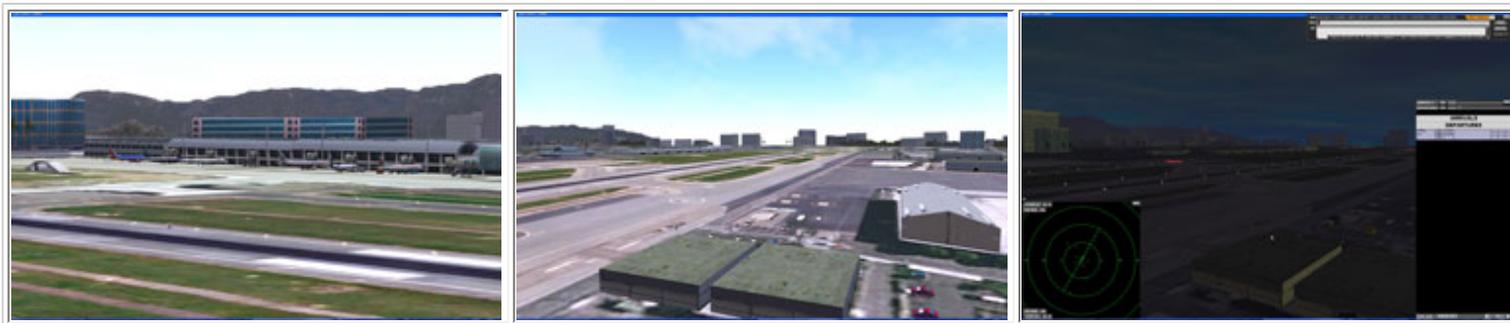
The first thing I needed to do was clear an Alaska Air flight for taxi to the active, keying up Voice Buddy, I tried reading off the aircraft ID tag before giving it its commands, but I found that I had to read each number or letter really slow to get it to do anything and when it came to the commands, it was all I could do to get it to recognize anything. The problem lies within Tower Simulator I believe, because I do not have any other problems using Voice Buddy with programs like Flight Simulator or LOMAC.

So, there I was with two other planes on my radar besides the first one waiting to land and guess what, if you don't talk to them they go ahead and buzz the field. I attempted to tell the planes to go into a holding pattern, but before I knew it, I had three 737's buzzing my airport!

I spent a great deal of time trying to make Voice Buddy and Tower Simulator work together and at one point I even went back through the Voice Training just to see if I missed something, and if that wasn't enough, I my switched headphones to a pair of USB ones hoping that would help, but it didn't.

Ultimately, it was Tower Simulator that had a hard time running with Voice Buddy, because I was actually able to see Voice Buddy recognize my commands, but when I went back into Tower, the voice recognition part of everything got really slow. If I spoke like A….L….P……H…..A it would work, but it still didn't recognize half of the commands that it needed to and I was never able to give an aircraft any kind of clearance using Voice Buddy. I do not expect a program like Voice Buddy to be able to understand everything I say, but in reality, Voice Buddy does a superb job at what it is designed for and should work flawlessly with Tower Simulator.

Off To The Forums I Go!

Needing help and at my wits end, I ended up on the FeelThere forum site for some much needed help and what I could find was relatively helpful. I did notice that there was absolutely no support for using Tower with Voice Buddy. In fact, on their website they make it clear there will be no support for Voice Buddy, yet it is sold as a bundled deal through their site!

While writing this review, a third patch had been issued for Tower Simulator and though it did not help the problems with Voice Buddy, it did help the program considerably and if you can handle the text to command style of gaming, then you will probably enjoy it. There is also a reference to SP3 on the FeelThere forums, but I have only been able to find SP1.2 and I am assuming that SP3 is in fact the SP1.2 file found on their site.

Taking it for what it is worth!

I ended up using the program without Voice Buddy and found that once I got past the "text" style of game play it was

designed around, and learned the hot keys rather than typing in each word, I did have a relatively enjoyable experience with Tower Simulator. I also found that SP1.2 really did help the program a lot as well as add some much-needed enhancements, and really did help change my overall opinion of this product.

As far as my problems with getting the planes to taxi, that solution came in the form of the manual. I cannot stress how important it is to read the Tower Simulator manual; print it out if you can. Once you read the manual, you will find simpler ways on how to do things. Shortcuts are outlined and airport procedures become a lot clearer.
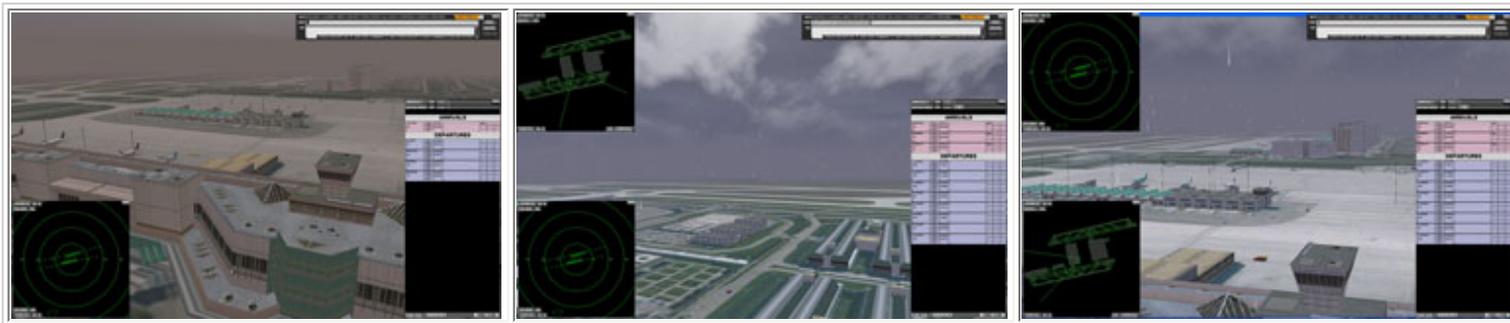
The weather was another big aspect for me in this sim. But in reality, the weather is controlled by the user when the program is started. You can have it raining, snowing, foggy or clear. The weather does not change during game play, which for me was a big letdown. The snow and rain seems to create issues with the sim and wasn't useable at all as it just created severe stuttering during game play. I was able to correct this problem by switching to windowed mode within the program. I need to point out this problem does not exist when I set the sim to clear or foggy weather.

There is no wind and it is only simulated in what runways you want to choose as being active during startup. I would have liked to have seen a more dynamic wind and weather engine in this sim. The other thing that really threw me off, was that there is no passage of time. You simply pick the time of day you want to use and that is where it stays!

The Sound

For a product like this you need something to pull you in and usually it is something like sound that does this. At each location you do have audible environment sounds like cars, birds and ocean, but what is the real catcher, is the sound of the planes landing and taking off. There really should have been more emphasis in the sound department on each individual aircraft, especially the big jets.

You cannot tell me when a 747 is landing at TNCM you are not going to hear it! I once had a relative that lived close to Seattle Tacoma International Airport and I remember spending hours out on his deck armed with a pair of binoculars watching as the big jets came and went. What I remember the most was the sound; although he lived a good distance away, you could still feel the sound of a 747!

The voices for the each different airplane is, at times, almost robotic and is really too quiet to understand sometimes. I cranked the sound up in both the sim and on my desktop, but found that the individual crew voices were really too muffled and to hear them well as you have to turn down other sounds just to hear them. I would think that it should have been the other way around; environment sounds muffled and the ATC traffic crystal clear!

In The End

When I first set out to use the product, it just turned into a hassle. Commands only worked sometimes and when I went to use it with Voice Buddy, I found that it hardly worked at all. If you look at the price tag, which is $57.00, and consider the main functions in this program, you have to wonder. However, after the recent patch, I have to say that the enhancements made to the program made it much more stable and useable. For what time I did get to spend with it after the patch, I found myself wanting to go back and learn more, because in the end it is a simulator.

I think the hard core ATC simmers will get past the text commands and will find some enjoyment out of it and see it for what it is. But for the amateur or casual simmer that wants to try something a little different, I think he or she will find themselves in the same boat as I am and on the fence about how he or she feels about the program overall.

Given the program's shortcomings, I think people will grow to like this one and I think it will only get better with age. But the biggest factor has to be that of patience. If you buy this you need to be patient in all aspects. Learn it, use it and then make a decision. Just do not jump to one conclusion immediately.

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Tower Simulator

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