AVSIM Commercial Utility Review

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Rating Guide		
Publisher: **Aerosoft**		
Description: FS Flight Keeper (FSFK) is an excellent tool for Flight Simulator users that combines four programs in one: A Logbook, a basic Aircraft Black Box, Flight Weather planning tool, and Flight Information System (ACARS) Device.		
Download Size: **17MB**	**Format:** **Software**	**Simulator:** **MSFS 2000, FS 2002, FS 2004**
Reviewed by: **Todd Cox** AVSIM Staff Reviewer		
Possible Commercial Rating Score: 1 to 5 stars with 5 stars being exceptional. *Please see details of our review rating policy* **here**		

Introduction

In 1952, British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) became the first airline to fly the world's first commercial jet-powered aircraft, the De Havilland Comet. Unfortunately the first Comet's were plagued with a design flaw that caused crashes from 1953-1954. In 1953, Dr. David Warren, a scientist with the Aeronautical Research Laboratories in Melbourne, Australia, was helping to investigate the first Comet crash. During the investigation, he presented the idea regarding cockpits being outfitted with a device that could record up to four hours of speech as well as a variety of inputs from flight instruments. So, in 1954, he presented a report entitled "A Device for Assisting Investigation into Aircraft Accidents", and by 1958, had developed the "ARL Flight Memory Unit," and by 1962 the device was in pre-production. All aircraft today are equipped with Flight data and Cockpit recording devices. It is from the feedback from these devices that many safety and operational enhancements in aviation have been made.

Enter Thomas Molitor, along with Mathijs Kok and the folks at Aerosoft who have created a phenomenal piece of professional programming in FS Flight Keeper (FSFK). Mr. Molitor, who is a professional programmer in real life, created FSFK in 2002 as he was dissatisfied with options that were available in log book applications. He also wanted to create a means to receive feedback from his flights, thereby improving his flying skills. The results of his efforts has yielded a program that is simple to use, yet extremely sophisticated in its nature.

What is FS Flight Keeper?

In order to appreciate what FSFK, you cannot approach it as "oh, just another logbook program", because it is much much more than that. FSFK is a "feedback" device, as well as a highly customizable and effective database application. To explain, basically the information that FSFK provides the user ultimately helps the user's flight skills get progressively better by providing a means to track performance. In addition, there are numerous options and functions contained with the program such as:

- Multiple Logbook and Pilot management
- Supports all types of Aircraft
- Full Flight Simulator Scenery support (automatic detection of Airports / Gates / Runways)
- ACARS ([A]ircraft [C]ommunication [A]ddressing and [R]eporting [S]ystem) generation support
- ACARS Device (Gauge) to display Logs, Status, Weather conditions and much more directly on your aircraft panel
- Realtime (live) ACARS reporting via Web Service
- Virtual Airline PIREP/FREP transmission (via Email, any available Web Service or file based)
- Flight Simulator 2000/2002/2004 Flight Plan support as well as FSNavigator 4.x Flight Plan support
- Full colored World (Moving) Map display that can display planned / flight route, weather, flight events, AI, Multiplayer and Virtual Airline Traffic
- Instant Messaging Service with File transfer feature (send Maps, Screenshots, etc.)
- Customizable HTML/Text Reports/Exports for Logbooks, Pilots, Flights, Aircraft, Airlines, Map, etc.
- Customizable Flight critique and scoring
- WideFS support
- Radar Contact v3 support (automatically reads alternate airport, transition altitudes and gates)
- Activesky 2004 and ActiveSky wxRE V1.6+ support (online or offline)
- FS Meteo v5.2+ and v6.0+ support (online or offline)
- Weather Center 2 support (online or offline)
- My Traffic and Ultimate Traffic Scenery (Airport Facility Data - AFD) support
- Highly customizable

This list is just a sample of all of the functions and options contained within FSFK. Additionally, Virtual Airlines (VA) will find FSFK offers unique features that makes it easy to automate day-to-day tasks. It also can give VA's, "a verifiable and controllable way of seeing what pilots have flown." There is also a VA SDK available, which makes it quite easy for VA developers to integrate FSFK with particular VA requirements. Because the program is extremely powerful, yet simple to use, Aerosoft has provided a "try before you buy" program that allows user's to experiment with all functions of the software. A more in-depth look of various FSFK functions will be covered within the review.

Installation and Setup:

FSFK is a 17mb download available at Aerosoft Online's website. There is a registration system in place for registering the product, regardless if trying out the program or purchasing it. On initial installation, you will be asked to choose the type of installation (typical, complete, and custom). Complete installation was chosen for the review. One thing to note, prior to installing FSFK ensure you have the latest versions of Pete Dowson's FSUIPC add-on. The installation was very quick and simple. Upon opening FSFK for the first time you will be asked to register. After registering, you will be presented with three screens to set up the program.

The first screen is the Pilot and VA Information page where you input your name and optional VA information. There is a pull down menu in the Airlines section that allows you to select a particular airline you may fly for. If your airline is not available, you can add it to the airlines.cfg file located in the main FSFK program folder.
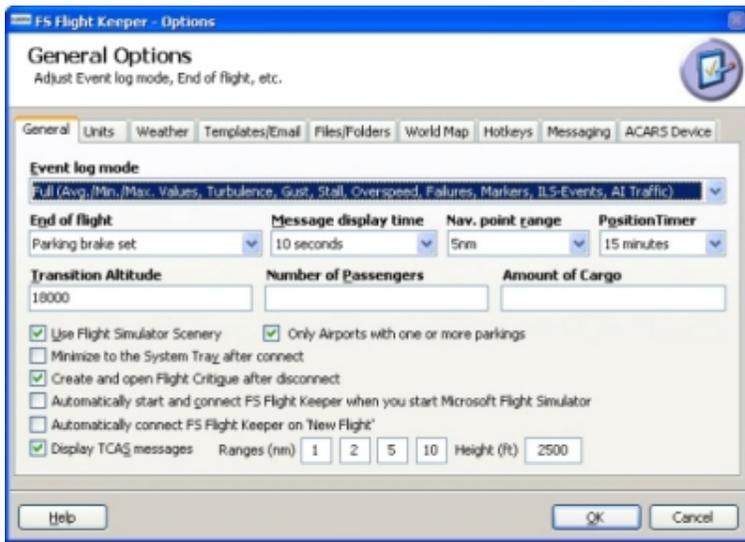
FS Flight Keeper General Options Menu

The next screen you will see is the "Create New Logbook" screen. This screen allows you to input your logbook name as well as any remarks or comments. This is also where you get a glimpse of the power and versatility of FSFK. There are 10 additional fields that can be used in the logbook to customize additional information you can display and save with your logbooks. You do not have to be a database guru in order to set up the fields. Basically input the name of the field and add the variables associated with the field. For example, I added a field regarding types of approaches and what they were. Input into the Field 1 caption was as simple as inputting the following: Type Approach~ILS~Visual~VOR. Simple!

The last screen you will see is the Options Screen. The various tabs at the top of this window allows you to fine tune and/or customize various sections of FSFK. These screen also helps you in becoming familiar with navigating within FSFK. Once you have specified your options, you will be taken the Flight Editor Page. One item to note: You can create multiple pilots and logbooks within FSFK.

Documentation:

FSFK comes with a very well-written and easy to use 135-page manual. The manual is broken down into various sections which provides for a fast search for particular items of interest. The quick start tutorial gives a basic overview of running the program and was a breeze to use. The tutorial, from start to finish, ran about two hours (most of that time is just flying a quick 30-45 minute hop). FSFK includes an extensive help facility that mirrors the manual, as well as tool tips. For questions that may not be covered in the manual, The FAQ located at the FSFK Home website, as well as forums, are available. Customer service was outstanding, and all questions that I asked were answered promptly. You can also tell from the FSFK user forums that all persons involved in the project make it a point to answer all questions and take them time to ensure the user understands how to work with any problems or issues that arise.

The Main Interface:
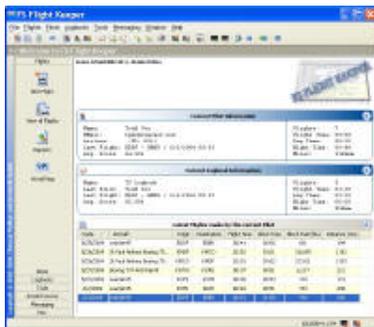
FS Flight Keepers Main Interface

The main FSFK interface display and functionality is similar to working with Microsoft Outlook™ or Outlook Express™. Every function in the main interface can be accessed in many different ways, allowing the user to choose how they want to navigate through the various items and options. Columns can be sorted or adjusted as needed. The first pieces of information shown is the current pilot information, current logbook information, and latest flights made by the pilot. Not only does the program track all flight flown with FSFK, but when selecting different logbooks, it shows the actual number of flights flown under that logbook.

The icons at the top of the display also include tool tips adding to the ease at which navigating through the display. You will also notice in the screenshot that there is an average score that is displayed as well. More on this later.

| Test System |
|---|
| **Dell Dimension 8250 Pentium 4 2.8Ghz 512mb Ram ATI Radeon 9600XT 128mb Video Card 160GB Hard drive 21"Viewsonic Monitor Creative SoundBlaster Audigy Audio Card Thrustmaster Afterburner II** |

The Flight Editor:

There are some many wonderful things contained within this program. You can tell that the program designer really took his time to ensure that anyone's experience with the program would not be wasted, enticing the user for more. There are three areas I will touch on in this review: the Flight Editor, the Moving Map displays, and ACARS.

First, the Flight Editor. This is the workhorse of the program. There are so many options and areas within the editor that I found my self thoroughly enjoying looking through the tabs and playing with the various functions. Words simply cannot express the technical prowess associated with just this section of the program. To illustrate, the tutorial asks that you that you create a small flight, complete with a flight plan. Once you have created the flight and are sitting at the ramp, you then load FSFK. Once FSFK is loaded you then select your logbook and pilot, start a new flight and then connect FSFK to Flight Simulator. Upon connecting, you will be greeted with much or your flight information, as well as your flight plan information filled in. Your position is automatically displayed, including active runway, airport and gate (in FS2000, this feature is not available).

joystick w/throttle
WindowsXP

FS Version Tested:
FS2004

Testing Time:
22.5 Hours over 12 days

Clicking on the weather icons allows you to download weather, either live, stored or through add-on weather programs such Active Sky™. As you start your flight, various pieces of information are automatically tracked. Flight modes are what separates each phase of your flight, from startup to shutdown. There are 12 Flight modes that coincide and work with different areas of the Flight Editor. On the Flight Simulator main screen, you get a nice message alerting you as to which mode you are currently in.
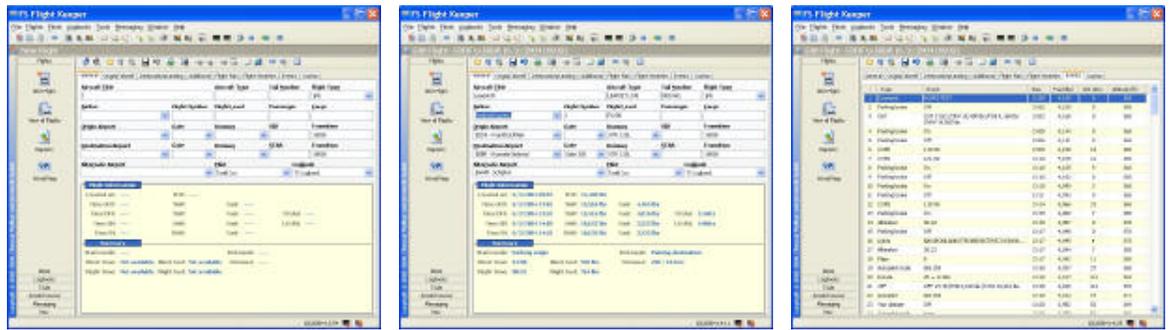
Various pages displayed in the Flight Keepers Editor

The "Events" tab in the Flight Editor is your "black box" function. Every event that takes place within your flight is recorded under this section. It documents items such as when your lights are turned on, engine starts, altimeter changes, spoils deployed and retracted, flaps, communication change frequencies...the list is almost endless as to what it tracks. Under the tutorial flight I flew, 194 events were logged. With each event, the time, fuel, speed and altitude are logged as well. This a great way to see what you did within your flight and when you did it. The "Flight Weather" automatically decodes METAR (METeorological Aerodrome Reports), TAFs (Terminal Aerodrome Forecasts) and Winds Aloft data into a very nice and easy to read format, not only for the departure and destination airports, but for the whole route of flight.

The "Origin/Takeoff" and "Destination/Landing" Tabs records specific information related to the aircraft's takeoff and landing, such as the aircraft's ramp position, location, airfield temperature data, runway information including the type of surface, and other settings. These two screens give a basic snapshot of all departure and arrival information. The "Additional" Tab calculates and gives an average of aircraft specific flight information for the flight, including G-forces, descents, climbs. Speeds, and how much of the flight was conducted during the day and night. One more item to mention, clicking on events or right-clicking on other items, in most, cases takes you to the Moving Map Display.

Flight Critique:

Once you are ready for your flight, you can minimize FSFK. It runs seamlessly in the background, with literally no interruption to frame rates or flight simulator operations. While flying you can switch back and forth between Simulator and FSFK to view your progress (there is another way to do this without leaving FS, more on that later). Upon completing your flight, FSFK will automatically disconnect and save your information. Based on the length of the flight, you may have to wait a few minutes until FSFK un-minimizes as it is storing every aspect of your flight. You are also presented with your flight critique which tells you, based on a set of configurable parameters, how you did. Your scores are kept in the database and are cumulatively tracked.
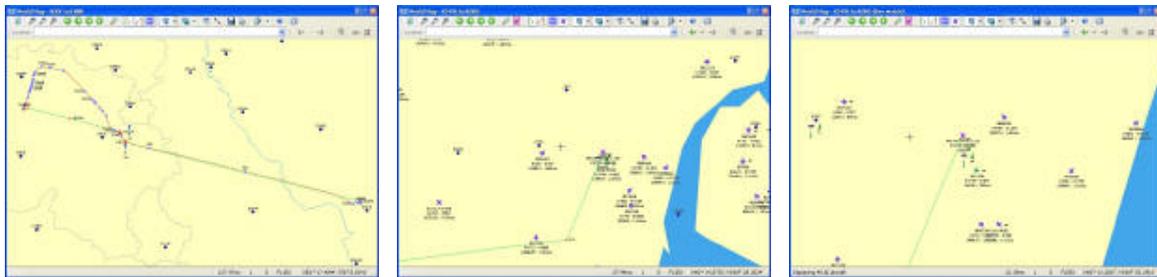
The Moving Map:

The Moving Map Display, simply stated, is the one most impressive pieces of programming I have ever seen and used. This map allows you to not only review your saved flight at anytime, but also watch flights (called Live Watch) while connect to Flight Simulator via FSFK. The screenshots below, as well as screenshots located at Aerosoft's Web Site. Without gushing too much, here is a small list of what the Moving Map offers:

- Display planned route (with weather forecast if available)

- Display actual flight route (with weather if available)

- Display detected flight events

- Airport Information (Location, Parking amount, Runways and ILS)

- Display Lakes, Rivers and State borders (US/CAN/AUS)

- Display airborne AI Traffic (Multiplayer Traffic is available via AI-Bridge)

- Display Virtual Airline Traffic (live ACARS)

- Display Weather and WMO Stations

- Display world wide weather (METAR/ALOFT) on the World Map

- Distance measuring

- Airport search

- Fit map ranges so that the complete route is visible

When watching Live Watch, every aircraft within the vicinity of your aircraft is shown. Events, waypoints, TCAS information, as well as weather data is shown on the map using ingenious little symbols that are clear and easy to read. Your planned route of flight, as well as what you actually flew, is displayed on the map. As you more the mouse pointer over various symbols, a pop-up comes up displaying detailed information that coincides with the symbol. For example, moving the mouse over an AI aircraft symbol will bring up information regarding the aircraft's call sign, route of flight, altitude, speed, if climbing or descending, as well as your current aircraft's information included in the pop-up screen. Equally impressive is a small triangle symbol located next to an AI aircraft's call sign showing if the aircraft is in a climb or descent, or disappears when the aircraft is level.

As mentioned earlier, by clicking on a event located under the "Event" tab of the Flight Editor, automatically brings up the moving map screen, and circles the particular event you have selected. Additionally, small text, such as "gear up", is displayed on the map as you zoom in. Impressive. In the Flight Plan section of the Flight Editor, double clicking on a waypoint in the flight plan also brings up the moving map. Finally, weather symbols are displayed on the map, or on a separate weather map. The symbols correspond with sky conditions, winds and temperature. They add to an overall impressive array of options for the map. Finally, you can select which moving map options to display, as well as modify the options through FSFK's Options Menu.

Fs Flight Keepers Moving Map Displays a Great Deal of Information

Icon	Description
	Weather Conditions
	Clear
	Few
	Scattered
	Broken
	Overcast
	Fog/Mist
	Light Rain
	Rain
	Heavy Rain
	Light Snow
	Snow
	Heavy Snow
	Light Hail
	Hail
	Heavy Hail
	Thunder Storm

Moving Map Weather Symbols

ACARS Device:

The ACARS Device, through the help of Jose Oliveira, displays various useful pieces of information, but shines as it allows you to access some FSFK functions without the need to switch to FSFK. This device is a separate installation from FSFK and easily integrates into any existing panel through the use of a very well designed device install program. This program, similar to a panel design program allows you to place either a small ACARS icon or hotspot within your panel in order to activate it. The icon or hotspots may be sized to fit placement.

ACARS Device Panel Display

ACARS Intro Screen

The information to be displayed is accomplished through the ACARS device Left and Right Line Select Keys. Those familiar with FMC type devices will be comfortable with the display. Even for the novice pilot, this display is simple to use and extremely powerful. For example, you can scroll through the information contained in the screens by using the Line Select Keys (LSK's), keyboard, mouse, or mouse scroll wheel. The keys displayed in the ACARS Device allows you to input text where needed. In addition, when connected live to a server, all aircraft information is relayed and posted on the server. Through the developer, I was able to connect to his server and actually see the information that was being transmitted live via FSFK to the server. If there are other players who may be utilizing the same server, you can see a list of those aircraft, as well as a list of any aircraft who enter your TCAS range. The weather information that you can gather from the device is also noteworthy, including the active runways in use based on Flight Simulator 2004's weather, current weather at all waypoints, and ambient temperatures and winds aloft. Those using FS2002 will not be able to access all information, with METAR data being displayed instead.

Information displayed by the ACARS

Virtual Airline Support and Other Feature:

For Virtual Airlines, there are many use functions that can ultimately enhance operations. Flight plans can be emailed or through a web service. There is an Instant Messaging service which allows registered FSFK users who are online to communicate with each other. Reports generated by FSFK for use by Virtual Airlines may be tailored to the individual VA, or may be used individually, though the templates provided are very useful. There is a Screenshot Manager, and support for other third party add-ons as listed earlier in this review. There are so many things contained within FSFK that you wonder what else can be added. As of this writing, Thomas Molitor and the folks at Aerosoft are soon releasing FSFK version 2.5. The following Aerosoft Forum link provides a glimpse of what is in store for users who upgrade to the new version.

Summary:

Thomas Molitor has created a truly visionary piece of software. Giving proper credit to other programmers who assisted him in this undertaking, he has created a wonderful program that is simple to use, extremely powerful, and highly customizable. The feeling I receive from working with this package is that the programmer, as well as the developers, wanted to create a program that truly had the user in mind. How many times have we seen a truly great piece of software all the sudden become half of its expectations due to struggle between the programmer and developer. This is simply not the case with FSFK. It is evident that everyone involved in FSFK is dedicated to the product, and it shows. The fact the FSFK is professionally programmed, it does not suffer from various problems that can occur from time to time with third-party add-ons.

From the Moving Map displays, weather functions, ACARS Device, online functions, and a host of other virtually unlimited options, the user is presented with a program that is valuable in many ways, including the ability to help the pilot become better. When I first used FSFK my flight scores were average. On continual use with the program my overall scores have gotten continually better. Using the moving map and events viewer to review my flight from start to finish alerted me of small mistakes I had been making. Reasonably priced at $30.00 ($26.00 without the Virtual Airlines Kit), this is one program I definitely recommend to have in your flight simulator library.

What I Like About FS Flight Keeper

- Professionally programmed with the user in mind.
- Manual is simple and clear, as well as an impressive help file contained with the program
- Simple to use, yet extremely powerful. Definitely enhances Flight Simulator
- The Flight Editor, Moving Map, and ACARS devices are second to none. The amount of detail and functionality involved in those modules is outstanding.
- Support for Virtual Airlines make this a great tool for use in the management and tracking of VA members.
- Highly configurable.
- Fully committed customer oriented support.

What I Don't Like About FS Flight Keeper

- The fact that I have to wait for version 2.5 to be released

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