AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Review

Dreamfleet Beech Baron 58

Rating Guide
Publisher: Dreamfleet & Flight 1

Description: Beech Baron add-on aircraft for FS9		
Download Size: 58MB (35MB Lite version)	**Format:** Auto-installer	**Simulation Type:** GA Aircraft
Reviewed by: [Bert Pieke](#) AVSIM Sr Staff Reviewer		
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Introduction

I'm sure you've all flown the default Baron that comes with FS9 and enjoyed the feeling of flying something bigger than a Cessna 172 (unless you cheated and went straight for the 747). The virtues of a prop-driven twin are a subject of some debate, with some pilots liking the comfort of having a second engine in case the first one quits… and others claiming that all the second engine accomplishes is getting you to the crash site sooner. It is certainly a true challenge to fly a prop twin with one engine out and best left until you've got all the required actions, like feathering the prop on the failing engine, well memorized.

I'm particularly fond of the B58 Baron, since a friend of mine used to own one and let me fly it on a sightseeing trip over the Niagara Falls. This flight will always stand out in my memory and one of the first things I did with FS9, was to repeat this trip. The FS9 Baron is quite nicely done and the instruments are big and readable, so the question emerges: "Do we need yet another Beech Baron?" After flying the latest Dreamfleet creation, my answer is a clear: "You bet we do!" This airplane is an improvement over the FS9 default in every way.

Baron with engines stopped	Over Niagara Falls	Baron with compartment doors open

I've enjoyed Dreamfleet add-ons ever since the first Dreamfleet freeware panels for the Cessna 182 and then the 172 were released, for FS2002. Lou Betti is a perfectionist in getting the panels and the view directions just right and since I am a sucker for beautifully rendered and truly usable panels, any new Dreamfleet product gets my heart pumping.

If you go for the "full version" which I would highly recommend you do, even if you already own Reality XP gauges, you are going to have not only a very realistic panel in both 2D and 3D, both also a set of gauges which are truly a joy to use. You have a choice of a model with an analogue HSI and a model with a Sandel 3308, and in both cases, you get the excellent Reality XP version of the Garmin 530 moving map GPS. What you may not immediately notice,

is that the Attitude Indicator is also produced by Reality XP and shares the high resolution and sub-pixel smoothness of all their gauges. Once you have experienced how fluid the ADI and HSI move, there is no going back, at least not for me. Now, I notice the slight jitter in most other analogue gauges, even at high refresh rates. I can hardly wait until Reality XP releases a complete analogue gauge set, which they have stated is their intention. A lot about the panel... but this is where you will be spending most of your time! Now for the rest of the action...

| Main panel with Sandel HSI | Main panel with HSI and GPS | Enlarged instruments in VC |

Installation and Documentation

The package can be ordered in one of two versions: The full version, as reviewed here, or the "Lite" version which does not include the Reality XP gauges. The purchasing process is via the Flight1 Wrapper system, which has always worked well on my system, and this time was no exception. Here is where you can find all the details: *www. dreamfleet2000.com/products.htm*

The install process puts a link to the documentation file on the desktop, and I would recommend leaving it there for a while.. You will be using it!

It is really tempting to just start the engines and take the aircraft for a spin, but at this time, you are missing much of the function that has been built into the aircraft... until you have read the manual. I have often been critical of the documentation that is provided with add-on aircraft, but in this case the documentation is both readable and complete. Bravo!

As we have come to expect from Dreamfleet and Flight1, the aircraft comes with a choice of liveries and a "Dream Manager" utility that allows adding additional repaints as they become available. The Avsim library already contains over a dozen repaints that you can download and install.

Interior and Exterior Views

It does not take long to realize that the inside and outside of the aircraft are very well rendered. You can walk around the plane on the tarmac, or crawl around inside the plane in the virtual cockpit view. Lots of little details, and all nicely done.

In best Dreamfleet tradition, there are some neat eye candy animations, just waiting to be discovered. More importantly, the basic animations like the moving flight surfaces and propellers are visible from inside the cockpit, not only in the 3D view, but also in the 2D view which makes the 45 degree 2D views, which I usually discard, quite useful. The virtual cockpit is very nicely done and matches the 2D cockpit in every detail.. Another Bravo!

As with all detailed virtual cockpits, however, the textures can take some time to load up, and that is where the 2D views come in. If you have lots of computer horsepower and do not mind waiting for the VC to appear, I would get rid of the 2D 45 degree views and go with the 3D views in their place. That way, you get the added benefit of the moving co-pilot gauges in view. If, however, performance is a consideration, the 2D 45-degree views are immediate and quite convincing… very nice!

| Exterior details | Virtual cockpit | 45 degree view to the right, 2D cockpit |

I commented in the introduction on the panel views, but let me tell you (one more time) what, in my opinion, sets this plane apart from the many add-ons out there. There is a universal challenge for any aircraft designer to get all the gauges and controls within reach of the pilot. That is why, in the real aircraft, the controls are placed in overhead panels, door panels, between the seat panels etc. For the Flight Sim designer, the challenge is even bigger.

Assuming a 17-inch screen, how do you get all the required controls placed so that they can be referenced when needed, but do not take up valuable screen real estate when they are not being used?

Microsoft dealt with this problem in a brute-force way. If you look at the default Cessna or the default Baron, you'll see that gauges and controls have been re-arranged to fit the screen, with little regard to where they are in the real airplane. Moreover, there is a section of icons that do not exist in the real plane, for the purpose of popping up various sub panels. As soon as you switch to the virtual cockpit, the gauges are now arranged in line with the real life cockpit. I find that this jarring transition from 2D to 3D panel totally destroys the feeling of "being there" that is the illusive goal of good add-on airplane design.

Various other approaches have been offered up by designers to improve upon this. Some panels are designed so that you can see all the way from the door to half way over to the co-pilot panel, which brings lots of controls into view, but at the expense of everything being so small that you have to pop up individual gauges to be able to read them.

Other designs limit the views to the key instruments only and rely on popup click spots to bring up other views, as you need them. Yet other designs give up on the 2D cockpit entirely and focus on making the 3D cockpit the default flight environment. I do not want to fuel the debate about what is the better approach, but every time I approach a new add-on, I spend considerable time switching from view to view and really getting familiar with the panel layout so that when I actually fly the plane, I can quickly get to whatever gauges I need.

So why do I like the Dreamfleet Baron? After some familiarization, I find that the panels in 2D or 3D format look absolutely identical, and moreover that the sub panels are easily accessible and nicely positioned, once you get used to where the click spots are placed. This allows the pilot to fly in 3D view when desired and flip back to 2D views at will, without losing any sense of looking at the real thing. This may not be equally important to all users, but for me, the effort that Dreamfleet spent on getting this aspect right makes me want to come back to this cockpit again and again. Another, big Bravo.

Flying the Baron

Before taking off the first time, I would suggest lightening the fuel load a bit. The default configuration is loaded closely to the maximum allowable weight and the aircraft feels heavy and sluggish (as in real life). If you reduce the fuel load to 50%, you'll find the Baron to be quite responsive and a lot of fun to fly.

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:
15 hours |

As mentioned, the key instruments are right at hand and easily readable. Once you figure out how to pop up the sub panels, you can quickly consult any of the gauges in the airplane. Failing that, you can switch to the virtual cockpit and pan over to the gauges or indicators. I really appreciate that everything works as you might expect. No difficult decisions on which gauge is "right click" or "left click". A lot of time was spent getting it all just right – and it shows!

The only imperfection I could find is that the radio stack popup only works in the default view and not in the landing view. I added a click spot on the ADF gauge in the landing view to pop up the stack to get around this. After contacting Dreamfleet, they said that they would include this capability in a future update. Let me say it one more time, the gauges are one of the best features of this airplane. It is telling that the user manuals for the Sandel HSI and the Garmin GPS are downloaded from the Sandel and Garmin sites respectively… in other words, the gauges work exactly as the real life gauges that cost about $10,000, each.

It does not take long to get used to the flight characteristics of the Baron, especially if you are upgrading from the Bonanza that was released earlier. Fully loaded, this airplane is best flown as you would an airliner, with deliberate control inputs and getting lined up for the approach well ahead of time and coming in "on the numbers", not the ones on the runway, but the ones in the landing checklist, for speed, flaps settings etc. Lightly loaded, this airplane is surprisingly responsive and can be flown by "the seat of the pants" without showing any nasty characteristics.

Sounds and Effects

The sounds are well done and come in a choice of "loud", and "muted" as if wearing regulation pilot earphones, a good feature. Talking about features, a very nice feature is the availability of a pop-up configuration panel where you

can select features in real time. As an example, you can fly without the virtual cockpit, or at least turn off some of the performance sapping visual features, such as reflections, in real-time! No need to restart the airplane for these changes to take effect, another Bravo in my books.

You can move the furniture in the cabin, choose your pilot: male or female, or have the pilot leave the airplane altogether etc. Here's a nice surprise when you see it for the first time, the red warning flags moving slightly in the breeze. One last example of where this aircraft excels is the gear animation. If you watch your landing replays, you'll see that the aircraft touches down solidly on the main gear with just the right amount of suspension travel and that upon braking, the nose wheel has a realistic amount of "give" without any hint of sinking into the pavement, as some other aircraft have been known to do.

| Tied down | Table in passenger cabin | Moving pilot |

Summary

If you like flying GA aircraft, the Dreamfleet Baron is a great choice. It not only demonstrates the current state of the art in add-on aircraft in every way, it goes beyond it. It has all the eye-candy you might want, but also has all the "serious cockpit features" you need to fly this aircraft. The panel graphics and the documentation are first class, but the addition of the Sandel 3308 and the Garmin GNS 530 as well as the "new generation" of Reality XP analogue gauges puts it in a class by itself.

It is not often that a product gets nominated for the full five Avsim stars, but this product fully deserves it. It will stay on my computer well beyond FS9 and it is already a personal favorite.

What I Like About the Beech Baron 58

- Realistic depiction, inside and out
- Lots of features, all well implemented
- Fantastic gauge set by Reality XP
- Handles well and realistically, makes you feel like you are in the real thing
- Very complete and readable documentation
- Good value

What I Don't Like About the Beech Baron 58

- Nothing… This time, they got it all right

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Baron 58

(adobe acrobat required)

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