AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Review

Coolsky Super 80 Professional "Redux"

Product Information
Publishers: Flight 1
Description: Modernized MD-80 for FSX.

Download Size: 94 MB	**Format:** Download	**Simulation Type:** FSX

Reviewed by: Peter Clemenko III AVSIM Staff Reviewer - January 1, 2009

Foreword

Hey folks, in case you're wondering, I realize that I screwed up. It took a little bit of an eye opener in order to realize just how badly I screwed up though on the first review. The purpose of this version of the review is to do a proper review as I, and the community, feel I didn't do the aircraft justice. Plus there were some things where I didn't think and I stupidly pointed out stuff that wasn't the aircraft's fault.

For anyone who found my first review offensive, or thought I was way off the mark, I apologize, as I realize that I should have not snapped and rushed the review. Anyone who would wonder why I rushed it? Well, let's just say it

involves the fact that FSX kept CTD'ing and my computer kept BSOD'ing. I recently got the BSOD fixed; turns out my RAM was bad, so I replaced the RAM. I also managed to get a lot of the CTD'ing fixed.

Now before I get started, I need to make a few statements about my review style just to clear a few things up. Yes, I do test DX10 mode in the review, but I also tested it in DX9. The reason I test DX10 is, even though it is a Preview, it has already been rumored that FSXI will be either DX10 or DX11 minimum, and I feel that if I don't test under DX10, then I can't test for any sort of future proofing.

Furthermore, if the aircraft is for SP2, then I have to test it under DX10 to see if it was true FSX. This may not sound like a big deal for some of you, but I have a friend who has experienced that if the aircraft is just ported over from FS9, it crashes his computer with a BSOD. It is because of things like this that I test DX10, as true FSX aircraft work under DX10, but those that aren't, only work under DX9.

People have also been calling me on using TrackIR in my reviews; well you know what, if you want to call me on using TrackIR, why not call people for using SLI or 64 bit OS, also. People have to understand that just because not everyone has it, doesn't mean that no one has it. I can see not testing in things like 3D glasses, but I have hung out in multiple flight simulation communities where not everyone has the same PC configurations. The combat flight simulation community in particular uses TrackIR A LOT.

I try to review using whatever means I can, and if I see a problem, I won't pull punches just because some people may not be affected. I review using as much stuff as possible. FSX was developed for use with TrackIR 6 DOF, and as such, I test everything I can that FSX supports out of the box. I admit that I can't test everything, such as force feedback, or yoke and pedals, as I don't have those, but I will test the product everything that I own.

Finally, I am sorry about the confusing terms I used in the first version of the review, and I will do what I can to prevent those kinds of issues from now on. Bear with me people, as I'm still kind of new to this, and I intend on getting better as I go. Nobody is perfect, especially me, and I will go to fix errors in my reviews if time permits. I personally requested the first version of this review be pulled because of the community pointing out several things to me, and now in this review, I intend on taking community feedback, along with using a patched version of the aircraft, to make the review right this time.

Introduction

The Super 80 Professional by Coolsky is a rendition of a modernized MD-80, with a glass cockpit. The MD-80 is a spin off of the DC-9, and the program for developing the MD-80 was launched in 1977. The MD-80 has had a total production run of 1191 aircraft built.

The Super 80 Pro is designed to stay true to the avionics and the complexity of the real aircraft, and while it has its pitfalls, it is, in general, a good rendition of the MD-80. This add-on includes features such as; a training program for learning how to fly the aircraft, detailed avionics, a dispatch menu for determining the payload and fuel load of the aircraft, and has options in the main center window for setting up an aircraft starting state, for instance cold and dark, or cleared for takeoff. Now that we have that out of the way, let's get to the good stuff.

Installation and Documentation

The install is simple enough, just follow the instructions on the screen and it should work. If using Vista however, remember to run as admin when you run the installer, as it needs to install fonts that won't install without admin privieldges.

The aircraft has a 28 page user manual, which goes over the basics of getting started. This includes which tutorials to run and in what order. The aircraft procedure manual is 333 pages and very well detailed. It has all of the info needed to get off the ground.

Speaking of checklists, Coolsky included a nice touch with adding a checklist gauge to the aircraft that has most of the procedures on the list, which you can access through the instrument panel section in the views menu. You just have to click the button to go to the next item to check it off; it's as simple as that.

The main user manual is a relatively good, but they leave out a few key things.

Test System
Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600 @ 2.4ghz per core (4 64bit cores) Nvidia Geforce 8500GT 512 megs XFX Nforce 680i lt SLI Onboard Realtek integrated sound card 4 gigs OCZ SLI 800 mhz on 2 sticks Windows Vista Ultimate 64 bit Service Pack 1 Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro TrackIR 4 Pro

The main problem with the manual is that it doesn't give any info as to how to manually access the configuration center. It took me 3 hours and multiple reinstalls to figure that one out on my own. I eventually found that it was in the instrument panel section of views. Personally though, I would have preferred if it had been in the add-ons tab, as that would have made more sense to me.

The Flight Dynamics

While I can't claim to know how a real MD-80 will handle, I can say this; the flight model seems to perform the way you would think it would. I would like to say it's spot on, but I can't considering I don't know what spot on is in this aircraft.

I can say however, that it does feel like it is fly-by-wire. The aircraft does feel pretty stiff and handles quite well in my view. The only problem I had was either stalling or over speeding, but after a bit of research, I found out that it is a glitch in FSX with real world weather. Where the weather changes too quickly, it causes problems with the flight dynamics. To fix this, turn off the option which makes turbulence affect the aircraft. The aircraft does feel like it has a bit of kick to it though.

Sounds

The sounds are well done for the most part. There were three key flaws I noticed though. The big and annoying one was that the First Officer that is included with the aircraft, has a tendency to go into a loop of saying V1, V2, and rotate while landing. This wouldn't be so bad if he said it once, but he says it in a loop that almost gave me a headache, and annoyed the heck out of me.

The other key flaw I noticed was that one of the audio warnings doesn't play properly, and you can't tell what it is trying to tell you because it is cutting out enough of it to not know what the heck it's saying.

Finally, I noticed that sometimes the sounds don't play in the 3D cockpit until you switch to the 2D cockpit. These glitches seem to be fixed in the latest patches though. Oh, one thing to note that is important, if you use Realtek HD audio drivers for your onboard sound card with Vista, you need to know that to get all the sounds working properly, you have to install the beta 3D sound pack off the Realtek site along with updating your audio drivers. If you don't do this, none of the FO or warning sounds will play at all, I guess it's due to the way they are encoded.
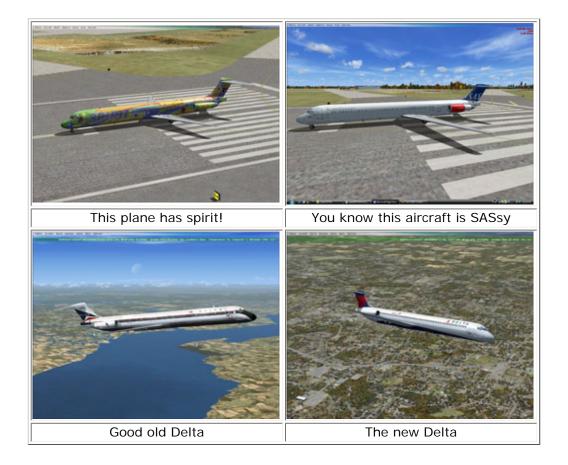
The External Model

The external model is well done up to a point. The main issues I found are that when you turn on the windshield wipers they don't move in external view. Furthermore, I noticed that you can't open the windows in the cockpit. This would have added a bit more realism in my opinion. These things are not that major, but they would have added a nice touch.

All in all though, the external model is very well done and are pleasant to look at. You can even see the reverse thrust in action when you activate it because the reverse thruster doors activate and move. I must note though that the things that I just mentioned as downsides to the external model are not real important unless you are one of those people who values graphics over everything else, and has a monster system to boot. I personally don't mind that much about those two things due to the fact that I firstly value avionics above all else, and I also value the internal cockpit, especially the 3D one, because I prefer to operate on the flight deck, unless I'm specifically looking for a screenshot to enter into a contest.

The Liveries

If you want variety, you got it, as this aircraft comes out of the box with 23 liveries. Some liveries look like a fresh coat of paint and others look weathered and worn. While I prefer the weathered and worn approach, I wish that they were all like that rather than just some of them.

The weathered liveries are done by McPhat Studios, and I have to commend them on these liveries as the weathering is the one thing that is missing from 90% of repaints for all aircraft for flight sim. The one thing I love with the add-on liveries is that you can install new ones using the Flight1 Manager. This is a very nice thing for convenience, so you don't have to dive into code to install a new skin.

This plane has spirit!	You know this aircraft is SASsy
Good old Delta	The new Delta

The Panel

Well, the panel is a mixed bag, a very mixed bag. In some cases, I love it, but with certain other things, it kills the experience for me. I love that the 2D panel and the major textures are sharp and it is easy to read the labels. The thing that really kills it for me is that the 3D virtual cockpit isn't all that 3D.

The large objects are in 3D, yes, but as someone who is hooked on virtual cockpits, the fact that 95% of the things in the cockpit are painted on really got on my nerves. It all looks relatively 3D from some viewpoints, but someone with a TrackIR or just looking at some areas can tell they are 2D painted on.

On the plus side though, I have to say that the avionics are very complex, which is the way I like it. This is something that really needs to be focused on by more developers, as the complex avionics are something I am willing to say that I would pay a little more for, say five or ten dollars more. Furthermore, I have noticed problems where the 3D panel would not update until I switched to the 2D panel. This is a glitch that really ticks me off at times. I should note however that this was also fixed in a patch.

The other real problem I have with the panel is that in 2D, you can see the windshield wipers move, but you can't see them move in 3D. I would have loved to see the wipers move in the 2D and 3D panel. That would be another nice touch for realism. I know you can't officially make rain work in the VC in SP2, so I won't make the mistake of mentioning that again. Also, I noticed that when you click something like the FMC in the 3D pit, the 2D panel for it pops up. In some ways this is nice, but in other ways, I would prefer to be able to punch in the FMC data in the 3D cockpit rather than having to do it on a 2D panel popup. That right there would have been a nice configurable option in the center.

Another issue I had was that the 3D pit was not very well textured on the areas where there weren't any knobs or switches. The textures just looked too, shall I say, clean and pristine. I got to the point where I felt that it's not that good looking or realistic if the textures make something look like it just came off the factory floor. To be honest, I feel that the textures just have to look dirtier to look more realistic. For instance, add some scratches or some worn off paint on some of the more used objects like on the pedals, or paint coming off the wheel.

Finally, I would have liked to be able to mess with the autopilot switches and knobs without having to do other things before I could even interact with them. Just to be fair, I have to commend Coolsky on the attempt to make the switches look 3D, but attempting is no excuse for not actually modeling them on something that costs this much.

3D panel screenshots

Oh boy I'm screwed

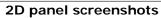The autopilot dash looks fine right....

Think again...

The overhead panel is, yup flat....

The FMCs are flat, and it looks like the gauges are painted on too.
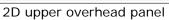

Those buttons are flat...

2D panel screenshots

Front Panel

2D Upper Pedestal

2D upper overhead panel

2D lower overhead panel

2D lower pedestal

Avionics

Now we go on to the actual avionics. The avionics are those of the modernized MD-80. This includes the glass cockpit, FMS, and various other digital goodies. Overall, the panel is very well detailed and the procedures to work with these avionics are highly detailed as well. The main problem I have with it is just that some of the avionics are a little glitchy, however, these are all officially fixed in a service pack. You can download the service pack from the Flight 1 website. New downloads include the fixes automatically, and any new glitches will probably be fixed in patches as they are found.

A few interesting details are that pretty much every function of the FMS is modeled, along with that you can actually adjust the brightness on all the screens. You have to adjust the brightness to turn the screens on. Also the weather radar is in there, and yes it works. It even allows you to set the different ranges for the weather radar.

Furthermore, you have to setup the autopilot correctly or you will get warning and caution lights. You also have to set the CG right or you won't be able to throttle up because the warning will come on and say "STABLIZER!", well actually you can, but you'll be nagged to death by the aural warning system. You can find the CG in the dispatch portion of the center.

The aircraft also features things such as accurate testing procedures, where you have to run the system tests to make sure they work properly. My favorite thing about the avionics is that they are accurately modeled to the point of being the sweetest avionics kit I have ever flown in a flight sim since Falcon 4.0 Open Falcon mod (that is something I have to give cudos to because it models the F-16 avionics to the brink of being classified, so you can't top that).

I'm a bit saddened though about the FMC. The FMC is nice and complex, but the problem is that it has a tendency to crash FSX. That's right I said it crashes FSX, as in CTD, or game over man, game over. Please note though that this has been fixed in the latest patches, and no it doesn't crash FSX anymore as of the time of this writing.

I noticed that the actual avionics model is just beyond belief, while I do believe that this is the kind of detail that should be standard on the MSFS default aircraft (I'm talking to you Microsoft), I also understand that this is an extreme amount of detail. This is more the kind of aircraft that I could get used to flying rather than a default airliner in FSX. The real issue is just the glitches, and since those are being fixed, it's all good, in fact, it seems as if the recent service pack has fixed EVERYTHING as far as glitches go.

The weather radar is fully functional, it even works so well that it can't render weather out beyond a certain point on the radar because FSX doesn't have an option to do weather that far away, so that's a problem that's on Microsoft's shoulders, not Coolsky's. The one thing I wish would be implemented in avionics though, would just be some better backlighting on the gauges as it's almost impossible to fly at night without the floodlights on.

There is one thing I did notice though about the avionics and that is they are not beginner friendly for someone just getting in to flight sims. I feel the avionics are for advanced simmers as these are fully detailed avionics. For an idea of what I'm talking about, I'm going to use an analogy; this is the equivalent of Falcon 4.0 in avionics complexity except this is an MD-80 instead of an F-16C block 52.

The Extra Features

The extra features include a training program, a dispatch program, and a bunch of other neat things. The training program is a very good idea for an aircraft this complex, but it has a few flaws, one of them major.

The major flaw is the way it is laid out. I understand that you would want to have tutorials dedicated to turning on the APU, but why can't it just be gone over in the tutorial about starting up the aircraft rather than having it reference a completely different tutorial on how to do it? This ticks me off because I don't want to have to switch between tutorials to figure stuff out.

I have a little idea for making the training program better in the future versions. How about actually making the training stuff missions, that way you can have a voiceover with an instructor training you on how to operate the aircraft.
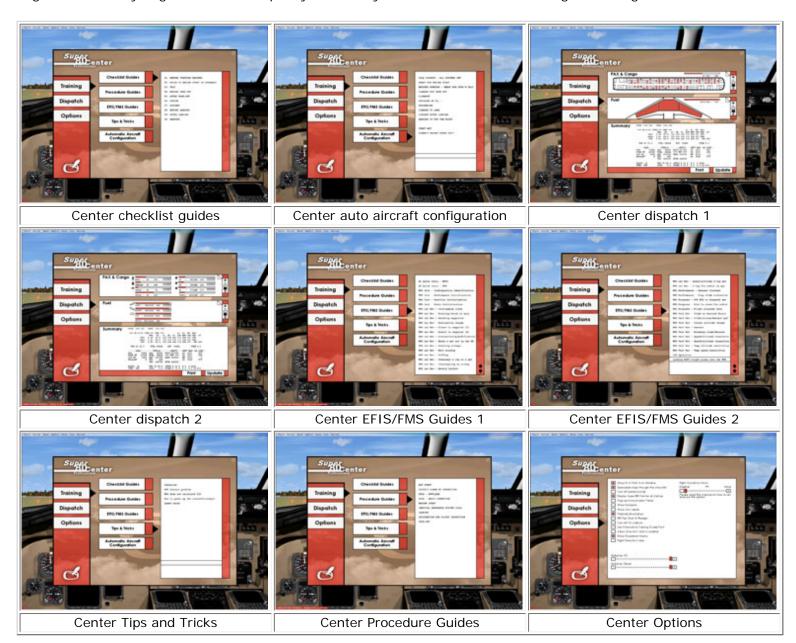
I love the dispatch page, as it allows you to customize the payload to a very good extent. This includes such things as gender and age of passengers along with their weights, and it also includes selecting which seats are taken. Furthermore, it allows you to select how much cargo you are carrying.

I also loved the aircraft configuration page, which allowed me to set up the aircraft for different phases of flight. The

virtual first officer was a good idea, the problems it did have seem to be fixed in the patches.

Finally, I would have liked to have seen the option to have a choice of a few different first officers, either male or female, and from different regions. It doesn't sound right when flying a China Southern Airlines aircraft to hear an American first officer.

Recently, Coolsky released a smoke system effect that adds engine smoke to the Super 80 Pro and Classic on takeoff, engine start, etc, you get the idea. It's pretty cool, but you have to do manual editing of the .cfg files to use it.

Center checklist guides	Center auto aircraft configuration	Center dispatch 1
Center dispatch 2	Center EFIS/FMS Guides 1	Center EFIS/FMS Guides 2
Center Tips and Tricks	Center Procedure Guides	Center Options

Summary / Closing Remarks

All in all, the Coolsky Super 80 Professional is certainly a very complex and nice add-on. While it isn't for everyone, it is worth the money if you enjoy the MD-80 and you are willing to read a big manual.

The main downsides are the glitches and the lack of detail on the 3D cockpit. Sadly, the 3D cockpit looks like something that was just slapped together in a hurry. While the textures in the 3D cockpit are nice for the most part, they are a bit weak in other areas, as the cockpit just doesn't look like it has been used that much; it looks like it just rolled off the factory floor. The 3D cockpit lacks detail in having the knobs, switches, and buttons modeled in 3D, and as such, someone like me who lives in the 3D cockpit, may have some issues with it being a bit…. flat.

The training program is a good idea, but was flawed in execution because of the need to jump between tutorials half

way in to do something.

Furthermore, the aircraft has some glitches that get on my nerves. These glitches however, are being fixed in patches as we speak. On the Coolsky forum, you can report glitches and hopefully they will be fixed in the next patch, or if not that one, then the one after that.

I personally recommend that if you can settle with a low detail 3D pit and a couple of glitches you should go for it, but sadly, in my personal tastes, I cannot say that I would be willing to pay 60 dollars for an add-on that doesn't have a detailed virtual cockpit with all the objects in the cockpit modeled in 3D.

It's not that I dislike the aircraft overall, it's just that for 60 dollars, I could buy a whole new sim, and I expect that if I'm going to drop anything over 30-40 dollars for an aircraft, the 3D panel has to actually be fully 3D rather than just painted on.

On a final note, if you get this plane, and I wholly recommend you do if you like complex avionics, be absolutely sure to register on the Coolsky forums and grab the service pack, as that really updates the aircraft.

What I Like About The Super 80 Professional

- Very detailed avionics suite
- The training suite was a good idea
- Very good frame rates in the cockpit
- The 2D panel is very clear and sharp
- The flight handling is well done
- Plenty of liveries, and easy install of more liveries that you download off the internet by using the Flight1 Repaint Manager to install them
- DirectX 10 support out of the box
- The included virtual first officer is a very good idea
- The McPhat liveries are sweet, and more people should take lessons from how they do it
- The dispatch handler is very cool

What I Don't Like About The Super 80 Professional

- The virtual pit was too low detail for my tastes
- The windshield wipers didn't move in the 3D pit or on the external model
- Various bugs and glitches, although on the up side, they are constantly being fixed in patches available to registered users on the official site's forums.
- The gauges need a little better backlighting, it's practically impossible to use them without the flood light on in the night.
- A lot of the internal textures are too clean and pristine
- Some procedures in the training mode were clumsily laid out, and left me frustrated
- It's a bit expensive

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Super 80 Professional

(adobe acrobat required)

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