AVSIM Commercial FSX Aircraft Review

Dodosim 206

Product Information		
Publisher: Flight 1		
Description: Helicopter add-on.		
Download Size: N/A	**Format:** CD	**Simulation Type:** FSX
Reviewed by: Mike Cameron AVSIM Staff Reviewer - August 16, 2010		

Introduction

The Dodosim 206 FSX is a single-engine gas turbine powered light utility helicopter.   It has a two-bladed "teetering" main rotor head and a two-bladed tail rotor, providing anti-torque and steering control. The 206 seats a pilot and four passengers.

The Dodosim 206 is based on the Bell 206 Jet Ranger. It was originally developed as the YOH-4 for the U. S. Army Light Observation Helicopter program but failed to be selected.   Bell redesigned the airframe and successfully marketed the new aircraft for commercial use as a five-place Bell 206A Jet Ranger. The first flight of the 206A was on January 10th 1966, received full certification from the FAA on October 20th 1966 and the first deliveries to customers was on January 13th 1967.

The basic shape and design of the Jet Ranger have remained unchanged since 1967. In 1971, Bell introduced the 206B Jet Ranger II with an upgraded engine and in 1977 introduced the Bell 206B-3 Jet Ranger III with a modified tail rotor and a more powerful engine. The Jet Ranger is very popular with news and media outlets and is primarily used for news and traffic reporting.

Installation and Documentation

Since this is an installation from the CD version of the product, installation is very easy.   After placing the disc in your CD or DVD drive, Autorun is supposed to take you to the startup screen. On my 64bit Windows 7 system, Autoplay asked if I wanted to wanted to run the setup program, then the Windows User Access Control asked if I wanted to allow the program to make changes to my computer, select "yes", pick the English, German or French version of the program, click next twice, accept the license agreement and the installation continues.

The installation routine automatically found my FSX location and the whole process took less than a minute on my system.   Installation of this product does not require entering a purchase email address or serial numbers which is very nice. Another thing that I like about retail CD products as opposed to having publishers burn a CD of the downloadable product is that printed documentation in included with the purchase.

Included are a 15 page Quick Start Guide, a 79 page Flight Training Manual and two checklist cards. An 88 page PDF User Manual is also included as part of the installation and as far as I can tell has the same information that is in both the Quick Start Guide and the Flight Training Manual. Before jumping into the helicopter for the first time, I recommend reading the quick start guide on how to set up FSX settings in order to have the best experience with the Dodosim 206.

The included documentation does a very good job explaining this process so I am not going to explain it here.   The Quick Start Guide recommends a joystick with a twist rudder action and at least one throttle control. With helicopter operations the throttle axis on the joystick controls the collective and whatever joystick axis or buttons that you have assigned to control propeller pitch controls the throttle.   For the most realistic experience the Quick Start Guide recommends a joystick with a second analog slider or rotary axis. Since the throttle is only used during startup and shutdown and remains at 100% during flight, mouse clicks, the mouse wheel or keyboard shortcuts works well for controlling the throttle.

Since I only have a single throttle axis on my joystick I used the mouse wheel option. On my system the only joystick buttons that I assigned was the engine start and the idle release hatch.   These two buttons were previously assigned to control incremental propeller pitch for fixed wing aircraft and as previously mentioned is easy to control using the mouse wheel.

The first time that you load one of the Dodosim 206 helicopters in FSX you will be prompted with the FSX security warning about if you want to run an unknown module, select "run" and click "yes" on the next screen to indicate that this module is trusted.

If you are a novice at flying helicopters, like I am, I highly recommend reading the Flight Training Manual in order to have the most enjoyable experience.

FSX Realism options.	FSX Controls settings.
FSX Security Warning.	Trusted module screen.
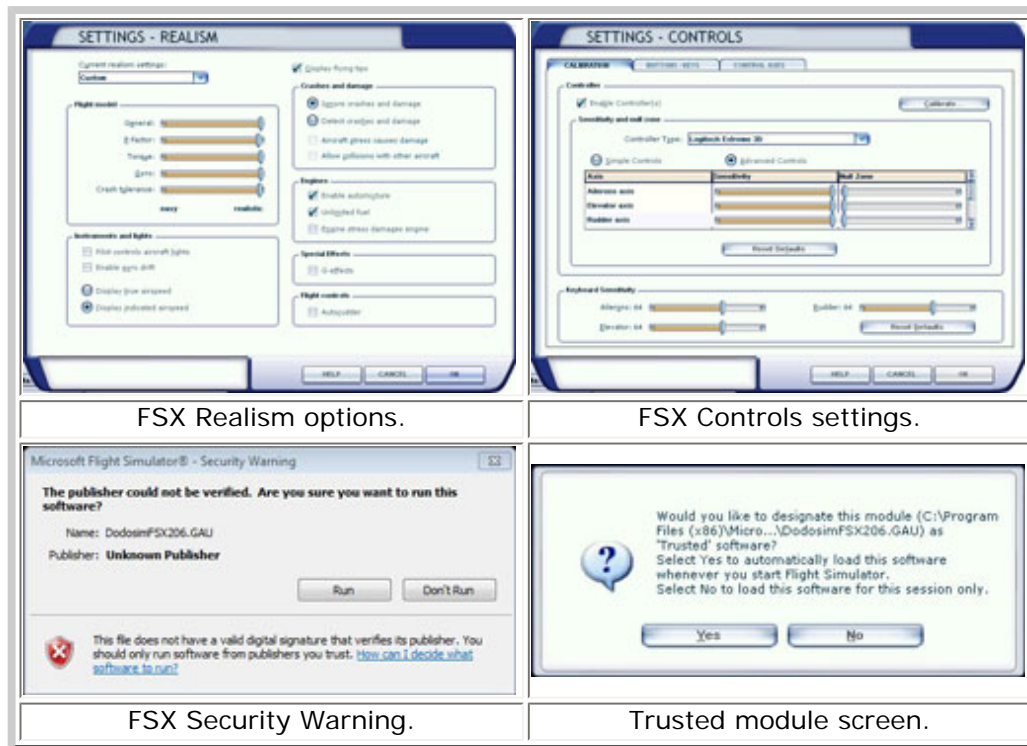
Panel

Unlike most flight simulator aircraft developers these days that are eliminating the 2D panel in favor of just a 3D virtual cockpit, Dodosim has included both. The 2D panel is excellent and has all of the required sub-panels open that are needed for the proper start up and shut down procedures.   The 2D panels are also used for the highlighted procedures during the fully automatic & manually cued startup and shutdown trainer modes.   I will explain more about this later in the review.

The virtual cockpit is also nice with instruments that are clear and easy to read.   For the most part, labels and other lettering on the panels are also easy to read and not blurry looking.   The only two labels on the panels that were hard for me to read were the Turbine Over-Temp Test button on the 2D panel and the Turbine Over-Temp Test button and the NAV/GPS switch on the virtual panel.   The lettering on these labels was grey in color on top of a gray background, which for me make's the lettering hard to read.

On the virtual panel I like that Dodosim included the Panel/Function shortcuts instead of having the pilot access these functions via menu. It is much easier for me to access these subpanels & functions using the shortcut instead of via the menu. This is true for all aircraft not just the Dodosim 206.

Since I am a novice at flying helicopters, I did most of my flying during the day. In order to review the lighting I took a short flight at dusk. When it became dark enough outside for the panel lighting to become visible, the results are wonderful. The panel lighting is excellent.

The only other minor issue that I have with Dodosim 206 panels is the default size of the GPS which is too large when it is first brought up.   This is a personal preference and is easily fixed by resizing the GPS. Unfortunately I have to do this every time I load the GPS for the first time.

| The excellent 2D panel. | The Virtual Cockpit. |

Exterior

The package contains four different aircraft with each painted in three different liveries and are labeled with unique registration numbers.   The four different helicopters are based on the type of landing gear that is installed.   These are standard low profile skids, high skids, floats and utility which is a high profile skid configuration with a belly mounted hook & wire strike kit.   Also each helicopter can be selected with or without doors.

The exterior textures are of high quality with nice reflective paint jobs. The textures are standard definition so aircraft load times and system performance in flight should not be an issue.   There are high definition repaints available on the web if you like HD textures.   I have a midrange system so I do not have a problem with standard definition textures as long as the exterior is nice looking with clear lettering and textures.

The pilot is visible from spot view. Several animations are included with the package. Both the main rotor and tail rotor move when these controls are being used, the front, rear passenger & baggage compartment doors open and the cargo hook can be extended and retracted.   I might have missed some other animations but that is part of the fun with learning a new aircraft.

Float version of the Dodosim 206

Utility version with cargo hook extended.

Interior

The only real disappointment of the Dodosim 206 is the interior textures.   They are bland looking and remind me of the default FSX aircraft interior textures. Also the interiors all look the same no matter which exterior color livery is being used. All of the upholstery and door accents are the same color instead of matching the exterior color.   For me this is a minor detail and would have added to an already excellent product.   If you are the type of person who judges the overall aircraft quality by the interior textures, then you may be disappointed.   I do not have a problem with the interior textures because for this aircraft I prefer accurate flight dynamics & operations instead of detailed interior textures.

| Front interior textures – float version. | Front interior textures – high skid version. | Rear interior textures – float version. |

Sounds

Dodosim has done an outstanding job with the sound effects.   I have not been around a real Bell 206 Jet Ranger so I cannot say how realistic the various sound effects are. Besides the usual sound effects such as button clicks, warning horns, the turbine engine, starter wind up and wind down, are some helicopter specific sound effects including, blade slap, transmission whine, rotor rumble, cockpit engine & rotor sounds and mechanical failure sounds.

All of the sounds that I noticed were impressive but the ones that I liked best were the turbine engine startup and the blade slap. After flying the 206 Jet Ranger for some time now, I can understand why real world pilots wear noise cancelling headsets.   The turbine engine sound effect in the cockpit is very loud.   I turned down the dynamic sounds volume from the Dodosim menu in FSX.   I could still hear all of the sound effects but I did not have the ear strain caused from the loud engine sounds.

Airfile & Difficulty

I have saved the best and most important section for last.   I am a novice at flying helicopters in FSX and also have not been around the real Bell 206 Jet Ranger, so I will have to trust the documentation and other users on the flight simulator aircraft forums that this aircraft has a very accurate flight model.

Dodosim did a very good thing and included five difficulty levels, so pilots of all skill levels can enjoy this wonderful aircraft.   The documentation includes a chart showing the five difficulty levels and what is included as you advance to the higher difficulty levels.   Dodosim also provides the manual on their website to download and I recommend that potential customers download and read it to see if this is the right product for you.

If you are a novice helicopter pilot like me I also recommend starting at the lower difficulty settings or you will quickly become frustrated.   I started with level one difficulty where the flight model is similar to the default FSX helicopters, so I was able to fly the 206 pretty easily.   I quickly moved on to level two, mostly because in levels two and three the visual tutorial startup and shutdown procedures waits for you to do the highlighted action instead of being fully automatic.

Test System
Computer Specs
Asus G72GX Laptop Intel Core2 Duo 2.53GHz 6GB DD2 Memory 500 GB Serial ATA HD(5400RPM) Nvidia GeForce 260M Video Card with 1GB GDDR3 Memory 17.3" LED-Backlit LCD Screen FSX with Acceleration Logitech Extreme 3D Pro Joystick. Saitek Pro Flight Switch Panel & Multi Panel
Flying Time: 25 hours

The tutorial is very useful in learning the proper startup and shutdown procedures and I wish other complex aircraft flight simulator developers would include some form of visual tutorial.   Even though I had pretty much memorized the startup & shutdown procedures or used the checklist, I continued to use the tutorial because it is very cool. As far as flying is concerned, after some trial and error, I was able to get the helicopter into a hover and fly from point A to point B on levels two and three.

It is a good thing that the documentation recommends turning off crash detection when you are first learning to fly the helicopter, otherwise I would have caused some expensive damage while I was learning. I was all over the place and tended to overcorrect on the controls when first starting out. The Flight Training manual has a section on flight operations and is pretty good at explaining the procedures, but for me it was somewhat technical.   I am glad it is included because without it, achieving hover and flight on all but level one would be nearly impossible for the novice pilot.

I wish Dodosim would have included an introductory mission to make learning these procedures a little easier.   The FSX Learning Center has introductory training missions but they use the default FSX helicopter with its simplified flight dynamics instead of the more advanced flight model of the Dodosim 206.   What I quickly learned about helicopter flight, unlike fixed wing aircraft where the pilot can trim the aircraft for straight and level flight without much control movement, helicopters require constant small corrections in order to have stable flight.   With my joystick setup, if I took my hands off the stick for more than a few seconds, I was asking for trouble.

The Flight Training manual suggests reducing the "General Realism" slider in the "Aircraft-Realism Settings" menu item in FSX in order to lessen the effects of some of the advanced flight dynamics.   This is a very good idea if you are a beginner helicopter pilot because it will lessen the frustration level somewhat.   I recommend getting several hours of flight experience with levels one through three before moving on to the last two difficulty levels.

I tried level four and after what seemed like endless warning sounds and messages was able to get the helicopter airborne proceeded to fly from one airport to another without too many troubles.   I also briefly tried level five while in flight but quickly went back to level three because I was not ready for all of the advanced realism of levels four and five.

The one thing that I had difficulty mastering on all difficulty levels was approach and being able to land in the correct spot.   I was able to land (sometimes rather hard) but could not land where I intended no matter how many times I tried. I would come close, but if there are cars or other aircraft nearby, this would not be a good situation.   This is the nice thing about flight simulation aircraft; it does not cost any money to practice, except with the Dodosim 206, it really is not free.

To add to the realism level of the product, Dodosim has included wear & damage modeling and a costing system.   For each variant that you fly, the software is keeping track of the costs associated with operating that aircraft using virtual dollars.   Every time that you add gas or service that particular variant (also included with the program), the costs are being tracked and you can see how much it is costing you to operate your favorite variant.   The accrued wear and damage feature is activated starting with level three. I really like that this is included because it adds to the overall realism level of the product.

Summary / Closing Remarks

For all simulator pilots that are interested in a helicopter with realistic flight dynamics & procedures, I highly recommend the Dodosim 206 package.   If you are primarily a fixed wing pilot or only a casual helicopter pilot, I recommend downloading and reading the user manual before purchase to see if this is the right product for you.

Having five difficulty levels and the tutorial for proper startup & shutdown procedures lets pilots of all skill levels enjoy this wonderful product. The Dodosim 206 is fun to fly, relatively easy to fly at the lowest difficulty setting yet hard to master at the higher difficulty levels.   If you give yourself some time to learn to fly 206 properly, you will not want to fly the default FSX helicopters again.

I am definitely going to keep the Dodosim 206 installed on my system so that I can continue to improve my skills at flying it properly and landing on the intended area.

What I Like About The Dodosim 206

- Startup & shutdown procedures tutorial.
- Excellent 2D panel with all required sub-panels open for proper startup and shutdown procedures.
- Having five levels of realism difficulty.
- Realistic flight model and operations on higher difficulty levels.
- The included documentation is very good and is already printed for you, no large PDF file to print.
- Good looking exterior textures.
- Sound effects are impressive.

What I Don't Like About The Dodosim 206

- Interior textures are bland looking.
- Would like to have had an introductory flight mission for novice helicopter pilots like myself.
- Turbine engine sound effects are a little loud for my taste.

Printing

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Dodosim 206

(adobe acrobat required)

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