

## AVSIM Commercial FSX Scenery Review

# *UK VFR Airfields*

## *Volumes 1 - 3*



### Product Information

**Publishers:** [UK2000 Scenery](#)

**Description:** Multiple airfield scenery add-ons.

**Download Size:**

**Format:**  
CD

**Simulation Type:**  
FSX

**Reviewed by:** [Ted Gold](#) AVSIM Staff Reviewer - May 23, 2011

## Introduction

The United Kingdom is a wonderful flight location with something for every virtual pilot to enjoy within the confines of some of the world's busiest and compact airspace. Airfields abound, ranging from the odd farmer's strip to historical WWII aerodromes, right on up to the major airports serving millions of passengers annually.

Oh yes, that fabulous weather can make things fairly interesting as well! For the online flyer, VATSIM and IVAO ATC have the airspace routinely covered allowing for positive (and more realistic) control, whether one flies heavies from Heathrow or VFR circuits around Little Snoring.

So where does UK2000 VFR Airfield scenery come in? As one may note, FSX is rather good about providing a baseline generic airfield to fly from; however, the source material is visually dated, incomplete and in the case of the typical grass aerodrome, non-existent and difficult to even see when trying to land.

This detracts significantly from the immersion factor and in the case of pilots using photoreal or other ground terrain enhancements for flight, I would imagine downright frustrating as well. Never mind that Heathrow has a new terminal (T5) and Gatwick has the world's largest sky bridge in place between terminals and other anomalies large and small.



To overcome these sorts of issues and provide enhancement for the photoreal crowd and pure immersive pleasure and airfield accuracy for the rest of us, Gary Simmons and UK2000 VFR Airfields Volumes 1-3 upgrade something like 225 airfields covering virtually all of England and Wales south of a line roughly running from the western Hadrian's Wall up to Newcastle.

These packages not only include corrected taxiways and aprons but also airfield-specific models, flying birds, VFR traffic, custom objects, and loads more designed specifically for FSX. All three packages are advertised as frame-rate friendly and designed to work in conjunction with Horizon Generation-X VFR scenery packages as well as default FSX installs (with or without UTX/GEX add-ons).

*\*\*Reviewer Note\*\* In exploring the UK2000 VFR Airfields effects I have chosen a combination of before/after images in conjunction with some VFR flights to illustrate the changes made to the pilots eye within the FSX world. A base FSX scenery install is used with REX+Overdrive and Ultimate Traffic 2 in order to provide a good look at what the tube flyers and especially the GA/VFR pilot groups can expect to see.*

## Installation and Documentation

The installation process consisted of 3 separate downloads ranging from 300-500Mb per volume. All three volumes are available in CD-ROM format for those that prefer a hard copy. The auto-installer worked perfectly and in addition to each scenery package, a full user manual for each volume is included covering recommended FSX settings, detailed installation procedures, and a listing of all airfields covered within each volume featuring a short history of each plus ICAO codes and basic runway/communication frequencies (this is a great touch).



*\*\*Reviewer Note\*\* Be aware that with a middle-of-the-road system like mine, my FSX settings were 50% spot on to recommended and 50% one "tick" below in the case of Mesh Resolution and Texture Resolution. While my system was fine with basic VFR aircraft at full recommended settings, I did dial it back as noted above when switching to complex aircraft at the larger airports. Your experience may vary depending on PC spec, add-ons, etc.*

*I should also note that during installation I restarted my PC after each volume in order to "set" any registry entries and after all three volumes were in place, I performed a full system defrag - always a good practice to ensure best performance!*

After installing each volume, an options program is presented that allows the user to further customize the experience including AI airfield traffic, static aircraft models, and a special module handling "explorer" flights that gives a pilot 3 GA virtual wingmen to fly a group flight visiting the various airfields.

Also installed are a series of "saved flights" with the default Cessna to ensure the user can explore every included airfield at a handy start point. I was pleasantly surprised when on a whim I loaded up at RAF Lakenheath and found myself inside an aircraft shelter with fighter jets parked outside.



**Starting up a saved flight and over-flying RAF Lakenheath. I hope I am too slow for those jets to nab me violating the airspace!**

## Discovering Little Britain VFR

*"Britain, Britain, Britain. We've had running water for over ten years, we have a tunnel connecting us to Peru, and we invented the cat." Tom Baker-Little Britain narrator*

When I lived in the Brighton area (Hove actually) one of my favorite airfields is located just to the west - EGKA Shoreham. Walking my dog along the river Adur was directly under the approach path and I was frequently treated to low-flying GA planes of all sorts, the odd rare Spitfire, and other small commercial aircraft that service the region. It is also home to the Shoreham Airshow which is one of the best I have attended. The transformation from the default FSX by the UK2000 scenery is astonishing.



How exactly do Gary Simmons and his team manage to provide such a dramatic improvement? Some answers from Gary regarding the process:

*"I first have to get hold of the ground photo image for the airfields. Horizon simulations kindly allowed me to reuse the images from their Gen-X product for this task. Horizon also released these products on CD. The image is displayed as a photo base image for the airport within FSX.*

*I then got my team of AFCAD designers to create the taxiways, runways and apron layout. They also made the airfield terrain files so you don't get any 'cliffs' around the airfield. I then added other 2D ground lines polygons to the*

scenery and added the 3D structures and some of the airfield 'clutter' objects and signage. Then back to my AFCAD team who then add other generic FSX library objects to the scene.

Some ILS's had to be adjusted as many default FSX runways are not correctly aligned."

Even with the default FSX terrain, the UK2000 airfields blend in nicely relieving the generic tan-bordered outlines and blends well with the surroundings. For the VFR pilot this results in a much higher level of immersion and I found it much easier to actually see the airfields from a distance within the cockpit. The level of detail shown on the ground adds to the fun with each airfield displaying individual objects that add a distinct flavor, unique to wherever you choose to fly.



I even found myself startled at times as flocks of animated birds appeared. Too bad FSX does not simulate bird strikes!





**Flying Along the West Coast of England**



**Over Devon and Final Approach EGHU Eaglescott**



**Ground Details EGHU Eaglescott**

As the screen shots detail, the flight experience is dramatically altered for the better from baseline FSX. This is just a small sample of what to expect given this treatment has been applied to more than 200 airfields within the UK.



## Discovering "Bigger Britain"

*"Swimming pools in Britain have very strict rules - no bombing, no petting, no ducking and no fondue parties." Tom Baker-Little Britain narrator*



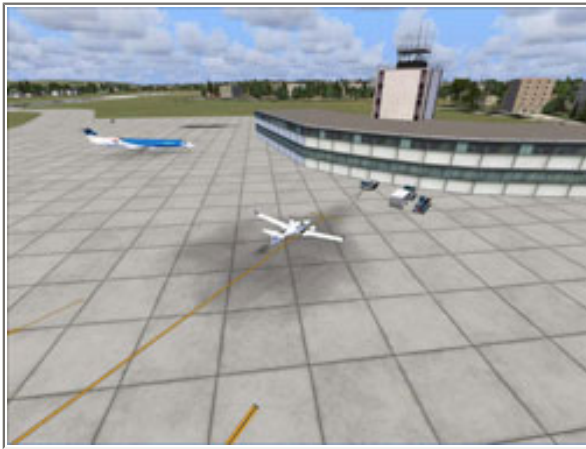
Pilots that prefer to fly larger aircraft into the big airports will find FSX given a similar makeover with pleasing visual improvements, accurately aligned runways and taxiways, and corrected ILS feathers covering all of the major airfields including Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Liverpool; basically all of the majors within the coverage area.

Night lighting is also featured and appears improved; always important given the challenging weather conditions found when flying IFR in UK airspace. For online network pilots, having accurate layouts is a bonus when trying to maneuver around on the ground without getting lost enroute to the stand.

I asked Gary Simmons about the differences that could be expected between the VFR Airfields and his range of Xtreme

Airfields that each concentrate on a specific major airport:

*"Well you have to install one of the Xtreme airports to see that. It is far more detailed, with more buildings, more accuracy, more higher res images, animation, service fleet, night effects, 1000s of objects, purpose-made jetways, purpose-made taxiway textures, hi res ground images ect... it is miles ahead in every possible way."*



**Before and After EGNM Leeds Bradford**



**Before and After Departing East Midlands EGNX**

During my testing of the VFR airfields, I spent some time at EGLL Heathrow, possibly the worst offending frame rate hog in the FSX world. Prior to installing the UK2000 volumes I had been using a free version of Gary's Xtreme Heathrow. It was an improvement over the default and could maintain mid-teens frames hence being a bit surprised to find the VFR Airfields version dropping my FPS to single digits. A response from Gary regarding Heathrow and the VFR Airfields package:

*"Yes you can get poor FPS at Heathrow, several reasons for this (apart from normal FPS hit due to AI, weather, settings ect):*

*-The LHR area is a poor FPS area due to objects in London being processed and displayed, even if you removed the entire airport it's not good, I've done this myself while testing.*

*-Having so many add-on airfields in one area is also a factor, designers can't tell FSX to stop displaying airfields so it is processing a lot of airfields within 80KM, but you can't see them.*

*-VFR Airfields uses the Official MS way to make scenery, which means AFCAD taxiway, aprons etc and uses the FSX library of objects. It was done like this for speed reasons and to help eliminate possible problems with purpose-made ground textures. Sounds a good idea in theory, but most FSX objects are made with multiple textures like 'bump maps' and 'reflection maps' that all add up together to slow the sim. You may be surprised by this, but my Heathrow Xtreme with 10X the detail and quality runs faster than this basic Heathrow, this is mainly due to the fact the basic version uses FSX default objects (Heathrow Xtreme does NOT use any default objects)*

*To speed up Heathrow you really must disable FSX airport vehicles, this is also a major killer, and*



again because its default objects popping up at every AFCAD stand, and as there's 200+ stand, that's a lot of objects. Some users also choose to turn off the airfields around Heathrow that they don't use.

It must be said that people who use VFR Airfields want to use the smaller airfields; the inclusion of the larger airports was just to complete it in a geographical way. Not many users actually use the big airport and prefer my Xtreme free version of Heathrow."



After reading Gary's helpful explanation I simply disabled the VFR Airfields Heathrow and turned the free Xtreme version back on and frame rates reverted back to the expected mid-teens. While I realize this is a lot of time spent on just one airport out of a couple hundred, I felt it was an important issue to cover given the popularity of Heathrow in the flight sim community.





With regard to the balance of the major airfields featured within the three volumes, I experienced only minor (if any) FPS hits and as can be seen from the various screen shots, the transformations achieved are outstanding and closely match the real world.

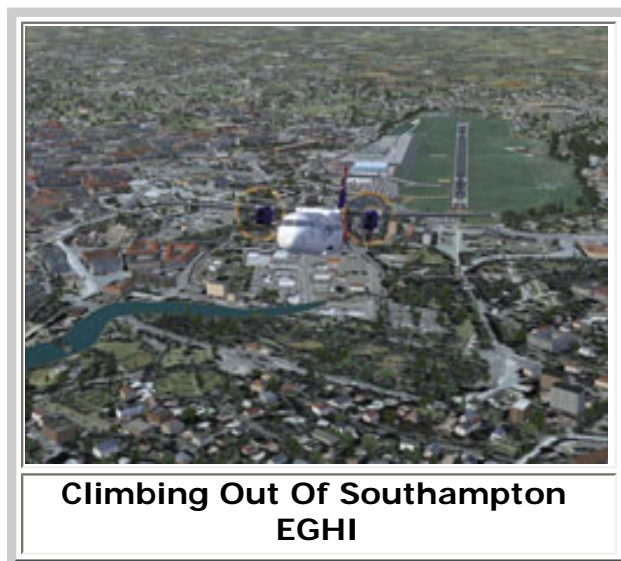
### **System Performance**

As detailed within the review, with the exception of Heathrow, I experienced only minor FPS hits and virtually none when flying GA-type aircraft.

### **Summary**

The UK2000 UK VFR Airfields Volumes 1-3 offer a massive change for the better for any FSX pilot that flies in and around the United Kingdom. Where some packages offer detailed examination of simply one airfield, Gary and his team present a transformation on a grand scale covering hundreds of airfields suitable for both VFR and airline pilots thus encouraging exploration and enjoyment of places that might ordinarily be missed while hugely improving the graphics and accuracy of the airfields.

<b>Test System</b>
Intel Core2 Quad Q8300@2.5GHz ASUS P5P41TD board 4Gb DDR3 RAM nVidia GT 430 1Gb WINXP Home SP3 FSX Gold (Notable add-ons include REX and Ultimate Traffic 2)
<b>Flying Time:</b> 15 hours



## **\*\*Final Reviewers Note\*\***

The sharp-eyed reader of this piece may have noticed my sneaking in a couple of VA-specific liveries. Both the [EuroHarmony](#) and [FlyUK](#) virtual airlines recently celebrated 10-year and 7-year anniversaries respectively and have significant operations within the United Kingdom. Gary Simmons is actually a sponsor of the FlyUK monthly screenshot competition and as he says:

"...I'm more than happy to help VA's. I do the same for several other VA's and groups, so far I think the count is around 9. I used to have my own VA and is how I started in this FS business. "UK Direct" VA was started in 1998 by me, with 2 BAC1-11 flying from Bournemouth, but I gave it up in 2001 due the lack of time, I think it's still going but run by others now. I am at heart a FS fan and not a pure business person like users some think I am."

For more information regarding the VA's above please click the relevant link and join me in wishing them many more years of enjoyment and service to the simulator community.

Also, for UK charts, you can find them at this [website](#).

### **What I Like About VFR Airfields**

- Incredible value for money with over 200 airfields included.
- Minimal FPS hit except as noted.
- Amazing visual and airfield accuracy improvements.
- Easy installation and documentation.
- Continual and enthusiastic support.

### **What I Don't Like About VFR Airfields**

- There is absolutely nothing to dislike about this package!

### **Printing**

If you wish to print this review or read it offline at your leisure, right click on the link below, and select "save as"

**[UK VFR Sceneries - Volumes 1 - 3](#)**

[\(adobe acrobat required\)](#)

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