AVSIM Commercial Hardware Review

MFD COUGAR Pack

Product Information		
Publishers: SimWare Simulation		
Description: MFD (Multi Function Display) Cougar Pack.		
Download Size: Drivers - 10.4 MB FSX/FS9 plug-in - 13.45 MB	**Format:** Software on Mini CD	**Simulation Type:** FS9 / FSX (reviewed in FSX)

Reviewed by: Angelique van Campen AVSIM Senior Staff Reviewer - December 9, 2009

Introduction

It's not even Sinterklaas or Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus – very confusing by the way – and the first gift arrives from UPS. Ok, I need to return this hardware present to SimWare Simulations after reviewing it, but nonetheless it's still fun reviewing some hardware. This time the honor goes to **Thrustmasters MFD (Multi Function Display) COUGAR Pack**, which comes with 2 multifunctional USB display panels.

These are, by the way, replicas of the U.S. Air Force F-16 MFD, but the hardware also fits perfectly when using it in combination with FS9/FSX civil aircraft models. To be honest, I'm very interested in what SimWare Simulations, who offered me this hardware, writes about it.

It's time to look at the **SimWare Simulations** website and copy this information here, so we can all see and read it. OK, here we go:

• The ideal companion for all joysticks and yokes:
- Compatible with all flight simulation games (military or civil) supporting multi-USB.
- CD included with Plug & Play presets for Microsoft Flight Simulator X and Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004.
Your choice of 3 presets: Generic / Light Aviation / Airliner.
• From the creator of the HOTAS Cougar and T.16000M joysticks!
• 20 buttons + 4 switches per MFD = 48 programmable controls in total!
• Forget about your keyboard and take control with real flight instruments for even greater realism!
• 2 programmable LEDs per MFD, to identify the MFD during programming.
• Backlighting for buttons with adjustable intensity (via the software or manually).
• Multi-position, weighted, non-slip and detachable base.
• Multi-Function Display.
• 2 Plexiglas windows per MFD to insert one of the 3 pre-printed cardboard layouts with presets for Microsoft Flight Simulator X
each cardboard layout corresponds to one of your choice of 3 presets: Generic / Light Aviation / Airliner.

While currently writing, I did most of the testing thus it's very easy to say whether the above is true or false, so I'll leave that open for the moment. I would like to make one thing clear and because of the importance, I'll tell you this again later. The MFD displays are not TFT screens. These are just open-frame panels with integral buttons and switches, which can be connected to FSX or FS9, depending on the activated profiler files.

In other words, a particular provided "profiler" file connects button and switch functions on the side of the MFD, to a dedicated Flight Simulator output. Let's give you an example; when a button which is assigned to Doors is pushed, the respective MFD button operates the aircraft DOOR or canopy, where canopy of course is applicable. This is possible because of the profiler file.

Then there's a second problem or question; how does the user know which button or switch is assigned to what? Simple because of the offered MFD card (s), which is inserted in the respective MFD. With these cards, the user can read on the card what the function of each button is and that is in combination with the correct activated profiler file. When you want to use a button function, you simple press it, the loaded/activated profiler file transforms it into a MSFS command and the airplane respond accordingly … let's hope it's doing so. Why am I'm writing down "let's hope", because not all add-on aircraft are responding as they should be.

Anyway, I hope this introduction gives you some background information what an MFD is and what you can do with it. For the rest, sit back, relax, take a coffee, tea or if the time is right a beer or glass of wine and enjoy the MFD Cougar Pack review.

MFD (Multi Function Display) COUGAR Pack – hardware

Display Units

For now, let's have a close look of what you get. The package consist of two MFD frames - let's call them for now display units – made of plastic although due to the weight and the way it's designed and casted, you get the impression it's made of a metal so you're off to a good start. Each display has its own USB cable, which can be connected to any USB port or hub. How and if that works, that's for later.

To keep the frames in an angled position, you could turn the round screws on each lower front side of the display, but remember, it's made of plastic and on the other hand, there's no need to. For each display unit there are two brackets, which you can clip on the backside. The brackets itself can be unscrewed and allows you to make them shorter or longer and thus influencing the length and thus when mounted, the angle of the display. To be more precise; you can create angles of 72°, 54° and 39° by simply following the instructions in the manual, which are found in the beginning of each manual.

Around each side of the display unit, you'll find lots of programmable buttons which are, by the way, back lighted. There are also four switches named GAIN, BRT, CON and SYM, which allows you to control, depending on the inserted card and software profile, the flaps, elevator trim, landing gear extending/retracting etc. Operating those switches and buttons goes very easy, and there's no need to put a placard on it because the inserted card tells you what kind of function it offers.

In other words, it's ready for use and because the whole MFD weight is a little more than expected from plastic, it's easy to press them without moving the whole display. If you wanted to, you could dismantle the two halve of each display unit and mount them directly to a screen or in a handmade cockpit. Confused or worried about how you do this? All the information is within the manual.





Some close-up views of the MFDs (Multi Function Display). The foldable MFD can be pre-set and locked in three angles but it's even possible to dismantle it and fit it to your own needs. Although the housing is made of plastic, it feels and weighs different. Furthermore, each MFD has its own USB connected, which allows the user via the activated profiler file, to interact with your favorite aircraft. Finally and depending on the profiler file used, you can insert different cards in the LH (RH) MFD. Unfortunately only FSX cards are supplied with the MFD COUGAR package.

Finally but yet importantly, the slots on top of each display allows you to insert two Plexiglas windows where in-between you can insert the supplied FSX related cards or a decorative version. But what about the FS9 flight simmers?

No problem since Thrustmaster offers on their website cards for FS9 users. Difficult to find … no way … find here the Thrustmaster website and follow from there Updates and Downloads. From there you select from the pull-down boxes PC (Product Genre) – Joysticks (Product Family) – MFD COUGAR Pack (Product) – and then you make your choice (Link) for either Drivers, Software, Games Settings or Manual/Help File.

By the way, it could be an idea to check while you're there for the latest software version. It could be that the offered version on the website is newer then the one supplied in the package. Before I continue with the supplied cards, I would like to make one thing clear in case you're lost. The MFD units are not offering any real screens with information .. I know, I mentioned this before but it's very important that you understand what these MFD's are.

The idea of a MFD is that you insert a card for your needs and auto program the buttons around it with the available profiler file. In other words, your buttons are now linked/connected to the requested FSX functions. That the green radar cards look nice doesn't mean they show you an actual radar image on the MFD, it's fake.

Decorative or functional FSX cards

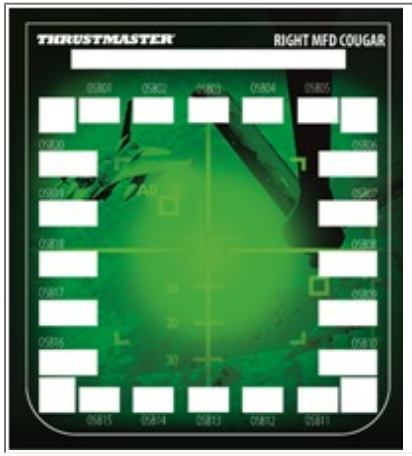
Already mentioned before; the supplied FSX related cards can be inserted in-between the Plexiglas plates. Via button programming and of course the supplied software, a card can be used in combination with either a "Generic profile", "Light Aviation profile", "Airline profile" or "own made". Own made by the way means you're able to program special functions and print them on the card itself. I didn't mention the two other cards because they are just decorative ones and do not have any function except that the display hole is covered by something.

Already mentioned before, for those who like to connect the display units in relation to FS9, just download those cards via the offered Acrobat file from the previous mentioned Thrustmaster website. The three lower screenshots are an extraction of this Acrobat file.

Generic Profile

Airline Profile

Light Aviation Profile



The upper three images show the different inserted FSX cards in a MFD. As you can see on each individual image, the inserted card offers opposite of each button/switch the connected text or function. Together with the correct loaded profiler file, the buttons and or switches control this function in FSX/FS2004.
The lower three images are extractions of the downloaded Acrobat file from Thrustmaster. Except for the lower LH image, which is just a decorative plate, the lower middle is used in combination with FS2004.

The RH lower seems to be a programmable card or let's say it allows you to make your own notes of what happens when you press a button/switch on the MFD in relation to the used aircraft or helicopter via of course one of the three loaded profile files.

Manual and mini CD

The paper version of the user manual comes in 8 different languages, so that shouldn't be a problem to find the one you prefer. Ok, here we go …it comes in English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese and I think Russian. Sorry, for the last one but I'm not sure. Anyway, I took the English version which covers 18 pages of what and how to install it and how to program it (program is probably not the correct word). Regarding the program I missed some things, namely examples. We will see when it's time to check this programming.

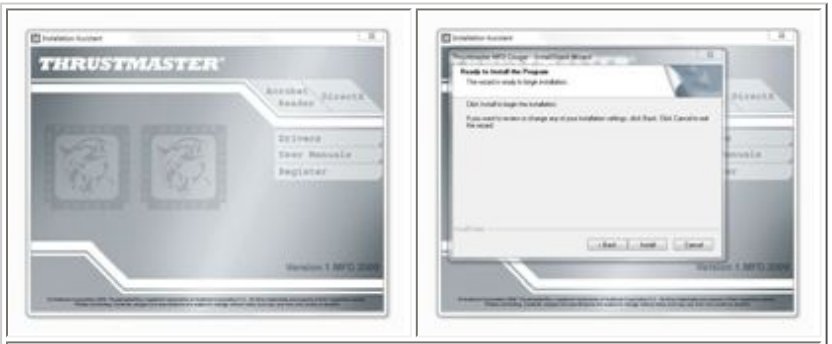
Regarding the supplied software, oops that could be a problem. It comes on a mini CD and I could image that when your CD/DVD player is mounted vertically, it might not hold this mini CD because it's too small and it won't fit in the holder. My player is mounted horizontally and this shouldn't give any problems. The small CD offers drivers, game plug-in

software and DirectX 9.0c. Written on the CD and mentioned before, always have a look on the Thrustmaster website to see if they offer newer drivers and/or plug-in software. By the way; the offered software is compatible with Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 for 32 and 64 bits.

Overall impression of the manual is very good. All the software installation and configuration steps including the activation of the different profiles are discussed in the manual. The only thing that isn't discussed is when you want to use the MFD Cougar with games other than Flight Simulator. Programming or connecting the buttons and/or switches to the particular game is not explained. I understand that this is not always possible because of the number of other games but at least an example of how to do it was certainly an option.

Installation

That's really simple and straightforward: just insert the mini CD and the installer shows the user a startup screen. Here you're able to register your product, install the driver, read the user manuals, install DirectX and Acrobat Reader (if required). You don't need most of the things related to manuals nor DirectX but it's all supplied if you need it. According to the manual I need to click the Drivers button. This activates a new window and after giving me the choice of the directory, it installs the driver(s). When finished, another window pops up and installs the program itself and we're ready. Before connecting any MFD, just restart your PC first.



Just an example of one of the few installer screens that pass during your installation. Don't worry …. It works great and afterwards when the PC is restarted, you can start using the Control Panel.

Oops, I don't want to write a complete tutorial here, but since it's fun testing these units, it could be that you'll find the necessary steps apart from what's already written in the manual.

My MSFS PC is back up and running and via the Start menu, I'll find two new folders; Thrustmaster and Thrustmaster MFD Cougar. The first folder offers a sub-folder Force Feedback Driver with the program to do so. The 2nd folder is what we need and that's how to program the MFD and how to install the plug-in for Flight Simulator 9 or FSX.

Before doing anything, first connect both MFDs via the USB cable to your PC or USB hub. By the way: the system should work already with one MFD. However, to use these MFDs within Flight Simulator you need to connect both of them or else it won't work. Before I forget it; the Thrustmaster Cougar software allows you to connect up to 8 MFDs.

Ok, back to the USB connection. As always with USB devices, the necessary driver needs to be installed and since it's not "plug and pray", after some seconds the unit is installed and all the green buttons and switches are back lit. It looks like

a Christmas tree and so far it works great. Is that because I'm using Windows 7 or should that be a difference with those who are still using Vista or XP. That's something I can't check, but I think even with Vista it should work straight away.

Some words about the software although the manual is very clear on this. The Control Panel shortcut allows you to monitor the connected MFDs as well as testing them before connecting them to a Flight Simulator version. Before connecting the MFDs to FSX (FS9), you need to load the respective FSX or FS9 profile from the Thrustmaster MFD Cougar folder.

You have the following choices of profile files:

- **Light Aviation profile** for Flight Simulator X (or FS9)
This profile is specifically designed to meet the requirements of light and leisure aircraft.
It comprises a basic autopilot feature as well as landing gear and flaps controls, electric systems management features, engine mixture, propeller pitch and engine cooling system controls, etc.
- **Airliner profile** for Flight Simulator X (or FS9)
While offering a number of features available in the Light Aviation Profile, this profile also accounts for more specific aspects inherent to airliners and professional aviation, while also providing an advanced autopilot feature.
- **Generic profile** for Flight Simulator X (or FS9)
This profile covers the most frequent requirements for both civil and military aircraft.

Test System

Intel Core Extreme i7-965 3.2Ghz
6GB Tri-Channel DDR3 1600Mhz
EVGA GTX-285 For the Winner
Triple WD VelociRaptor 300GB HDD
Single WD 1TB HDD (data)
Windows 7 Ultimate – X64
Flight Simulator FSX SP2
Saitek Pro Flight Rudder Pedals
Saitek ProFlight Yoke System
Saitek Pro Flight Switch Panel
TrackerIR Pro 4
TrackerClip Pro

Flying Time:
41 hours

Let's summarize what I've done to get this actually working. I installed the software from the mini CD, restarted my PC, connected the MFDs, configured and mainly tested each MFD individually, inserted the FSX card of my need, and loaded the FSX plug-in to conform to the profile I want. That's it and you're ready to start FSX.

Does it look complicated to you? Believe me, it's very easy and worth mentioning, the manual shows you all the steps to perform, so you can't make a mistake. It's now time to see how it really works and what you can do with it since the software doesn't talk about add-on aircraft. In other words, do the created profiles work with complex programmed add-on aircraft models like PMDG, Leonardo SH, Wilco Publishing or the CLS Lite models like their DC-10 or Boeing 747 Classic or even Airbus models? I'll tell you right now that I can't check them all, but for a few I will do.

First Impression (default FSX planes)

Testing Light Aviation Profiler file

Where I left with the installation I'm back on track with FSX running flying somewhere in the northwest of the United States or probably I've already passed the Canadian border heading for Vancouver Island. Since I activated the Light Aviation profile and to make it clear, I inserted the LH and RH Light Aviation MFD cards in the display units, I'm flying around in the default FSX Cessna 172.

Looking at all the possible options on the card, I'll press each button by button and see if the aircraft or system is responding to my actions and the answer is yes, it does. Even using the BRT switch selected, it allows me to extend or retract the flaps, which is of course written on the card. It seems that every switch is working and that means that this profile works for default models.

Just a small note: suppose you forgot to connect the MFDs to your PC, the plug-in software will tell you right away!

Testing Airliner Profiler file

Before moving to complex add-on aircraft, let's first swap the inserted cards with the Airliner profile ones and see if those work with, for example, the default Boeing 747-400 or 737 and not to forget the Airbus A321. You can already expect the answer: as far as I can test and see, every button and or switch marked with a specific text on the inserted card works in FSX and the aircraft is reacting to my actions.

The advantage of this is that you don't need your keyboard for those buttons that have been taken over by the MFD and you can even increment/decrement the VOR1 or the HDG bug, for example. To make one thing clear: you can't select a value since there's no rheostat installed but by clicking the respective switch, you can change these previously mentioned functions.

Testing Generic Profiler file

Finally there's the Generic profile and associated cards and even this works fine with what they say; both civil and military models. Unfortunately, my default FSX doesn't offer any military models and therefore you will find a special chapter related to the F-16 Fighting Falcon software from Aerosoft offered to me by SimWare Simulations.

Back to our generic profile with any aircraft and as expected, most of the buttons and/or switches do what I want. Some don't work for the simple reason that I've got the wrong aircraft selected. A Water Rudder for example, doesn't work in combination with a business jet or the tail wheel lock doesn't function when you've chosen a nose gear equipped aircraft etc.

Apart of some screenshots that never reflect the real operation and function of the MFD's and activated profiles, I must conclude that it all works perfectly. Remember, the profile files are essential to get the hardware MFD connected to FSX (FS9) and in that respect the developers did a great job but now it's time to check the profiler files in relation to add-on aircraft.

I sincerely hope this works because the manual doesn't say anything about this and let's say that 95% of the average flight simmer is only flying add-on models and hardly (or never) one of the default aircraft. Therefore, it's time to move on to the Second Impression where I'm going to test the hardware with some add-on models.

Second Impression (add-on planes)

Light Aviation Profile test

The first one I'll check is the **Carenado C172N Skyhawk II floatplane** and I can tell you already that not all the buttons and or switches are working. Simple things like cycling through the different views work as well as flap extension/ retraction, but Nav(igation) Lights have no effect, however the Light All button works. Mixture works but Master Battery button doesn't have any effect.

I can conclude that my overall impression is that some buttons work and some don't. To be honest, I'm not surprised since these profiles are default files and the more complex an add-on plane becomes, where more commands are created outside the default FSX programming (I'll hope I write it down correctly), the more problems appear.



A few screenshots of the Carenado C172 in combination with the COUGAR Light-Aviation profiler file. As said, not all the functions work except for the basic ones. The other problem is making photo's of something which works interactive and not always visible. Anyway, the above setup of your MFD's could be an option.

Let's go for another light plane or at least I think it's a light one, the **Focke-Wulf 190A1** from **Classic Hangar**. You could think I'm using the right profile since there's a profile specially for all other models including military versions and no doubt that the Focke-Wulf is a military airplane. However, it's a very uncomplicated model so that's the reason for using the same profiler file.

We will see how it responds to my MFD commands. What we've seen with the Carenado model is more or less the same here. Not all the buttons do what the text on the inserted FSX card is telling me. For example; GEAR UP needs to be done via the keyboard however, DOWN selection goes via the RH lower switch indicating ZOOM Decrease Selection while the assigned Gear UP/DOWN LH upper switch doesn't do anything.

The RH upper Mixture Increase/Decrease switch does control the mixture setting and that's good news. This is the same for LH bottom Flaps Retract/Extends switch on the MFD, this one also controls the flaps as indicated. Let's give you another example: the Nav Lights button on the MFD works fine as well as the Light All and many more of those.

I know that it's a long list with what is working and what is not, but the in-between conclusion for these Light Aviation add-on models is that not all the buttons and/or switches do what they're supposed to do or at least when looking at the text on the cards and the outcome in FSX. Some button actions don't give any responce in the aircraft while some do something not confirmed on the written card text. It seems that you need specially created profiles for Light Aviation add-on models.

Additional Carenado and Focke-Wulf with Generic Profile test. Before moving on to the Airliners profile, let's try the two previous tested add-on models in combination with the Generic profile. You never know what the outcome will be and it could be that the profiler is more adapted to these aircraft.

We first start with the Carenado and it seems that some buttons, which were previously not connected, are doing their job. On the other hand, the card and thus the profile offers more functionality not related to this GA airplane. The overall button/switch functions work well compared to the Light Aviation profile however, the missing of certain interactive functions is also a matter of your own preferences.

We close this chapter with our last model, the Focke-Wulf old-fashioned fighter. It seems that most of the things that work with the previous profile, doesn't work here apart from those buttons and/or switches which are differently

configured via the software. Thus the Focke-Wulf is partly supported by the two profiler files – Light Aviation and Generic - in relation to the add-on models. It's not worse, but it's a shame there are no dedicated files available for certain add-on models or it's because it isn't possible. That answer stays for the moment, unanswered.

Airliner Profile test

It's time we visit the heavies and because of this, we first need to load the Airliner profile. The first add-on aircraft to test with this file will be the **Captain Sim 757**. After some while playing around it's better to ask ourselves the question; what's not working?

As far as I've seen almost everything is responding except for a few things like the Increase ZOOM switch, the AUTOBRAKE Increase/Decrease doesn't respond either and that's it. That's very good news.

Nice pictures of the Captain Sim 757 but very difficult to show those situations where you can see something. As written in the text, most of the MFD Airliner profiles work with the CS 757 model which is great news. That's much better than the pictures.

Up next, **Flight1's Level-D Boeing 767-300**: My first impression is that this won't work. In my opinion all of the Auto Flight related buttons like Autopilot, Autothrottle, Altitude Hold, and Heading Hold etc. are not responding. This means that the MFD buttons have no possibility via the Airliner profile to inform the Level-D 767 what to do. Is it because the Level-D uses different commands or simply because it's too complex? Who will know, but what I know is that one of the most essential buttons doesn't work and that's a pity. For the remainder of the buttons and switches it seems they are all responding. Not bad at all but I'm slightly disappointed, while on the other hand, I did expect this already.



What's applicable for all the others is the same here. What and how should you make pictures when you've pressed one of the buttons or switches? Not an easy job and although the pictures look nice, they never reflect the real interaction between the MFD and the Level-D. Oops, there's at least one thing that worked and that's the LANDING GEAR DOWN selection.

Our next victim is the **Wilco Publishing Airbus Volume 2**. I need to watch out testing this model since officially it's not supported for a 64 bit operating system and we're not even talking about Windows 7. Ok, that's something else since I've got the idea that when something runs on Vista x64, it will run for sure on Windows 7 x64.

After some test flights it seems that almost every button and switch on the MFD Cougar is working or the aircraft is responding to its command thus the Airliner profile seems to work fine with this Wilco / feelThere add-on model. That's good news since I could image that this will be the same for the other Wilco Airbus models and hopefully for the recently released Embraer Regional Jets.

Oops, while writing this I figured out that there are hardly any screenshots but that's difficult since you can't see what's happening or how the aircraft is responding. I will offer you a few but that's more to give you an idea of the setup rather than seeing anything.



Wilco Publishing Airbus 34-600 and the MRTT in combination with the MFD Airliner profiler. As you could read, it works not bad at all although certain buttons/switches do not respond on your action. A dedicated profile would be a very good option and probably not difficult for Thrustmaster to make.

Would it be an idea to test these heavy jets with Thrustmaster's generic profiler? I don't think so and that thought is confirmed when looking at the generic cards. Although a few items are the same, there's less of what's related to the Airliners profile thus I don't think it's useful to do this test only to find out what happening.

Ok, before closing this Airliners profile chapter, let's try one more, the **Leonardo SH Maddog 2008 Professional**. Based on my experiences I think it's better to tell you again what isn't working and the conclusion will not be strange. It seems with a complex model like the Maddog 2008 that all the MFD buttons and switches work except those related to the Auto flight and Autothrottle system. This is something we had seen before with the Level-D 767. As we have seen before, without a dedicated Airliner profile, the most elementary buttons and/or switches work, however with a more complex programmed flight sim model.

In-between conclusion.

What have we learned so far of the Airline profile? Basic MSFS commands work however with more complex functions it seems to me that those are not working at all or just partly. Those complex programmed add-on FSX airplanes and their functions are the Auto Pilot and Auto Throttle system because the default FSX AP and/or AT are far from real and don't give the advanced programmer enough space to create a realistic cockpit and behavior.

As long as an add-on aircraft is using the default AP and AT, there's no problem. However, when the developers want to create their own realistic Auto Flight system, then it seems this profile can't handle that.

MFD Cougar connected to a F-16

The two MFD Cougar panels suggest that those come from a military airplane and yes, they are mounted in a General Dynamics F-16, but how do they respond in combination with a simulated F-16? Because of this, SimWare Simulations offered me an F-16 Fighting Falcon package to make it possible for me to test the MFD Cougar pack.

It's my turn to find out if the generic profile works well with this advanced military aircraft. By the way, I only tested the MFD profile with the F-16 since I'm not a military flight simmer at all and don't own any other advanced or modern fighters yet except for the previous tested Focke-Wulf. Oops, that was a very old military fighter.

Before doing anything, I prepared myself by first inserting the Generic Profile cards in the left and right MFD panels,

loaded the Generic Profile via the plug-in for FSX software, fired up FSX and loaded the F-16 Fighting Falcon, ready to go from a American AFB. I can tell you already that the Generic profile isn't well integrated with this modern piece of simulation. Of course, some buttons and switches don't reflect what's inside the F-16 like "rotor-brake", "cowl flaps control", "water rudder" or clutch.

Unfortunately, the flaps switch on the MFD is not working but at the same time we need to remember – as far as my knowledge goes - that the F-16 is equipped with flaperons. As in real life, when the landing gear is down the flaperons move down to a certain degree, but as said before, there's no control possible via the MFD flap switch.

Although the F-16 Falcon Fighter is an impressive fighter to fly, the pictures I made never tell you the problem and the missed interactions between the used profile and the F-16. Not really a big problem but I had hoped that more functions worked. The middle lower shot shows you the tail hook, which is a button command while the panel window 2 offers the two pop-up windows, which you can see on the RH lower picture. It allows you to directly start/ stop the F-16 general operations. A very handy button indeed!

Does this mean nothing works or that the Generic Profile can't be used in combination with this F-16? No, that's not true since many other buttons and switches are working. But let's say there's limited operation because of the complex programming of this add-on fighter and thus not an optimal profile
.
I'll try to do my best by giving you some MFD buttons/switches that are working:

- doors (opens the canopy),
- pushback,
- Virtual Cockpit,
- View (cycle),
- View (next category),
- Locked spot view,

- Kneeboard,
- ATC display,
- Panel window 2 (see screenshot),
- Spoiler extend/retract switch,
- Light all,
- Landing light,
- Panel light (which also controls the logo light),
- Master battery,
- Landing gear switch (only down),
- and finally the tail hook.

Finally there's also the question of the displayed MFD data on the simulated F-16 Fighting Falcon MFDs versus the Thrustmaster MFDs. Remember what I wrote before … the Thrustmaster MFD's don't have a real TFT screen showing you real aircraft information for radar (LH display) or navigation (RH display) as it is done in the F-16 Falcon Fighter.

What's my in-between conclusion with this F-16 in relation to the Generic Profiler file? That's more or less the same as with the other add-on airplanes. The profile works for basic MSFS functions but the moment it becomes too complicated, they don't respond and thus the need for a dedicated profile for well known add-on models would be great.

Summary / Closing Remarks

Although the Thrustmaster MFDs don't offer real TFTs, I still liked the hardware that I reviewed. Ok, the MFDs don't really virtually fit in a Cessna 172 or a Boeing 747-400 nor in an Airbus A320, it's still a straightforward option of adding some hardware to your favorite flight simulator.

The software installation is perfect and the integration with the hardware is even more stunning. The Control Panel software allows the user to check and test the individual MFD, including buttons or switches testing. By the way, the Thrustmaster software only speaks of buttons and no switches, but don't worry too much about that. The second part of the software, the plug-in for FSX or FS204, is also great and works with the Flight Simulator version you want to use.

That the package doesn't come with FS2004 cards is a shame but not that big a problem because those cards can be downloaded for free at the Thrustmaster's website. That the software comes on a mini CD looks nice, but imagine you have a CD/DVD drive mounted vertically, then this could lead to a problem. Ok, also in this case you're able to download the software directly from their website, but honestly I prefer a normal sized CD and also the FS2004 cards together in the box.

Using the different profiles – Light Aviation, Airliner and Generic – gives, as far as I've seen, no problems with the default FSX airplanes. Just as a reminder; I didn't check it with FS9. No problems means that most of the buttons work with FSX and thus the flight sim model responds to your remote commands. However, when using the profile with an add-on GA or large jet aircraft, some of the buttons didn't respond or at least I didn't see anything happening in the cockpit or externally.

This is not strange to me since almost a year ago, I did a huge VRInsight review and there the developers had special add-on aircraft files to work with the hardware. That's something that's missing here and I don't know Thrustmaster's plans, but when they are able to make dedicated profiles for the PMDG or Wilco Publishing planes, for example, it would be great. When this doesn't happen, then an extension of how to make your own profiles would be another option, although not every flight simmer may be able to do so.

Ok, just in one sentence: Altogether it's nice looking hardware and well designed, great backlighting options, great basic software, however I do miss dedicated profiles for the most known add-on aircraft models. With that being said, you pay €79.99 including VAT for the MFD Cougar Pack at the SimWare Simulation shop within European countries excluding shipping costs.

I also know that the offered screenshots of the tested aircraft models are not what I had hoped for. It seems more complicated to make a photo of something that should show you the relationship between an MFD and the outcome in FSX. Unfortunately, it didn't work out as I wanted it to.

Is this a lot of money for what you get? That's difficult to answer for me since I don't know how much money flight simmers would spend for their hobby, but I can say this; the software and hardware works without any problems. Installation is great as well as the link with FSX and for sure it will be the same for FS2004.

I won't say that as long as you fly the default FSX airplanes it's great, since I know that only a very small group flies default models. Therefore when flying advanced add-on models and using one of the offered profiles, it seems not always the best solution and I highly recommend that Thrustmaster offer dedicated profiles or give the flight simmer the tools of how to create those dedicated profiles themselves.

What I Like About The MFD Cougar Pack

- Nicely packed with good-looking MFD frames (looks like it's made of metal) with all that is needed to install them and to get them working with Flight Simulator.
- Manual offers different languages but more important; the procedures to follow to get it working is well written in clear steps.
- Nice and realistic looking FSX data cards.
- Easy to use and to operate the buttons on the MFDs, with the anti-slip at the bottom of each unit.
- Testing the MFDs with the help of the Control Panel software works perfectly.
- Activation of the relevant plug-in file works straightforward and as long as you're using default airplanes, most of the buttons control the associated functions in your favorite aircraft.
- Profiles also work with complex add-on aircraft however, certain functions do not work. For this reason, a dedicated file would be a better solution.

What I Don't Like About The MFD Cougar Pack

- Supplied mini CD with software is not always the best solution for those who have a vertical mounted CD/DVD drive.
- Although downloadable from the Thrustmaster's website - I could image that for those flight simmers still using FS9 – I do miss the FS2004 cards. Downloading and printing by you is never as beautiful as the supplied ones.
- Why isn't it possible to have dedicated profiles for complex and highly realistic add-on models like the airplanes from Wilco Publishing, Aerosoft, PMDG, Flight1, Carenado and many others?

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MFD Cougar Pack

(adobe acrobat required)

Comments?

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