

PRODUCT REVIEW

Tom Bailey

RC Flight Master

TOM BAILEY TAKES TO THE VIRTUAL SKIES WITH THE LATEST VERSION OF REALITY CRAFT'S SIMULATOR SERIES



The RC Powers Compact Flight Controller is the absolute business. You can buy it packaged with the simulator for £99.99.

No need to stick to simple circuits if you're used to flinging your models around. Perfect that prop hang practice!

Fixed-wing not your thing? Not a problem. RC Flight Master caters for glider guiders and chopper enthusiasts alike.

The main question I ask of any computer software is a simple one: How easy is it to get this thing running on my machine? I don't want to be fiddling around with complicated installation



processes, only to find that one hardware conflicts or another ultimately hampers my progress. I'm an impatient man at the best of times, so if a software CD wants to avoid ending up as the latest addition to my ever-growing coaster collection, it needs to be user-friendly. In this department, Reality Craft's RC Flight Master eXtreme64 simulator is a success. Installation was a technophobe's dream: put the disc into the CD drive, let it load up, click install and you're away. Once it's done, you're given the chance to configure the controller of your choice (more of that in a second), and that's it. Done. Ready to use. It doesn't even need anywhere near a powerful PC by today's standards to run it (see the System Requirements panel). A huge tick in the box marked 'Simplicity itself'.

OK, enough of all that - let's get down to the stuff that's going to really float an aeromodeler's boat. Each individual model's flight characteristics can be fiddled with in great detail. Various sliders can be manipulated to change mass, C of G, engine power / RPM, prop size, control surface deflection, drag, trim settings... you get the picture. There are also 'fuel and failures' sliders, which allow you to toggle unlimited fuel on / off, change the amount of fuel in the tank at the start of a flight, and adjust the likelihood of failures occurring with the following components: engine, structure, servo, gear and transmitter. Again, it all adds to the realism for those that want it. Those who don't can simply set the plane to 'indestructible'. Ideal if you just want to have a bit of fun, or if you're just starting out. Also



You can buy separate connector leads to hook up your Futaba, Hitec or JR tranny to a USB slot on your PC, allowing you to control the simulator using the Tx you're already comfortable with. However, I took advantage of RC Power's optional Compact Flight Controller (available in both Mode 1 and Mode 2), which is designed specifically with simulator use in mind. Again, it plugs directly into a USB port and is detected straight away without the need to load any drivers or anything fiddly like that. It works like a charm.

fully configurable are: wind strength, direction, gusts, turbulence, strength at ground level, ground influence height, atmospheric pressure and thermal strength.

If all this sounds a bit overwhelming, be aware that there is a comprehensive help directory at hand - one click of a button is all it takes to pop this handy feature to the front of the screen. To be honest, though, after a thorough test of the software, I'm not sure many users will need to make use of it; the user interface is pretty self-explanatory