

AIRLINE 6

The Aviation Business Simulation



Category: [Reviews / Others](#)

Date: 08.07.2005

Reviewer: Sami Puro

Publisher: [Efzed Ltd](#)

Retail price: 69.95 AUD

System Requirements:

- Pentium 3
- 600 MB HD
- 128 MB RAM
- 1024x768 screen resolution
- Windows 2000 or XP
- (Airline5 compatible with Win98/ME)

Test System:

- AMD Athlon XP 1800
- 768 MB RAM
- GeForce4 Ti4200
- Windows XP SP2

SCORE



[Grading scale](#)

Introduction

There aren't many airline or airport related games in the market for PC's. Reason is naturally that this is a small market segment with small interest to the big public. Some game studios have however produced airport and airline management games, but they are all more or less just light "tycoon" genre games that are not that realistic (in terms of aviation related things) nor true business simulators.

Australian company Efzed Ltd has produced the Airline game series that focuses in realistic management simulation, and also truly gives the player an access to airports and aircraft models all around the world. The game comes in two versions, one that is a normal PC based game, and another one that is played online through Efzed's website. In this review I will take a look on the normal "offline" version of the game, Airline6.

Airline puts you in control of your own airline which you start up from scratch. You can begin between 1946 to current year and you are responsible about every aspect of the airline - all the way from purchasing or leasing aircraft to making contracts with hotels and car leasing companies. You can make business in over 6500 different airports around the globe, and you can select nearly any commercial airplane that has been produced (or even planned!) as your company's workhorse. The feature list sounds (and is) impressive at least, but the game itself still leaves some things to hope for in its finishing touches.

Installation

My review copy is the download edition of the game. Game files can be downloaded after purchase from publisher's website from the member's area. Current game version was 6.1.11, so I needed to download the basic game (version 6.1.07) and necessary updates for it. The download of the basic game files has been made rather laborious as the game files (133 MB

total) are divided into 29 (!!) different packages which you must download one-by-one. Okay - for modem users this is OK, but for broadband users, it's just 15 minutes of extra click-work.

Once files were downloaded, installation was normal and smooth. Fresh game installation takes about 300 MB of hard drive space, but saved game files consume 60-70 MB each.

Ever wanted to run your own airline?

Starting the game, you are first requested to make up a name and logo for the airline and then submit a business plan for the first five years. You can focus on being anything you like - from a long haul international carrier offering only premium service, all the way to domestic no frills carrier. You must also select the headquarters base and place for aircraft heavy (C & D) maintenance.

I decided to start up my airline, Nordic Airways, from year 1990 and selected Copenhagen Kastrup as my homebase. Strategy was to become an international short-haul route carrier with minimal onboard services. Already at this point the game gave a hint about one of its features - very long loading ("processing") times. The startup calculations for the game may take up to 15 minutes. Before you can start playing at all that is! My computer usually handled this calculation much quicker, in 3-7 minutes however.

Once everything was set up, game is taken to the main office where you can control your airline and take a quick glance of your routes on world map. For a new airline, the first thing what we need is brand new aircraft you might first think. Wrong actually. Before we can make the planes fly, or even order planes for the airline, there are some things to be taken care first. Such as hiring staff, deciding what routes to fly, and also thinking about the onboard service. For a newcomer these things are not clear at all, and it might be also rather difficult to find the things you want from the menu jungle. There is no tutorial mode in the game, and all information is laid out in a normal Windows help file that can be found via F1 key. Glancing the help file while browsing the game menus will help you get started, but still it takes a couple days to get acquainted with all possible functions.



Where would you like to fly today, Sir?

After setting the staff salary levels, onboard service (you can determine things such as style of food served on flights and number of baggage allowed from here) and aircraft configuration style (select the number of seats for first/business/economy classes, determine seat pitch etc) it was time to start looking for good routes to fly on. This is naturally the whole basis of successful airline operation; you must have passengers that are interested in flying your route.

As mentioned before, the game has over 6500 airports in its database, with information about operating times, runway lengths and other necessary information. The game date also naturally affects on the airports available. For example if you start in 1950's, you can only fly to Stockholm-Bromma as Arlanda naturally didn't exist at that time. Airports are also classified as domestic or international and this is basically the only restriction, otherwise you are able to fly from any airport to any other. Just make sure you have enough runway and range on your airplane. So possibilities are nearly unlimited.

However the problem is finding the data from the airport and traffic demand database. Here, as also everywhere else in the game, the selection of airports you wish to view is operated via normal pull-down menus. With thousands of airports in the list, and no possibility to sort them by any criteria (even by country), makes it hard to find what you want. So basically if I wish to know what airports there are in Denmark, close to my Copenhagen base airport, I have to take a map from my bookshelf and look it from there (if I do not memorize them otherwise). When searching for lucrative air routes the player needs to know from real life, based on his experience, what to look for. The same problem for data being hard to access is also repeated elsewhere in the game.

Anyway, traffic between big cities cannot go wrong. So I quickly decided to make my new Nordic Airways to fly from Copenhagen to Stockholm and Oslo, with Helsinki and possibly London later on. Good solid routes to start for, as my investors blessed me only with one million USD cash for airline startup. Try to make something out of that in the age of modern jets, eh... But now we know where to fly, just the matter of what and when to fly.



And how many engines you would like with that airplane?

Time to build up the fleet. Options are to lease aircraft, buy old and used ones or order them as factory new. For starting airline, the only choice is to lease some wings for your business. Used planes are still too expensive for my small budget and so are the new ones too (and besides, you need to wait for their delivery for some time, just like in real life too). So luckily the leasing firm has a lot offer, with instant delivery.

There are hundreds of airplane models, and naturally depending on the game date again. Besides of the normal airliners, you can also choose from planned prototype models that never came true in our world. All aircraft are represented by their real model names, and have accurate data information (range, seating capacity, crew requirement, minimum runway length, fuel used etc). Again with the number of selections available, it's a bit hard to find what you like or what would be the most economical choice.

For my new airline, Airbuses and other fancy airplanes are out of the financial reach, so I have to find something more modest. Even Tupolev's seem to too expensive to lease out, but luckily a short term lease of old-generation Boeing 737's is not too expensive. Money to the lessor and airplane is at my disposal. Before it can be used, it must be fitted with the seats according to my specifications - and this naturally costs extra (oh my, bank account empty shortly, and not even a single departure yet!).

Before the 737s can be put to work, the company still needs landing rights to airports that are going to be operated. You just cannot go to any airstrip and start flying from there, you need a slot for the airport first. Money helps you here again, as even these must be purchased (but of course ;-)).



It's all about the schedules

Making your planes fly is done via scheduling menu. And the schedules matter the most if you wish to make your company work. From here you determine the routes that each individual airplane flies, and also at what times the routes are flown. The scheduling menu itself is rather easy to use, and you can clearly see the airplane's rotation each day. You can determine individual schedules for each day of the week, or just use the same for each day.

My purpose was to make the first 737 to fly two round trips between Copenhagen and Oslo every day - 14 legs in a week that is. After entering all the information in schedule, and pressing 'complete', the system informed that I didn't have enough landing rights (for some airport on the schedule). So, I had to discard the whole schedule I had made and to return back to airport menu, and purchase some more landing rights. From this menu only I was able to see that I was actually missing some landing rights. Here is the problem of information being hard to access again: I need to discard what I was doing and go back from the current place to a whole different menu to do a thing what I have overlooked before, while the same information or function could be in the menu I was in at the first point (as that information is vital for that menu too - such as here the number of available landing rights). Similar small inconsistencies were also found elsewhere in the game, related to navigation and using functions ("do I need to double-click this part to make that information open?").

After fiddling with landing rights, I was finally able to complete the schedule. Now the only thing left was to determine ticket prices for the routes. Not so small thing that either, but for us newbies, the computer luckily suggests a decent ticket price automatically.



Magic quarters

Since everything is set up, it's time to advance the game time. Unlike many other management games, Airline runs in clear turns where each turn represents one quarter of a year. Gameplay works generally so that while in 'paused' mode, the player is allowed to make the strategic decisions for running the airline, and when he is finished computer calculates the results for that quarter. So player's decisions must be smart, as if you make wrong moves, the company can suffer heavy losses during the 3 months that go by during the calculation process and there is no way player can affect the situation, until on next quarter (= next turn).

Also notable is the long time required by the quarterly calculations. In plain English, it takes about 2-5 minutes to move to next turn in the game (this again depends on number of things, such as the number of computer controlled competitors). There is naturally a lot to calculate, but still I haven't seen a similar solution in any game so far. So game's tempo is definitely not very fast, but the calculation period is at least a good point to step up from the computer for a minute



and stretch your legs. Too bad that you need to do that every 10 minutes of normal game play! I might also add at this point that saving or loading the game also takes about 2-4 minutes which is a looong time with modern computers.

Calculations take their time, can't help it. But once they are finished, it's time to see how our last quarter went. Basically we are of course interested if we made profit or not, and what kind of load factors we had. These can be seen from the very detailed financial reports, where you can view one-by-one how much passengers each airplane (even passengers per each flight) had and what kind of profits they made. The financial accuracy and number of available details in this area seem to be one of the items that received most thoughts from the developers - extra points from that.

The first quarter of the game usually means everything - if you lose money on the first quarters, your game is usually over in a matter of few turns. With losses made, you have no money to expand or modify the routes and you cannot borrow any more from the bank (there is no bank!). But if you manage to make profits, even small, in the first quarters, then the game starts to develop and in no time you have tens of millions cash. Generally speaking, the result of the game is perhaps too much dependable on the very beginning, and once you are started, money just keeps rolling in, and the biggest challenge after that is to keep your planes maintained and open new routes.



Scenarios, Multiplayer?

The game contains no predefined scenarios or tasks what the player would be able to play. Game always starts from scratch and is open-ended, meaning that it continues until player is bankrupt or just stops playing (at least I didn't get so far that I would have "won" the game). Usually management simulators are like this, no problem with that. But to extend the life of the game, some additional scenarios would be a must. The most simple of these would be a task where player must raise a badly shaped airline into positive results again.

Also there is no multiplayer feature, Airline is completely one man's game. There is however a different product called Airline Online which is an internet version of the same game. It is a stand-alone game concept and does not require a license of the actual Airline game to be played (Online version is played completely via web browser), and you also have to pay a monthly fee for access to the Online version although you'd own the PC version. So those two cannot be really put together in this review.

Graphics and appearance

At first look Airline6 does not seem to be a very special case when talking about graphics. Most of the menu buttons and other items are customized from their layout, but some items are still just normal Windows menus or buttons that look very plain to be in a 70 dollar priced game. But, this is not a big problem, as this is a strategy game where fancy graphics are not needed and you get used to the layout very quickly.

There are no animations or other active content whatsoever, and basically no sounds or any



music either. The only things you can hear are 'click' sounds when pressing menu buttons and some other very small sound effects. On the other hand, some music jingle in the background can easily spoil the game (at least in many other games, the selected music just doesn't fit).

Company support, game bugs

Let's face it, all games have some bugs. It's just a matter of how much, and how severe they are. In Airline, I encountered some game crashes every now and then - usually some run-time error where only way out was to click "ok" and go back to Windows desktop losing all game data

(luckily autosave feature helps here a bit as data is saved every time a quarterly data is processed).

Second and bit more disturbing issue was with computer's regional settings. In Europe people usually use comma (,) as the decimal separator in currencies. Meaning that 55 Euros and 15 Cents is 55,15 €. In USA this is period: 55.15. When playing Airline, the computer's settings must be changed so that decimal separator is ".", or otherwise all decimals in prices are lost and for example price 0,5 becomes just 0 (see image). This is rather basic issue that should be automatically correct in this kind of software, without users having to change their settings. But I've been told that this bug is also to be corrected.

The good thing however is that the producer, Efzed, is actively developing the game and is truly interested in user feedback and possible bugs they've found. It's possible to submit bug issues via Airline's website (members area) and developers actually even promise frequent updates to the software. During my review, the game for example received several small updates all the way to version 6.1.16 (most of the review done however with .11 version).

Summary

All in all, Airline6 is a decent game. For regular gamers it doesn't have much to give - but for airline enthusiasts it's basically the only choice to consider when looking for airline management game. The level of details is outstanding (all the airports, real aircraft and so on), but playability and graphics are not top notch here. Also price is somewhat high in my mind compared to other games in market. But if you really fancy management games and want to try if your airline can make it, then then only game I can recommend is Airline6.

Pros

- + Lot's of features and possibilities
- + Lot's of airplanes and airports
- + Realistic details
- + Company support and game development

Cons

- Long loading times
- No scenarios or multiplayer
- Visual appearance
- Price on the high side

SCORE



[Grading scale](#)