

airliner-edition audio environment

A mighty noise for FSX!
by Tony Radmilovich



If you think that your AI traffic is just a little too considerate of airport neighbours and your default FSX jets sound more like vacuum cleaners than aircraft, then you might want to have a look at Flight1's new *Audio Environment*.

Over the past few years, AI (Artificial Intelligence) traffic has become more and more of an integral part of our simming experience, and thanks to a handful of high-quality commercial and freeware options, it can now create a very life-like airport and en route environment with

countless real-world carriers, aircraft and liveries. While the planes appear very realistic, one aspect has, for the most part, been overlooked... sound. Typically (Just Flight's *Traffic X* being the sole exception), add-on AI aircraft sounds are aliased to similar default FSX aircraft. In the case of default FSX AI traffic, the 747-400 and Airbus A-321 are aliased to the Boeing 737-800's sound folder while the other AI aircraft use a 'scaled-down' version of the particular aircraft's sounds. The result is a

The unmistakable sound of each aircraft's turbine 'howl' under full power is captured perfectly with *Audio Environment*



rather subdued audio environment that sounds nothing like what you would hear at a real airport.

Turn up the volume!

Enter Flight1 and Turbine Sound Studios (TSS) - which together have developed a set of sounds that puts some life into the rather dull AI soundsets. Turbine Sound Studios (www.turbinesoundstudios.com) has been around the FS scene for a few years now, offering sounds for a wide range of aircraft for both FS2004 and FSX. In partnership with Flight1, TSS now offers a comprehensive package of replacement sounds for all aircraft used by various AI traffic programs as well as the default FSX jet user aircraft.

The concept is deceptively simple, while the 'behind the scenes' execution is much more vast and complex. Let's start off with what you get with this package: included are all new sounds for the Boeing 737-800 and 747-400, Airbus A-321, Bombardier CRJ-700 and Learjet 45. Each of these default aircraft comes with separate sound folders containing sounds designed for both user and AI use. *Audio Environment* (AE) replaces both sets with its bigger and bolder sounds. AE will

Hearing is believing!



They say that a picture is worth a thousand words, but in the case of *Audio Environment*, this is not so. Since no screenshot can convey what this product delivers, we urge you to watch the *Audio Environment* videos on this issue's cover CD.



ABOVE: The Turbine Sound Studio engine sounds take full advantage of the FSX 'Sound Cone' technology for a realistic 360-degree audio effect

BELOW: Deploying the thrust reversers in real life makes an unholy racket that FS aircraft have never really captured. TSS has made great strides to change that with *Audio Environment*

Included are replacement sounds for the default Boeing 737-800, Boeing 747-400, Airbus A-321, Bombardier CRJ-700 and Learjet 45



also give a boost to add-on AI traffic packages such as *Ultimate Traffic 2*, *Ultimate Traffic 2007*, *Traffic X* and *My Traffic X*. Freeware AI packages from developers like World of AI and Project AI, whose aircraft sound folders are aliased to the default FSX AI sounds, will also benefit from AE.

Making all of the above happen is breathtakingly straightforward for the user, thanks to a simple, but powerful, user-interface that individually installs and uninstalls the TSS sounds from the default aircraft with the push of a button. Running the interface automatically detects the presence of any of the supported AI programs and in turn offers you the option of installing the sounds to it and/or the default FSX AI traffic. A separate interface, the Third Party Aircraft Sound Installer, also enables you to automatically assign your choice of TSS sounds to any user aircraft you have installed in FSX.

As I said earlier, the simplicity of AE's operation belies the sheer number of .wav audio and .cfg files that have been added or modified to bring these sounds to life. When the AE Manager installs the new files, it automatically backs up all of the originals, so you may easily restore them, though once you hear the new sounds, I seriously doubt you will have much interest in going back to the stock ones.

Sounds good to me...

So when all is said and done, how does it sound? It sounds very good! From the time you engage the starter, to the sound of the engines spooling down, each of the user aircraft sounds are an enormous



Does this look like something that should sound like a high performance vacuum cleaner? More realistic sound files and skilled .cfg tweaking make the FS versions sound more like the real thing

The new AI sounds make it fun to just sit next to a runway and listen to the aircraft go by



improvement over the default versions. Taking full advantage of the FSX 360 degree 'Sound Cone' technology, the TSS sounds seem to add greater dimension to the FSX experience. Using the B737-800 external view as an example, a few seconds after the first engine begins to spool up, you hear the very distinct whine of the turbine as RPM increases. Once the igniters light the fire, a deep, guttural roar seems to come right of the bowels of the ship and you can almost feel the power of the engine. There is a distinct sound that emanates from any turbine engine winding up to full power, which is noticeably missing from the default FSX engine sounds. As power and RPM increase and the aircraft begins its take-off roll, you will hear the 'screaming' sound of air passing through the fans. As it nears your outside vantage point, the Doppler effect comes into play and the roar of the exhaust and thrust gradually becomes the predominant sound.

Perhaps the most noticeably absent aircraft sound throughout Flight Simulator's long history has been the bedlam that usually accompanies deployment of thrust reversers. The TSS sounds have marvellously captured this to a tee, accurately reproducing the sound of massive amounts of air being redirected, accompanied by the high-RPM turbine whine. If you have a good speaker system and understanding neighbours or family, I heartily recommend turning up the volume and bass, picking a good outside vantage point and watching a few replays of take-offs and landings to truly appreciate these sounds. The Learjet, A-321,



Installing the TSS sounds on individual aircraft is as easy as pressing a button on the simple-to-use Audio Environment 'Configuration Manager'



The new and vastly improved sounds can easily be assigned to any of your installed user-aircraft through the 'Third Party Aircraft Sound Installer'

CRJ-700 and 747-400 sounds are equally impressive and each has its own distinct character - as do their real-world counterparts. The interior sounds are equally superb, providing the aural experience one would hear from the cockpit, including the requisite wind noise, ground rumbling and squeaks and rattles that come with the ultimate front row airliner seat.

Issues

As they say though, into each life a little rain must fall and in this case, there are a couple of potential issues that users need to be aware of. There are some known conflicts with other software packages such as the Dodosim helicopter expansion and FSDreamTeam scenery that can cause problems with AE, but the one that might be more difficult to work around is a hardware conflict. In testing AE, I learned that if your computer is equipped with an onboard sound device rather than a PCI slot-based expansion sound card, all sounds (including ATC) will be muted whenever a message is transmitted through FSX ATC. This could pose a problem for many laptop or lower-spec desktop computer users.

Other than that one potential issue, you would be hard-pressed to find another add-on that will make this much improvement to so many aircraft, and with so little fuss. Flight1 and TSS also have a General Aviation Edition in the works that should make the prop-heads out there very happy!

REVIEW SCORE

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Price: USD \$39.95/£27.36/€33.29 (546 MB download only)

Developer: Turbine Sound Studios (www.turbinesoundstudios.com)

At a glance: A nifty way to add some life to your airport environment and perk up the sounds of your user-aircraft as well. Watching your AI traffic with Audio Environment sounds installed will bring the airport right into your home.

System requirements: Flight Simulator X, Windows 7/Vista/XP, 2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 2.7GB hard drive space, 256MB video card

Recommended: Any system that will adequately run FSX, good quality PCI sound card (non-onboard sound device)



Four popular commercial AI traffic programs, plus the default AI, are the beneficiaries of the new TSS soundpacks