eview by Marc Messer

**Title:** Flying Circus
**Developer:** Bullseye Software
**Price:** $59.95
**Contact Info:** http://www.nauticom.net/www/website/bullseye/
**Genre:** Flight simulation
**System Requirements:** 180 MHz 603 Power Mac, 8 MB RAM, CD-ROM drive, monitor capable of 512x384, 640x480, or 800x600 at thousands of colors, 3D hardware acceleration highly recommended.

## ntroduction to the Non-Monty Flying Circus

I'll be honest: my introduction to the flight sim genre was Top Gun on my trusty Nintendo, many moons ago. Since then, flight sims have become much (much!) more realistic through improved graphics, a wider range of movement, and improved accuracy in the portrayal of a wide range of aircraft. Bullseye Software's Flying Circus is one of the latest sims which attempts to accurately portray four World War I aircraft over a 700 square-mile textured world through 20 complete missions.

If you've ever dreamt of someday hopping into a Sopwith Camel and shooting down an observation balloon just like the real pilots used to do (before HUDs, laser guided missiles, and afterburners), then you may want to consider Flying Circus. Find the Flying Circus Demo on the web at http://www.nauticom.net/www/website/bullseye/fcdemoinfo.html . Extra missions and screenshots are also available for your enjoyment.

# ameplay

This game excels greatly when it comes to realistic physics. I've become so accustomed to playing flight sims with which you can jump in and fly a mission in a few minutes that I forgot that I really don't know how to fly a plane. This game was a startling reminder of that fact. The programmers at Bullseye certainly wanted to make sure that gamers received a realistic experience! The first 10 missions enable you to hone your takeoff, landing, dogfighting, bombing, and other flight skills. This game is not only realistic in that respect, but it's also quite true to form from the standpoint of World War I era aircraft, which are even more difficult to control than today's overpowered auto-pilot machines. With these planes, you won't be able to just do whatever you want. More than once, I started a bank only to find myself in a nose dive because I turned too sharply for the engine to handle.

# lanes and Weapons

Flying Circus lets you take the controls of four different WWI-era planes: the Sopwith Camel, the SE 5a, the Fokker Triplane, or the Fokker D-VII. Each plane has different characteristics. Some feature a multi-setting throttle, while others have only an on/off-style throttle. Since each plane has a different design and power capabilities, they all fly differently.

Your primary weapons are machine guns and bombs — you won't find any heat-seeking missiles in this game. I found that it's really difficult to hit anything. None of the enemy planes are willing to wait for you to set up your aim, and bombing requires quite a bit of coordination and timing as well. The good news is that there's lots to hit — planes, balloons, bridges, and buildings are everywhere.

# ontrols

The standard controls in Flying Circus are a mixture of keyboard commands

and mouse movements. The mouse is used to control the ailerons/elevator, and the mouse button controls gun fire. Various keys control throttle, rudders, bombing, and viewpoint. Flying Circus also supports Game Sprockets, allowing you to easily use a joystick or rudder peddles to enhance your ability to fly.

I found the controls easy to pick up on. This is one of the first realistic flight sims that I've come upon that doesn't require that I have a list of the controls in front of me in order to fly. But I guess that's the beauty of these old aircraft.

## isual Effects

Despite the fact that Flying Circus was designed with ATI and 3Dfx acceleration in mind, I found that the graphics in some cases were a little lacking. The landscape did not seem to have the complex textures that I've come to expect from the latest 3D games. Fires and explosions were unrealistic and cartoonish in nature, with no antialiasing or transparency to blend them into the rest of the environment. Pixellated edges are not something I expect in 3D-accelerated games. The fog and haze are nice, but are only available to those with an ATI Rage Pro chip.

On the other side of the coin, the planes look extremely realistic, with beautiful texturing (the only exception is that within the cockpit, your plane lacks enough textures). The ability to watch the action from several views is one of the things that really excels with 3D acceleration. When in the plane, you can rotate your head 180 degrees in either direction (necessary in a dogfight, because you have no radar). You can also look up and down. Movement from each angle is smooth. Other viewpoints, such as from the wings and tail of the plane to the cockpit (I prefer the view from the tail looking forward) are available, as are views from the tower, of enemy aircraft, and landmarks. Also, once you've dropped a bomb, you can switch to a view of the bomb to see if it hits the enemy bunker or Fanny Smith's farm house.

## ound Effects

The ambient sound in Flying Circus is top-notch. The hum of the engine seemed pretty realistic (remember I've never actually flown a WWI-era plane) and the gunfire and explosions were crisp. Bullseye has also given gamers the option of cutting the engine sound should they grow tired of it. For me, one of the best sounds in the game is the creaking of the wood as you push the plane to its physical limit. It's also a good warning that you're about to lose control if you don't change your angle.

## etworking

Flying Circus has also been designed for network dogfighting. It supports up to six aircraft and six humans over an AppleTalk or TCP/IP connection. The host is allowed to set each airplane's personal characteristics and starting position as well as accept and reject other pilots. Bullseye warns that using the maximum six players is probably a bit too much for a 28.8 modem and may cause "warpy" play. As with all network games, a high speed connection is suggested. Because most of the high speed connections are at places of employment, an office full of flight aficionados might just skip lunch when they get a hold of this game.

## xtra Goodies

Some people may feel that 20 missions (of which,

10 are

training) just aren't enough. For those

gamers, Bullseye

has added a mission creator, allowing you

to adjust time

of day, weather conditions, each plane's

location and

personal characteristics, and each pilot's

personal

objective and abilities. On top of being

able to download

more missions from the Bullseye website,

this is a handy

tool for improving your own skills while
prepping for

that next network game.

Custom paint jobs are another feature
that I found interesting. You simply pop the template (in the Custom Paint
Jobs folder) into a graphics program and have fun. This is great for those
serious pilots who have a specific design in mind and for those with too
much time on their hands.

Have you ever played a game in which you completely toasted someone,
only to find later that nobody believed you? Flying Circus has a buffer which
keeps track of the last 10 minutes of action. At anytime, you can view a
replay (and even adjust the starting point) of the action to show off your
abilities to co-workers, friends, and random strangers.

## onclusion

Flying Circus could almost be considered a niche game. Flight sim
enthusiasts who are looking to specifically fly WWI aircraft and want the
difficulty of handling these machines most definitely will want to give this a
try. For those gamers with a more passing interest in flight sims, Flying
Circus may be a bit too difficult   to keep you interested long enough to
master the flight of these machines. Either way, a demo is available at
http://www.nauticom.net/www/website/bullseye/bsflyingcircusdemo.hqx , and I encourage
everyone to give it a try. Requirements are low (for the performance you'll
see), so many Macs have the guts to go at it. Go ahead, see what it's like to
fly.

Marc Messer
macjunkie@applewizards.net