

Transair/Oxford PPL Ground School Software

WHEN TWO OF THE UK'S BEST-KNOWN AVIATION COMPANIES JOIN FORCES TO LAUNCH A PRODUCT, EXPECTATIONS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY HIGH. TODAY'S PILOT PUTS THE TRANSAIR/OXFORD SOFTWARE TO THE TEST IN THE HANDS OF A PPL STUDENT, AN INSTRUCTOR AND A GROUND INSTRUCTOR.

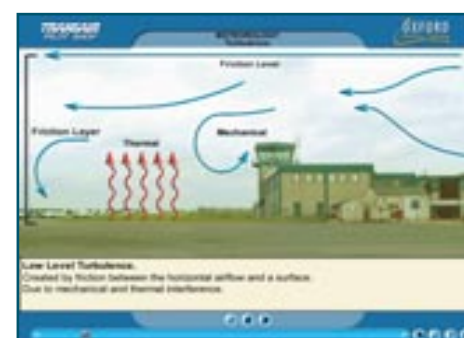


EASE OF USE

We found the software easy to install, and once it was up and running we were treated to a simple, but helpful, verbal introduction on how to use the programme. Even basic information, such as which button to press, is welcome as it saves time reading a potentially huge instruction manual. We all found our way around the presentations in no time at all.

A drop down menu can be accessed at any time to move quickly forwards or backwards to the next or last subject. The scroll bar is also an effective way of accessing a particular part of the presentation and it was gratifying to see that it was not overly-sensitive, as can so often be the case.

vection cloud' on the Met CD. However, in fairness this may simply be due to the fact that he is used to his own way of explaining topics to students. Each disc opens with a comprehensive spoken introduction to the subject matter (which can be skipped). It is also perhaps worth mentioning that the package is as useful to the qualified pilot as it is to the student. Members of the review team found themselves becoming engrossed at times, one of them now and again muttering to himself "Well, I didn't know that!" Reading about a subject is all well and good, but how do you know whether it has really sunk in? With this software the answer is easy - you take a self-assessment. We found the self-assessment facility to be simple to use. The student has a choice of being assessed on an individual subject or covering all areas of the syllabus. The student can also choose how many questions he or she is asked and at the



Early in 2003 Tom Moloney, founder of the well-known Transair Pilot Shop, briefly explained to *Today's Pilot* that he was planning to launch a computer-based PPL ground school package in association with Oxford Aviation Training (OAT). Launching the product meant a lot to Tom. "Many student PPLs are not completing their training due to the difficulty they experience in studying the PPL subjects" he said. "It is really important to the GA industry that we do not let these potential pilots fall by the way-side because they have difficulties understanding the complexities of, say, European Air Law!" This was an interesting proposition as over the past few years there has been a significant growth in the number of CD Roms launched with the aim of teaching fledgling PPL or NPPL students subjects such as air law or navigation. However, given the backing of Transair and the training expertise of OAT, this product should - in theory - be head and shoulders above anything previously put on the market. By the time the product was officially launched in the late summer of 2003, it had taken more than two-and-half years to develop. Clearly, the wait has been worth it as more than 2,500 complete sets of the software were sold in the first three months and Transair has received letters from students who had almost given up, but are now back on track to becoming a pilot. But if there is already a proliferation of computer-based training packages on the market, what is so special about this one? Well, one main advantage immediately evident is that all the CDs have been written and designed by the same team, aiding the continuity of study from one subject to the next. In the past, most software has been written and marketed by a company specialising in one particular subject. The presentation and training style throughout all six subjects is easy to follow and, most importantly, standardised. Further more it has been written by OAT, one of the UK's - if not the world's - leading flying training organisations, so one would expect it to be tailor-made for pupil pilots.

WHAT DO YOU GET?

Student pilots can purchase individual CD Roms in each of the PPL course subjects. Disk 1 covers Air Law and Operational Procedures and other disks look at Human Performance and Limitations, Navigation and Radio Aids, Meteorology, Aircraft General and Principles of Flight, and Flight Performance and Planning. Each CD costs between £49.95 and £69.95 but the whole package can be purchased for £249.95 - a saving of £79 over the total price if bought individually. Alternatively, the set can be acquired complete with Oxford's acclaimed VFR RT package for £299.95, giving a total saving of £100. All the software is presented in an embossed blue leatherette case which not only looks good but also keeps the CDs clean and safe when not in use. In total the software gives 50 hours of instruction in audio, written and visual formats. The interactive graphics are well designed and the review panel were particularly impressed by the randomly generated question facility. As the NPPL and JAA PPL ground school and exams are the same in both cases the product serves both courses. The package cannot repeat verbatim the contents of the main manuals as published by Thom and Pratt nor would one want it to. Consequently, the presentation is a potted version of those publications - hopefully covering those areas the CAA examiner will pick out when setting the exam questions. But is the result a reliable/successful attempt at sorting the wheat from the chaff, as is claimed by the manufacturer? Transair and Oxford proudly boast that "the depth and scope of all subjects covered meet the syllabus requirements of the JAR-FCL PPL and NPPL" and our ground instructor agreed. He found himself looking for any glaring gaps in the study material, but we are pleased to say that all relevant subjects appear to be covered. The package is so extensive that the review team has yet to search every minute of the 50 hours for errors or omissions. However, what we have seen so far has been well presented and easy to follow, and the syllabus is pertinent to the CAA examinations.

While the graphics and commentary were mostly excellent, there was an initial tendency to read the text whilst listening to commentary. We soon learnt that the text does not necessarily follow the commentary, though, and we got over this temptation. One of the commentators has annoying 'hiss' in his speech - but perhaps this just comes down to personal observation. We used the software on a number of PCs of varying specifications and experienced no 'freezing' or similar problems. The only issue we had on one computer was the tendency of the 'Quit' to not always quit at the first attempt - occasionally it would actually start the chosen presentation all over again. Both our instructors and our student pilot found the content to be pitched at the appropriate level for a PPL/NPPL pupil, and all of the subject matter was relevant to the course and was not overly technical. The majority of the subjects are very well explained, although Ground Instructor John Rolph had difficulty following the logic of some, such as 'formation of con-

end of each assessment a pass/fail result is given in line with the 75% pass rate required for the CAA exams. This is a good indicator as to your progress in study and preparedness for sitting the exam. It is not unlike the Q&As in the manuals and the readily-available PPL Confuser books, but you will find it far more interactive. One point we found particularly impressive is that the areas in which a student does not answer correctly are 'hyperlinked' at the end of the assessment, so that the student can go straight to that section to revise weak areas.

A WORTHY ADDITION?

Every PPL or NPPL student has to make the same decision when it comes to personal ground school - whether to study from books, videos, computer-based software or a combination of these. The decision will be based upon how and when they want to study and how much they want to pay. As we have reported in the past, books can be read anywhere but are notoriously 'dry'. Some students find it easier to absorb information from videos but this requires finding two or three spare hours in which to sit 'glued' to a television set. The alternative is to use software, such as the Transair/Oxford product reviewed here. It can be viewed in total, or parts at a time and unlike a video, it can be viewed at home or the office, in total, or parts at a time. It is interactive, generates random questions and benefits from excellent graphics. Although there is no substitute for tuition from a professional tutor, this product is a perfect supplement to classroom work. We'll leave the final summing up to John Rolph. "My advice to the PPL/NPL student keen on passing first time," he says, "is to invest in all the options - including the manuals, the videos and computer-based training (even if the latter is only for an hour's revision before the exam). This may be the 'belt, braces and a piece of string' method but it is well worth the investment".

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

MINIMUM
Windows 98, ME, 2000, NT
- 300 MHz Pentium II
- 32MB Ram
- 4x CD-Rom Drive
- Graphics Card - capable of 800x600 16 bit colour
- Sound card

Windows XP
- 350MHz Pentium II
- 128MB Ram
- 4x CD-Rom Drive
- Graphics Card - capable of 800x600 16 bit colour
- Sound Card

RECOMMENDED
Windows XP
- 500MHz Pentium III
- 256MB Ram
- 12x CD-Rom Drive
- Graphics Card - capable of 800x600 16 bit colour
- Sound Card
- 1.3GB Hard Drive space for full installation

THE REVIEW PANEL

John Rolph - PPL Ground Instructor (Walkbury Aviation)
Rob Battley - PPL Flying Instructor (Walkbury Aviation)
Steve Bridgewater - NPPL Student & *Today's Pilot* Assistant Editor

