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**Hands-On Look At The Canadian-Made Dreamflyer And Microsoft's New Expansion For Flight Sim X**

by [Kris Abel](#) on Tue 11 Sep 2007 08:00 AM EDT

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At the Toronto Island Airport last week, Microsoft Canada held a showcase event inside the Porter Charter Terminal, both for their own Flight Simulator X software, which has a new expansion pack called "Acceleration", and for a Canadian-made home simulation chair called the Dreamflyer. Microsoft has nothing to do with the Dreamflyer, other than to say that their employees are fans and were happy to adopt the invention from British Columbia for use in their own promotions. I've been following the chair's progress ever since it was first reported on by Daily Planet on the Discovery Channel and was just a wild idea in a mad man's garage. I'm sure people laughed at George "Doc" Holloway at the time, but they certainly aren't laughing now. After attracting considerable investment, his crazy idea is now a finished product on the market and it's selling.





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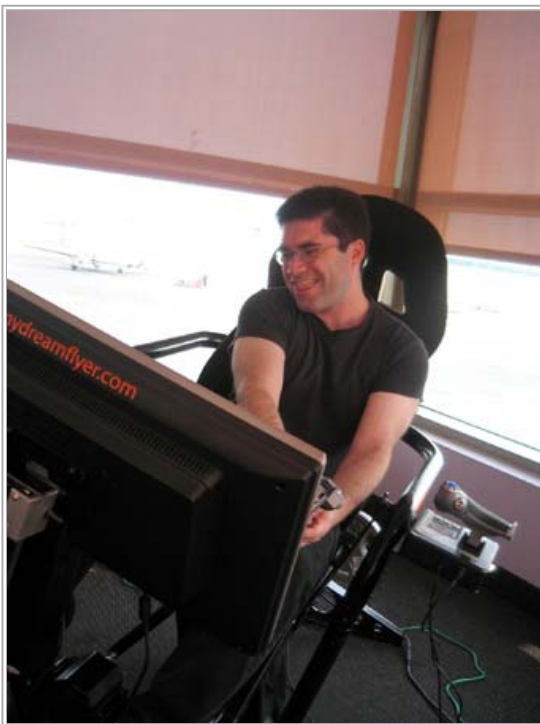
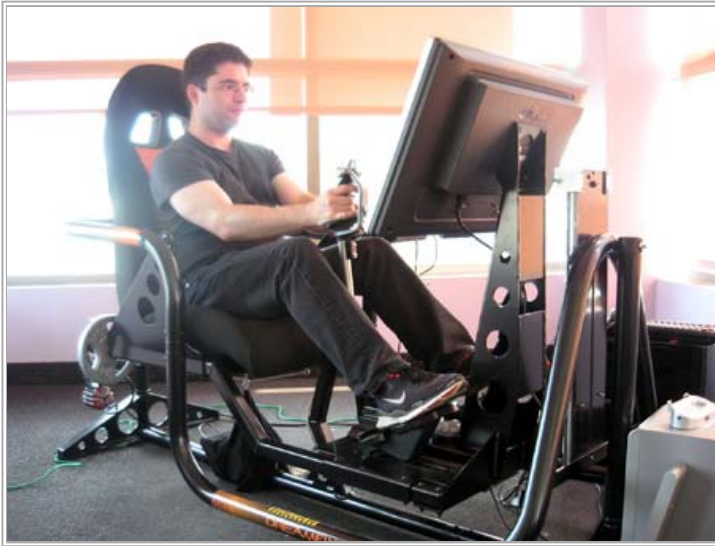
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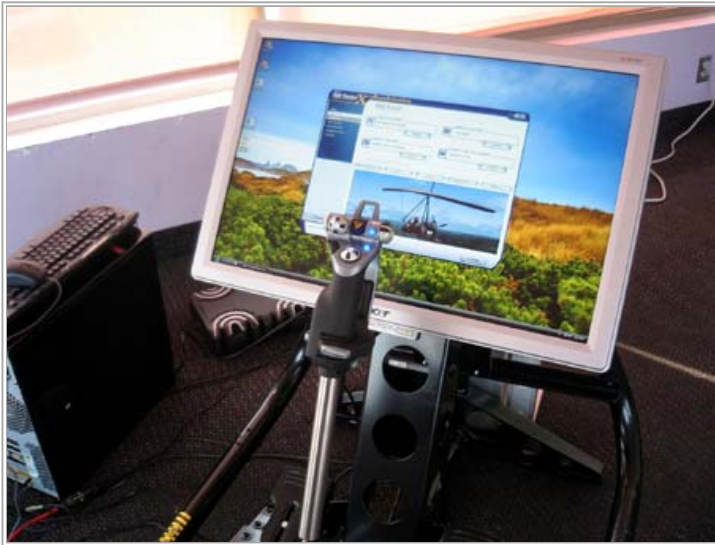
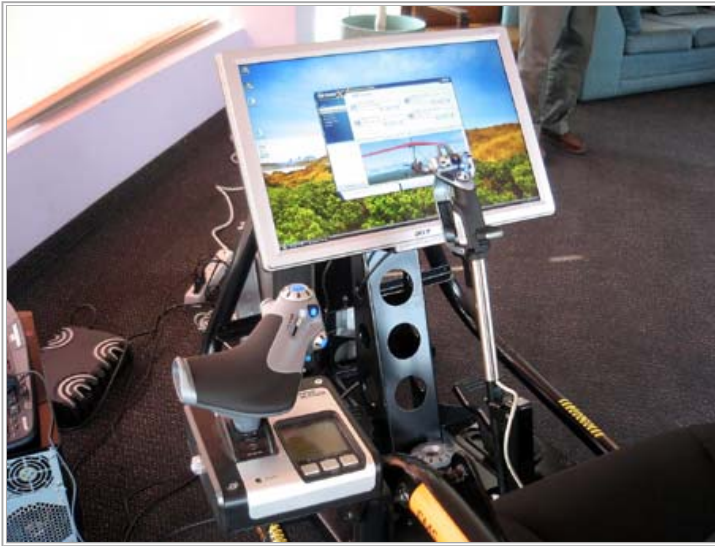
The Dreamflyer is a chair that shifts, pivots, banks, and tilts in all directions, all in reaction to and under the weight of its user. It rests inside an aluminum cradle, connected to a computer monitor, a flight stick with pedals, and a computer running the flight software suite of your choice. It has no power, no motors, no lights, but much like a teeter-totter or a hammock, uses your own weight and balance to guide its movements. Once you climb in and grab the controls, you simply have to lean to the left or to the right, forward, or back, along any angle to get the chair and its foot rest to swing in response.

Your movements are then translated through a set of sensors into joystick movements for the computer. You lean left, the airplane banks left. You lean forward, the nose of your craft pitches down, you lean back and you immediately gain in altitude. The same movements that you would normally perform with your hand on a joystick, you can now perform with your body in a chair.



The result is delightfully fun. You are now suspended off of the ground and can roll and pitch in the air as fast as your own body can react. You can glide gently with your feet up in front of you or you can slam yourself about in tight, g-force turns and teeth-gritting dog fights. With the physical movements married to the visual illusion on the screen, your brain is more easily deceived that you are up in the skies, behind the controls of a flying machine.

The Dreamflyer may seem like a crazy contraption, and indeed it certainly began that way. The Internet is full of websites and stories devoted to aviation nuts and their own home-built simulators. These are the kind of obsessive fans who passionately expound on their hobbies with that kind of foaming-at-the-mouth fervor that often gets them eye-rolling reactions from their friends and families. Some spend countless hours creating film set-quality passenger plane cockpits in their basements, others spend thousands of dollars on pistons and servos to create theme park-like cockpits and thunder and rumble in their garages. They gather online, share their blueprints and photos, and spend as much time designing their rides as they do flying in virtual space.



What separates George Holloway's idea from the others is its simplicity. In many ways its no different than the countless number of treadmills, stationary bikes, and exercise machines already populating many basements and bed rooms around the world. If people are willing to spend big dollars for large, cumbersome machines with the idea of losing weight, they will certainly do the same for learning to fly.



In fact, the Dreamflyer is far easier to accept into your home than a treadmill. It comes as a kit, a collection of aluminum tubes that you lock and screw in place like an Ikea bookshelf. It uses an off-the-shelf Saitek-branded video game flight control set and includes mounts for you to attach your own monitor, computer, and speakers. Once assembled, it fits easily through a household doorway, making it easy to move about without disassembling. This is the appeal that investors saw and what lead them to think "we can sell this" and form a company for Holloway's idea in Kelowna, B.C.



The Dreamflyer sells for \$2,800 US (that's the basic kit) and is available for online order at [MyDreamflyer.com](http://MyDreamflyer.com)

The launch of the Dreamflyer couldn't have come at a better time as the flight sim program of choice amongst aviation nuts is Microsoft Flight Simulator X and their new Acceleration expansion pack, their first in over a decade, is also hitting stores this month. It adds aerial racing as a whole new way to explore the virtual skies with friends.

Although yes, the original software did offer a basic scenarios where you could try out a Red Bull race track, the Acceleration pack's racing mode is a fully-featured, online multiplayer racing game with real-world recreations and fictional designs of all the Red Bull Courses and the unlimited Reno National Championships. There's both cross country and sail plane courses taking place in countries like Istanbul as well as other parts of Europe, and some fantasy tracks, such as one course that takes you through a canyon. In each you and the other online pilots compete to pass over special markers along a set course to reach a finish line. Weather conditions and changing winds help make it a very tactical game as well as it lets the program offer different difficulty levels.



I tried the Reno Course (which is coming up this week in real life) and it was a lot of fun. One of the biggest growing needs of video games and simulations today is in offering modes that allow for more social interaction and by offering these creative races, with support for headsets and real-time voice chat, Microsoft is certainly fulfilling that for Flight Simulator X.

Now one of the key elements in their racing mode that Microsoft is preparing for is the large fan community that likes to use program editors to create their own plane designs. These fans will be able to use their own planes within the race scenarios and it's expected that they will form a community around the races, challenging each other with their personal aircraft and competing to see who can build the best one.



The pack also includes 20 more missions, including a search and rescue scenario (a lot of that happening in the real world lately) and one where you can play at being a jet fighter NASA test pilot. There's also three new aircraft – the F/A-18A Hornet (crazy fast airplane), the P-51D Mustang (for racing), and the EH101 helicopter (for law enforcement and the search and rescue missions).





Both Microsoft Flight Simulator X and its upcoming Acceleration expansion pack are designed to work with Windows XP and Vista.

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