

# Aerosoft's Mega Airport Rome for FS2004

by Claudio "Cloudy" Di Veroli, published in PC FLIGHT,  
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I have a personal interest in the place: although I was born in Argentina, I have relatives in Rome, where my family has five centuries of documented presence, and I have flown countless times to the Leonardo da Vinci airport. Commonly called "Fiumicino", because it is located near that town in the outskirts of Rome, this is the main airport serving the great city. So I was very interested in checking what this recent release (March 2013) has to offer, especially as I have been unable to find any review in the web, just a few user comments.

Aerosoft is one of the main publisher of add-ons for Flight Simulator 2004 and X, and several of their products have had excellent reviews and are available in both boxed and download versions. In this particular product, however, although Aerosoft's webpage shows a nice picture of a box, the box does not exist! The product is only available as a download at the non-insignificant price of €24.85. Let us see then whether it is worth the expenditure.

( <https://www.aerosoft.com/en/flight-simulation/flight-simulator-2004/sceneries/735/mega-airport-rome> )

The download is essentially an automated installer .exe. Once you run it, after the install path, your only option is a box to be checked in case you have Ultimate Terrain Europe (UTE) installed. This is because two slightly different Landclass sceneries are installed, in order to agree with the roads surrounding the airport. So you are fine if you have the default roads or you have UTE installed.

What if you have instead other relevant and well-known add-ons such as Roads and Rivers of Europe (RRE) and/or Mazzokan's VFR Lazio of Jul. 2008 (VFR) [available from <https://www.flightsim.com/> by just searching for Lazio Mazzokan]? No directions are given by Aerosoft for these, but we have tested both and can attest that a virtually perfect match is provided by installing the UTE alternative.

What if I install/uninstall any of these add-ons (UTE, RRE, VFR) future? Do not worry: although nowhere explained in the documentation, the installer also includes, in your Landclass scenery folder \Mega Airport Rome LC\Scenery, the original files of both alternatives, in clearly labelled subfolders \LIRF\_STD\_FS9 and \LIRF\_UTE\_FS9. To change the alternative, you simply delete all the files (not the subfolders!) in the folder \Mega Airport Rome LC\Scenery, and replace them with the alternative set from one of the subfolders.

At the end of the automated install, we are shown an optional additional install for the Aerosoft Launcher: this is an utility allowing you to see your installed Aerosoft products, to configure minor details (of which none applies to this product), to check whether they are up to date and to uninstall them. I find this utility uninteresting: it is not needed to use Mega Airport Rome or any other Aerosoft product, the install process is lengthy and also requires you to download and install Microsoft's .NET Framework 3.5 SP1 in case your PC does not have it. And it will not work if (as many find it convenient) you rename or move the folder of any of the installed products.

The installed Mega Airport Rome (MAR) scenery is not located in the usual \Addon Scenery folder but in the \Aerosoft folder. Two subfolders are installed. \Mega Airport Rome LC includes only the above-mentioned \Scenery with the alternative landclasses: just a handful of small files. \Mega Airport Rome SC includes:

- (a) A Traffic .exe configurator that allows omitting some airport moving items to ease on frame rates and is only needed for very old/slow PCs.
- (b) A small Readme.txt explaining that this is v.1.02 with a few minor bug fixes.
- (c) A beautifully produced 16-page PDF Manual which makes very interesting reading and also includes the technical specs of the airport, runways and nav aids.
- (d) An impressive 64-page Charts PDF with the complete real-life airport documentation, including full airport technical information plus 34 full-colour charts.
- (e) The \Scenery subfolder with 526 .bgl files including the AFCAD and (f) the \Texture subfolder with 717 original textures (i.e. not borrowed from any of the Nova or other standard texture set).

Additionally, in FS2004's \Modules you will find three new files, most likely related to the moving features of the scenery (note that nothing is installed in \Aircraft). Finally, in the Start Menu you will find links for the PDFs and for Aerosoft webpages, and in the scenery.cfg you find the two new sceneries, with MAR SC given priority over MAR LC as customary (note that this is not a universal rule: e.g. Jon Patch's British Columbia Victoria scenery requires reversing the usual priorities). The MAR SC folder uses a total size of 310Mb of hard disk.

Advanced users are understandably wary of an automated installer: could this ruin years of painstaking add-on installs? This one will certainly not. Even though at a point the installer says "producing backup files", I tested the product on a fresh FS2004 install (with all Archive flags off) and I could not find any replaced file anywhere. So there is no reason to worry. However, it would have been nice if Aerosoft provided a small text file clarifying this.

Most importantly, from the above detail of installed items it is apparent that an automated installer was by no means necessary: perhaps Aerosoft should also have provided a manual installer as a simple zip file (requiring the serial number to unzip) with the new folders on it, to be installed by simple copy, with manual configuration instructions for UTE/RRE/VFR landclass and airport traffic alternatives.

The experienced user annoyed at finding add-on sceneries in the \Aerosoft folder can of course move them anywhere else in the PC and suitably edit the scenery.cfg file. The only caveat is that, once this is done, the traffic configurator will no longer work.

If you have installed VFR Lazio, it is important to ensure that it has lower priority than Rome SC, but higher than Rome LC! If you give VFR Lazio lower priority than the latter, a few LC patches around the airport will appear over the VFR, but others nearer to the airport will not, with a very unrealistic effect.

Having installed the beast, how does it look? Gorgeous, as expected. Let us compare the three alternatives: the default FS2004 Fiumicino by Microsoft (files dated May'03), the freeware Fiumicino by ISD (Italian Scenery Design with files dated Jan'05) and this Aerosoft MAR payware (files dated Mar'13 except a handful of later fixes). [The pictures below all include Roads and Rivers of Europe]



Fiumicino default by Microsoft (May. 2003)



Fiumicino freeware by ISD (Italian Scenery Designs), (Jan. 2005)



Fiumicino Mega Airport Rome by Aerosoft (Mar. 2013)

The default FS2004 airport is just a rudimentary placeholder with a few flat blocks. ISD is instead a true FS airport scenery, a high-quality yet still amateur effort, with most buildings in place but mostly with no textures and quite blocky. Eight years later, the present Aerosoft MAR is a huge improvement: every single building is represented, every detail is cared for, even in some very complicated buildings, their complicated roof structures painstakingly reproduced. At long last, flying low over the Fiumicino, screenshots look like real-life photographs.

All this is achieved with no significant effect on framerates: I checked the product on a 7-year-old typical Pentium 4 PC, with full traffic and all scenery sliders at maximum, and got 20 frames per second, not bad at all. In any recent PC the frames are 60 or more.

The only detail I found less than excellent in MAR were the land VFR textures: with no seasonal change, they are rather dark and brown which is not bad for winter but, in other seasons, contrasts with the real-life green of surrounding landclass textures (whether default or separate add-ons). This is particularly so with VFR Lazio: with roads and other features in perfect agreement with the Fiumicino VFR included in MAR, it is a pity to see this agreement spoiled by the sharp transition between the decidedly dark colours of the latter and the decidedly light colours of the former: see the picture below. Certainly the VFR realism is worth having, but the transition is a real shame.

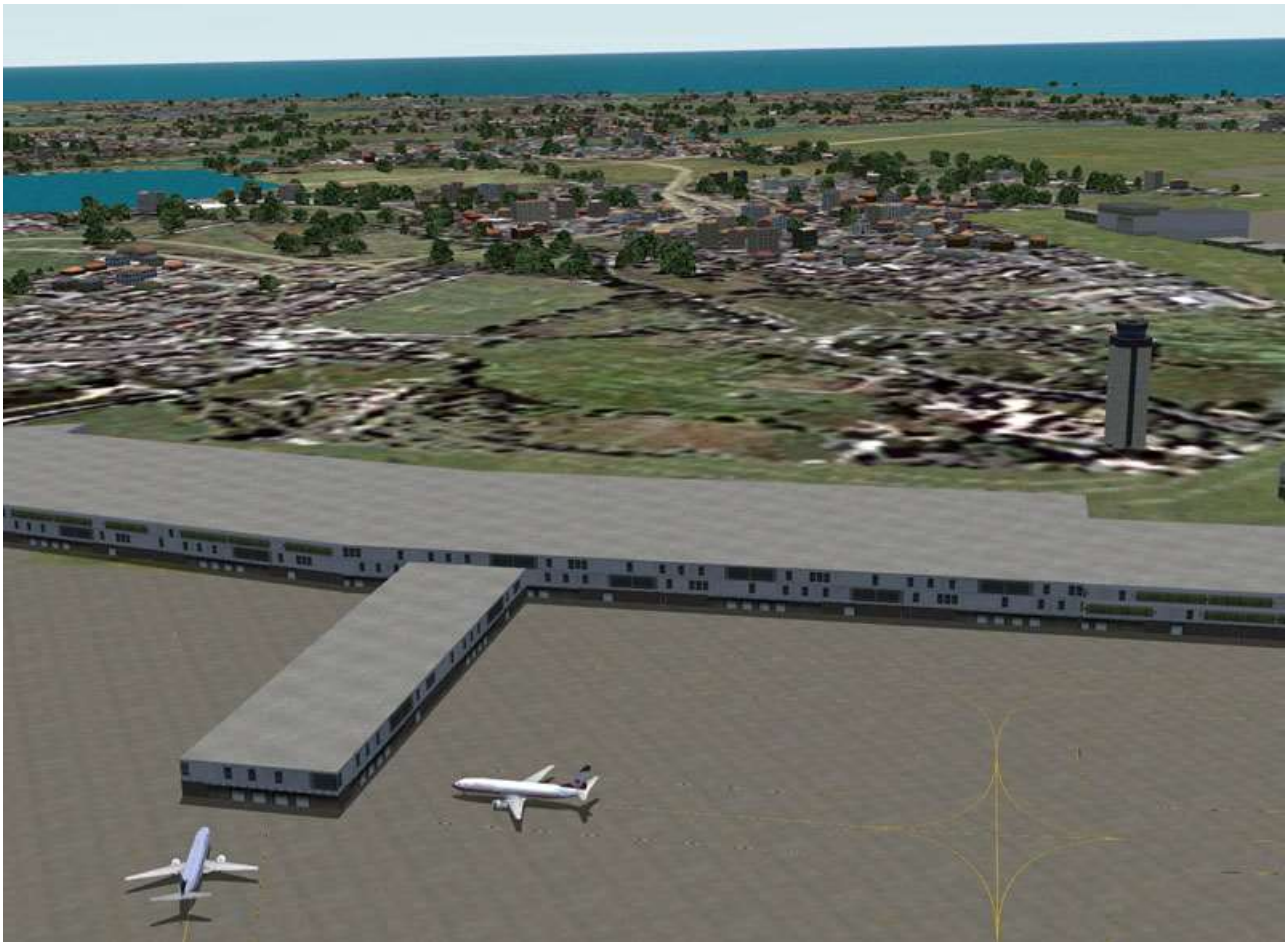


Fiumicino Mega Airport Rome by Aerosoft (Mar. 2013) over VFR Lazio (Jul. 2008)

In the Aerosoft forum one can find user complaints about poor texture quality, trees and other details. I find most of these criticism unfair: unlike the ISD freeware, where the buildings are blocky with features grossly reproduced by a few textures applied to cubic surfaces, in MAR the airport is reproduced to all the detail possible under FS2004. Whether the just-released FSX version is up to the FSX standard I cannot tell obviously.

Users have also complained about the square-looking trees: this is of course a consequence of the trees being represented in FS2004 by two flat 2D textures 90° apart, but we know that clever design of these textures can minimise the effect, which in MAR is particularly poor: anyway, there are very few trees in the scenery, so it is really a minor issue overall. The quality of moving vehicles in the airport ranges from acceptable to excellent.

As for textures of buildings, they may be somewhat fuzzy and unremarkable as some users claim but, honestly, so is real-life Fiumicino! However much I love the Rome of my ancestors, in fairness I have to concede that this airport is a concrete monster, an aggregate of many large buildings, a few of them stunning, perhaps, but most of them much less so: the ensemble is certainly not the most elegant of the famous international airports. I can attest that the MAR scenery does justice to Fiumicino, and fastidiously reproduces this large airport down to the smallest of its many buildings, lamp posts, strange structures and even air conditioning roof pipes and smaller details. Also importantly, at night all the lights are on in every single window, lamp post and moving vehicle. Let us see some detail comparison pictures.



Fiumicino default by Microsoft (May. 2003) - Detail



Fiumicino freeware by ISD (Jan. 2005) - Detail



Fiumicino Mega Airport Rome by Aerosoft (Mar. 2013) - Detail

Note in the above picture the improved detail in large buildings and the many additional small buildings in the background.

Unlike other add-on airports which are sometimes very nice but also relatively simple, this one prompts you to take off on a slow aircraft (or maybe a small heli) and spend an afternoon in the exciting adventure of exploring this excellent virtual reality and discovering its spots and views in all their complexity.

A version for FSX is also available from Aerosoft:

<https://www.aerosoft.com/en/flight-simulation/flight-simulator-x-steam/sceneries/867/mega-airport-rome>

I sincerely recommend this add-on to Flight Simulator users.

