

The perfect beginner airliner?

A review of Microsoft's ATR!

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12 min. de lecture

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Asobo and Microsoft together with developer Hans Hartmann have released the ATR 42/600 and ATR 72/600 for Microsoft Flight Simulator. The twin engine turboprop airliner has been released as the first aircraft under a new 'Expert Series' designation which has caused quite a bit of attention to be paid to this aircraft release. After several weeks and a couple of dozen flights in the ATR, I wanted to share my more casual take on the 'Expert Series' airliner. Let's have a look at Microsoft's ATR 42/600 and 72/600!

Where I'm coming from

For this review I feel like I need to add some qualifiers on where I'm coming from.

Regular readers will know that one of my goals this year has been to dig into and learn as much as I can about airliners in simulation. For those who don't know me as well, my typical flight sim experience usually involves cross country general aviation flights in MSFS and X-Plane, bushplane adventures, and combat sim sorties matching wits in biplanes or fast-action attack runs and missile duels in fighter jets. Airliners are their own thing and that's required learning quite a bit of new material or revisiting information that I've glossed over before.

I've been looking at multiple airliner products and finding ways to have both a fun as well as an authentic experience. One thing should be clear in this review at the outset: I'm not an experienced virtual airliner pilot. Instead, I'm approaching this view from the perspective of a slightly more casual player. That may in fact be a majority of virtual pilots out there so I'm hoping that this might help inform some buying decisions from that point of view.

We've learned via the last developer Q&A series that the ATR is the fastest selling product in the Microsoft Flight Simulator Marketplace. I wanted to explore what that means with so many people potentially buying this product. What does Expert Series mean and how does this apply to different types of flight simmers. On with the review!

A bit of history



First flight at Toulouse-Blagnac Airport in 1984.
Photo by: [André Cros](#). [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

The ATR airliner itself has an interesting history and one that I, admittedly, knew little about. All of my turboprop airliner experience personally has been as a passenger on the De Havilland Canada Q400 series (an airplane that I hope makes its way to MSFS someday). The ATR is the closest competitor to that type and, like the Q400 and the Dash 8 before it, has gone through quite a few revisions.

The type itself emerged as a joint venture between Aerospatiale from France and Aeritalia from Italy. You may know both of those companies by their updated names – Airbus and Leonardo. Both companies started out independently, however, as was the trend in the late 1970s, it made more sense for a joint venture to offer a single aircraft family than compete for a small market.

The initial ATR 42 model would soon be followed by a lengthened ATR 72 and by 1988

the type had seen 200 deliveries. Demand for the turboprop airliner would continue and saw the type progress through the multiple variants with the -300, -500 and -600 all being major variants. Both 42 and 72 are part of the same production line making it easy for ATR and for customers to select the appropriate size of airplane for their fleets and to date around 500 ATR 42s and over 1,000 ATR 72s have been delivered to 200 operators in 100 countries.

ATR continues to produce aircraft and have [recently shared a hybrid engine concept](#) which seems likely to ensure that the ATR continues on for quite some time. The version in Microsoft Flight Simulator is the short ATR 42/600 and the longer ATR 72/600 – modern versions with better more fuel efficient propellers and engines and updated avionics.

Why the ATR appeals

My first serious airliner for MSFS was the [PMDG 737-600 which I did my first full flight in a couple of months back](#). That airplane is a potential starting point for many who are interested in this space thanks to its high quality and somewhat lower price point (versus the other models of 737). But this airplane does have one problem – it's complex and it's a lot to take in all at once. Veteran 737 sim pilots take to it easily but newbies are going to struggle in some instances. This newbie did!

Going straight to the 737 from other types of airplanes felt a bit overwhelming at times. That caused me to look elsewhere and find other airliner experiences that might ease me in a little more gently. As it turns out, what I might have been looking for was a turboprop airliner.

The ATR is flown on shorter routes, at slower speeds, with a little less complexity and a bit more time to anticipate next steps. That makes it awfully appealing when you're getting a good sense of how all of this works.



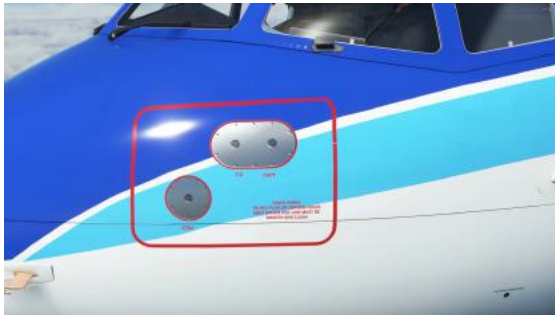
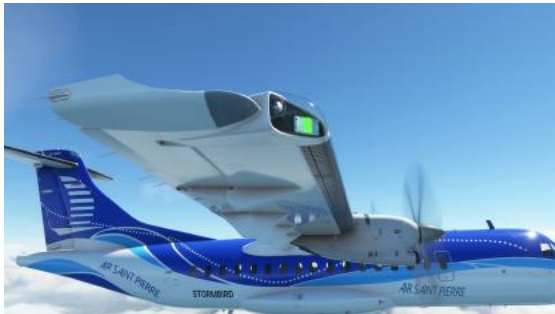
That slower speed and smaller size also means that the ATR is flying into and out of some more unique locales that your average 737 flight is not going to do. On my first flight [I flew it with the Air Tahiti livery and flew that airplane into Bora Bora](#). That was just a stunning experience visually and a great introduction to the airplane. Then I took it out again and again flying it from [Liverpool to Dublin, from Munich to Prague, St. John's to Saint-Pierre](#), and more!

Microsoft are also selling the bundle including the 42 and 72 for low price of \$19.99 USD. They are not sold separately although with the low price it makes it an easy purchase. That price goes even lower for Premium Deluxe owners with it coming in at \$12.99 USD. That means that, for many, this is an easier airplane to take a risk on. It's better to find out that maybe you don't like airliners spending \$12 or \$20 than spending upwards of \$50-150 on the other options out there.

The good stuff

There's a lot to like already with this airplane and that starts off with its looks. Quite simply: it looks really good.

Like many aircraft that Asobo were involved in directly, it has a very clean almost factory fresh appearance. That is likely, in part, driven by the licensing deals that they work out with the companies that they are doing business with. That also doesn't mean that there aren't plenty of details from the overall shape of the airplane to the landing gear to the highly detailed exterior lighting.



There are also functioning doors and cargo hatches, a full cabin, a door that opens to the cabin, and a very nicely detailed cockpit where pretty much everything has a consistent look and feel. There are some arguments in the community over the colour of the cockpit. Having compared images of the /600 series real world cockpits versus the simulated one makes me think that this one is nearly bang on. Earlier versions of the ATR had a different colour to the cockpit and so that may be where the disagreements come from. I'm not sure.



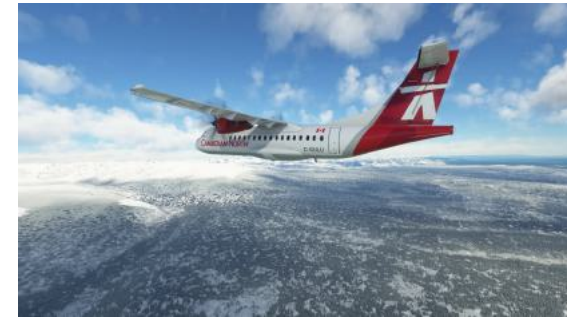


Performance with the ATR has also been great. While some complex airliners incur a substantial hit on frame rate, I have not experienced that at all with this airplane.

Both variants of the ATR, the 42/600 and the 72/600 come with a few liveries included. That's just enough to be interesting and good for Xbox flyers too. Of course, more would have been nice but then again we see the community filling in the gaps quickly and there are [over 350 already available on flightsim.to](https://www.flightsim.to/over-350-already-available-on-flightsim-to) for PC sim flyers.

Here are some of the included liveries.





And here are some great community liveries that I've made use of. Superb!



The ATR also seems to fly really well. There are some quirks with the drag profile at low throttle

settings according to real world pilots but in normal flight it seems to do everything its supposed to without too much trouble. Its easy to handle, and it takes off, lands, and taxis easily too. Mind the climb rate as it doesn't climb too quickly and 1,500 fpm is an optimistic setting at higher operating weights or at higher altitudes. Yes, I have stalled the airplane a few times and that stick shaker noise really captures your attention!

The ATR is far easier to line up on and land on a runway than the faster airliners are. It also setups up for a landing around 120 knots, so folks who may be jumping from a Cessna to the ATR won't find this as overwhelming as something bigger and faster.

Microsoft have also, to their credit, released several tutorial videos to help with the learning process of tackling a new, complex, airplane. No PDF manual is available at this point and the word that we have from the Flight Simulator team is that they don't yet have a way forward for that. The YouTube based discovery series fills in the gap nicely though.

Anything that these tutorials have missed have also easily been made up by the community as there are several dozen videos out there. I watched a bunch of them before my first flight and then even more for my second, third and fourth full outings.

EFB, MCDU, and other button pushing items

The EFB included is a very welcome feature for me. It has quite a few abilities and it gives you the capability to manage things like the doors, performance values, weights, and more. It also has panel states – with a click of a button you can take the aircraft to cold and dark, with external power on, or ready to taxi option. That last one is essential for a fast and fun start at the gate.

I think these kinds of features are essential, especially if you just want to get going and not do the full cold and dark start. The EFB doesn't do everything which I'll get to but it does a good job overall.

The MCDU (the flight computer) does do a lot and while it has some problems, covered below, it is as I understand to be more or less an authentic ATR experience. Like most of these flight computers, it is not the most user friendly experience. You slowly start to get the hang of it over time and this one has helped me get over some of the challenges that I've experienced with other flight computers. I'm not going entirely by the book but thanks to the tutorial videos I've managed to make it work. This has been a revelation and a learning experience for me and I've enjoyed the outcome!



It also does support a VNAV capability and, from what I hear, it works albeit not quite at the level of the PMDG 737 or Fenix A320. VNAV, for veteran pilots, does seem to be a make to break for many and so having this capability at the start is good to see. Right now, with my less than precision flying, the VS mode works just like it does in a general aviation airplane and the ATR has its own top of descent marker on the flight plan too so that makes it easy to sort out when its time to start the trek down from cruise altitude. Nothing happens too quickly in the ATR so you usually have time to sort it out and I'm less concerned with what's listed on an airport chart personally although you can absolutely fly this by the numbers judging by the videos I've watched.

The ATR does also have some helpful clickspots on the glass panels too. These are referenced by a help screen on the EFB. What they do is let you control functions that you'd otherwise have to look down in the cockpit for. Click the top of the nav screen, for example, and it will increase

the viewing range of your flight plan. Click the bottom and you do the opposite. Click on either side of the screen and you'll flip through the different modes too. Nice! I always appreciate quality of life enhancements that recognize that you aren't there in the cockpit interacting with the plane in the same way as a real life pilot would.



The glass panels do come with some options like the ability to have synthetic vision displayed. Very useful for low visibility situations.

I want to end this section to note that the ATR is, after its first patch, remarkably stable and without any crash issues that I've noticed. It handles time acceleration well in my experience and you can active pause without any issues. My frame rates have also been very high – some airliners can get bogged down but not this one.

The not so good stuff



The [bug reports section of the MSFS forums](#) is filled with issues on this airplane. Some are obscure and some more evident to the average user. It's not a complete bug fest but these will be annoying to some.

Flight planning on this airplane is something of an issue for some. If you're a veteran airliner pilot the MCDU's bugs may annoy. The ability to enter airways, for example, has currently been disabled pending a re-write of that system. Eventually this will be fixed, I'm confident of it, but for now you have to skip entering airways. Waypoints, SIDS, and STARS are fine.

If you prefer to use SimBrief to do your routes, there is no way at the moment to officially import it into the MCDU. I say 'officially' because some have discovered a workaround that does seem to work and [a video covering the process shows a relatively straightforward method for PC owners](#). A future update is apparently planned that will enable a more integrated means of importing a briefing.

For more casual flyers, you may also be like me and find the flight planner in MSFS to be perfectly adequate for your purposes and with that I'm a bit disappointed that the ATR doesn't support it at present. I hope that it might some day but for the moment – no. You can still use it to plan a flight and then plug in the information into the MCDU yourself which has been my workflow when flying this airplane. On the upside, it has forced me to learn how to use the MCDU so maybe its not all bad!

Many have reported issues with the throttles too. This airplane, like several others, has the ability to set and calibrate throttle positions and that is both good and bad. The recent update seems to have sorted out most of the problems with it but I know that it may still be a problem for some. The recent update also added the ability to toggle reverser mode (by button press) which I am very thankful for.

I should note too that some users appear to have ignored the gust lock which prevents the throttles from moving too far forward until its appropriately toggled. Some bugs are not bugs after all.

There is a throttle calibration system specific to the airplane which can help, however, I do find it a bit perplexing to use. It is accessed through the EFB and frankly I haven't fully cracked what its supposed to be doing. [There is a help guide](#)

[available but I'm not sure if its helping explain how to use this feature adequately.](#)

There are a few visual issues too. The worst offender I found is that there are light leaks into the cargo area, immediately behind the flight deck, at certain times of day.



One patch has already solved a long list of issues and if Microsoft can keep up a steady stream of fixes over the short term I think the ATR will be in a great place very soon. I personally, have not experienced many of these bugs. That may either be through luck or my lack of experience but nothing has gotten in the way of having a lot of fun with this airplane.

Some final thoughts

Microsoft have used a very specific marketing name on this aircraft calling it the 'Expert Series.' This new series coexists with the 'Local Legends' and 'Famous Flyers' series that they have been running for a while now.

It's obvious that they decided to call it the Expert Series to distinguish from these other two series and I think it's justified. No matter what the detractors will say, the ATR is definitely more deeply simulated and more complicated than anything else that Microsoft and Asobo have released. Excepting the iniBuilds A310 in the 40th Anniversary pack and I think if Microsoft had released the A310 separately, it would also be deserving of the same naming scheme too.

With some bugs crushed already and future plans to better import flight plans I think this ATR can be elevated to a brilliant airplane that is happily in the middle between the intense detailing and deep systems modeling that you see with a PMDG or Fenix product on the more study level side and and some of the simpler types that are available on a more casual side of things.

Fast enough to cover some short hops between interesting airports, deeply simulated enough to provide a learning experience, and easy enough to screw things up and still bring it in for a quick and easy landing all make this extremely appealing as a beginner airliner for the aspiring airliner flight simmer. It's not perfect, but its really fun and that ultimately is what I'm looking for here. Many of you are too I suspect!

At \$20 USD or just \$12 for Premium Deluxe owners, Microsoft have priced this one to sell making it easily within reach for many flight simmers. Its fun enough for casual pilots and just good enough for veterans. I think I can already recommend it to most unless the aforementioned issues with the MCDU or the throttle give you pause. If, however, you are a PMDG or Fenix fan and your airliner experience has to be of that level... you may want to skip it and keep on flying your airliner of choice. For me, however, this has been some of the most fun that I've had with the sim in many months and I was already having a lot of fun.

Screenshots

