

BY JOHN D. RULEY

navAero t•Pad 800

A great answer for notebook PC users in the cockpit

Increasingly, aviation software is available that's useful not only on the ground, but also in the air. Unfortunately, notebook PCs are poorly adapted to the aircraft cockpit—displays tend to wash out in direct sunlight (and can also be too bright for comfort at night) and, unless you fly solo with an empty right seat, there's no place to put the computer. As a result, computers in the cockpit have tended to be either expensive electronic flight bags (EFBs) or limited-function personal digital assistants (PDAs).

Well, navAero is out to change that with the t•Pad 800. It's a completely separate display that straps to your leg, driven by a 12-volt cigarette lighter. Any notebook PC running Windows XP with a VGA external display output can run it; navAero supplies software that rotates the display through 270 degrees into a "portrait" orientation. The display also contains an "active digitizer" that allows you to select menu items, press on-screen buttons or even input text using an on-screen keyboard, one letter at a time, with an electronic stylus. The notebook PC can be placed under a seat to keep it out of the way.

I tried the t•Pad on a local flight near my home base in Modesto, Calif. I used it with a Motion Computing M1200 Tablet PC, which I've configured as an EFB by installing Jeppesen's FliteMap and JeppView programs. FliteMap provides flight planning and moving-map functionality (when used with a compatible GPS), while JeppView provides electronic versions of Jeppesen instrument procedures and airport diagrams.



The biggest problem that I had with the t•Pad was installing its software on the M1200. The t•Pad runs *only* on 12-volt power; running it on a 120-volt house current requires a DC adapter, which navAero didn't supply. The computer on which I was testing it has an external CD-ROM, which only runs on a 120-volt house current and can't be operated from 12 volts. To get around this problem, I copied all the files from navAero's installation CD onto my computer's hard disk, then car-

ried it and the t•Pad out to my car.

Physically, the t•Pad looks like a slightly oversized (9.4x6.2x0.9-inch) PDA glued to a Velcro strap. The strap goes on your leg, turning the t•Pad into an electronic kneeboard. A six-foot cable connects the t•Pad to a slightly larger (6.7x5.6x1.3-inch) interface box, which can be stowed under a seat. Two shorter cables connect the interface box to VGA and USB ports on your computer and to the 12V cigarette lighter for power. Total

WWW.PLANEANDPILOTMAG.COM



navAero's software allows you to slide your notebook PC under the seat and strap on a 9x6-inch t-Pad display. The pilot selects information via an electronic stylus.

weight of the t-Pad is 3.6 pounds, not including the computer that drives it.

Before turning on the t-Pad, you'll need to turn on your computer, install navAero's software (note that you must install the serial-USB driver before the WACOM tablet driver—figuring that out took me a couple of hours) and use whatever controls your computer manufacturer provided to direct the output to the external VGA port. At this point, you should get a display on the t-Pad. You

WWW.PLANEANDPILOTMAG.COM

can now turn off the built-in display on the computer (how to do this varies, depending on the manufacturer and model) to save battery life.

The t-Pad has three buttons on the front panel—a standby button, which turns the display on and off, and two brightness buttons. The interface unit has five buttons, which can be used for a variety of purposes, including adjusting display color and contrast, and to override the primary brightness buttons, which have a limited range.

With display brightness set to maximum and contrast adjusted, I found the t-Pad viewable in direct sunlight, although, at some viewing angles, it can produce a lot of glare (polarized sunglasses help). That's much better than the display on my M1200, which washes out in bright light. At minimum brightness, the t-Pad provides a viewable display without overpowering the other lights in the cockpit—again, better than my M1200, which can be too bright for comfort at night (although the "Night Vision" feature of Jeppesen's FliteMap helps). On the other hand, I found the t-Pad's 8.4-inch display a bit small for comfort when viewing approach plates, which show up well (in normal light) on the M1200's 12-inch display.

I had one major complaint at the time of this writing: navAero's documentation was inadequate. But as we went to press, the company expanded its original three-page installation guide, making it much more comprehensive. The guide is available for download at navAero's Website. The company is also shipping the hard copy of the expanded instruction guide along with the product to customers who are buying it now.

The t-Pad 800 has a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$1,395, or less at various avionics dealers, which doesn't include a computer to drive it or any aviation software. It sounds high, but if you already own a notebook PC and have been looking for a way to use it in the cockpit, the t-Pad 800 is perfect. Ask the company for a 12-volt adapter so you can set up the unit on the ground before taking it in the air.

For more information, contact navAero at (866) NAV-AERO or log on to www.navaero.com.

P&P

John D. Ruley is an instrument-rated private pilot and a freelance writer specializing in personal technology and aviation. E-mail him at jruley@ainet.com.

Got Checklist?



The Checklist Injector™ will read your checklists back to you in your own voice, directly into your headphones, without disrupting vital communications. Endlessly customizable, it allows you to allocate space for everyday checklists as well as critical emergency lists. Tremendous ease of use and interactivity let you defer items to the end of the list. Also included: Dual independent reminders for instances such as switching tanks. The unit face is only 1" x 2". To find out more about how you can add an extra measure of safety to your SOPs, visit us at www.PMA-Tech.com.



PMA-Tech.com
(831) 630-9435

To request information, see page 79

TEXAS SKYWAYS
INC.

Power Plus Performance

Time to Upgrade



to a 550 Engine
REGAL SERIES 2000 ENGINES

More Safety	No Airframe Mods
More Power	No Electric Fuel Pumps
More Performance	No Exhaust Change
More Climb and Cruise	No Cockpit Fuel Tanks
More Miles Per Gallon	No Additional Fuel Lines
More Time Between Overhaul	No Increased Maintenance

308 Boerne Stage Air Field, Boerne Texas 78006
phone 830-755-8989 fax 830-755-2384

To request information, see page 79