

Review of
HOTAS F/A-18C Hornet Grip
Manufactured by ThrustMaster

Intro

My name is Raymond Andersen and many of you might know me better as Rays Aviation. For several years now, I have been testing a large variety of hardware specifically designed for flight simulation purposes, and this time I got a huge opportunity to test a brand new and very exciting product from the company ThrustMaster. The product is their new replica HOTAS F/A-18C Hornet grip that is an independent product however, the grip do need a base from either the HOTAS Warthog or the HOTAS Cougar.

The grip is developed under the Boeing / McDonnell Douglas Official Franchise and is 100% native and integrated into the DCS World F/A-18C Hornet game module. Of course you can also use the grip for other flight simulators as long as they are compatible with OS Win7, 8 or 10 and used on a PC.



Packaging, Delivery & Assembly

I received this new grip directly from ThrustMaster in France. It was sent directly to my home address in Denmark using FedEx as forwarder and immediately after collection at the warehouse I received a track and trace number. The delivery was very fast, the collection in France was a Friday and already the following Monday I received the package, giving a delivery time of only two business days which I think is really fast.

The grip was packed in an outer box made of hard and thick cardboard, and inside this outer box was the inner sales box packed with polystyrene foam piece around to prevent potential damage during transport or hard handling. Now, the sales box is just a thin cardboard box but inside this box is a really luxurious, almost show-case like box, made from a hard and stiff material with a softer form-shaped internal part that fits perfectly around the grip – almost like the inner part was the mold used for the grip. This provides a superb protection but also provides a really great sense of high quality and an extra luxurious experience of unpacking this item. Additionally the grip was here also packed in thin plastic again to avoid potential scratching or similar.

Included in the pack is the F/A-18C grip and a guide also found in the show-case – there are no wiring, no base or similar included since the idea here is that you use a common base that supports multiple grips.

There are no tools included since the grip is completely assembled and does not require any additional assembly. All you have to do is to connect the grip to one of the two approved base types and you are ‘Go’ for flight. The approved bases are either the HOTAS Warthog original found featuring the A10 grip or the Cougar base - this test and review is performed using the Warthog base.

Included is also an 8-pages user manual describing the grip, the buttons and the layout of pre-programmed commands. In the user manual it is also stated that to get the correct setup you have to make sure your base’s firmware is up to date – how to update the firmware is also included with a link to <https://support.thrustmaster.com>.



Look & Feel

The look of the F/A-18C grip is simply just stunning – very realistic, very authentic and the replica grip resembles the real world grip almost perfectly according to all the various images that I could find on the internet etc. It is easy to see that ThrustMaster has kept a keen focus on the details and created this grip with great accuracy and attention to the real grip.

The grip is of a metal construction just like the A10 grip, which makes the sensation and feeling of using the grip very realistic and authentic. According to the list of details on the sales box, the grip is made of 85% metal parts which is awesome. The color is black and just holding the grip before I attached it to the base gave me a feeling of quality – it certainly is not just another light-weight plastic flight control stick, but instead a heavy, high quality replica grip that is perfectly shaped to fit the right hand also featuring a forward bend on the top which eases the muscle load when flying and makes the access to the buttons more ergonomic.

The parts used including the electronics, buttons, switches etc. are of an industrial-grade quality meaning high performance and durability. I have of course not been able to test this grip for a longer period of time, but if the standard is the same as in my A10 grip, then the durability is really good. I have used my A10 for about 7 years now, and everything is still working 100% without any flaws.

I absolutely love that the scale of this replica F/A-18C grip is 1:1 with the real grip used by the U.S. Navy – this makes the experience even more perfect in my opinion, and I could easily see this grip used perfectly with either the F/A-18C Hornet in DCS World or even with the VRS Superbug for FSX/P3D.

This grip features lots of buttons which are all of high quality, but of course no axis, since these are featured by the base instead. In total there are 19 programmable action buttons together with one hat-switch which are placed at various locations of the grip. E.g. you have a ring finger button, a pinkie button controlled by a small metal lever, a dual trigger and the rest of the buttons are found on the top and thumb side of the grip.

The buttons are firm and do require a fair amount of force to be activated. This first of all, provides a great feel of quality, but secondly also that you do not have to worry about accidental activation of buttons. There is a nice click sound when each button is activated which confirms that a buttons has been activated.

The only minor difference I noticed on this replica grip was the small 2-way MoM-Off-MoM and click flip switch found on the top section of the grip, which is used for VR (stated in the manual). This switch is found slightly to the left of the small click switch marked for 'Recce'. This switch I could not see on the real grip but other than that, the grip is a perfect replica.

Connection & Performance

Connecting the F/A-18C grip is really easy and only takes half a minute or so. In my home cockpit setup I have the Warthog A10 base and grip, so all I had to do was to unscrew the large ‘wheel-like’ screw placed at the bottom of the grip. This screw you can tighten and untighten just using your fingers, no more is needed. When the screw is untightened you can lift off the grip from the base and now just place your new F/A-18C grip on the base, tighten the ‘wheel-like’ screw again and that’s it.

The base and the grip interact using a small connector that looks like a 5-pin mini DIN connector and the connection from the base to the computer is a standard USB/A cable.

I tested this grip on 5 different platforms/flight simulators and what I found was that the programming or assignment of functions was easy to complete within each platform. In general I would assume that you could use any assignment or programming tool like C++, LINDA, SIOC or the TARGET etc. however, I did my assigning using the included assignment tools for each simulator and finally also using Pete Dawson’s FSUIPC which turned out perfectly.

I started out with my tests on Lockheed Martins Prepar3Dv4+ and I quickly noticed that the grip was recognized as the Warthog HOTAS. This is of course due to the base being the Warthog A10 and the data which are pre-programmed into the base PCB. No problem though, because in P3D I can setup various profiles even for the same base, meaning that I have created a profile that fits the buttons found on the Warthog grip and a second profile that fits the buttons found on the Hornet grip. These profiles are selectable in the internal assignment tool of P3D.

The same as above I also found using Microsoft’s Flight Simulator X also known as FSX – this I had also expected due to the connection between FSX and P3D, but I of course also tested the connection to Xplane11. The result here was also that the grip was recognized as the Warthog HOTAS and the image displayed was of course the A10 grip with that grips specific button layout. None-the-less, I could easily program the grip even tough the numbers of each button might not be the same as with the A10.

I now moved on to the DCS World 2.5 for which the grip is actually created and this especially for the F/A-18C Hornet game module. Actually I did the test on both the Huey and the A10 as well as the Hornet but the experience was of course the very best on the Hornet. The grip is awesome and just perfect for this simulation – it does not need any programming since everything is pre-programmed and works straight out-of-the-box like a plug and play unit.

All buttons are pre-programmed when using the DCS F/A-18C aircraft – this also the hat-switch which I normally use to look around the cockpit etc. This hat-switch is in real life used for trims, and this is also applied into the DCS aircraft and thereby also within the ThrustMaster grip. This is however no issue and you can of course just assign new commands for the hat-switch so that it will function for views instead, or you can add to your simulation a head-tracker if you don’t have a full 3 or 4 projector

view. For me, I selected the option to use my IR5 head-tracker which gave me the possibility to use the grip with the most optimal and realistic setting.

The final flight simulator I used for test was the 'WoP' alias Wings of Prey, which actually is not really defined as a flight simulator but maybe more like an arcade World War II war game. The grip was recognized as a programmable gaming device and I could easily assign functions to all the buttons to my preference. I had previously used the A10 grip on this simulator, but it seemed that I had to assign all functions once again since none was saved.



Conclusion

My comments on the experience of this new and very exciting F/A-18C Hornet grip, is that this grip absolutely is a high quality product. The grip is manufactured with high precision, an eye for the details and with a keen focus on the real-life grip, providing this replica grip with a sensational and awesome realism and authenticity.

The grip features a smooth and beautiful metal construction with a clean black paint which provides the simmer with a perfect and true-to-real-life feel of realism. The components are of an industrial grade giving a superb quality and durability to the grip, and my impression all combined, is more than just great – this is in my opinion one of the best grips that I have ever tested for any flight simulator. For you that have tried the A10 Warthog stick, also from ThrustMaster, then you can expect the same high standard, quality and innovation for this new replica F/A-18C Hornet grip.

The idea of being able to quickly switch the grip in your home cockpit, to fit the aircraft that you are about to fly while still using the same base, is a superb idea that certainly adds greatly to the realism and experience of the overall flight simulation. E.g. my own home cockpit setup has integrated the stick and the wiring which would make it difficult to change stick, but using the same standard base and only changing the grip is a very cool idea and an easy way of improving the in-depth experience.

No matter which flight simulation platform you are using, then using a replica grip for each aircraft is just awesome and something that I can only recommend. Maybe in the future we could see more grips coming to support a larger variety of aircraft and maybe also helicopter cyclics...

This replica grip from ThrustMaster is a high quality master piece that I most certainly will recommend for the more serious simmers. I rate the grip with a perfect 5/5-stars rating – it is high quality, pure eye candy, true to real-life and is a perfect addition to e.g. the DCS World F/A18C Hornet, the VRS Superbug or any other military jet add-on.

Rays Aviation



Review Computer Specifications (primary test-bed)

- Windows 10 (64-bit)
- Windows 7 (32-bit) (secondary system)
- Intel Core™ i7-4790K 4x4.00GHz (Turbo 4x4.40GHz)
- Asus Maximus VII Ranger (ROG-series)
- Antec Kuhler H20 650 Water Cooler
- Kingston HyperX Beast-series 32Gb DDR3-2133 RAM
- 500Gb Samsung 850 EVO SSD
- 3Tb Seagate Barracura (7200rpm, 6Gb/s)
- Asus GeForce GTX 980 Strix OC 4Gb
- 150/150Mbit Fiber Internet Connection

- Tested on the following flight simulation platforms
 - Prepar3Dv4+
 - Xplane11
 - FSX w/Acceleration Pack
 - Wings of Prey
 - DCS World 2.5