

NO MT PROMISE!

No glass cockpit? MT-VisionAir's multi-function unit could come to the rescue



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MODERN glass cockpits with multi-function displays are improving the lot of private and professional pilots alike - but what if the aircraft you're flying is still in the dark ages, equipment-wise? It costs a lot to retro-fit a full glass cockpit and, besides, you might be flying several different aircraft.

One of the options is from a German company called Moving Terrain Air Navigation Systems, whose latest VisionAir system is available as a panel-mount or as a portable unit which sits either on the knee or on the control yoke.

At the core of the MT-VisionAir is the display unit which is 6.5in diagonal screen of 1028 x 768 pixels. Unusually, instead of a keypad, the keys are arranged around the edges of the screen - this gives maximum display for the size of the unit, says MT. It's a full keyboard too, from A-Z and 0-9 with a row of operating buttons along the bottom edge. The claim is that this system avoids the constant delving down into menus common, to say, Garmin units.

It's a modular system meaning that you have as few or as many functions as you want or are prepared to pay for. First choice, of course, is a GPS signal to provide moving map navigation. The MT comes with all

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* MT-VisionAir also available as a portable unit.

European charts preloaded, and flightplanning software. On top of this, you can add comprehensive VFR and/or IFR databases full of detailed info including approach and departure plates, then additional functions such as Traffic Collision Awareness, Stormscope or MT's own Satellite Radar, and Terrain Awareness.

Just launched is the MT-BlitzPlan which, despite its unfortunate name, is a terrific function. You create your IFR flightplan on the MT-VisionAir system and then submit it to Eurocontrol via MT's servers at its base in

Sulzberg, Germany, and it is then immediately available to the tower of the airport you are at and all the ATC units along the route without having the usual hour or so lead time.

The flight plan can be created in the aircraft, at home or in the office on a PC then transferred to the unit, or if you have the portable system, on that. The flightplan can be filed from the aircraft by integrated GSM phone. MT boss Stefan Unzicker claims "there are absolutely no rejected routings" because they are all checked automatically by MT, with access to European-wide NOTAM and bang-up-to-date route availability.

So does it work? Mr Unzicker flew his company Cessna P210 turbine single to Cambridge Airport for P1 to try. We inputted a simple IFR flightplan from Cambridge to Norwich, pressed the submit button and it went. Two minutes later we called Cambridge Tower for our IFR clearance and they had the flightplan! It shouldn't be a surprise in these days of instant communications but well done all concerned. "It could have been a much more complicated flight to, say, Tunisia," said Stefan, "and it would have come through just as quickly."

We departed Cambridge as planned then almost immediately cancelled the flightplan by radio with Cambridge, and continued as a VFR flight.

We wanted to fly out to the north Norfolk coast so selected Blakeney Point as a temporary waypoint, and the unit drew a black line on the screen map for us to follow. It was all very simple to operate using the periphery keyboard.

Cloud over the coast meant we abandoned that plan and flew back into blue skies over Newmarket racecourse instead - clearly shown on the screen as well as just out the window. The screen display was perfect - bright, sharp and the controls intuitive too.

Back on the ground, Stefan took us through some of the other functions available, using a record of his previous day's flight from near Munich. This showed his flight routing and how he had diverted south of the Alps to avoid a build-up of thunderstorms - also shown on the replay - and then regained his route once past the weather.

We also tried the portable unit which comes with a neat 'block' to attached it to your knee and display it at the right angle for easy viewing. UK importer Simon Parker expects this unit to be of most interest to UK pilots since it can be used without any additional certification work, and can also be used across a range of aircraft. It's a big unit for a kneepad, but provided you have a reasonably roomy cockpit, shouldn't be an issue.

SCREEN TEST

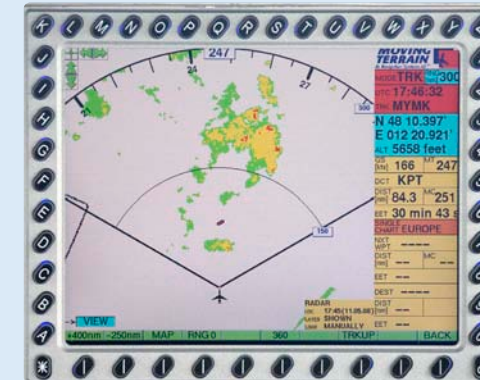
The MT-VisionAir is a multi-function display to which you can add all sorts of tools to the basic unit - weather radar, TCAS, TAWS.



* MT-VisionAir can use CAA charts in UK.



* File a flightplan from the aircraft.



* Weather radar shows activity and flight info.



* Terrain awareness is an add-on function.



* All European charts are pre-loaded.