

TOP GEAR | PRODUCT REVIEWS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST AVIATION KIT WHERE WE IMPARTIALLY TEST AND EVALUATE EVERY PRODUCT FEATURED

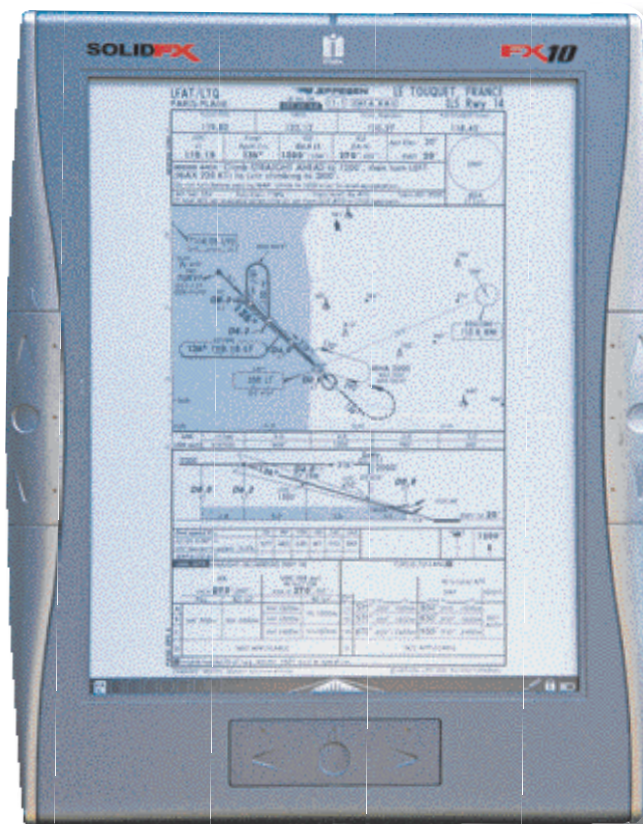
SOLIDFX10

£1,000 (approx)
www.solidfx.com

As electronic books gain in popularity, the market hasn't been slow to provide aviation applications designed to make use of epaper technology. Buy yourself an Amazon Kindle or similar, and with a \$10/month subscription you can have access to all of the approach plates in the US in one, easy to read, easy to carry ebook. That's good news if you fly in the US, and if you use the FAA NACO plates, but if you fly in other parts of the world you pretty much have to lug around heavy binders containing the pages for any airport that you may want to use. You could carry a laptop, but they're not really designed for in-flight use or to be easily readable in strong sunlight, and hard disks have a habit of crashing above 10,000ft thanks to the thinner air (ereaders make use of solid state memory so do not suffer this problem).

At Oshkosh this year, SOLIDFX launched the FX10, a portable electronic chart reader that works with Jeppesen electronic plates. The unit is based on the top of the line iRex DR1000S digital reader, which SOLIDFX supplies compete with its FXVIEW software. It measures 26.8 x 21.7cm and is 12mm thick. More importantly, the large, electrophoretic greyscale screen measures 25.9cm diagonally and provides a crisp, easy to read image. It weighs just over 500g, so, from a size and weight point of view, it provides a significant advantage over the traditional binders.

To use the unit, you will need to buy a data subscription through Jeppesen. I imagine that most people will choose to install Jeppesen data on their PC (that will require either FliteStar or JeppView) and to take advantage of the FX10 bundle deal



which prices the data add-on at around \$130 for Europe. Updates are carried out online using Jeppesen's Services Update Manager (JSUM).

The FX10 takes about a minute-and-a-half to switch on and fire up the FXVIEW software. Although it can be left on (the screen technology means that battery life is in the ten hour range), it's suggested (and only sensible) to do some flight preparation either before departure or in flight, well before you need to start thinking about an arrival and approach. I found that the easiest way to prepare was to search for and select the information for the departure, destination and alternate airfields as part of my pre-flight preparation. These airfields can be tagged in several different ways, each of which will give you quick and easy access in flight.

When you need the information, turn the unit on, run FXVIEW and select the TAB to which you have assigned an airfield. If it's your home base or a regular destination you can also define it as a favourite, giving you another way to look it up with the minimum delay.

Once selected, the screen displays the entire approach plate. If necessary you can zoom in by simply circling with the stylus the area you want to enlarge. Scrolling around an enlarged plate is also easy with the stylus. Electrophoretic screen technology is designed to provide crisp, easily readable text, and to have low power consumption. To achieve both of those aims, there's no backlight, and, much like paper, the screen is easier to read when there's ambient light. If you are going to use this at night, then just like paper you'll need to provide that light – there's none available in the unit.

In use, it performs very well indeed.

It's a pleasure not to have to carry around countless binders for a long trip, and although I'd always print out paper charts for departure, destination and alternate, it avoids the need to print out every chart for every other airfield that might be needed along the way. This utility, however, comes at a price. SOLIDFX is selling the FX10 for about £1,000. On top of that, you'll need to add a Jeppesen subscription for the unit.

Still, if you're in the market for a top of the line ereader then it's worth considering this option – if you fly all over Europe or elsewhere on a regular basis then this will be like finding the Holy Grail. If you fly piston GA and only fly a couple of instrument approaches a year then it's luxurious overkill, unless of course you need an ereader for something else too... **IS**

Reading list

Our round-up of new aviation books



The Story of Flight
Stephen Woolford & Carl Warner
£30 hardback
www.carltonbooks.co.uk

Beautifully presented account of the development of aviation over the last 100 plus years, this book cleverly includes facsimiles of items such as George Cayley's 1849 design for a glider and Arthur Brown's logbook of his trans-Atlantic flight.



Tiger Cub - A 74 Squadron Fighter Pilot in WWII
Christopher Yeoman and John Freeborn
£19.99 hardback
www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

Another pilot memoir, this time the story of John Freeborn DFC who flew Gloster Gauntlets with 74 'Tiger' Squadron, moving onto Spitfires during the early years of the war and The Battle of Britain. A brief spotlight on an extraordinary time to be a pilot.