

Sky Odyssey – Sony PlayStation 2

Developed by: Cross

Published by: Activision (<http://www.activision.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.activision.com/games/skyodyssey/index.html>

Genre: Flight Simulation

Number of Players: 1

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 8

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 7/10

Documentation: 8/10

Getting Started: 9/10

Gameplay: 9/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: Excellent physics and flight model; highly addictive gameplay; a wide variety of adrenaline-pumping missions; awesome weather effects; tons of plane customization options.

The Bad Press: Landscape graphics are a little rough; nothing is quite as frustrating as crashing right near the end of a 15-minute mission and having to start all over.

Supports: Dual Shock 2, memory card

Overview: Seemingly out of nowhere, *Sky Odyssey* soars its way to the top as one of the best PS2 games currently available.

Tips:

Stick with using the yellow biplane until you have a firm grasp of the controls. The extra speed of the alternatives is nice, but you'll have far less time to react in tight quarters.

Fly low as you travel to mission waypoints to rack up the acrobatic points.

Back when the N64 was released, a sleeper hit known as *Pilotwings 64* hid quietly in the shadows amid the firestorm of accolades directed at the other launch title, *Mario 64*. A truly innovative game, nothing has ever quite compared to *PW64*. A case could be made that the PS2 flight simulation *Sky Odyssey* would be it's closest competition. And while the two titles certainly have some differences, they share one key similarity: they are both incredibly addictive and just plain fun.

Sky Odyssey might not be quite like any other console flight simulation you've played before. This is where the comparisons to *PW64* come into play. While most flight sims concentrate on intense dogfights or large-scale air raids over land and sea, these two titles focus more on the art of precision flight under less-than-ideal circumstances. *Sky Odyssey* features five basic game modes: sky canvas, training, target mode, free flight, and adventure. Training gets you acclimated to the ins and outs of the flight model, and lets you practice skills such as tight-quarters flight and landing. Sky canvas challenges you to draw objects using smoke jettisoned from your aircraft, target mode requires you to fly through a predetermined number of rings and land before time runs out, and free flight simply allows you to fly around without worry and enjoy the scenery. While you can certainly burn countless hours playing around with these modes, they are mere diversions compared to the real meat of the game: adventure mode.

Adventure mode literally brings all of the skills you've acquired in the other modes together into a series of increasingly difficult missions. The main goal in completing these missions is to find the necessary clues to locate the legendary Tower of Maximus—a fabled landmark allegedly hidden in the clouds where no adventurer would dare traverse. Discovering this mythical tower will require a great deal of patience, hand-eye coordination, and in many cases, good fortune.

Once you've made the necessary interface adjustments, chosen your gameplay mode, and viewed the impressive mission objectives cinema, it's time to fly the not-so-friendly skies. The controls are pretty simple—you control the direction of your plane using the analog stick, and there are buttons to adjust the throttle, apply air brakes, lower

the landing gear, etc. The screen is logically laid out with a detailed radar in the upper-left-hand corner, and indicators for speed, altitude, mission length, and the amount of fuel you have remaining. A handy little marker on the radar directs you to your next point of interest, so you won't waste valuable time and fuel searching for the next waypoint. All in all, the interface and controls are as comprehensive as they should be without being too complicated.

The thing that makes *Sky Odyssey* such a blast to play is definitely the sheer variety and ingenuity of the mission objectives. No undertaking is ever the same, and there are branching paths so you can still continue the story if you get stuck. Some of the more memorable responsibilities include having to land your plane on an aircraft carrier during a nasty thunderstorm, coming to the rescue of a hot air balloon that has lost control and will crash without your intervention, or navigate your way through a narrow network of treacherous caves to locate a map. As if the objectives themselves weren't daunting enough for you, the developers also toss in the occasional rockslide, earthquake, or 100 MPH gust of wind just to keep you on your toes. All of these factors combine for some adrenaline-pumping and often incredibly difficult missions that, although occasionally frustrating (if you make one slight mistake and become a permanent part of the scenery, you have to begin the mission all over again), will leave you with a real sense of accomplishment if you manage to complete them.

Completing missions is not only gratifying, but rewarding as well. A grade is given to your performance after each successful operation based on how long it took you to complete it, how many of the optional rings you passed through, the amount of damage you sustained, and how many acrobatic points you earned (by flying dangerously low or pulling off barrel rolls). Good grades translate into new planes or upgraded equipment for existing ones. Each upgrade generally adds to your plane's performance in one area, while detracting from another. Luckily, you can always go back and re-equip old equipment if you're having trouble adjusting. It should also be noted that all of the planes have fully customizable paint jobs, so you can really have some fun tinkering with its appearance.

Everyone knows that the PS2 is capable of churning out some really impressive graphics, but sadly, *Sky Odyssey* seems to be one of the exceptions to this rule. The planes themselves look good and the weather effects are tremendous, but the game does suffer from occasional slowdown, graphical pop-in crops up from time to time, and the landscape graphics are generally bland and pixelated. As for sound, the music fits the mood perfectly--ranging from happy-go-lucky to heart pounding depending on the mission and weather conditions. The plane engines and atmospheric sounds all ring true as well, though the voiceovers during mission briefings are lifeless and boring.

Overall, I was pleasantly surprised with the entertainment value and challenge I got from *Sky Odyssey*. So much so that I'm willing to classify the title as one of the top five games currently available in the PS2 library. The graphics aren't quite up to par, but the game makes up for it with tons of innovative and enjoyable missions, excellent physics, and enough planes and customization options to please even the most demanding flight simulation fans. If you've got lightning-quick reflexes, a passion for the wild blue yonder, and don't mind a little frustration, *Sky Odyssey* is the game for you.