

Condor Christmas Buying Guide

Scott Manley and Frank Paynter

Scott and I were asked to write a little bit about what we might recommend for Christmas presents for Condor enthusiasts or someone shopping for a glider pilot. My first thought when receiving this assignment was to put the 'Paynter Arcus Glider Fund' down as the obvious recipient of any extra money you might have, but then I thought better about it (actually, I didn't, but my wife read me the riot act – again!). Anyway, here are some things that might come in handy in Condor-land.

- **Condor (well, duh!)**

Condor is by far the best and most popular soaring flight simulator on the planet. It is optimized for cross-country racing, and includes (assuming you get the companion plane packs) almost every glider you can think of (well, it doesn't include the 1-26, but...). The flight physics are very good, and the package will run fine on any modern PC or laptop (Windows only – doesn't run under Apple/Mac OS's). Although Condor can be downloaded directly from their website at <http://condorsoaring.com/order.htm>, I highly recommend getting it from Paul Remde at Cumulus Soaring (<http://www.cumulus-soaring.com/>). Paul is very knowledgeable about all things Condor, and backs up his sales with excellent technical support. The basic Condor program from Cumulus Soaring starts at \$59, with more advanced kits at attractive prices.

- **Condor Plane Packs I & II**

These two 'plane packs' add a variety of glider types to the ones delivered with the basic program, and I consider at least PP1, which adds all the top racing gliders such as the ASG-29 and Ventus 2cx, to be a required add-on. PP2 adds a number of club-class gliders like the venerable LS-4 and ASW-20 to the mix. PP1 is \$16 and PP2 is \$23 from Cumulus Soaring.

- **Joystick**

The Microsoft Sidewinder Force-Feedback II joystick (MSFFB2): Years ago, in a galaxy far far away, Microsoft produced a line of joysticks culminating in the MSFFB2. It has been out of production for at least a decade, but ironically it is by far the best and smoothest joystick out there for flying gliders in Condor. Comparing the MSFFB2 to a non-force-feedback stick is like comparing push-rods to cables and springs – the feel is completely different. The good news is that Microsoft produced a *lot* of these things, and they can be had on eBay for around \$50-75. There are actually two models that will work fine – the 'regular' MSFFB2, and the 'red' MSFFB2 (comes with a translucent red trigger switch and red thumb-switch covers). Just be sure you are getting the FFB2 (the '2' is important) with a USB connector, as earlier models were equipped with the old-style game card connector.

- **Point of View Control**

A significant problem for real-life (RL) glider pilots when transitioning to Condor is the loss of peripheral vision and the ability to quickly glance out of the cockpit and back in again. When I

work with my cross-country students, I have them use the mouse for view movement (called 'mouse look' in the settings page) as this is much faster and smoother than the normal hat-switch view controls. However, there is an even better way for view control, and it is the 'TrackIR' camera/headset system made by NaturalPoint (<http://www.naturalpoint.com/trackir/>). This system translates very small movements of the pilots head into very large movements in the perceived view. A plus/minus 5 degree head movement can cause a plus/minus 90 degree (i.e. wingtip to wingtip) view change in Condor, and it makes flying in Condor a much more natural and immersive experience. It comes in two models, the \$149 TriackIR5 which comes with a camera and a passive IR reflector set that clips onto a baseball cap, and the \$169 TrackIR Pro Bundle with the active IR LED TrackClip Pro that clips onto a standard gaming headset band. I recommend the Pro model because the active LED arrangement provides much better signal to noise ratio and smoother/faster tracking. The bad news is the Pro model (recommended) makes you look a bit like a space alien when you go to that next in-person Condor contest (don't worry – almost everybody else will have one too!).

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Frank is always a tough act to follow, but I am beginning to get used it. Here are some other ideas for Condor stocking stuffers. By the way, if the "Paynter Arcus Glider Fund" idea takes off, I have first dibs on Frank's discarded Ventus.

- **Joystick**

For recreational and instructional purposes, I recommend and use the Logitech Extreme 3D Pro joystick. It is reliable, affordable, available, and actually looks like a control stick you might find in a real glider (vs. something out a Sci-Fi movie). The 3D has an adequate number of control function buttons and an analog (slider) control that works well to control the spoiler function. Cumulus Soaring, Inc. has the 3D Pro for \$35 ala carte, or you can purchase it packaged with the Condor software and/or a set of rudder pedals. 'One-stop shopping'.

- **Rudder Pedals**

Speaking of rudder pedals, if you are using Condor to learn to fly gliders or to maintain your flight proficiency skills, I highly recommend using a set of rudder pedals. In fact, I require my simulation students to use rudder pedals (I will drop that requirement when yaw control in real gliders is no longer done by moving your feet). My holiday gift recommendation is the CH Products Pro Pedals. I have several pair and find them to be rugged and reliable, and available from Cumulus Soaring for a trivial \$120 (less than the price of three tows).

- **Great Graphics**

While most modern computers will easily run the Condor software, they don't always come equipped with the best graphics cards. If you are ordering a new computer, treat yourself to the best graphics card you can afford. If it is possible to upgrade the graphics card in your current machine, consider giving yourself the gift of great graphics this holiday season.

- **Condor on a Macintosh**

While on the topic of computers, Frank correctly pointed out that Condor does not run under the Macintosh “operating system”. It will, however, run on modern Mac hardware. Macintosh computers now use Intel chip sets (just like PCs), and the newest Macintosh operating systems enable you to boot your Mac as a PC running Windows natively. This is not Windows emulation. So, if a new Mac is on your holiday wish list, but you really wanted something that could run Condor, no need to hope for two computers under the tree. By the way, Condor on a Mac is the only known exception to the adage “you can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

- **Consulting Services**

As with any good piece of software, getting the most out of Condor requires that you know its features and limitations. An hour with someone who knows their way around Condor will save you months of trying to figure things out on your own. Paul Remde (<http://www.cumulus-soaring.com>) provides excellent consulting services on all of his products. If you are new to Condor, or even if you have had it for a while and “think” you know your way around the software, a great gift (to yourself or another) would be an hour or two on the phone with Paul. You will probably get a complete return on your holiday investment in the first couple minutes.

- **Training: Cross-Country / Competition Soaring**

As you may or may not know, Frank Paynter offers an excellent online course in cross-country soaring and competition flying, in the off-season, using the networking capabilities of the Condor software. In fact he has written a companion book on the subjects, *Cross Country Soaring with Condor* (not surprisingly available from Cumulus Soaring, Inc.; \$19.95). I’m not sure why Frank didn’t think to suggest his course and/or his book. If I thought he had any, I would have offered humility as an explanation for this obvious oversight. So allow me to take this opportunity to embarrass Frank and highly recommend his online course and book as superb holiday gifts for your favorite glider pilot.

- **Navigation Hardware, Software, and Training.**

The Condor software enables you to connect and use your real life navigation (PDA, PNA) hardware and software just as you would in real life. The Condor simulation environment, however, is a much more effective and safer environment in which to learn to use these devices and the features of your navigation software. Cumulus Soaring offers many of the best navigation devices, a variety of navigation software products, the hardware (wiring harnesses) used to connect your device to your Condor installation, and the valuable consulting services you will likely need to make it all work. Any or all of these products or services are great gift ideas for the aspiring or mature cross-country or racing pilot.

- **Cockpit Ergonomics Simulation.**

To get the full effect of flying your high-performance racing glider in simulation, you may want to ask Santa for a “bean bag” and the new butt cushion from TempurPedic. At this summer’s

cross country / competition camp held at Frank's home base (Caesar Creek, OH), while the rest of the competition struggled with ergonomics dating to antiquity (chairs), a number of Condorphiles were confidently flying the assigned task in the semi-reclined comfort of their bean bags. Rumor has it, a number of the bean bags available from Amazon.com can be ordered with the optional, but very popular, integrated relief system.

- **Disclaimer.**

Despite appearances, neither of us own stock in Cumulus Soaring, Inc. Its not my fault Paul Remde does such a great job providing the soaring community with so many valuable products and services.

Happy Holidays