

MORE THAN A GAME



THE LATEST VERSION OF DUTCH GAMES DESIGNER VSTEP'S SHIP SIMULATOR PC GAME IS NOW AVAILABLE AND ACCORDING TO THE COMPANY COULD SOON BE READY TO BE USED IN NAUTICAL TRAINING COLLEGES, WRITES **JANNY KOK**.

PROFESSIONAL maritime simulator centres could soon be taking onboard a programme originally designed for gamers according to Dutch company VSTEP.

Games designer VSTEP's latest software, Ship Simulator 2008: New Horizons, for ordinary desktop PCs will get a successor planned for next year.

And according to VSTEP's chief technical officer Pjotr Van Schothorst it will need just an additional device on the PC to have three screens connected to create a near professional bridge simulator environment. There will be one screen for radar, one for vector charts and one for 3D images of a particular port.

The New Horizons programme allows the community of what is called Ship Sim fans to hook on the internet to simulate particular navigation areas together with other gamers.

"They communicate and chat with each other, which makes the game more interactive", Van Schothorst said. "Since that application can be used, the Ship Simulator 2008 is nearly ready for educational use in nautical colleges. It is more cost-effective than a large professional simulator, which costs at least €500 to €1,000 (euros) for some four hours training."

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However, he added that it will need some further fine tuning of the programme to have it ready for introduction in nautical colleges.

Ordinary gamers and professional mariners with an interest in computer games were pleasantly surprised when VSTEP launched the first Ship Simulator PC game in 2006.

It became quite a success, but it took two years before the game developer launched this year's New Horizons.

Van Schothorst tells ECDIS Today that at least 380,000 copies of the Ship Simulator Series have been sold worldwide via internet-based vendors and in shops. "We did not expect so many copies to be sold," he said.

VSTEP has appreciated, however, the many emails with input and suggestions for further developments of the Ship Simulator coming from teaching instructors of nautical colleges and from seafarers – two very dedicated ships' masters included



– which have helped the serious games designer to develop a simulator game for ro-ro vessels in which particular missions will be integrated. When a gamer has completed a particular mission successfully, the Ship Simulator will 'promote' him to a higher ranking position.

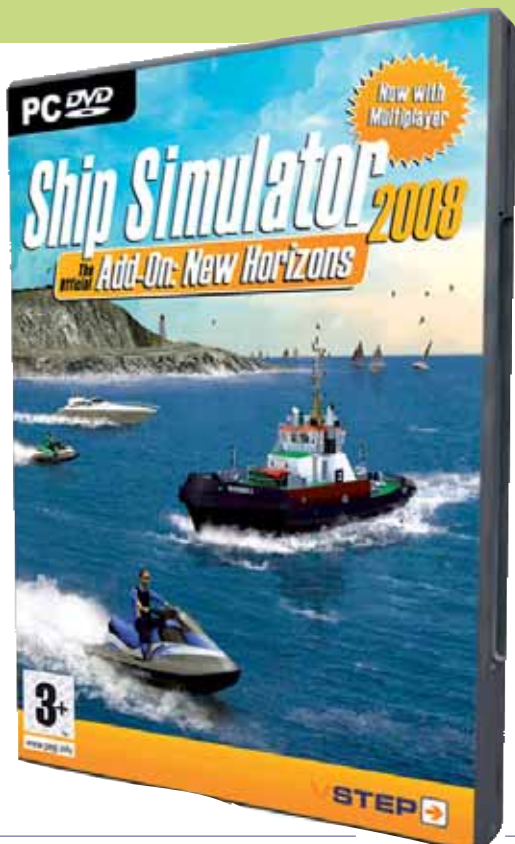
The New Horizons add-on Ship Simulator 2008 features eight new vessels, including a modern harbour tug with advanced azimuth thrusters and a push boat with four different cargo barges, and online multiplayer free-roaming action, including towing.

It includes sailing areas such as San Francisco, Southampton/Solent, Cowes and Marseille, but also the new sailing area Padstow in Cornwall. The professional game includes 20 new missions involving the new vessels and the new environment, as well. It has an option to connect and disconnect barges to the push boat and new walkthrough options to explore the push boat's highly detailed engine room.



PROFILE ON V STEP

- VSTEP is a provider of serious games and uses real-time 3D technology to develop virtual training applications for firefighters, train divers, safety officers and nautical training
- Since its inception in 2002, it has been involved in over 35 projects for clients, such as the Royal Dutch Navy, the Port of Rotterdam Authority and Shell
- The basic Ship Simulator 2008 game can be bought for €34.99. It can be run on MS Windows 2000, XP or Vista. CPU: Intel Pentium IV, 2.66 GHz. Video chart: minimum 128 MB
- Website www.vstep.nl



The fact is that the gamer – whether a professional mariner or an ordinary virtual ‘sailing addict’ – can feel in control of many ships. The Ship Simulator puts gamers at the helms of fast speedboats, cruise liners, ferries and oil tankers and the like, and even the Titanic.

They sail varied waters and have to perform a multitude of tasks, in some missions the gamer has to control a gantry crane to load a container vessel to rescue shipwrecked people.

Critics say that the game requires extremely high computer systems. Only a powerful equipped computer can produce the images on screen as depicted on the package of the Ship Simulator 2008.

Van Schothorst is in agreement that it is not a game to be played when using a laptop.

“Virtually all computer games are not fit to be played on a laptop, which is not powerful enough to produce perfect graphic images on screen. But one certainly does not need to buy an expensive PC. A common one will suffice.”

