Logitech iFeel Optical Mouse Review

BY STEVEN BUTTS UPDATED: OCT 21, 2011 8:29 PM POSTED: FEB 6, 2001 2:00 AM

Last week we brought you an announcement about Immersion's technology being used in Black and White. Immersion, who is the leader in force feedback technology by the way, has incorporated their TouchSense technology into a new generation of mice. The first commercial mouse to utilize the technology is Logitech's iFeel mouse. This

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new mouse offers gamers (and, heck, even you productivity types) the chance to feel cues through the mouse.

But let's get the basics out of the way first. The iFeel mouse is a standard 3-button scroll mouse with a USB connection. It's totally symmetrical and suited for both left- and right-hand use. Best of all, the mouse is optical so you're going to get smooth movements with high levels of accuracy. And messy types (like me) can't And all this for $40? That's not so bad. The mouse is compatible with Internet Explorer 5.0 or the surprisingly unintercapped Netscape 4.5, 4.6 or 4.7.

But the real selling point of the iFeel mouse is something else entirely. This mouse translates your onscreen actions into tactile cues. In other words, when the

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mouse cursor passes over a certain icon or action bar, the mouse responds by producing a slight vibration. The quality of the vibration can be adjusted to produce a range of sensations -- rubbery, crisp, metallic, steely, and so on. It sounds completely ridiculous (at least it did to me the first time I heard it) but it totally works. The Immersion Desktop allows you to set the character of the sensation and adjust its strength. A quick link to the update site makes things really convenient. New sensations can be created with the free developer tool available at the Immersion website. It's a little more complicated than it looks at first, but it's actually pretty easy to make your own custom sensations.

The mouse uses a small internal motor (that is powered through the computer's USB port) to

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create the sensations. A piece of plastic vibrates very quickly back and forth and the frequency of that vibration determines the character of the feeling. Higher frequency vibrations produce buzzing sensations; lower frequencies produce more rumbling kinds of sensations. The strength and timing of each sensation is completely customizable as well -- which is one of the reasons it's being included in Black and White. With over 100 different tactile sensations in the game, Black and White might just be the one title that this product is perfect for.

As for other games...well... I've always been willing to do without force feedback in my games and first person shooters are no exception. Still, the iFeel mouse does add a lot to the experience. When you can get it to work right. I had a helluva time

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getting the various patches to work right. It seems easy enough. You just download the patch for your game and unzip it to the game directory, right? I guess so. In some cases it worked fine (Soldier of Fortune and Unreal Tournament) but in others (Elite Force and Half-Life), this was more problematic. A set of instructions on the Immersion site would actually have been great.

But when it did work, it was pretty damn cool. Being able to feel each shotgun blast or I-MOD beam actually gave me a little thrill. The best effect so far is on the chaingun. You can feel a kick as the gun fires and, once you take your finger off the trigger, you feel a slight whir as the gun winds down. It won't help your frag rate really but it's a neat sensation. On the productivity side, I found that

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the mouse made me more conscious of the cursor position. If you're trying to move individual pixels in PhotoShop or click on specific links in your browser, then the tactile cues are really helpful. Each action button or hyperlink produces a little pip from the mouse.

I think that the iFeel mouse is totally worth the $40 asking price. But that estimation is based primarily on the more traditional features of the mouse. The TouchSense technology is neat, but until it can be better integrated into more games, it still seems kind of gimmicky. A cool gimmick to be sure, but still a gimmick. Once developers take the technology beyond weapon effects in first-person shooters, then it'll be a lot more effective. Hopefully, Black and White is going to help show developers how it ought to be done.

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