

David Upchurch finds
that skidding along
the road on your face
can give you a nasty
rash in Software
Toolworks' new racer.

MegaRace^{CD}



It is the not-too-distant future, and the world's TV-viewing billions are being kept glued to their screens by a new and ultra-violent gameshow — MegaRace. The show's format is simple: a member of Joe Public is picked at random to become the Enforcer, champion of the People.

Having selected a start-of-the-art roadster, it's the Enforcer's job to race at a lethal pace around sixteen of the most bizarre racetracks ever built. The aim? To win a place in the MegaRace Hall of Ever-Lasting Fame — and a fantastic Star Prize into the bargain.

Alright, to tell the truth MegaRace isn't quite that simple. For a start, the Enforcer isn't alone on those high-speed highways — there are also psychotic streetpunks to contend with driving their own souped-up hotrods. Luckily, however, the Enforcer's car is fitted with front-mounted laser cannons as standard, with which he can blast the low-life scum off the road and into the gutter where they belong. And if he manages to waste enough of them in the time available then victory is his. But if he doesn't then the Enforcer's fifteen minutes of fame are up and all that remains is a one-way trip back into obscurity.

And even that's not the full story. The laser cannons are only good for a limited number of shots, and if they dry up the only way to ice the punks is by ramming them into the track walls or out-running them, both of which eat up valuable time. And on top of that there are further complications like the road markings which award bonuses when driven over, some good, such as speed-ups and smartbomb-like missiles, and some bad, like energy drainers and skid patches.



Yes, MegaRace is fast, violent and, most importantly as far as the show's audience viewing figures are concerned, deadly — at least, it would be if it was real. You see, MegaRace takes place in Virtual Reality, so all those spectacular exploding cars, mangled bodies and fantastic racetracks are nothing more than artificial constructions in a super-computer's memory.

Not that this matters — everything looks and feels so convincing that it might as well be real. And on top of that there's the added advantage that morally-responsible types can crash and burn to their hearts' content, without having the guilt of murdering scores of their fellow human beings on their consciences (although Doom-freaks might find this aspect of the game something of a politically-correct cop-out).



Hey-hey! It's Lance Boyle — the host with the most! His smarmy crapness is very amusing at first, but soon becomes rather tiresome. Luckily you can skip these bits if you want to.



MegaRace is beamed to giant telescreens all over the globe so you can't escape from Lance no matter where you are. By the way, there are no prizes for spotting the game's obvious (and rather clichéd) Bladerunner inspirations.

(Above) Running over the road markings will reward you with a number of effects, not all of them good. There's even one that makes the screen go all wibbly-wobbly which is the last thing you need when racing along at two-zillion mph.

IT'S A BIT LIKE...

CyberRace and MegaRace have frighteningly similar gameplay elements and, hell, they even *sound* alike. But while CyberRace's 3D-generated landscapes may be very clever and allow the player total freedom of movement, they don't have the 'wow' factor of MegaRace's beautifully-depicted animated tracks. There are also more baddies to blast in CyberRace, yet it doesn't generate the same rush as MegaRace. Strange old world, isn't it?



MEGARACE...

...OUTPERFORMS CYBERRACE

FANCY A TEST DRIVE, SIR?

Before each race you get the privilege of choosing your chariot for the battle to come. Each has varying performance characteristics and a number of added extras, though fluffy dice are sadly not available.

There are eight in all, although you can only choose from three at the start, with the rest made available as you progress through the game. Let's take a look at them, shall we? I'm sure we can find something to fit Sir's pocket...

JOSE

The Jose boasts good armour and shield capabilities, which just about makes up for the fact that it comes fitted with just one laser cannon and can't carry missiles. A good buy for fans of ramming and shunting.



LUIS

Light on armour, the Luis is nippy little run-about that packs a punch thanks to its three laser cannons, though its compact design means that it can't carry missiles. Perfect for hit-and-run drivers.



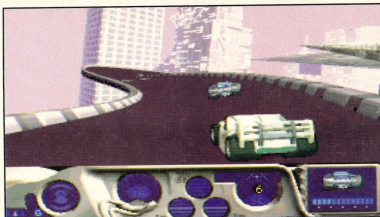
DUZBEL

Although impressively fitted with three laser cannon and slots for missiles, the Duzbel's heavy armouring make it slow off-the-mark which means it may have trouble getting within range of its would-be targets.

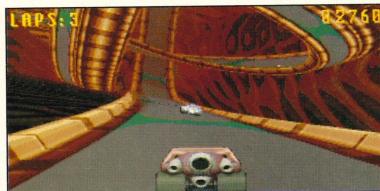


This idea of having a computer game styled as a TV gameshow is nothing new and has been done countless times before. However, MegaRace does it better than most, and it's all thanks to the power of CD-ROM. The game's intro, for example, is an audio-visual feast, complete with full-screen animation and copious amounts of speech, as Lance Boyle (geddit?), the gameshow host from Hell, introduces you and the viewing millions to the game.

During the game hyper-active Lance pops up between each race to congratulate you wildly if you win or cry crocodile tears of fake sympathy if you lose. He's also on hand to give you a short preview of each track before you tackle



High over New San 2 with another streetpunk in your sights. The dashboard varies from car to car but provides near identical info, such as how fast you're going and energy remaining.



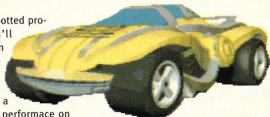
Playing MegaRace is often like going for a ride on a futuristic rollercoaster — except you don't have to put up with annoying kids screaming in your ear and waving their hands in the air.

It, as well as provide a potted profile of the punks you'll meet there. He'll even dish out special bonus prizes, like a dream holiday or a designer watch, but only if you chalk up a particularly spectacular performance on the track.

It all works so well that you could easily believe you were watching a real gameshow. In fact, it works a little too well, as Lance Boyle, who's probably best described as a cross between Bob Monkhouse and Hannibal Lecter over-dosing on ProPlus, is a truly vile and nauseating specimen and his paper-thin charm soon wears very thin. Thankfully, a well-timed tap on the ESCAPE key will cut through his crap and get you straight back into the high-speed action.

Unlike all-too-many CD-based products, MegaRace isn't all front-end and no game. Admittedly, MegaRace doesn't boast the most complex gameplay ever — the player's controls are limited to just steering left and right, accelerating, decelerating and firing — but it's fun and very addictive all the same.

The tracks are varied and increase in difficulty perfectly, providing a well-judged challenge for every level of gamesplayer. And because the tracks are effectively animations pulled off the CD they look absolutely gorgeous too — the roller-coaster ride around high-rise New San 2 is amazingly effective at inducing nausea and has to be experienced to be believed.



However, the price for these good looks is high. Because you're racing over an animation, the amount of freedom of movement you have is limited — you can't turn around and race the 'wrong way' up the track, for example, or bring your car to a halt. The cars also have a tendency to look as if they're floating over the road rather than actually racing along on it, which rather spoils the feeling of 'being there' created so well by the rest of the game.

There are other niggles too, like the way there's only ever one other car on the road apart from yourself. Surely some 'innocent bystander' cars could have been included just to give you something to dodge in-between pump-pumping? As it stands the repetitive chase-'n'-blast gameplay has a tendency to get a little boring.

Still, despite these faults, it has to be said that MegaRace is hugely enjoyable — in small doses, anyway. If you're looking for the perfect way to let off steam after a long evening with something more 'heavy duty' like Tornado, you could do a lot worse than this. Go on. Make the streets safe for decent folk — stay off the road.



Take that! Good shooting, Tex — you're another piece of streetpunk closer to that Star Prize. The enemy cars only appear one at a time, so there's no opportunity for doing anything clever like ramming one car into another. Pity.



The trouble with your lasers is that their range is extremely limited — you have to get right up close to your quarry before letting rip or else you'll just be frying tarmac.

MEGARACE CD

SOFTWARE TOOLWORKS/CRYO

(0444) 246333

£44.99 Out Now

RECOMMENDED SPEC

33MHz 486, VGA, 640K, 4Mb RAM and a CD-ROM drive.

ALSO SUPPORTS

AdLib and Sound Blaster soundcards; joystick.

THE GOOD...

- Just as much fun as you'd think blowing up cars would be.
- Absolutely stunning to look at and to listen to.
- Challenging for both arcade pros and novices.

...AND THE BAD

- Simplistic and limited gameplay can result in boredom.
- It's official — MegaRace's host Lance Boyle is the most irritating game character ever.

OVERALL

80%