

SNES

Platform ■ Nintendo
£59.99 ■ Out November
■ No other versions available
■ No other versions planned



It hasn't been his decade, but fresh from his Game Boy reincarnation comes Nintendo's oldest new star...



s the superbly animated intro to Donkey Kong Country tells us, the old and young apes are actually divided between old-style bleepy game music and drum-bashing jungle romp-a-thons respectively. What primates like to listen to, however, is probably the least interesting thing about this game.

Donkey Kong Country is brought to you by Rare, a company with a long and glorious history of innovative and playable games. Rare's latest effort is this tale of two apes, Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong, which adopts a surprisingly conventional approach, being a side-view platformer. However, Rare has added their twist with the graphics, which are quite exceptional. All the sprites and backgrounds were digitised using a Silicon Graphics workstation and then ported over to the Super NES, so you're actually looking at 32-BIT visuals instead of anything the Super NES would be capable of on its own. Basically, this is just about as good as a platform game can look.

DKC contains everything you'd expect from your favourite titles. Loads of bonus rooms, pseudo-puzzle elements, hidden screens, minecart levels and suchlike. And there's even a two-player mode. Actually, there are two two-player modes, depending on your feelings towards your playing partner. If you get along, you should try the cooperative mode, which sees you each controlling a character and helping each other along the way. If you can't stand the get then the competitive mode will be more to your liking. This mode is only any use if you're dead good at the game and your 'friend' is a hopeless sad case you wish to humiliate.

That, basically, is it. Don't be misled, though – it's like saying Mario 4 is just some fat bloke jumping about. There's no doubting that Donkey Kong Country is a superb game which is bound to sell in the thousands and keep hordes of gamers going for yonks before they complete the game and find its secrets.



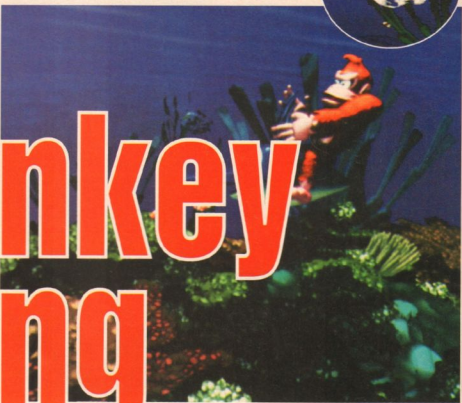
▲ Donkey Kong is just another platformer and the World Cup is just a football match.

If you look closely at Kong you'll see its not actually shading according to the background light source. This is the only thing that gives away the fact that it's not really a proper SNES graphic.



▲ Career from barrel to barrel at hyperspeed while picking collecting energy-giving bananas...

Kong and Diddy in deep sea diving excursion ▼



donkey kong country

FROG KONG

It's tough being an ape, walking around on your knuckles all day long. Showing its more compassionate side, Rare has placed some alternative modes of transport in the game to save a bit of wear and tear on your paws. Large crates are secreted in certain areas of the game which contain giant animals all too eager to aid you on your quest. Each of these has its own special ability and protects you from harm so long as you're riding (although they scarper after taking one hit and you have to chase and remount them). The three most interesting creatures are the high-jumping frog, baddie-horning rhino and shark-detering swordfish. There's also an ostrich, who's not pictured because he's got funny legs.



▲ The shark-detering swordfish is your main ally in the underwater level...



▲ Rare, the team behind DKC, is producing Killer Instinct, the first game for the Ultra 64...



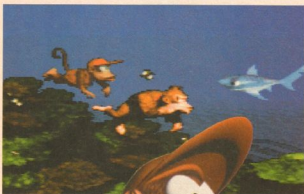
◀ This reptile critter may look nasty but is eminently disposable - just bounce off the tyre and onto its head.

**MORE FUN THAN A BARREL OF MONKEYS**

Sonic has bumpers, Mario has magic blocks, and Donkey Kong has barrels. Yes, a platform character is nothing without his (or her) environmental props, and DKC has them in abundance. These barrels are capable of propelling your monkey over short distances. Marked ones do this automatically, and plain ones require the player to initiate the launch sequence. This is pretty straightforward, but once the barrels start moving around and you're forced to shoot yourself from one to another at high speeds things get somewhat trickier.

HITS FROM THE KONG

At certain points during the game you're introduced to various other inhabitants of your domain. Some of these just lecture you, such as Cranky the Kong from the original Donkey Kong coin-op, now a wizened pensioner. Others, though, are useful contacts who can do something for you. Funky Kong is probably the one of these you'll get to know best, as his Jumbo Barrel is capable of propelling you from his pad to any saved position you wish to visit, whether to pick up more bonuses or just re-play favourite sections of the game.



The game isn't really set in the Congo. It's set in the Kongo with a K. Eerily, there's a town in Cheshire called Congleton, which is probably where all the characters live in real life.



▲ The aim of the mine section is simple: jump the gaps in the broken track...



▲ Mr happy frog is one of the helpers you can enlist by dissing the larger crates.

◀ The music for the underwater sections of the game is filmic and truly beautiful.



▼ Donkey is better at killing things with his bulk, Diddy is faster and a more proficient jumper.



◀ Collect as many bananas as possible. A hundred of these soft fruit treats are sufficient fuel to add an extra life to your total.

SECOND OPINION

You really do stop, stare and gawp when playing sections of this game. Donkey Kong Country is a major achievement in terms of 16-bit graphics. And although it might not seem so at first, there's enough variety to keep you going. However this is a game that's been produced with the mass market in mind and, on that score, it was never meant to be overtly taxing. Die-hard game fans may find the playing unoriginal but there's no denying its beauty....

STEVE JAMES

VERDICT

SNES

This is a phenomenal-looking game, and no mistaking. However strip away the clever graphics and what you've got is a very regular platform game. It's a good one, yes, but you can't help thinking Rare could perhaps have come up with something a bit different. Anyway, that's about the only fault you can pin on DKC, because it's ace. You really ought to think very hard indeed about buying it if you have even the slightest interest in games.

RAD AUTOMATIC

■ GRAPHICS	97
■ SOUND	92
■ PLAYABILITY	93
■ VALUE	89

OVERALL

90

ALTERNATIVE

SUPER NES

■ Super Mario 4

■ Nintendo Free

It comes free with the machine, so you'll already have it, but this is the only title which gives DKC a real run for its money. Get it if you have an import machine.

■ Not reviewed