

# R: RACING EVOLUTION



RIDGE RACER RETURNS WITH A FRESH LICK OF PAINT AND SOME NEW GAMEPLAY MODES

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PS2/  
Xbox/GC  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**PUBLISHER:** Namco  
**DEVELOPER:**  
In-House  
**RELEASE:** Q4 '03  
**GENRE:** Racing  
**PLAYERS:** TBC

■ *Ridge Racer* meets *Gran Turismo*, as the classic arcade racer gets a selection of licensed cars, new racing styles, and a more realistic look.

Not to be confused with Infogrames' *Racing Evolution* on Xbox, Namco's *R: Racing Evolution* is the next instalment in the ten-year-old *Ridge Racer* series. Having played a major role in the successful launch of the PlayStation in Japan, the first *Ridge Racer* game featured just one simple track with a choice of two routes. Of course, no-one complained about the lack of content at the time – most gamers were just pleased that such a prolific arcade hit had made it to a home console in what seemed to be a perfect coin-op conversion.

## YOU GO GIRL

Continuing the *Ridge Racer* trend for featuring Japanese cyber babes, Namco has unveiled two lovely new ladies for *R: Racing Evolution*. However, this time their inclusion will be far more integral than before; rather than simply mincing about at the start line and breaking the heels off their stilettos in the FMV opening sequence, Namco's new polygonal protagonists (who have yet to be named) will actually be driving the cars in the new Racing Life mode. Similar in structure to the Story mode in *TOCA Race Driver*, Racing Life will focus on the lives of Namco's new leading ladies as they struggle to be the best at their sport. Expect a few cat fights in the pit lane.

**"NAMCO HAS PLENTY OF WORK TO DO BEFORE THE GAME IS OUT AT THE END OF THE YEAR"**

Looking back at it now, it's easy to see that the game was nowhere near arcade-perfect, though it was certainly an impressive piece of programming – especially seeing as the entire game was transferred into the PSone's meagre two megabytes of memory in a single load. Sadly, despite remaining popular with its core audience, the various follow-ups failed to set the world alight in the way that the original had, and by the time *Ridge Racer V* was released on PS2, the questionable dynamics and synthetic car handling were starting to look hideously out of date.

It's now been three years since *Ridge Racer V* launched alongside the PS2 and a lot has changed during that time. We've witnessed the release of some decent racing simulations, such as *Gran Turismo 3* and *SEGA GT 2002*, while the likes of *Burnout 2* and *Quantum Redshift* create an adrenaline rush in the way that *Ridge Racer* did all those years ago. So where can Namco go from here? Has its once acclaimed series finally had its day?

Well, as you've probably guessed by the screenshots, Namco has taken a completely new direction with its first multi-format *Ridge Racer* game, though it's not really a route that the fans were expecting. With a selection of licensed cars and a choice of eight different racing styles, it seems that the developers have decided that a *Gran Turismo*-style racing simulation is the only way forward for the series. The game will be broken down into four basic

gameplay modes – Arcade (which should retain a little of the heritage), Time Attack and Versus (which speak for themselves) as well as the new Racing Life mode, which is Namco's stylised answer to the simulation modes found in similar titles.

Of course, you have to ask whether fans of the series particularly want to play yet another *Gran Turismo* clone. Surely it would make more sense if Namco was to take inspiration from the likes of *Burnout* and create an exciting city-based racer with rush hour traffic and large-scale pile-ups? Besides, the fantasy cars featured in the previous games gave the Namco designers the opportunity to flex their creative muscle, whereas now their cars will be dictated by the limitations of real life.

However, it isn't just the gameplay that worries us about *R: Racing Evolution*. Judging by the first screenshots, it would appear that the visuals are distinctly average, certainly falling well short of the vibrancy we've come to expect from Namco. The early videos suggest that everything looks better in motion, but you still couldn't really describe the graphics as cutting edge. Perhaps this is because three versions of the game are being prepared simultaneously, or perhaps it's because the designers are spending too much time perfecting the car models. Either way, it would appear that Namco has plenty of work to do before the game launches at the end of the year. Let's just hope that's enough time to get it right.



## COMPANY PROFILE

■ Although the name Namco has been associated with videogames since the Seventies, the company actually started out as Nakamura Manufacturing Ltd. in 1955. Based in Tokyo, the company initially built children's rides, and even collaborated with Disney during the Sixties, before changing its name to Namco in 1972.

## HISTORY

- RIDGE RACER 1993 [Arcade]
- PAC-MAN 1981 [Arcade]
- GALAXIAN 1979 [Arcade]



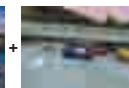
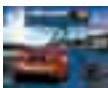
■ A range of racing styles are set to be included, including circuit, drag racing and, of course, rally driving.



■ Is it Ridge Racer or Gran Turismo? Judging by the screenshots it would appear that even Namco doesn't know the answer.

### VIDEOGAMES MATHS

RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?



RIDGE RACER

GRAN TURISMO

CARS & TRACKS

R: RACING EVOLUTION

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