

## GINA CAVALLI

Buxom and sassy, Gina is your main rival—but secretly, we think she really likes you.



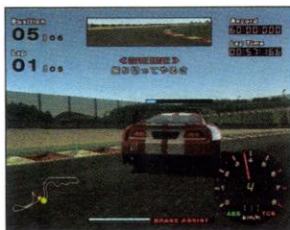
## RENA HAYAMI

This is you. You're new to the racing scene, and it takes you a while build a reputation.

If you really like Codemasters' *Pro Race Driver*, there's a pretty good chance you'll slip into *R*'s groove pretty quickly. Apart from *R* featuring a hot chick instead of a whiny, grumpy dude, the experiences are quite similar. The notion of a story-driven racing game is definitely something I'm getting used to, and after an initial feeling of resistance, I have to say the game got to be quite fun.

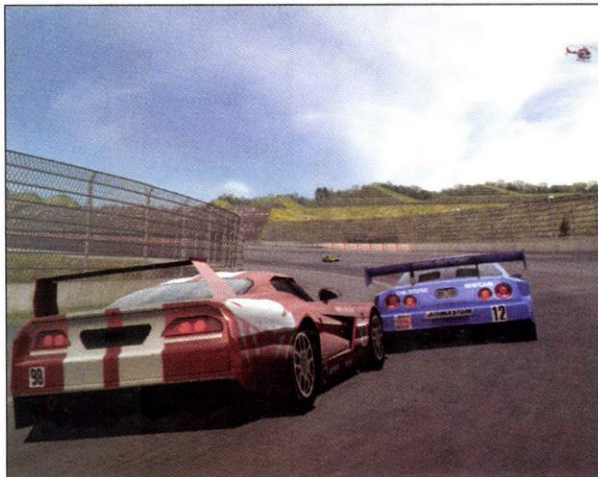
After being discovered as a wild and crazy ambulance driver by a dude who looks like a young Heihachi, you find yourself as the new mascot of a race team—and at the heart of some corporate intrigue and interpersonal rivalry. The tension between the two chicks that Namco has been showing images of for the past six months rears itself early in the game, and you're actively chasing after your rival as soon as you start a race.

There's a lot to like about *R*. It has 11 track types and features eight completely different styles of racing, including rally, GT, and the ubiquitous drag. In trying to be all things to all people, I was expecting it to falter in some areas, but it's perfectly competent through-



out. The rally modes have a distinctly *Sega Rally* air to them, and all the other modes look good and feature very believable driver A.I., so you don't feel like you're racing against robots.

My biggest complaint is, like with so many racers these days, it just doesn't feel fast enough. When you're running a Touring Car spec S2000 on the Suzuka course, you should really be able to tell that it accelerates like a bullet and flies like the wind.



There's a sluggishness throughout that isn't helped by the sound effects. Engine noises sound good, but when you're popping gears at the red line, you never get the feeling of being on the edge. In terms of visceral driving experiences, *R* couldn't be much more different from *Need For Speed*. It's terribly sedate and almost too forgiving in its physics.

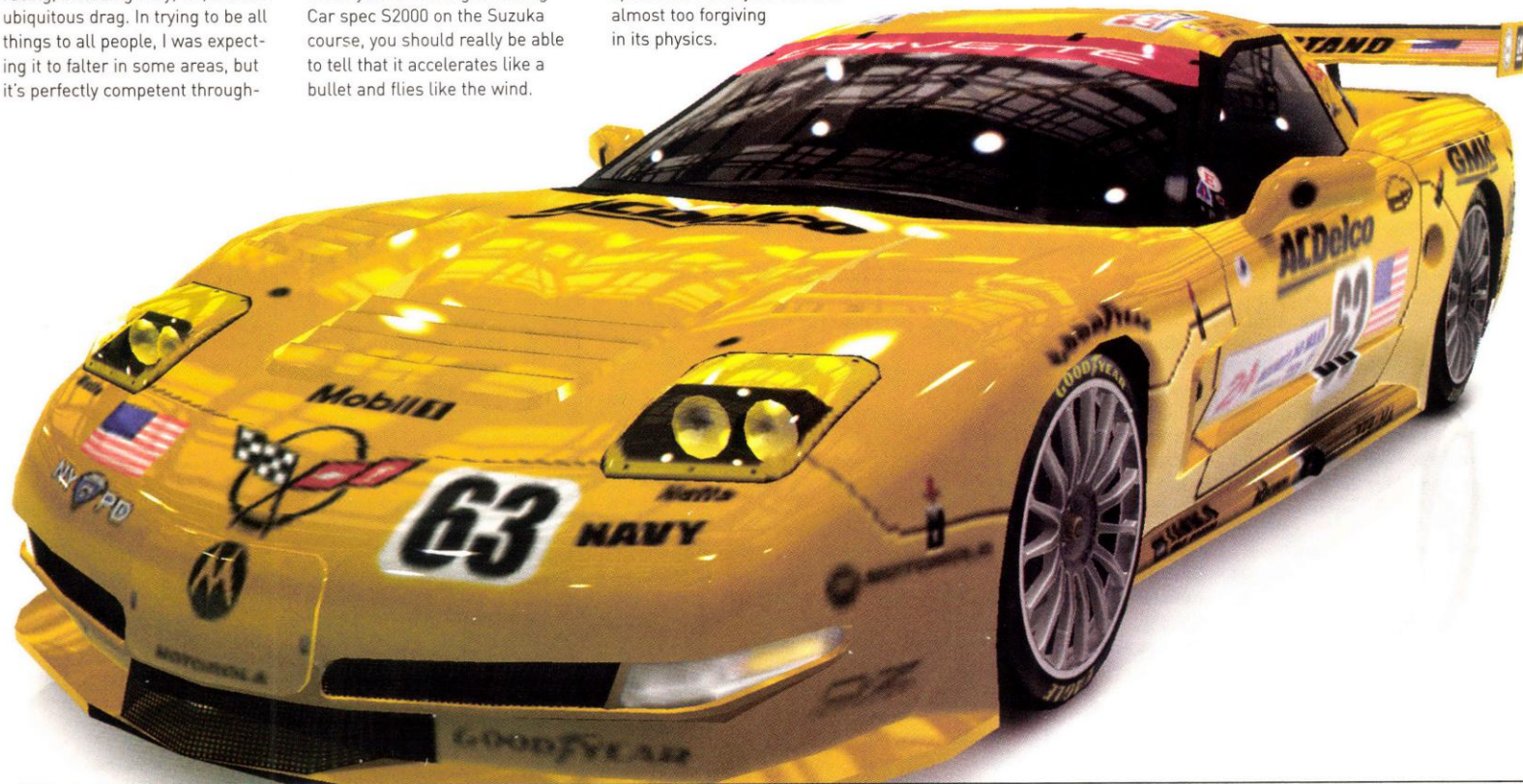
You can hit a corner like a bat out of hell and pretty much get things under control without losing your grip. At times, it's like the tires are made out of glue. Given the choice, I'll take sticky over *Ridge Racer*-style slippery-slide, but I wouldn't mind a bit more oversteer to make things exciting,

especially in some of the rear-drive monsters available.

Namco makes a big deal about the game's in-race communications, and at first, I wasn't sure why. All games have a bit of radio chatter for flavor, don't they? *R*'s is constant. At first you think, "Yeah, OK, thanks," but after a while it's actually kinda cool to have the guy in the pits tell you that you just took that last corner like a pro. It's not a major factor in the grand scheme of things, but it's a nice bit of flavor that will especially thrill nongamer types. "It's like it's watching everything you do," was one comment I overheard a nongamer make.

It's not the greatest racer ever made, but it is pretty darn good. If you're waiting for *GT4* and the grit of *NFSU* doesn't appeal to you, it's certainly worth your time. There's a lot of content to play through, so it will certainly keep you occupied for a while should you want it to.

**John Davison**



# R: RACING EVOLUTION

An opportunity to use our favorite term, "CarPG"