

PUBLISHER EA | DEVELOPER NAMCO | WEBSITE WWW.RACING-EVOLUTION.COM

R: RACING EVOLUTION

RIDGE RACER CHANGES GEAR, HEADS ONTO THE GRID MARKED 'SIMULATION' AND PREPARES TO CHALLENGE GT AT ITS OWN GAME

Unlike all the faceless, super-efficient drones that populate Formula One, *R: Racing Evolution* is a racer with personality. Thankfully, that personality isn't a chinny Teutonic fella called Herr Schumacher, but a gorgeous Japanese girl by the name of Rena Hayami. An ex-ambulance driver, Rena is recruited into the heady world of motor racing after a team boss witnesses her expert handling of the medical wagon during an emergency. Swapping overalls for figure-hugging racing leathers, Rena sets out on the long road to pole position, gradually uncovering a twisty storyline as she progresses.

Despite coming from the petrol-addled minds behind the superb *Ridge Racer* series, *R: Racing Evolution* isn't a direct continuation of the franchise, and that's obvious from more than just the addition of a plot. Where *Ridge Racer* was always the yin to *Gran Turismo*'s yang – offering crazy speeds and fun arcade handling rather than total driving realism – *R:RE* dips its toe into the sticky pool of simulation and comes out smelling a little less alluring than we would have hoped.

Thing is, we were kind of hoping this would be closer to the old *Ridge*-style action than it actually is. There are plenty of po-faced driving sims on PS2 and, let's face it, there isn't much point in releasing another one when *GT4*'s revving up on the horizon (see page 24 for a huge playtest). What we wanted was a straight arcade racer that delivered jumps, bashes and the kind of outrageous powerslides that see you skidding from fifth to first place in the space of one screeching bend. The fact that *R:RE* doesn't feature fictional, logic-defying cars, neon-lit cityscapes and powerslide-friendly handling is a shame, but that doesn't necessarily make it a bad game – just a different game to the one we were expecting.

SIM-PLY THE BEST

'Course, the problem with heading down the *GT* route is that you're automatically going to be compared with a game that simply can't be beaten. We can tell you now, before either game is finished, and without any fear of being proven wrong, that *Gran Turismo 4* will be much better than *R: Racing Evolution*. *R:RE* certainly follows the template closely: it has a range of different racing classes including GT, rally and drag; a selection of vehicles split into performance categories; and success is

rewarded with points that can be spent on upgrades and modifications for your motor. But where *GT* does this stuff with unrivalled depth, *R:RE* is just another wannabe that doesn't come close to the master's wealth of options.

Out on the track the story continues. Although never less than entertaining, the 14 courses here can't compete with the variety and impact of *GT*'s tracklist. As for the handling, it's caught somewhere between arcade and simulation – not as simplistic or exciting as *Ridge*, yet far too twitchy to get anywhere near the realism of *GT*. The fact that the cars are a touch floaty and don't feel as if they're fully interacting with the road doesn't help either.

R: Racing Evolution does do a few things differently from *GT* and is all the better for it. The most original feature is the pressure gauge which appears above each opponent's car as you bear down on them. The bar turns from blue to red as you edge closer and put more and more pressure on the driver ahead. Stay on their tail long enough and the gauge will flash red, giving you a points bonus and the chance to watch smugly as your rival bottles it and spins out of control. Another nice touch is the in-game radio communication that enables you to receive instructions from your team boss, and also listen to your fellow competitors as they threaten to whup you or sulk that you're just too damn fast.

Already released to a lukewarm reception in the States, it'll be interesting to see whether *R:RE* can overcome the twin disappointments of not being as good as *GT* and not being a proper *Ridge Racer* game when it hits UK shelves. Make no mistake, this is a decent driving game but in an overcrowded market where even fantastic titles like *Burnout 2* fail to set the sales chart alight, *R: Racing Evolution* might well find itself driving in the pack. ■ LH

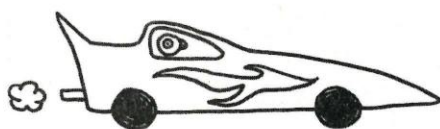
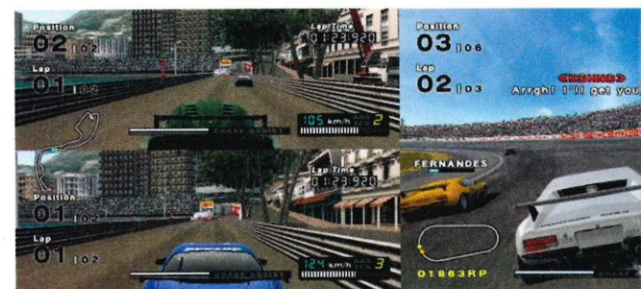
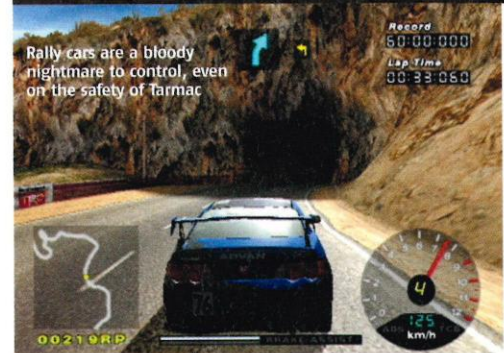
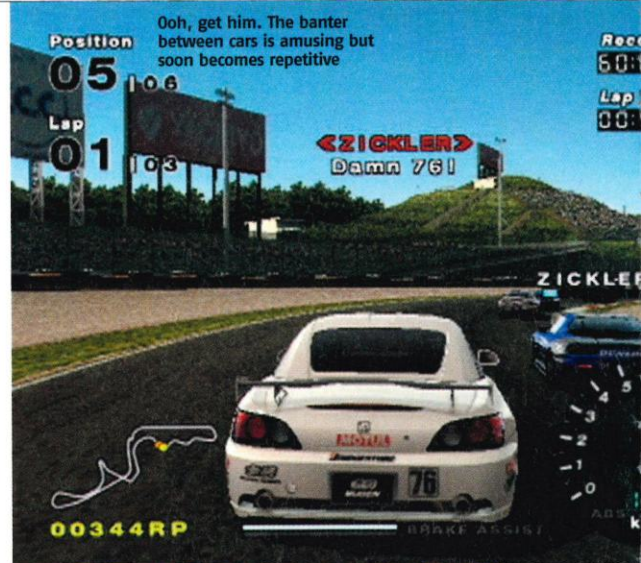
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WITHOUT THE ARCADE fun of *Ridge Racer* or the in-depth realism of *Gran Turismo*, *R: Racing Evolution* will have to rely on its character-driven gaming to escape PS2's racing game gridlock

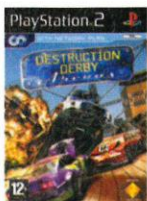
HOT OR NOT?

TEPID WARM HOT BOILING MELTDOWN





s m a s h y o u r m a t e s



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