

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS

Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER

Namco

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2

THE RIDGE RACER TEAM RETURNS WITH A NEW ATTITUDE

# R: RACING EVOLUTION

**T**here was once a time when *Ridge Racer* was coveted by fans of the driving genre. A time of huge powerslides, when gaudy, unlicensed cars with passing resemblances to the latest exotica could blast round city circuits with little regard for accurate weighting, handling or performance figures. Boy, we had fun. Lots of us, too. But over the last few years, the series has faded into relative obscurity, fondly recollected but massively overshadowed by serious, tight-lipped simulators like *Gran Turismo*; balls-out, hyper-fast arcade titles like *Burnout*; or games like *Project Gotham* that can do both with effortless ease.

Resurrecting the *Ridge Racer* name was not a task to be undertaken lightly. Which is perhaps why this game has a different moniker – to reflect its new serious intentions and the inclusion of a multitude of motorsports (GT, touring car, rally,

classic car and even drag racing). There's even a *TOCA Race Driver*-esque narrative as well, albeit with a cheery young nymphet called Rena Hayami rather than an arrogant hothead like Ryan McKane. A

classic arcade racer turned sim with a story? What's going on? Truth is, we're not sure Namco knows either. The good news is that *R: Racing Evolution* features a pleasantly surprising line-up of past and present motors ranging from the Motorsport Elise to a Dodge Charger to a Renault Alpina, as well as authentic Japanese tracks like Suzuka and Yokohama. These factors, plus the ability to do the usual spanner-monkey tweaking like altering brake bias and damper settings as well as buying upgrades for each car, suggests that this could be a title gunning for a *Turismo* reputation.

But when you take your car onto the track you find that this is not the case at all. Imagine the handling of *Ridge Racer* after it has eaten too many pies and you're pretty close to the mark. You've got a multitude of different cars, with varying power outputs and different wheels; yet they all feel the same. Whether it's a front-wheel-drive Honda Integra or however-many-hundred-horsepower Chrysler Viper, they all have an unpleasant tendency to fishtail around as if a drunk is behind the wheel. All the usual conventions applied to prevent a spin seem strangely absent here. Yes, 'drift' handling can be fun, but only when the balance of the car feels like it's under your control.

FAQs

**Q. PHWOAR, A GIRL! DO YOU GET TO SEE HER IN THE SHOWER?**

Er, yes actually, you do. Namco isn't afraid of mild titillation to keep gamers playing.

**Q. DO YOU GET DECENT CARS?**

Despite a relatively small number of vehicles, the range is eclectic – American muscle cars, Le Mans racers and Seventies rally classics are among the line-up.

**Q. BETTER THAN RIDGE RACER?**

Not really. Previous games had an arcade focus and this has confused things with stats and figures.

TOTAL IMMERSION RACING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

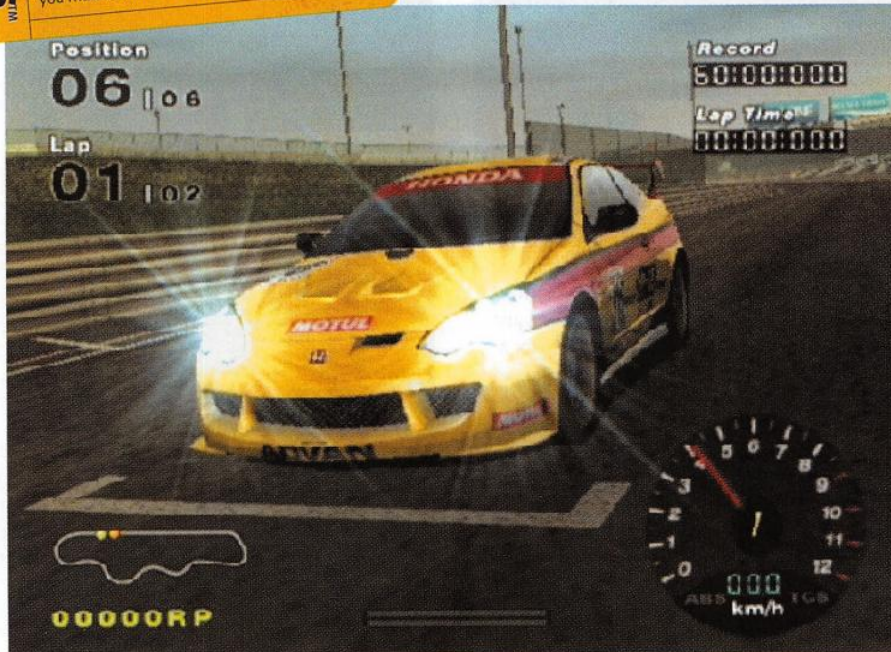


GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC

**games™ FINGERPRINT**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

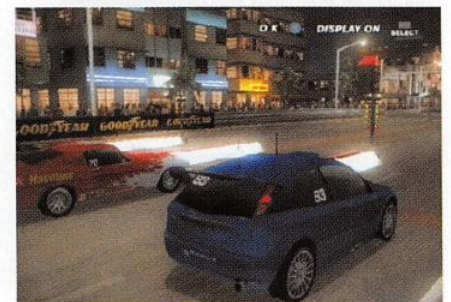
**FUNNY HOW?** *R: Racing* may be more straight-laced than its forebears, but it still has time for some tongue-in-cheek fun – like a modified Fiat 500 that you must use to race GT Vipers and NSXs...



Not only are all the cars licensed, many sport accurate liveries too. Sadly, all the pixel-perfect paintwork can't make up for the slightly haphazard handling and the fact that each sort of racing here has been done better elsewhere.



The rally stages highlight the flaws in the handling the most. We like powerslides, but only if it feels like you can hold them.



A drag race? Very *Need For Speed: Underground* you might think. Well think again, it's not that exciting.

## DO I HAVE TO PARALLEL PARK?

The main focus of *R: Racing* is the Racing Life mode which tracks the exploits of promising young racing starlet Rena Hayami. Plucked from obscurity as an ambulance driver, Rena is thrust into the limelight as a motorsport driver for the GVI Company. It's keen to promote you as the next big thing, but are Rena's financial backers as honest as they seem? You'll have to watch a number of chest-oriented cut-scenes to find out more... The construction of the characters works much better than in *TOCA Race Driver* and their presence gives personalities to other drivers that many games in the genre lack.



*R: Racing* hints at simulator handling, yet throws in arcade frivolity and ends up confused. It's not impossible to adapt to it, but it takes far too long before the blancmange-like handling begins to feel anything like second nature.

Still, should you manage to get to grips with the driving style then there is plenty for you to do. *R: Racing* can't boast a *GT* or *Gotham*-sized showroom (there are less than 40 cars), but it makes up for it with the sheer volume of tasks. As well as the story-driven Racing Life mode, *R: Racing* features a massive Event Challenge mode too. Much like in Namco's *Moto GP* titles there are hundred of individual tasks – ranging from tournaments, rival races, one-make championships and rally time-trials – that are bound to take an impressive amount of time to complete. But even if your prize is a Bentley Le Mans car, are you likely to care when it drives like every other vehicle and offers no greater sense of speed than a Mini Cooper?

There are a couple of features in *R: Racing* that we do like, though. The in-race chatter and the ability to intimidate fellow drivers, for example. A bar hovers above each car denoting how calm its



Once the bar above the car in front starts flashing red, the chances of the driver making an error increase massively.



Yep, that's a Fiat 500. And yep, it's about to come flying past a race-spec GT car. There's nothing wrong with a sense of humour.

MACHINE

Event Challenge | Performance Shop | Drag Class

SHELBY  
G.T. 500

Max HP/Torque	478 kW 1226 Nm	STEP 1	493 kW 1263 Nm
Weight	1735 kg	STEP 1	1685 kg
Price:	48000 RP		

Perform Stage 1 weight reduction.

479302RP

driver is – tailgate them for long enough, the bar will fill and the likelihood of them making an error increases. Once they slip up you can casually drift past to the sounds of them cursing you and your mother and no doubt screaming how big your bottom looks in that race suit. Thankfully, words of encouragement from your pit crew and mentors stop you feeling like too much of a hate figure and their cheering actually spurs you on to finish a race. It gets repetitive after a while, but it's nice to know your hard work is being appreciated.

An enduring fondness for the *Ridge Racer* series could be enough to encourage you to pick up *R: Racing*, and its attempt at being a jack-of-all-trades could seem quite appealing to gamers who casually approach the driving genre. Connoisseurs, on the other hand, will own the highest quality examples of each trade that do each job better, leaving *R: Racing Evolution* feeling mostly redundant.



VERDICT **5/10**  
TOO CONFUSED TO DO ANYTHING BRILLIANTLY



GAMECUBE \$99.95 MARCH '04



*R: Racing* is probably at its strongest here. Not only is there less competition but the graphics look crisper and more detailed than the PS2. The handling feels less twitchy too.

XBOX \$99.95 MARCH '04



Although *R: Racing* looks best on Xbox, the machine could do better. With no extra features to speak of, there's little to draw gamers away from *Project Gotham Racing 2*.