

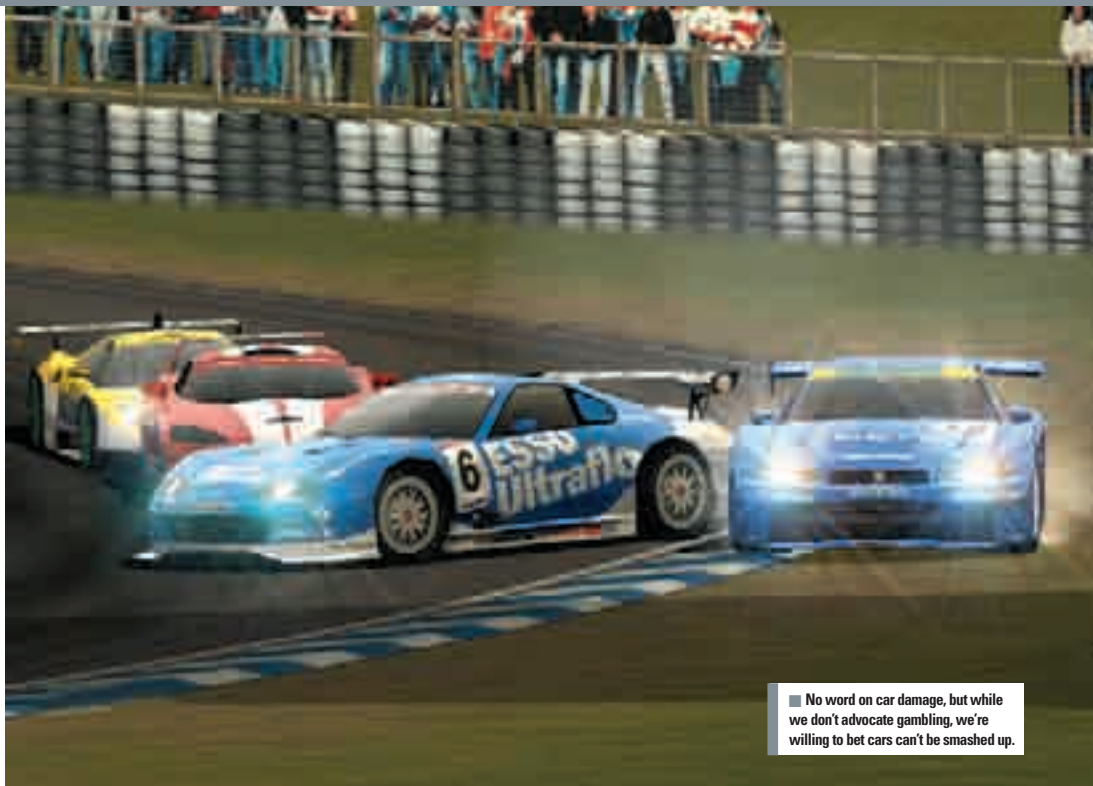
R: RACING EVOLUTION

90-DEGREE POWERSLIDING IS OUT, BRAKING EARLY IS IN

 When *Ridge Racer* first appeared in arcades in 1995, it quickly found a place in gamers' hearts thanks to its comical powerslides and an undemanding approach to racing. While this set the game apart at the time, it's worth bearing in mind that back then there was no *Project Gotham Racing*, and *Gran Turismo* was little more than a twinkle in Kazunori Yamauchi's eye. These games have now overtaken Namco's flagship series, so in order to claw back some of the popularity lost over the years, it's taking the simulation road instead of burning down the old arcade route.

The upgradeable real-life vehicles, including the Nissan Skyline and Dodge Viper, reinforce Namco's new-found quest for realism, and the handling has also been altered – the notorious powerslides from previous games are still possible, only they're harder to pull off and not as exaggerated. Even the tracks look more like real race circuits than the fantasy settings of old, all of which adds up to an experience that has more in common with *Gran Turismo* than any arcade racers.

Also making its series debut is the Pressure Meter. Sticking close to the tail end of another driver will see this meter



■ No word on car damage, but while we don't advocate gambling, we're willing to bet cars can't be smashed up.

appear above his car. Staying behind the car and putting him under pressure will increase this gauge to show the driver's stress – the more the meter fills, the more likely he is to make a mistake. It's not just there for your advantage either, as rival cars can also put the heat on you, which makes cornering and braking tougher until you can shake your pursuer off. It adds a

novel twist to the racing but also seems to be somewhat contradictory to *Racing Evolution's* nod towards pure simulation.

R: Racing Evolution will also mark the series' first multiformat expedition, so it will have the unenviable task of fending off competition from both *PGR2* and *Gran Turismo 4*. The title might be changed to *Racing Evolution* but has the gameplay evolved sufficiently to recapture our interest? We're not entirely convinced yet, but there's still some mileage left to run before it crosses the finish line...

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now, US: 9 December)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ *Ridge Racer* sheds its arcade skin to gun for *Gran Turismo's* simulation glory.



"THE INGENIOUS PRESSURE METER IS A GENUINE SURPRISE IN A GENRE WHERE INNOVATION IS RARE"



■ Dirt rallies are uncharted territory for Namco, so it'll be interesting to see how it fares.



■ The *Ridge Racer* games were famous for their pristine cars, and the motors here are just as good.