

SEGA SATURN

The Big Three have finally arrived. You know what we're talking about - Virtua Cop, Sega Rally Championship and Virtua Fighter 2. Three huge arcade games that promise to redefine what next generation gaming is all about, says Sega. And **MAXIMUM** has to agree as all three titles take their respective genres to the very heights of entertainment. Curiously, even Virtua Cop, which promised to offer zero lastability has surprised the hell out of us by officially being the most played game this month (even beating VF2!), mostly down to the huge amusement factor offered by one player using two Virtua Guns. The tables seem to be turning now - whereas Sony stole the lead from Sega with their hype-driven

PlayStation launch, the true quality software seems to be drying up now - just as Sega release their three biggest Saturn products.

However, what this month's reviews section also shows is that as we've mentioned before, third party support (without which, PlayStation would be dead) is virtually non-existent on the Saturn. Although there are some exceptions, such as X-Men and Thunderhawk 2, generally, if it isn't by a Sega AM team, it tends to be average and not worth buying. While PlayStation has that advantage over Sega, the Saturn's future will always be the basis for some pretty heated controversy. Let us know what you think...

VIRTUA FIGHTER 2 - Is this the greatest video game of all-time?



MAXIMUM SATURN

An updated top five peripherals list, which shows exactly why these particular Saturn appendages are pretty much a load of rubbish (apart from the Virtua Gun of course).

1. VIRTUA GUN

You need to play Virtua Cop with TWO guns - one in each hand! - to fully appreciate this stunning game.

2. MPEG VIDEO-CD CARD

Why settle for "VCD quality"? Save up £300 for a dual standard PAL/NTSC LaserDisc player if you're really into watching movies as they were meant to be seen.

3. VIRTUA STICK

Sega of America have been pushing this heavily with VF2. Our advice? Stick with the pad. Without an unmovable base, these sticks aren't that great.

4. SIX-PLAYER ADAPTOR

Apparently, there are some games coming out for this one, such as NBA Jam and NHL Hockey. Right...

5. LINK-UP CABLE

Exclusive! It does exist! It will be released! But commitment from Sega remains dodgy.

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY MAXIMUM

In Japan, it is officially the biggest game ever, eclipsing even the Street Fighter phenomenon at its height. Although not quite as popular over here or in the States, Virtua Fighter 2 is acknowledged as one of the best fighting games there is; visually stunning and extremely playable, with a huge array of techniques.

It would perhaps be the understatement of the year to say that a lot rides on the quality of the Saturn conversion - not least the future of the Sega super-console. It's fortunate then that master programmers AM2 have confounded the sceptics and handed in a game that is remarkably similar to its coin-op parent - a game that's running on hardware that's 20 times more expensive than the Sega Saturn.

The first thing to strike you about VF2 is undoubtedly the resolution. The sheer definition of the game is stunning - far in advance of anything seen on Saturn and PlayStation and very, very close indeed to its arcade parent. You wouldn't have seen anything like it on Saturn before and it's a fact that most of the magazine reviews you will see of this game will have substandard low-resolution frame grabs of VF2 (**MAXIMUM** VF2 pics are full high resolution but even this isn't as good as actually seeing the game on-screen). Trust us: seeing is truly believing with Virtua Fighter 2.

Again, staying with visuals is the sheer fluidity of the action. Virtua Fighter 2 runs at the same speed as the arcade machine (60 fps) and has a smoothness to it that's unlike anything seen before. Namco's PlayStation



Tekken is the only thing remotely close to it.

But while the game's graphics are the main attraction of Virtua Fighter 2, its staying power rests entirely on the gameplay. It would be fair to say that each of the characters is fairly unique.

Whereas there were a lot of shared techniques in VF1, the new game introduces new styles and far more moves for each fighter. The range of available moves is frankly breathtaking - the Japanese have just released a book called Virtua Fighter 2 Maniacs which





spends over 500 pages going into depth on every facet of the game's techniques. Finding all of VF1's 700-odd moves was tough going - VF2 has over 2,000, which remains the greatest number in any arcade fighting game available in the UK (pseudo-sequel Fighting Vipers remains something of an unknown at the time of writing).

As well as the vast array of throws, punches and kicks, VF2 boosts the amount of reversals significantly. Previously, this was only the province of Pal, but now Kage, Akira and Wolf have them as well. Mastering them is pretty tough, but spectacular to watch. A **MAXIMUM** favourite has to be Akira, who effortlessly shrugs an incoming kick aside and responds instantly with an elbow to the chest, which sends the opponent flying across the ring. These moves are the icing on the cake, and it's surprising to us that they haven't been copied by Sega's competitors.

In terms of options, again AM2 have excelled themselves. All of the options of VF1 have returned, but plenty of extras have been included, such as a bewildering array of multi-player



options. There's no tournament mode, but better still is the King of Fighters-style Team Battle, which allows players to choose a team of five characters to control in an elimination scenario. It's touches such as this, along with comprehensive selectables (including how long you want your replays!) which more than make up for any of the compromises that are evident in the conversion.

Most notable in the list of compromises has to be the absence of the bridges on Shun's stage (it's funny how most people who remember one), and the slightly ropey sound quality (there's so much more speech and sound effects that something had to give). Also, we're led to believe from VF2 director Keiji Okayasu that some of the reversal attacks have either been changed or removed. Let's just say



Super-realistic visuals show the true 3D power of Sega Saturn!

that we haven't noticed anything amiss yet. As explained in previous **MAXIMUMs**, the backdrops are no longer polygonised. They're 2D backdrops à la Tekken, only with more parallax layers, including one that scales to accentuate depth - a peculiar hardware trick only Saturn can do. There was some initial concern about this compromise, but in the finished version, it appears to work well. The coin-op's light sourcing is also missing, although some subtle changes in the colours between stages almost make up for it.

Additions such as Virtua Fighter 2.1 data are to be commended as well - as well as the controllable Dural boss, this tightens up many areas of the game-play that experts exploited. It's also a nice addition in that the 2.1 upgrade was a Japan-only release, so finally US Westerners can find out what all of the fuss was about.

Virtua Fighter 2 isn't without its flaws however. The CPU player, like its arcade counterpart, is extremely susceptible to throws, and unless you've

played countless games against people with many different styles, the Expert Mode (which learns techniques and uses them against you) is actually easier than the Arcade mode! This

might sound like nit-picking and the fact is, it probably is, because Virtua Fighter 2 is as near to the perfect Saturn game as we're ever likely to see this side of the sun.



The bottom line is this: PlayStation used to have the edge in 3D games, but nobody can be sure if Sony's machine is better now because Virtua Fighter 2 is such an astounding conversion, far superior to anything seen before on the machine. AM2's Research wing (who developed the SGL graphics engine) have recently announced that this conversion of VF2 uses only 66% of the Saturn's power and that future games will be even better technically (we'll believe it when we see it).

Until we see those games, though, Virtua Fighter 2 will do quite nicely. An incredible achievement that will undoubtedly sell thousands of Saturns - not just on hype and flashy graphics, but on solid quality.

★★★★★