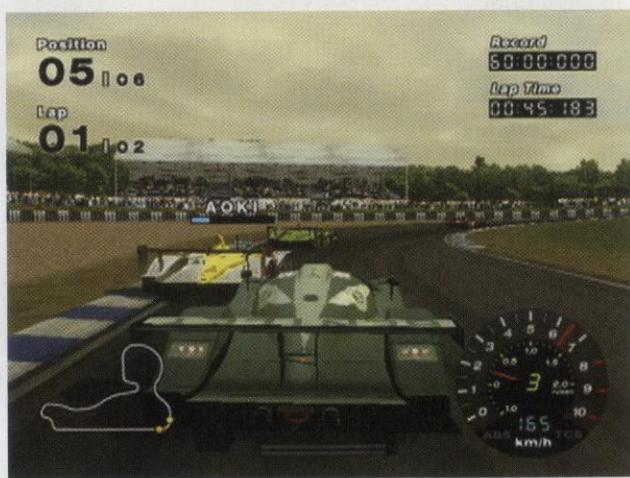


R: Racing Evolution

Format: GC (version tested) PS2 ■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: In-house ■ Price: ¥6,800 (€35) ■ Release: Out now (Japan) TBA (UK)

■ Previously in E125



Graphics are functional rather than spectacular, and car models are acceptable. It's not just the road that is angular – most of the game environment feels that way



Once upon a track

Racing Life attempts the uncomfortable marriage of racing and narrative, and sees an ambulance driver slide into the overalls of the racing driver she's just delivered to hospital. Key plot sequences utilise good CGI, while secondary developments rely on static images. While it is unlikely to win awards, the story does at least add a little spice by delving into some of the political issues affecting the world of motorsport.



The handling's reliance on lift-off oversteer can be mastered but lacks finesse and feels dated when compared to the competition. Racing points collected during events unlock extras and more cars

Although also available for the PS2, this is an important release for Nintendo. The odd F1 title aside, format-exclusive real-world racing games haven't fared particularly well on the company's home consoles and are arguably a contributing factor to the lightweight status many attribute to NCL's hardware. *F-Zero GX* may be excellent, but in their minds it hardly matches powersliding a GT-R in *GT3* or thrashing an Enzo in *PGR2*.

Namco's latest may not have been signed as a Nintendo exclusive but with its licensed vehicles, genuine performance specialists' logos, and a handful of real circuits (alongside fictitious alternatives), it joins the likes of *Burnout 2* and *NFS Underground* in an effort to present the GameCube to the wider gaming circles as a platform capable of offering quality realism-influenced racing.

Except, sadly, quality is the one thing *R: Racing Evolution* doesn't possess much of. Initially things look promising, the main mode managing the (admittedly easy) task of overtaking *TOCA Race Driver* for integrating plot into racing (see 'Once upon a track') and offering a pleasantly varied racing menu – ovals, rally stages, overtaking challenges, drag races, super special stages and international events, to name the first few. There are some interesting touches, too, with team orders coming into effect (the pit radio crackles incessantly) and the ability to force opponents into mistakes, not that you'll necessarily need to, given the manner in which they jerk out of your way as soon as you attempt an overtaking manoeuvre.

That's the game's first weakness – it's simply too easy. Even with the driving aids switched off a competent player will power through the events and will feel bored before feeling challenged, particularly as too often the same venues are revisited with the number of laps cruelly extended.

Then there's the handling. There's little feeling of contact with the track and the back end whips out in the most awkward manner seen in a racing game for a long while. It's also worth pointing out that the collision dynamics display a set of physical properties foreign to followers of Newton's work.

For a title trying hard to inject personality into the genre, the experience feels irreparably mechanical. There's plenty of variety in terms of racing categories and machinery, but the overall lack of refinement and involvement is inexcusable.

Edge rating:

Four out of ten