



PLAYERS	1
STAGES	6x3
SKILL LEVELS	1

Julian Boardman tries to avoid getting run over by Sega's answer to Mario (oh, the irony!)

Those of you who have had the chance to play Sega's *Rad Mobile* coin-op may have noticed what looked like a little fluffy cat swinging in the windscreen. You probably wouldn't have taken much notice but the more astute will have recognised this character as none other than Sonic the Hedgehog. To say that young Sonic has been hyped would be like saying that the Titanic took on a bit of water. But there's a very good reason behind this. Sonic is Sega's answer to Mario and the nearest they've come to a homegrown mascot for a long time (Alex Kidd was a bit of prat to be honest).

Things aren't what they might be for Sonic. The cuddly – er, and a bit spiky – fellow has had all his mates kidnapped by an evil scientist.

He's used them as pilots for a whole army of bionic insects and other creatures that he may use to take over the world. But this Sonic guy is all heart and he doesn't even think twice about using his spikes to save his cute



The Labyrinth Zone requires more careful jumps and considered tactics than other levels. Choose your route with care; it's not just mindless speeding on this level.

friends, even if it could mean his departure from this world. This is one brave – albeit a tad reckless – hedgehog.

So off goes Sonic through six massive zones, each made up of three treacherous stages, collecting rings as he goes. The rings, which are dotted all over the place, give him bonus points at the end of each level and also protect him while he is carrying

This is the first level of the Green Hill Zone. The straightforward route is fairly simple but once you have the hang of some techniques you will be able to take more adventurous routes. Experienced players will venture above and below to find extra rings, and subsequently gain a larger bonus at the end. One word of warning: beware of the bridges. If you are not careful, a vicious piranha will leap from the water beneath and Sonic's life could be curtailed.

them. Should our noisy hedgehog friend take a hit whilst he is carrying some rings, he won't die but he will lose all the rings. He must then pick up some more quickly before he takes another hit and buys the farm.

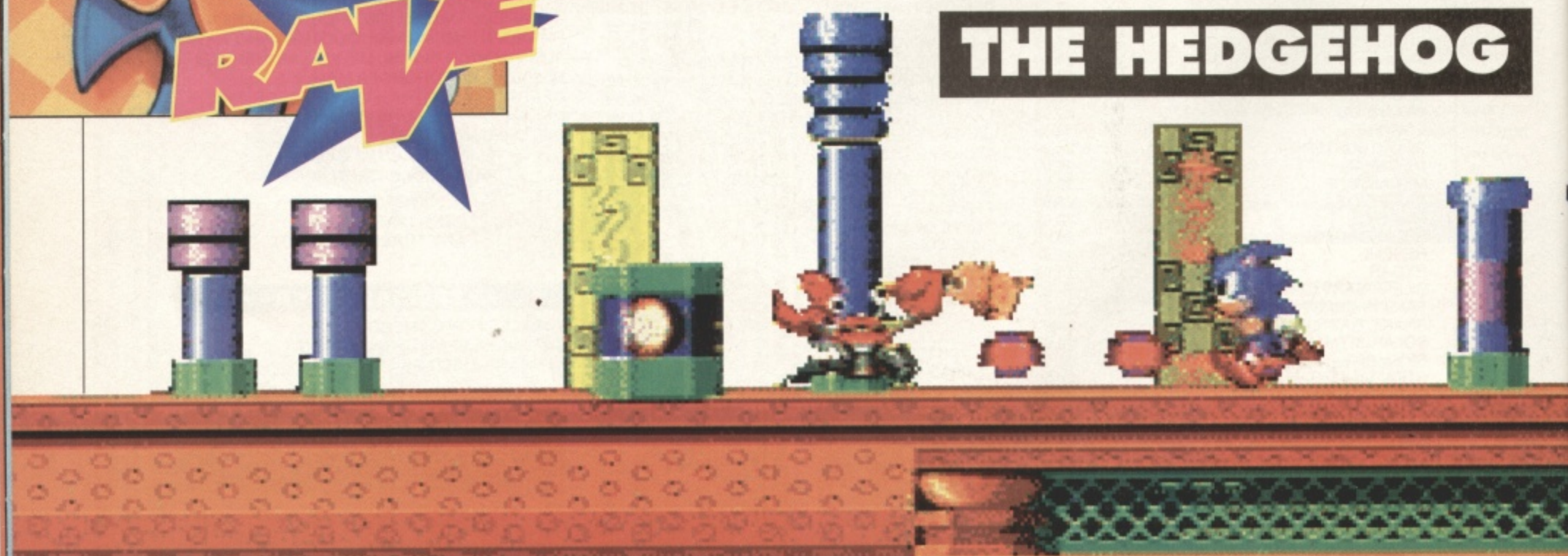
Sonic is probably the fastest creature you are ever going to come across on the Mega Drive. Even without power-ups, the spiked wonder can reach ridiculous speeds. Should he hit a spring or find a pair of speed



RAVE

SONIC

THE HEDGEHOG





Sonic has made it to the end of the first stage of the first level, the Green Hill Zone. It is a fairly simple level that gently introduces you to the techniques required in the game. But it's no push-over, so don't get complacent.

boots it will take some lightning reflexes and more than a spot of luck to stop him ending up in some uncharted part of the level that you have never seen before.

That's one aspect of the game that you may not notice initially, the sheer

many traps that the evil scientist has laid for you. Not to mention the masses of bionic creatures that you will meet as they attempt to kill you, even though it is you that is trying to save them in the long run!

What makes for the fun is that it is



The beginning of the Marble Zone pits you against a metallic wasp and a spiked crab. The latter cannot be taken from above, so just avoid him. Check out that classical backdrop – froody!

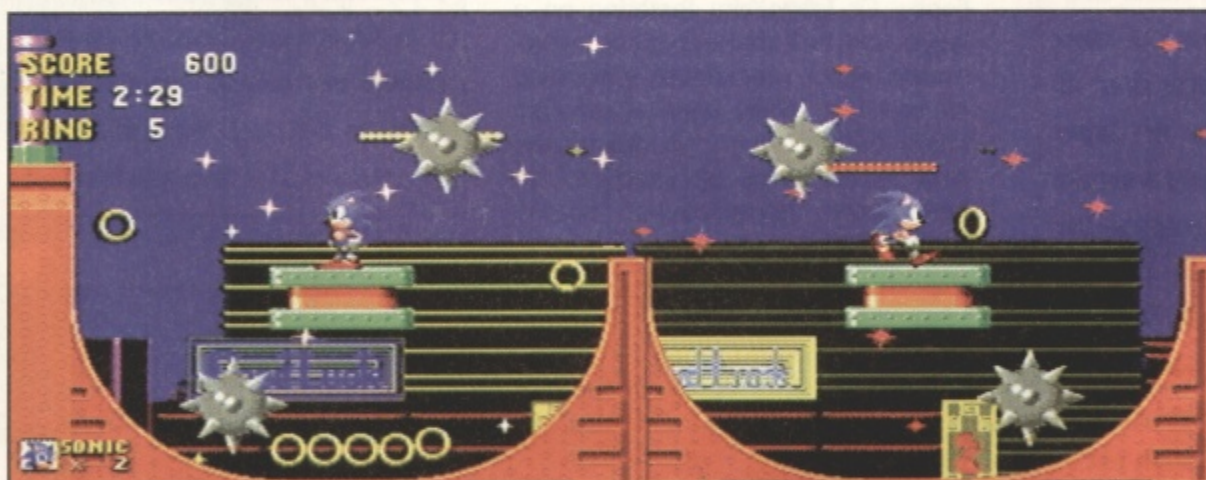
MEGA HOG

- The latin name for the hedgehog genus is, in fact, *Erinaceus*.
- Leaving milk for a friendly garden hedgehog can be dangerous; it does absolutely nothing for their teeth or their coat or their general health. They will also become lazy. They are much better if left to forage for snails and the like.
- Most hedgehogs are infested with every type of flea you could name.
- The hedgehog is an insectivore native to Asia, Africa and Europe.
- They coat their spines with saliva (gross).
- In heraldry, hedgehogs are known as Herisson.



The construction site of the Starlight Zone has many moving elements that require precision timing to ensure Sonic doesn't plummet to a typically messy hedgehog death.

size of the levels. First of all you will probably take the straightforward route, but there is always another route to be found above or beneath you. Lord knows what manner of bonuses and secret rooms you may find on your travels, they just keep popping up all over the place. While you are exploring, though, you have to watch out for the



all just high-paced running and jumping. There's no shooting or exploding, just that manic, out of control oh-my-God-where-am-I-going-now? feeling that you get when you run flat out down the side of a hill in the naive assumption that the path to safety will be a clear one.

The trick is to try to combine enough skill to be able speed along and remember when to

This is definitely one of the more tricky sections of the Sparkling Zone. Those large mace-like balls rotate slowly making it difficult for Sonic to collect all those rings in the bottom of the loop. Sure, he could leap across onto the platform, to the ridge of the loop and to the next platform fairly easily, but then he'd miss all those valuable rings. Decisions, decisions.

jump to pick up bonuses *and* when to turn into a whirling dervish of spikes to leap onto the mechanical creatures and save your buddies trapped within their metallic skin. Although you

should be reckless at times, those without skill will find themselves losing rings too often to make any real progress.

The graphics are another major factor in making this such a terrific game. The backgrounds are incredible – bright, colourful and full of detail



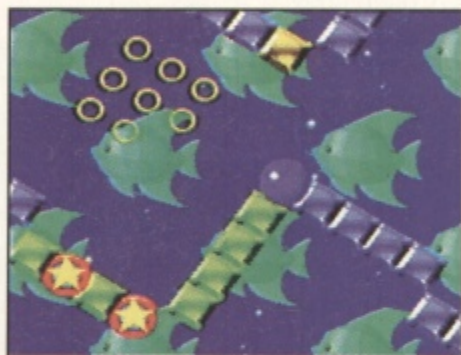
The hidden bonus stage is something of a bizarre experience. The rotating framework he is trapped in has within it several rings that Sonic must collect. Sometimes he almost has to defy gravity to ensure he doesn't get lost somewhere at the wrong end of the frame.

WHICH IS BEST?

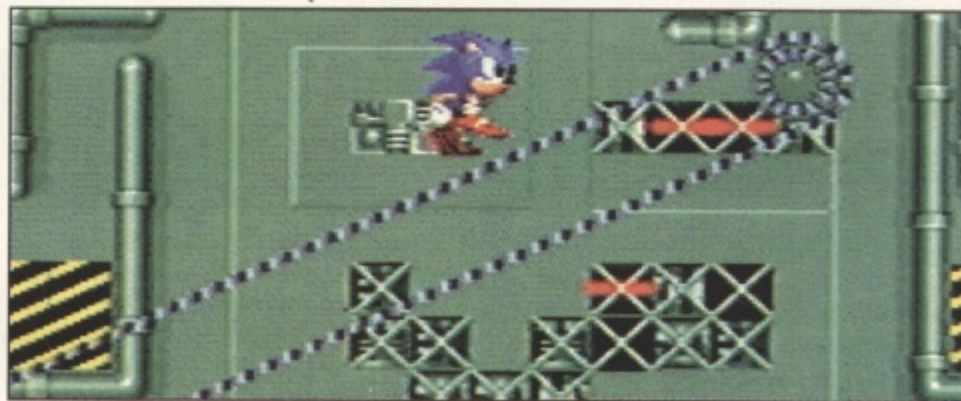
The question everyone is asking is: Is Sonic better than Mario? Well, it would only be fair to compare the latest outings of each character. *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom is undoubtedly a superb game. *Sonic the Hedgehog* on the Mega Drive seems similarly impressive. However, it would be impossible for us to compare the two till we have been playing *Sonic* for at least a month out of choice (not for review purposes). Anyone who is already saying that one is better than the other is either biased or prophetic. Until *Sonic* has been on general release for a month, no-one should be counting their chickens.



– as is all of the scenery. Each zone has its own distinctive character and feel. The amount of time and effort that must have gone into producing the graphics is quite phenomenal. Not to mention mapping and designing each of the huge zones, ensuring the high level of playability that is so obvious throughout. Even Sonic himself has his own little routines: leave him alone for a few seconds and he'll begin tapping



his foot or scratching his head impatiently. Or leave him teetering on a ledge and he'll make a great performance about precariously balancing on one leg: totally unnecessary but totally brilliant. Even his determined strut as he builds up speed to his head-down no-nonsense speed-blurred sprint makes the point that



The hi-tech looking, but strangely titled, Clockwork Zone pits Sonic against many a weird creature, not to mention a tortuous climb on awkwardly behaving conveyor belts.

The Star Light Zone takes place on what seems to be a construction site. Here Sonic must sprint down the slope to gain enough speed to race through the loop, up the other slope and over a small gap just off screen.



this guy is not going to take any monkey business. Sega have obviously spent a lot of time and money on *Sonic* with the deliberate aim to turn

SONIC vs MARIO?

At the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, Sega stole much of the limelight from Nintendo's Super NES launch by setting aside a part of their stand for Sonic. This section would allow visitors to compare and contrast the mascots of the two major players in the console arena. It is a sign of Sega's confidence in Sonic that they are willing to let him be openly compared to the latest incarnation of Mario (*Mario World*) on their own stand at such a high-profile show. It is also a sign that, now both protagonists have a corporate mascot, the previously gentlemanly battle – in Europe and the States at least – is going to degenerate into an unholy battle.

This challenge between Mario and Sonic is not the first shot that Sega have fired at the disdainful walls of Fort Nintendo. American mags are currently carrying an ad for the Game Gear that begins, "If you're still playing with Game Boy then it's time to grow up". It continues, "...[the Game Gear] makes Game Boy look like child's play". Only to conclude: "So quit kidding yourself, it's time to get into gear".

At the moment, Nintendo are probably going to rest on their laurels as the number one console supplier in the US (one in three homes now have a Nintendo machine). But if they're not careful, Sega might just sneak up on the rails and beat them into first place this year. This one could run and run.

the eponymous character into some kind of cult hero and mascot for Sega. The great thing about it for us is that we get possibly the most playable game yet on the Mega Drive (and we don't have to put up with any more Nintendo owners going on about that pesky plumber all the time). Now we've got our own breed of hero to wave in their faces, and this guy deserves the adoration.

MEGA DRIVE

GRAPHICS

- ✓ Colourful and highly detailed backdrops.
- ✓ The main sprites are fabulous.

96

SOUND

- ✗ The tune is a little boring.
- ✓ Loads of cheeky effects.

82

PLAYABILITY

- ✓ Huge levels to explore.
- ✓ Action gives a high-speed high.

95

SEGA

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95