



# SONIC

## THE HEDGEHOG



**Move over Mario! Now we have a new cult gaming figure for the 90s courtesy of SEGA. But can he match Nintendo's pipe-fitting superstar?**

(Left) The evil Doctor Eggman awaits at the end of Green Hill Zone, flying high in his lethal ball-and-chain machine.  
(Below left) Bonus points aplenty in Spring Yard's pinball section - bounce Sonic off those bumpers for ten points a time.

**F**rankly, I'm getting a little bored of it all. Mario this and Mario that. The way things are going, the little pest will be addressing us from the Oval Office before we know it. I'm not arguing with the games he stars in - finest quality throughout - it's just I think it's time for a change. A new people's champion. A new hero.

Sega obviously thinks so too. Its latest MegaDrive character is already being groomed for all kinds of Mario-style marketing opportunities. Chances are that this new pretender to the console crown will be propping



up a freeway flyover long before he gets a chance to muscle in on Mario's action - but in the meantime the console debut of *Sonic the Hedgehog* (obviously the result of many a torturous brainstorming session in Sega's marketing department) is a real blinder.

In the classic Mario tradition, Sonic, who's lovely and cute but not entirely unendowed in the special powers department, finds himself battling through a colourful and enemy-infested world in an attempt to rescue his fluffy chums from the clutches of the evil Doctor Eggy. Perils and







when Sonic is travelling at such high speeds, he's more or less invulnerable, simply by virtue of the fact that he's moving so damn fast. He hurtles right over deadly lava pits and abysses and cuts through his adversaries like a hot knife through butter. The only problem is that, at such a tremendous rate of knots, Sonic is likely to miss out on the aforementioned bonuses, which often take care to find.

A nice touch is that Sonic can take things as fast or as slowly as he likes, since there's no time limit to force him towards the goal-line. Instead, a clock ticks upwards, with bonus points awarded for how quickly the level was completed. As a result, the player is given much more opportunity to explore and discover the game's intricacies at leisure, with still some incentive to get a move on - pats on the back all round for that one.

In its attempt to create a game that would do for the MegaDrive what Mario has done for Nintendo, Sega deserves credit for not coming up with just another uninspired clone, but a game that's genuinely original in its approach to the platform genre and still immense fun to play. Admittedly there are infuriating aspects, like the tiresome way in which Sonic sometimes has to negotiate steep hills and the occasionally fiddly control, but these are but minor bumps in what is otherwise a lovely, smooth velvet blanket of playability. It's difficult without being frustrating, addictive without being repetitive and altogether a joy to play.

● Gary Whitta



## THE LEVELS

### GREEN HILL ZONE

Designed as a taster of things to come, so as to ease even the greenest of gamers into the style of *Sonic* gently, the Green Hill looks to be pretty standard stuff - but don't let appearances deceive you. There are plenty of tortuous twists and shortcuts to be found among the vegetation. One of this zone's more interesting features (and one that is used throughout the game), is a loop-the-loop corkscrew that Sonic can only get round if he takes a long run-up and builds up enough speed. Care must be taken when coming out of the loop (invariably at high speed) to not run headfirst into a buffer which could send you flying right back to where you came from. The evil Doctor Egg awaits at the end of the third act in his jet-powered flying machine, bent on stopping you from reaching to the next level. Armed with a hefty ball and chain, he's a pretty touch customer - the only way Sonic can see him off is to use the special raised platforms to jump onto Egg's head. Don't think you've seen the last of him once he's defeated though - he returns at the end of the next, and every other level, with a tougher weapon every time.

### MARBLE ZONE

The style of gameplay changes dramatically for the second zone, where things start to get very Greek in terms of graphic style. In each act, the basic setup is the same: after a few screens of bouncing on aliens heads and running about, the



(Left Top)  
Green Hill Zone  
(Left Middle)  
Starlight Zone  
(Left Bottom)  
Clockwork Zone



Marble Zone

action takes Sonic underground and into more *Rick Dangerous*-style territory. Now it's time to engage those grey cells in the solving of some basic puzzles (using blocks to weight down plungers which in turn open doors and so on) and become even more adept with the joypad as the game starts to throw some really hideous stuff at you for the first time. Jumping across a sea of fire on floating blocks, dodging great spiked weights that descend from the ceiling on chains and keeping ahead of a great column of flame as it pursues you down a narrow corridor is no mean feat. Manage to survive that lot and it's back up to the surface for the final dash to the finish line.

### SPRING YARD ZONE

The third level takes its rather unlikely name from the inordinate amount of springy plungers that are vital to Sonic's progress. Each of the three acts has been built with platforms at such giddy heights and distances that only use of the multitude of bouncy buttons will get Sonic anywhere. There are plenty of original touches in evidence, such as one particularly bizarre scene

where platforms are replaced by Pinball score-bumpers, allowing Sonic to amass a few extra points by using himself as the ball!

### LABYRINTH ZONE

More shades of *Rick Dangerous*, now with a little Strider added to the mix make up this forth level, where the backgrounds are decked out in shiny aztec-style gold and sloping ledges make platform-negotiation skills all the more vital. A new feature makes its entrance here - water! As the tide-level rises, much of the action takes place underwater, with enhanced momentum to provide realistic aquatic movement. Hedgehogs can't breathe underwater, so Sonic must constantly grab bubbles of air as they rise from the seabed in order to top up his oxygen supply. There are no shortage of marine-style bad guys to hamper your progress still further, and as the zone's name suggests the layout of these levels is distinctly maze-like, making it easy to lose your bearings if you don't keep your wits about you.

### STARLIGHT ZONE

Best not to say too much about the later levels, suffice to say that this zone is very spacey and high-tech. Like Spring Yard, bouncy plungers play a big part in propelling Sonic between the many high-rise platforms - and, of course, it's very very hard.

### CLOCKWORK ZONE

The final challenge! As the name suggests, big clunking machinery is the setting here, with Sonic tested to the limit by... well, wait and see.