

BEHIND THE SCREENS AT SEGA OF JAPAN

"THE MAKING OF SONIC THE HEDGEHOG"

He's cute, loveable, ornery, and impatient. Just looking at him on the screen causes you to smile because he has the attitude and looks of a character that is so different, you can't help but like him. Who? It can only be Sonic the Hedgehog.

We fell in love with him back in June of 1990 when he made his public debut at the Tokyo Toy Show. It was only a short running demo but what was there was so different that we had a feeling this game was going to be something special. And we've been chasing after him for a year and finally caught up with him this June. After interviewing the key people behind this super game we find his history is as exciting as is the game.

THE BEST FROM SEGA

It was 1 1/2 years ago. Sega had their new Mega Drive/Genesis system and they wanted to make a game that was to be truly exceptional. It was to show off the capabilities of the system. It was to be Sega's flagship. But it also had to be fun to play for people of all ages.

SONIC THE WOLF...???

The first project was to select a character that would be appealing to everybody. This was done inside



of Sega of Japan. A contest was held, and all the employees of the company were asked to send in a sketch of this new character. There



The finalists in the pick the hero contest!

were over 100 different entries and the four finalists included a bulldog, a wolf, a man with a large moustache and a porcupine-type animal.



The first appearance of a porcupine in a Genesis game was in Alex Kidd.

We all know who won but could you now picture Sonic as being a wolf? The man with the moustache was impressive and he did make it into the game, but not as the hero, rather as the evil Doctor Ivo Robotnik!

DO THE IMPOSSIBLE!

With the character set, it was time to do the game. But it was not to be just an ordinary game, it was to be the best that Sega has ever done. To do this Sega pulled out all the stops and gave the project to the best people they had.

The main people who were responsible for this super game are Mr. Minoru Kanari, Manager, 16-bit Consumer Software Development and Mr. Naoto Ohshima, Chief Character Designer. Six other people worked on the Sonic project including graphic designers, programmers and artists. The music was done by a popular group - Dreams Come True.

GOOD GAMES TAKE TIME!

The directive was that Sonic had to be all new. Not just another action game with a cute character, but this game was to do things that no game has ever done. This would take time. In fact the first 6 months



Mr. Minoru Kanari and Mr. Naoto Ohshima of the Sonic Team.



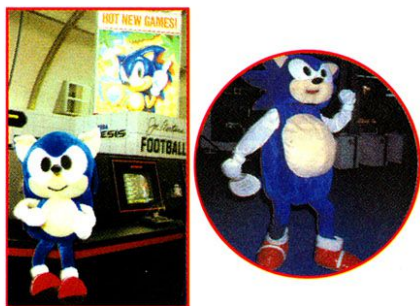
After the shape of Sonic was determined, a clay model was made to assist in the animation.

were devoted to the game concept alone. That's an unusually long time considering that a 'normal' game takes only about 8 months to do the entire project!

With the game laid out, the next year was devoted to make the impossible happen. Sonic was to have incredible speed (as the name implies), the animation had to be perfect - not choppy but smooth. The screen rotation had to be done in software and condensed to fit into a 4 megabit configuration. Secret rooms were built in as was a 'skill' factor. Depending on how fast Sonic would be going off some of the jumps, he would reach various heights where there are different bonuses. Multiple endings were also built into the game to inspire the player to continue playing.

SONIC'S A HIT!

While Sonic made a brief appearance as a self running one screen demo at the 1990 Tokyo Toy Show, it wasn't until the U.S. 1991 Winter Consumer Electronics Show when



Either stuffed or real, U.S. or Japan, Sonic was at every trade show!

Sonic would make his grand debut. And what a grand entrance it was! Virtually every publication, both U.S. and foreign, was thoroughly impressed with the unbelievable action and tricks that were built into the game. We here at EGM were so impressed, that all of the editors unanimously selected Sonic the Hedgehog as the "Game of the Show". And, as we found out later, Sonic was less than 40 percent done at the time of the show!

After the CES Sonic went back to Japan where work continued on the detailing of the game. Additional moves were incorporated into the

game, the animation was fine tuned until it was perfect, and special software algorithms were created just for this game so that the screen rotation sections would be smooth and natural appearing. As all of this was progressing Sonic would take some time off to make an appearance at the various Consumer Software Group shows throughout Japan. And always getting the same results - long lines of interested players waiting just to get a few minutes at playing this sensational soft. Finally, after over 18 months of long hours Sonic was finished. Just in time for the U.S. Summer Consumer Electronics Show. Again, as in January, Sonic drew crowds. But this time he had competition. Mario was back for his fourth adventure. Sega, prepared for the comparison, was undaunted and took the initiative. At their booth, Sega had a



Sega ran a side-by-side comparison with Mario 4 at the CES!

side-by-side comparison of Sonic vs. Mario! From similar comparisons held nationwide, Sega officials stated that over 90 percent of the players who participated in the comparison preferred Sonic to Mario 4.

SONIC GOES PUBLIC

It wasn't much of a surprise but when Sonic appeared in the stores in early June, Sonic literally flew off the store shelves. Sega states that not only is Sonic their best selling U.S. cartridge ever, but worldwide preorders also surpassed even the most optimistic forecasts. Sonic hit Europe around the end of June and appeared in Japan in late July. According to our World Net sources, Sonic is in great demand virtually everywhere in the world! Shortages exist everywhere and Sonic is get-

ting rave reviews by game magazines in every country.



Sonic appeared in Europe shortly after the U.S. introduction!

SONIC DIVERSIFIES

Like any popular character, the Sonic likeness will start appearing elsewhere. In Japan Sonic dolls, fans, comic books and note pads are already out. Also, if you look



Sonic dolls, pads of paper, fans and comic books! Soon he will be everywhere!

close, Sonic makes a cameo appearance in the hit 32 bit arcade game - Rad Mobile - he is hanging on a chain that sways back and forth on the screen. TV isn't out of the realm of possibility and, of course, a sequel video game is already underway as is a Master System and Game Gear 8 bit version of the original cart. One thing that is for sure, Sonic will not fade away into obscurity as Alex Kidd did. Starting in September, Sonic will replace Altered Beast as the pack-in cart with the Genesis System!

It's been a year and a half in the making but it was well worth all of the extra effort. Sega now has a game that not only shows off the capabilities of the system, but is fun to play too!