

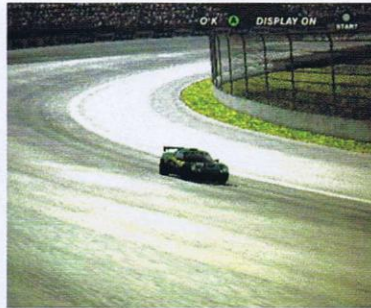
"Definitely some mileage to be had"



△ The obligatory oval circuit. See if you can break the sound barrier or something.



△ You'll need something meatier than this Lotus to crack the lap record here.




△ Just jam the accelerator and steer right a couple of times. Couldn't be easier.



△ Blow up this image on a 32" widescreen telly and you'll see how pixelated it is.

INFO BURST

PUBLISHER NAMCO
 DEVELOPER NAMCO
 RELEASE DATE NOW (JAP/US)
 PLAYERS 1-2
 MEMORY CARD PAGES 2
 GBA LINK-UP NO
 SURROUND SOUND YES
 WIDESCREEN YES
 COST ¥6000 (£32)





R: RACING EVOLUTION

Much more than cars and girls. Well, okay, not *that* much more. It's a driving game...



△ The pit radio gives you useful info, such as 'don't drive past a police car while talking on your mobile'.



△ Old man Chang is going to feel the pain when we shunt him off the course. No car damage, you see.

Come on, admit it – when you first heard this game was being developed by the people behind *Ridge Racer*, you were hoping it would really be the latest addition to that classic arcade series and not a hardcore serious driving sim.

Well, we certainly did. After the excellent *Burnout 2* came along and

AFTER BURNOUT 2 CAME ALONG, WE WANTED NAMCO TO RESPOND WITH A HIGHLY PLAYABLE ARCADE RACER

comprehensively out-ridged *Ridge*, we wanted Namco to respond in kind with a highly playable, insanely fast arcade racer to steal back their crown.

But this, of course, isn't it. This is the *Ridge Racer* team's attempt to outdo *Gran Turismo*, which is probably an



EVENT OMNIBUS

This is the bulk of the game – a shop filled with hundreds of racing challenges ranging from multi-circuit tournaments to highly technical parking challenges. You buy them with the points won by winning other events. After blasting through the *Racing Life* mode on Easy we had more than 600,000 points to blow, and with events costing around 20,000 or so it shouldn't take forever to see them all.

even tougher task to take on than doing a number on *Burnout 2*.

It's suitably big. Although there are only 14 tracks to choose from, there are hundreds of events and challenges to squeeze every bit of value from a wide range of vehicles and a commendably solid handling system.

STEER-JERKING

The controls make great use of the Cube's analogue triggers. Unlike most racing games, jamming the accelerator and brakes won't send you sliding smoothly around a corner. You have to balance the amount of pressure you're applying, depending on the surface you're on and the type of vehicle you're in. Because this is tough to judge at first if you're not used to using the triggers' full range (and few games have done so), power bars at the bottom of the screen show how hard you're pressing. So it isn't the kind of game where you can really start throwing the cars

R: RACING EVOLUTION

A Ridge too far?

DIRECTIONS

You only get these on the rally courses. As is customary, you have a co-driver shouting helpful information to warn you when there's a corner.



TIMING

Discover your split times and see how far ahead of the opposition you are. Then quit and switch it out of Easy mode – that's just no challenge.

Record
60:00:000
Lap Time
0 1:57:866

OPEN ROAD

In rally stages like this one, it's just you and your car versus the clock. The normal race tracks have five competitors to race against, each with a pretty decent level of artificial intelligence. They certainly don't simply roll along a preset line, although you'll have to turn up the difficulty to see the best stuff.

POWER METERS

These bars show how much power you're applying to the brake and accelerator pedals. It's not all that useful thanks to the Gamecube's squeazy triggers.



SLIDING OUT

For some reason it's very tricky to get the car to slide like you want it to, even on dirt tracks. Turning off the ABS and braking assistance helps, but don't expect Burnout-style sliding fun.



around after a couple of quick practice laps. With depressing inevitability, pushing it too hard results in an ungainly spin or a trip across the grass.

If you prefer, you can also use the C-stick to control the accelerator and brake, although this means you won't be able to apply both at the same time.

The courses are a mixture of real Grand Prix tracks and fantasy street circuits. We could have done with a bigger selection of both, to be honest, but at least what's there is nicely done. Racing game veterans will probably be sick of seeing the narrow streets of Monaco rendered up yet again (presumably developers can just buy the model off the shelf), and the Suzuka track is another standard fixture in this sort of thing.

Happily, there's definitely some mileage to be had out of experimenting with inappropriate combinations of courses and cars. As you might expect, putting something like a hopped-up



RACING LIFE

Life as a racing lady is tough, particularly when you're an extremely fit former ambulance driver with a penchant for dressing in jumpsuits that are just a little too tight to zip up past your bra. Men don't respect your driving skills (at least, not until you run them off the road) and women try to get one up on you by dressing in even tighter leather overalls. Still, at least you can relax in a nice, steamy shower cut-scene. Oh, Namco...

Dodge drag racer on anything other than a straight piece of road or a competition sports car onto a dusty rally track results in some interesting spins and a nerve-wracking battle with the controls. To get the best out of it you're really going to need a decent steering wheel. While the standard Gamecube controller is perfectly usable, the game just seems to make more sense when you're wrestling with a nicely sprung wheel and stomping hard on a couple of good, solid pedals. It's a game you really need to fight against before the controls and the physics system really click.

The differences between the types of vehicle are a big help with the learning process. If you can take a powerful single-seater smoothly around the oval track and a



"Take the cheekiest shortcuts"

LIFE'S A DRAG

As well as the usual sort of driving events, you also get drag racing. That's just a straight bit of road with up to four opponents blasting down it as quickly as possible. The skill comes in timing the start and working the gears. Manual shifting is a significant advantage here.



△ Bang! You don't get penalised at all for smashing into your competitors. Sometimes you might get unlucky and the contact will make you spin out, but it's mostly to your advantage.



△ No, you can't smash those fences down. They're made of solid anti-matter.



nippy little sports model around one of the Grand Prix circuits, you're pretty much qualified to take on the rally courses.

THAT'S YOUR PLOT

The game is split into two main modes. The first one, a sort of Story mode called Racing Life, is broken into 14 chapters linked by some reasonably good cut-scenes. You play a lady ambulance driver who becomes a would-be racing star. A tale of racing rivalry unfolds as you progress through the tournaments, although the pre-rendered FMV doesn't allow you to do anything to affect



CLASSIC CARS

You'll really notice the difference if you go straight from the modern racing machines to the vintage vehicles. After enjoying the benefits of four-wheel drive and traction control, the old cars seem almost undrively tail-happy, sliding all over the place if you're a bit heavy on the accelerator. There's a little Fiat 500 in there, which is the only one that's genuinely simple to handle.

the overall plot. You can persistently ram your rivals into the advertising hoardings, take the cheekiest shortcuts across the run-off areas to skip slow chicanes at Monaco and Suzuka, and generally drive like a stock car racer, but the resulting cut-scene won't reflect your actions. It's extremely easy to finish on the default Easy mode, so we'd definitely advise turning the difficulty up once you've won a few races. You can do this at any time during the game, even during the breaks between races in a tournament.

The second big mode is the Event Omnibus, which is a mish-mash of driving challenges such as single races, racing tournaments and the kind of stuff you have to do to win your licence in Gran Turismo - stopping within a marked area and so on. You have to purchase the events one by one, paying for them with the points you win by driving well or winning races. To maximise your points potential you'll



CRUNCH TIME

Feeling the pressure yet? Let the computer drivers know you're on their tail...



■ As you approach a computer-controlled car, a bar pops up showing how calm the driver is feeling. An interesting touch.



■ The closer you get, the more pressure he'll feel. Overtake and he'll go back to feeling fine, but stay on his exhaust pipe for a while...



■ ...And he'll get so panicked, a driving mistake becomes inevitable. Laugh as he spins out on a corner or crashes into the barrier.

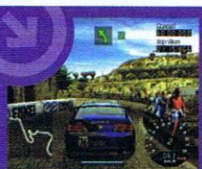
need to make use of the game's best feature – the pressure meter.

TIRE PRESSURE

The computer drivers all have built-in personalities, and you can apply pressure to force them into mistakes. The closer you drive, the more pressure they feel, and the more points you rack up. When you've had enough of driving in somebody's slipstream and your rival is feeling truly worried, you can pull out to overtake and force him to make a total hash of his race.

Drivers who've been nobbled like this tend to fall way back down the field, and if you do it a few times during a race not only will you win by miles, you'll have earned enough style points from your bullying tactics to buy large chunks of the Event Omnibus.

This is all great stuff but what lets the game down is its lack of genuine speed thrills. We wanted the cheek-flapping pace of *Burnout* or *Need For*



CROWD CONTROL

Disappointingly, the trackside spectators in the rally sections are just flat cardboard cutouts. While you won't notice them too much as you speed past them, it's glaringly obvious in screenshots and if you bump into a barrier. Simple 3D models would have looked much better – the crapness of the bystanders highlights the fact that *R: Racing Evolution* isn't the greatest-looking driving game ever.

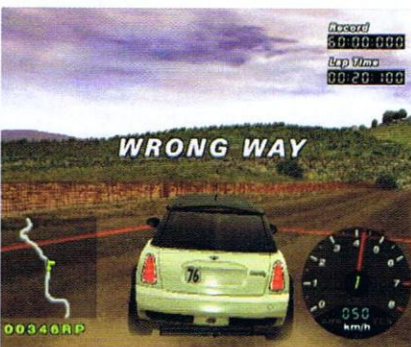
R: RACING EVOLUTION

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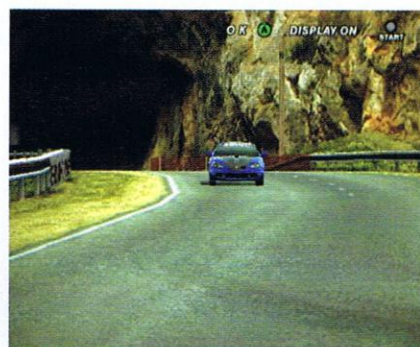


SEE THAT AGAIN

As you'd expect, *R: Racing Evolution* has the full range of replay cameras to enjoy your exploits after a hard-won race. You have to accept whichever one the game chooses as it cycles through them. We do like a bit of shaky heli-cam in a racing game, but it's a shame you don't get a nice interior view so you can admire the fur-trimmed steering wheel and Alpine CD player.



▲ It's a high-speed parking challenge.



▲ If this were 20% faster it would be loads better.

Speed Underground, but at times *R: Racing Evolution* looks pedestrian. Fighting your way up from the back of the pack is a lot of fun but there are only five opponents on the track, and once you're out in front the race is effectively over.

Watching the replays, the only time you'll be convinced that the car is actually travelling at 180mph is when

Gamecube title that genuinely looks better on a little portable set, via an RF lead. It's barely any better looking than *Ridge Racer V*, which was one of the PS2 launch games absolutely ages ago.

So it's hard to get into, nowhere near as fast as it should be, and hardly the greatest looker to boot. But for some reason we've enjoyed playing *R: Racing Evolution* rather a lot. Not as much as

PROBABLY THE ONLY GAMECUBE TITLE THAT GENUINELY LOOKS BETTER ON A PORTABLE TELLY

the camera switches to a super-low bumper view, which isn't available while you're playing the game.

And while the car models are very nice, the rest of the graphics have a horrible unfiltered grainy look that's totally hideous if you're using a decent telly. This is probably the only

we enjoyed thrashing around in *Burnout 2*, obviously, but the fact that there's a lot of driving skill to learn counts highly in its favour. Not to mention that it's the only game of its type on Gamecube too. Number one in a field of one.

MARTIN KITTS



- Loads of cars.
- Plenty to unlock.
- Several different driving styles.



- Grainy graphics.
- Familiar tracks.
- Not the most accessible game.



IF YOU LIKE THIS...

Need For Speed Underground

EA
NGC/88 77%
Very long, a bit jerky, and much easier to handle.



6 VISUALS

The bigger your TV, the more obvious the pixellated graphics.

7 SOUNDS

A handful of pretty abstract tunes and lots of speech.

7 MASTERY

Well, it's nice and smooth, running at 60fps. Thank you.

8 LIFESPAN

Tons to do, and a fairly complicated driving model to master.

VERDICT

Not brilliant, not bad at all. As long as you're not expecting *Ridge Racer*, *Burnout* or a *Gran Turismo* beater, you'll have fun with this one.

NGC
INDEPENDENT NINTENDO GAMING

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DID YOU KNOW? Of the 206 bones in the human body, 106 are in the hands and feet. Which are, um, what you use to drive a car. Interesting, no?