

Virtual Racing **Chassis**

John Gregorio takes a ride in the VRC, the brainchild of former road-racer Bob Earl—so how does it measure up?

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First Look

I have been ripping around the tracks in all of my favorite sims (*Forza Motorsport 2*, *NASCAR '09*, *rFactor*, and *Arca Sim Racing*) using [Bob Earl's Virtual Racing Chassis](#) (VRC). Bob Earl is a retired road racer who won the 1973 Formula Ford National Championship, and the 1981 Formula Atlantic Macau Grand Prix. He drove the Nissan Performance Technologies GTP car to victories in Miami, Watkins Glen, and Sebring in the early 1990's, and is currently a freelance driver coach and instructor at the

Jim Russell School at Infineon Raceway. Needless to say, when he decided to design the Virtual Racing Chassis, it's no surprise that he designed a simple, effective, functional, and comfortable rig that reflects his years of racing experience.

True-to-life racing seats for home use are nothing new, and the market is full of potential suitors for every sim-racer. Some seats come in the form of high-priced full motion racing rigs costing thousands of dollars, and others are made to appeal to a broader market, both in

terms of design and price. The range today is so full that there is little reason if you (yes, you, sitting there with your wheel attached to your desk) don't have one yet.

For the casual racer, an affordable, easily stowed racing seat that still meets the needs of 'sim racing immersion' is generally the way to go. Bob Earl has created the Virtual Racing Chassis to be an affordable solution to the family room racers conundrum—space, or the lack thereof. If the VRC looks as if it sits low, and in a reclined 'racing' position, that's because Bob has designed his unit to emulate the racing position found in most racing formats.

Bob Earl's company, Bob Earl Racing, offers an affordable sim-chassis that is pre-assembled and delivered directly to your door in short order. The Virtual Racing Chassis is available with either a black or red frame along with a black/silver seat cover. I opened the enormously large shipping box (a fully assembled race rig needs a large box ... it was so big; it could have doubled as a coffin!) to discover that Bob thankfully sent me the red VRC, as the black seemed a bit—boy-racer—to me. The design of the VRC is so efficient that it was only a matter of minutes (about ten) before I had my wheel attached, and was ready to go racing.

The VRC has the looks of a quality build, and the feel of the thing backs that up. The chair is comfortable and low to the floor—which makes getting into it feel rather authentic! The chair itself is a fiberglass racing bucket that is dressed in vinyl with a foam pad behind it for extra comfort during those long endurance races. The pleated vinyl seat shell is stretched over the fiberglass bucket and secured with a nylon draw string.

There's a heel pad that is included which fits at the base of the pedal plate so that your feet are sitting comfortably while using the pedals. Without it, the pedal position feels awkward.



The wheel itself sits on an adjustable wheel plate that can be raised or lowered to your individual liking by twisting a knob loose, and pulling the plate up, or pushing it down. The same thing applies to the chassis length adjustment knobs: They allow you to adjust distance between your seat and the foot plates making the chair easily adjustable for children and adults alike. The pedal support has an adjustable range of twenty-one inches, and the steering support moves higher and farther from the driver simultaneously to accommodate the taller competitors. With this range of adjustment, the VRC will fit racers ranging from four foot all the way to a towering six-foot-six. The VRC is about as good as it gets when it comes to comfort and adjustability, while offering you an authentic seating position.

When fully compressed, the VRC measures a paltry 47" x 21" x 21". It can be stored standing on end, with wheel and pedals attached, and thus stored it occupies a minuscule three-and-a-half square feet of floor (or closet for married guys) space. Great news for apartment dwellers, or those who have limited space in their office/game room.

On The Flip Side

A larger racing wheel, such as the Thrustmaster Rally GT Pro (see Vol4 Num3 for a full review on the wheel) does not adequately tighten down to the racing wheel plate, and will require some sort of modification to keep the racing wheel from slipping around while racing.

If you are an owner of the Logitech G25, you have nothing to worry about, though: The VRC comes with pre-drilled holes for the pedals and wheel, and the six-millimetre bolts are supplied along with the instruction-guide. You can also purchase—separately—a G25 shifter mount.



So Who Is Bob Earl?

Bob Earl started racing in 1972 and has since established himself as one of the most competitive drivers in North America, as well as an excellent test driver and driver coach. Earl's major successes include:

24 career victories in the International Motor Sports Associations Camel GT Series (in 86 starts)

—Two victories and one second in six attempts in the 24 hours of Daytona

—One Victory and three seconds in five attempts in the 12 hours of Sebring

—13 Solo Camel GT victories

—Macau Grand Prix Champion

—Formula Ford National Champion.

—2001-current-Freelance Driver Coach, Invented the Virtual Racing Chassis, Lead instructor for Jim Russell Racing School Mechanics Training Program

—2000-To Present—Freelance Driver Coach, Oversees the Mechanics Training Program at the Jim Russell School at Infineon Raceway in Northern Calif. Invented and sells the Virtual Racing Chassis

—1996-2000—Started and was Director of instruction for the Derek Daly Performance Driving Academy, also the chief coach in the Team Kool Green Academy driver search



In the package that comes along with the rig, you will also find the ever-dependable Velcro straps that you can use to keep your pedals from moving around, and additional Velcro is included to be used to organize and keep your power chords from sticking out from the chair. There's definitely a lot of thought that went into this baby, but ... you need to make sure you check their website here to establish whether your wheel/pedal configuration is supported with the VRC because, while Velcro is an amazing thing, it is not substitute for a solidly-attached pedal-unit. You can check your compatibility [here](#).

Once I had the cables secured to the chassis, all that was left to do was to put the footrest next to the pedals, and I was ready to burn rubber.

Final Thoughts

I have been using the VRC off and on since I received it and I must admit it feels solid in all aspects while I am turning laps at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve. I haven't used it

in official sanctioned races yet, however, as getting used to the new racing position is taking some time.

Overall, I would highly recommend the Virtual Racing Chassis to anyone who wants to take their racing experience to a new level. It's not an expensive motion simulator, it doesn't fold away under your bed, and no, it doesn't have a cup holder. But if you are ready to kick your racing experience up a notch, pick up Bob Earl's Virtual Racing Chassis as it adds another level of enjoyment to all of your racing experiences. The racing chair will work with most racing wheels that are on the market today as well as those that may be coming in the near future.

With our new generation of motor-sport simulations, the time has never been better to invest in a race rig that will both their entertainment and performance. I like the fact that the chair can be put away when not in use as it crunches down to about three feet in seconds. I also like the price. Another feature that the VRC adds is its shape: It has no sharp edge on which you—or more importantly your kids—could get injured, and thus makes this unit ideal for home use. Oh, and I almost forgot to add—this chair is *light*, and can be picked up and moved around with ease if you need to move it around while cleaning (not that anyone cleans your race-room, right?) or storage.

The Virtual Racing Chassis will run you about \$299 with an additional range of \$25-\$55 for the Western U.S. to \$45-\$70 for the Eastern U.S. depending on where you live—did I say it comes in a big box? Aside from the chassis and shipping, you may need/want to purchase additional accessories. Items include a monitor stand (\$99.00), G25 shifter adaptor (\$45.00), and an extra wide seat (\$99).

A check of the Bob Earl Racing website shows that the red chassis is on sale for a \$50 discount. Good looks, style, and less expensive, and for the price of a VRC last month, you can now throw in a G25 shifter adaptor. Still here?

PROS

- Compact design with no assembly required
- Lightweight assembly for easy storage
- High-quality construction using powder-coated steel frame
- Large, comfortable bucket seat—wide seat option available at extra cost
- Velcro strap cable management
- Works with most PC or console wheel and pedal sets that use a table-top clamping system
- Fits racers from small kids to 6'6" adults

CONS

- No seat angle adjustment—it's a true-to-life racing position with adjustable wheel and pedal positions
- Low seat height means 'climbing' in and out of the chair

FEATURES

- 0.7cm fiberglass racing-style bucket seat with pleated and padded flame and perspiration-resistant vinyl for comfort
- Rugged, steel frame with durable, powder-coat finish and nylotron sleeves for easy adjustment
- Easy to store and no assembly required
- Heel Riser Pad
- Shifter Adapter available
- Monitor Stand available
- For ages 8 and up; supports driver height up to 6' 6"

PLATFORM

- Compatible with most table-top steering wheel and pedal sets for PCs and consoles (for a list of VRC-compatible wheels)
- Available Colors: Black or Red
- Dimensions: 47 x 21 x 21 inches fully compressed (L x W x H)
- Weight: 22 lbs (10 kg)

PRICE

U.S.\$299