



AUTOSIMSPORT

Volume 3 Number 7

Slidin the Sport into the Sim

WE GET INSIDE *VIRTUAL GRAND PRIX 3*



110 PAGE HOLIDAY ISSUE WITH:

LATEST ON *IRACING*

RACE07 REVIEW

AND—*NOT AGAIN!*—ANOTHER OPEN LETTER TO SIMBIN!

PLUS *SO MUCH MORE!*



Turismo Carretera Review



**Blimey! Ian Bell's Had A
Kart Attack!**



OBUTTO OZONE REVIEW



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Virtual Grand Prix 3 promises to be a mix between rFactor's modability, nKPro's physics, and a Live For Speed-like business model ... all combined in a brilliant simulator ... we test the beta on page 18 ...

AUTOSIMSPORT HeadOpEd

LxMartini

Another Year ...

Well, here we are, another year, another chance to look back at the 365 days that passed in a flash ... Sim-wise, it's been the poorest year since the early days of this century, with only two simulators released: SimBin's *RACE07*, and 2Pez's *Turismo Carretera*, both of which are reviewed in this issue.

Image Space Inc.'s aging engine has ruled the roost for five years now, with only two sims since 2003 released featuring anything other than ISI's physics engine: And both simulators this year feature yet another outing for the moto-engine.

But it appears as if the engine's days as the choice spec' for major sim-developers may be numbered, with *iRacing.com* coming in the spring (see inside this issue), Blimey!Games' in-house engine powering *Project Falcon* (also coming sometime next year, see inside this issue), and SimBin's own engine reputedly to be featured on their next sim. This promises much for the genre next year (in theory, anyway); as long, that is, as all the developers get it right, because another year like this one, and the community may well be close to folding.

Mods Of The Year!

In the meantime, as we wait for the evolutions and (promised) revolutions, we have been kept alive—and thrilled—by mods that are, in many ways, far better than anything we have been able to buy in a box (virtual or otherwise) for quite some time now. *AUTOSIMSPORT* is proud to have been involved in some small way with three of what I personally think are amongst the most important mods ever created: GPC's GP79, and the Mercedes 196 for *rFactor*, and the Power & Glory mod for *GTR2* (see inside this issue for what you can expect when the GTLWorkshop release their next chapter).

We are not running a 'best-of' this year because, firstly, we don't have the time, and secondly, because ... well, we have decided to do something a little different (and perhaps better) this year (see the next issue!) but ... if I had to choose between these three mods, I'd have to choose ...

Hard

And unfair ... so I won't choose. Instead, I'd like to wish everyone great 'holidays', New Year, and so forth. January the thirteenth will see this magazine celebrate the start of its fourth year, and in that time, we have had so many wonderful guys and gals send us articles, as well as good wishes, help, and support ...

I wish I had a list, but since I don't, I'd rather not start thanking individuals because I'd miss someone out and feel like hell for it—so let me just say, on behalf of myself, and all of us at *AUTOSIMSPORT*, that we are all immensely grateful ... and we continue to be grateful to those (nearing thirty—out of over a quarter of a million individual downloads) who have given us their generous contributions.

And finally, we should not forget the 'silent majority' who read this magazine every month: Without you, we would have no ads (not that we have many, but we'd have zero!), and obviously no motivation to continue ...

Those Who I Must Thank

There are, however, a group of guys who I cannot allow (Jees, this is beginning to sound like the {I said 'the', not 'a'} Queen's Speech!) to pass without mention, since, as I said at the onset of this rambling thing, this is always a time to look back in order to see forward: So, many thanks as always to Bob Simmerman, Jon Denton, and Lou Magyar who, along with myself, have been involved with this magazine since the very-very first issue in one way or another.

It's an odd thing, for a sentimentalist like myself, to see how this magazine has grown through the last three years ... was a time when a call to a sim-developer would go largely unnoticed ... and sending someone to a Champ Car race was unattainable ... and yet, here we are, with a magazine that enjoys a certain amount of prestige, and all of it as a result of a little project we started on the side one night in November, 2004 ... so, thank you very much to all—each of you that have helped us along the way, and continue to do so, because this was a team effort, and, one hopes, we will see you all next year for what is shaping up to be a Renaissance!

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
HAPPY NEW YEAR
FROM ALL AT
AUTOSIMSPORT
TO SEE WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU
IN THE NEW YEAR, CONTACT
GREG HAGLUND**

Gentlemen Start Your Engines!



GoGamer
.com



News

Got Milk? ... Got Juice?
[Then send it to us!](#)



Powering The Glory

Bob Simmerman

At an undisclosed time, and location, a few of us magazine types {*that's a font of knowledge in a pun—urgh, it must be the holidays—Ed*}—as well as a couple of normal folks—got together for a bit of retro' action at Anderstorp using what many consider to be *the* mod of 2007: The Power & Glory mod for *GTR2*.

Even a certain Mr. Mahood at *PC Gamer* magazine dedicated his entire Sim-Column to the mod this month ... but he, like the rest of us (until the test), had no idea how much better this mod is about to get (looks like an end of January release): Although the Lotus Elan was the final car for all but one runner in the test, take it from me; the Ford GT40 MK II is one awesome piece of modding machinery. From the tasty rumble under the hood to the glistening paint job, the MK II is just one of the many new additions due to arrive for part two of the Power & Glory mod.

Being a massive fan of the outstanding *GT Legends*, I am left nearly speechless at what the properly modeled—as in time period correct tyres, suspension, chassis, and brakes (tricky!)—cars of yesteryear give to the user in *GTR2*-world. From the smoky exhausts to the colossal body roll through the turns, this is nothing short of impending greatness; toss in the possibility of rain, and what you have is one of the best times you're likely to experience in sim-racing this—or indeed any other—year. Further, when you consider the fact you can now have a look at what Colin Chapman could only dream of—in depth MoTeC telemetry graphs and charts—it becomes abundantly clear your *GTR2* box just got a whole lot heavier.

You need the *GTLegends* disk to install this beauty, but what self-respecting hardcore simmer doesn't already have a copy? If you need one, though, you can ask an Italian friend to buy this month's *The Games Machine* which features a free-copy of the SimBin title along with the magazine. Or head to your nearest Best Buy in the U.S., where I still see it bundled with *GTR2* for under

twenty bucks. (I should note, though, that I have been unable to confirm whether either will work with the P&G mod, 'though I can't see any reason why not). If you're unable to go either of these routes, there is always the ultra-reliable and always stocked-up [GoGamer.com](#).

Now I know you don't trust me, but trust me: When part two of the P&G trilogy releases, you're going to hate yourself if you don't have a copy of *GTL* at hand ... so do yourself a favour, get one now. (For those who hate StarForce, don't worry: the P&G mod doesn't actually need you to have *GTL* installed, it just requires the disk in the tray so it can confirm you actually own the title since so many of its cars—but not all—are based on *GTL*.)

The guys at the [GTL Workshop](#) are definitely in command of their talents, folks, this one is off the hook!



James Bond Had Nothing On This!

AUTOSIMSPORT

Here is a rather nice piece of kit: It makes the news because it's just so nerdy as to actually be kinda cool ... click [here for a youtube video](#) and, if you're in a hurry to get back to the mag', fast-forward two minutes and thirty seconds ...



The Hills Are Alive ... With The Sounds Of GTR2!

Bob Simmerman

I tell you, not even the hard knocks of life can keep this guy down—MethylEthyl has released yet another of his amazing works of sound, this time for the beasts and beauties of GTR2. To be found at his site—[The Sounds of Sims](#)—this is another in a long line of must-haves from one of the community's best. Thanks again, MethylEthyl! Keep your eye on AUTOSIMSPORT for a much more detailed look at the man behind the sounds in a future issue.

DTM 2005 For Grand Prix4 Released

Bob Simmerman

Tony shot me a message and gave me the great news; the [DTM 2005 mod](#) is out! The very same mod we previewed in these pages can now be yours at a click of the mouse, this is must-have for those in need of a non-open-wheel fix for their Grand Prix 4 installs. Also available is a track-pack featuring all of the tracks of the 2005 DTM season.

Both items are a snap to install with the ZaZ tools, so there is no excuse for just sitting there—go get it! In the meantime, all you'll be missing if me thanking Tony, Konstantin, Mark, Ulf, Jorge, Alien@work of GSMF, jimbobl, Ruboy, Schaller, TTM, ZaZ Lo2k, Erik, Kev, Jason, and all the others I am no doubt missing for their continued dedication to this all-too-often overlooked simulator.

To the Polls

Bob Simmerman

Get on your soapbox and let your voice be heard as the voting for Mod of The Year is now taking place at the best rFactor site on the planet, [rFactorCentral](#). But it won't be easy as this year has seen several mods stand head-and-shoulders above even the highest commercial ventures. Make sure to take a few moments to tally your vote.

Sim-Racing Gets Into Autosport Magazine

Ivan Askew

Autosport's double-issue—"The Best of 2007"—features two pages on the history of sim-racing, following its roots from the land of classic arcades to its evolution into consoles and PCs. Not a bad article, and the GP79 mod gets a mention, too, as do RACE, and rFactor. On the other hand, the title of the console-section—"Console Yourself"—sounds like a direct rip-off from this magazine's console special issue; now how dare AUTOSPORT copy AUTOSIMSPORT, eh? Some people have no class ... next they'll have a Fifth Column as well ...

The Mercedes Benz 196—First Encounter

Jeff Reid

Mercedes Benz World Racing from Syntec/TDK, released in 2003, includes a version of the W196. I made a video with the W196, and also another classic, the W154, at Hockenheim Ring.

This game, and its sequel, *World Racing 2*, were unusual in that the terrains were truly 3D, allowing a

driver to drive off-track to explore the environment. In addition, the tracks varied from fairly short to quite long, and there were a lot of them; so many, in fact, that I doubt any player ever learned them all.

Here are three videos of these sims in action: [The 196](#), [the 154](#), and [a fast car from World Racing 2](#) on one of the short tracks.

Home Simulator Company Releases Home Simulator Pro And SIM Racer 4000

Press Release

High performance racing and gaming simulator delivers like never before; built to industrial specs for rugged durability and real-to-life game play.

Whether gamers are looking for the next level in their gaming experience or simply want the best equipment out there, when it comes to gaming, [the Home Simulator Company](#) is simply as powerful and as real as it gets. To experience the feel and full effects intended by the game developers—gamers have purchased flat screens, driving wheels and sound systems; most have relied upon \$35 control pads to play their racing games—the Home Simulator Company delivers unparalleled gaming recreation.

Home Simulator Pro

A high-performance, commercial quality home racing simulator—the Home Simulator Pro—is being made available from Home Simulator Company. A thrilling addition to the game room, anyone ready to turn a game into reality can do so with the Home Simulator Pro:

—Sit down and feel the roar of the engine shaking every nerve as the 1000 watts of power throttle through the body.

—Experience every bump and jolt with the three customizable force feedback modules.

—Get inside the action with the close proximity video monitor and the full digital 5.1 —Surround Sound (10 inch subwoofer) wrapping drivers up in the game.



The advent of the Pro Simulator from the Home Simulator Company allows gamers to leverage the tens of millions of dollars companies have spent on state-of-the-art software development to be able to sit down and drive like they are actually in a car and to use their home entertainment center to get the feel of a real racecar. The Pro Simulator is ready for action into the future, as newer and more sophisticated software comes out.

Users can race without limitations and own every racecar ever made with Home Simulator Pro: the system eliminates the need to buy a race car, pay insurance, get limited track time, have spouse troubles, and jeopardize life. People who own racecars can practice and get to know authentic race tracks even better. For the price of a set of tires, anyone can own a simulator.

Jeff Ostler, president of Home Simulator Company, states, "The future of gaming is in the peripheral period, and we have made the best peripheral in the industry.

Compare what you actually get, and our simulator is quite a bargain. Other systems may look the same and tout the same features but their performance is far inferior. Simulators on an equivalent level cost up to \$50,000 and don't offer you as fulfilling an experience as our simulators can."

- One hundred percent upgradeable. Easily Upgrade the Console, Wheel, Pedals or Display.
- One hundred percent customizable. Take Full Control of the Force Feedback, Sound System and Positioning.
- Fully Adjustable. Custom Seat Moves Back and Forth. The Pedals Move Up and Down.
- 1,000 Watts of Digital 5.1 Surround Sound. Live the Game with Full Surround Sound.
- Compatible with PC's, Xbox, Xbox 360, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Systems
- Sim Racer 4000: A powerful home simulator at an unbelievable price; designed with the home gamer in mind.

The Sim Racer 4000 is a significant advancement in the entry price level of home gaming simulators. The Sim Racer 4000 is an incredible simulator, incorporating many of the same features found in the Home Simulator Pro at a price everyone can afford. The chair is completely adjustable and can fold up into a compact size for easy storage. The built-in Force-Feedback and available 5.1 surround sound package put gamers in the game while the available display stand makes it easy to get close to the action with the monitor of choice. Among these amazing features are:

- Adjustable Force-Feedback Rumbler in the Seat
- Digital 5.1 Surround Sound
- Folds Down for Easy Storage
- Sturdy Metal Frame
- Accommodates small children and adults up to 6'8"
- Parks easily in front of entertainment centers or wall-mount monitors
- Compatible with PC's, Xbox, Xbox 360, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Systems



iRacing—Spring Release—Somewhere Near \$500

According to Steven Cole Smith writing in the Orlando Sentinel, we can expect a spring debut for the most anticipated sim in history (no, really). Dave Kaemmer's John Henry-funded simulator also—according to this article—will be pay-to-play (or some sort of subscription service), with a cost of 'less than \$500 a year'.

Smith also reports that sixty tracks have been given the laser treatment (at \$100,000 per track), but, more intriguingly, it seems as if there will be no download or, indeed, CD involved—Smith reports that the simulator will be updated when the user goes online with every session, and that iRacing.com's simulator will *not* reside in the user's hard-drive ... it will be a completely online sim. This means that tracks will be constantly updated, as will cars, and so forth.

Congratulations to Mr. Smith, who seems quite unaware that he's just revealed more details in [his one article](#) than any other media outlet has reported in the three years that we've been waiting for this sim!

Bob Simmerman's Humiliation—Made Public

I was well and truly humiliated at the first ever Sim Racing Tonight and AUTOSIMSPORT media day event at the lovely Nordschlieff.

I think I may have told Darin before the race that I was a little rusty, but to be honest, I think there are centuries-old sunken ships with less corrosion. Humility aside *{and Bob was humbled, finishing in a strong fourth place—out of four runners ... —Ed}*, it was a great race, no matter how much video evidence of my lacking skills exists! But make no mistake—a rematch is in the cards, and this time I get to pick the mod and track ... I wonder how the weather is in South Africa...? Make sure to check out Episode Five over at Sim Racing Tonight for the full story, and a whole lot more. Many thanks to Darin, and Shaun for their innovative and well done broadcasts!

**Grid Motor-Sports**

The GM Admin Team

We're proud to announce the (imminent) release of the first publicly available version of the [Grid Motor-sports](#) software. To coincide with that, we're officially unveiling our new website and would like to cordially invite all of our drivers to come over and check out the new digs. Register a login for yourself, you'll soon be putting it to good use, and make yourself at home. Once you've registered, check out the survey that we've prepared, for the express purpose of soliciting your opinion on nearly everything regarding the league and its operations. Take your time, though, you don't have to fill it out all at once—we're more interested in quality feedback than quick feedback (the survey will save your progress and you can submit it whenever you're done). Perhaps the most utilitarian part of the website right now is the forum, so be sure to visit that and get comfortable with it. Due to the increased feature set

available with a forum, we'd like to have the majority of league discussions occur inside the forum. That's not to say we're discouraging use of our reliable Google list, just that we think everyone will appreciate the effect that the forums will have on our ability to collaborate and have fun. In particular, it makes a perfect host for team-based discussions that have had the tendency to fall off the Google list because of the recognition that not everybody cares to hear the day-to-day chatting of the various team members amongst themselves. To facilitate this, we've already established dedicated forum sections for each team. The forum fully supports attachments, so it's the perfect place to stash setups and MoTeC files, etc. A really neat feature of the forum is that it will notify anyone who's already participated in a thread whenever a new reply is posted to the thread. Also, new threads will trigger an email notification to the Google list, so we'll all easily get exposure to thread activity without having to manually babysit it on a regular basis. The notification system that we have available is very powerful, and we'll continue to tweak our usage of it over time, based on feedback and as we discover how we all tend to use the website.

Having said this, however, please recognize that there is a tremendous amount of new systems and configuration involved in the website and we're bound to have gotten any number of things setup incorrectly or inadequately. Please notify us immediately if something doesn't work for you, either at all or in the manner that you expect. In all likelihood we'll be able to remedy it quickly.

We sincerely hope that this is the beginning of a very enjoyable and productive internet presence for our league, and we look forward to providing more and better services for our members and in establishing a premiere destination for friendly sim-racing enthusiasts like those that are already part of the Grid Motor-sports family.

Endurance Touring Car Series 2007 Mod PART 1 Released

DrivingItalia.net

The S.R.M. Team has [announced](#) the release of the 2007 Endurance Touring Car Mod for *GTR2* at *DrivingItalia.net*. The mod includes all fifteen teams from the recently completed ETCS 2007 Championship, and these (below) are only some of the featured cars: ([Download Here](#))

ARSENIO CORSE BMW M3 E46 3.2 VER.2007
DULLER MOTORSPORT BMW M3 E46 3.2 VER.2007
EDM MOTORSPORT BMW M3 E46 3.2 VER.2006
W&D RACING TEAM BMW M3 E46 3.2 VER.2007
SRM RACING BMW M3 E46 3.2 VER.2006
WHEELS RACING BMW M3 E46 3.0 VER.2007
ZEROCINQUE MOTORSPORT BMW E46 3.0
BMW TEAM MILLENIUM BMW E90 330D VER.2007
SUPERCHALLENGE BMW E46 2.0
BARBIERI RACING ALFA 156 GTA
SCUDERIA DEL PORTELLO ALFA 156 GTA
BD RACING SEAT LEON MKII 2.0
I.R.M. RACING SEAT LEON MKII 2.0
SEAT SPORT ITALIA SEAT LEON MKII 2.0
TEAM MILLENIUM SEAT LEON MKII 2.0
WS RACING SEAT LEON MKI 2.0

Rumours, Tittle-Tattle, And Worthless Data ...

Ivan Askew

Regular readers will be well aware of my great affinity for Lewis Hamilton: In fact, I have now read all (eight) biographies, and have come away mightily impressed at how the greatest driver that ever turned a wheel in any form of motorized sport in the history of the universe (period) managed to blow the biggest lead in the history of Formula One to lose this year's championship by one point. Well, second biggest, actually—the biggest would be James Hunt's come-back in 1976, although that, of course, was aided in no small measure by Lauda's shunt at the 'Ring. Eventual 2007 Champion Kimi R. was down some thirty points after the U.S Grand Prix, and down what should have been an insurmountable eighteen (with twenty at play) with two races left to run ... and yet Lewis found a way to lose the title, and in so doing set a record which I suspect he will hold for some time to come ... chokes like this do not come along every generation.

I am even more impressed by the fact that Lewis not only cost his team one hundred million dollars in his rookie year (if he'd not—allegedly—reneged on the deal with Alonso in Hungary, the Spaniard would never have gone to the FIA with the emails that eventually—did I say allegedly?—formed the backbone of the case against McLaren in the

worst spying case ever seen in professional sports), but then managed to annoy the team's number one driver to such an extent that even he—after a run of two successive championship wins against the most successful driver in the history of the sport—landed up throwing away the championship in complete frustration. So, in one season (or season one) Lewis cost McLaren a one hundred million dollar fine, the drivers and constructors championships worth who knows how many more millions—not to mention the loss of all constructor points that will see McLaren enjoy the absolute worst pit-spots at every race next season (the pit in Monaco is apparently somewhere in France)—and the desertion from McLaren of probably the best driver of his generation, two-time world champion Alonso. Now bad for one season in Formula One, eh!

Of course Lewis' epic season made him the darling of the British media (so much so that Martin Brundle, ITV commentator, is now being sued by the FIA for his article in *The Times* that suggested the sport's governing body was conducting a witch hunt against McLaren), a love-affair that saw him land—or so it was widely reported—a fat, plum deal with EA Sports that, according to reports, bought the rights to Lewis' (holy) image in a deal with a fair-few 0s ...

The question of why, however, has vexed everyone associated with sim-racing. Since Sony holds the license to Formula One, EA Sports' Lewis Hamilton image would seem to be a bit of a waste ... unless EA are developing a new game, that is, which won't be associated with Formula One ... something, perhaps, along the lines of *Choker*, where you take the role of Blewit Shamilton, and attempt to bankrupt your racing team while throwing away what should be an un-surmountable lead in a series of utterly clueless gaffs that has the British media declaring that you're simply the best ...

On the other hand, maybe the rumours—that Sony have surrendered their Formula One license (and closed down the developers of their Formula One sim for the PS3, Liverpool Studios)—may be true ... which would mean that the Formula One license is indeed up for grabs. Does the capture of Lewis' image-rights by EA Sports

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suggest that they may have forked out the reputed millions of (not dollars, for sure, since that currency is all-but-worthless unless it's the Canadian version, dear God!) whatevers to bring Formula One to a platform other than one owned by Sony?

The answer is apparently no. AUTOSIMSPORT is led to believe that EA Sports does not have the license to either Formula One, or Lewis Hamilton, despite rumours to the contrary ... but who knows, we're living in strange times indeed when sim-racing developers are about as secretive with details of their business as ex-Ferrari chief mechanics are with theirs ...

An Open Letter To SimBin Regarding StarForce Protection and GTR

Dear Sirs and Madams'

I wanted to write and express my feelings about the brilliant racing simulator, GTR. Of the four copies I own, I believe the first copy was the most important to me. An online friend residing in Germany asked if I wished to have a copy, and of course I said yes—German language localization aside, I needed to drive that Lister. And in due time, my copy arrived, and set in motion events that would not only consume the next four months of my life, but lead to my eventual second career as a freelance writer for AUTOSIMSPORT magazine.

You see, GTR so consumed me that I began to write fictional stories of my exploits on the track. When the forum's bandwidth forced me to move my stories, well, I created a very basic webpage for them. Nothing fancy, mind you, just a place for folks to go and download the stories if they wanted to. Now, something like this is nothing new; people are constantly creating webpages based on their favourite racing simulators, or other types of games. But it was the first time I had ever done something like that, and the effect GTR had on me was a bit surprising. I couldn't wait to get home from work and stay up to all hours of the night racing. I even went so far as to attempt the full length twenty-four hour event at Spa, and most

likely would have done just fine if not for a slightly incorrect engine radiator vent setting. I did, however, manage to make it to hour eight, with six of those hours done during one sitting as I split the duties with my AI co-driver.

To make a long story short, GTR was to me what Falcon 4.0 was to me—the most intense, realistic, and immersive simulator for racing cars I have ever played. And like the great combat flight sim, Falcon 4.0, the GTR game world felt alive, vibrant, and dynamic.

The inclusion of the new LiveTrack Technology was pretty much the seal on this deal.

But now I have a problem, and in speaking with other fans of GTR, I have discovered that we all have the same problem—what is most likely one of the best simulators ever coded is now nearly impossible to find ... and even if we do stumble upon a copy, the StarForce copy protection is having the effect of forcing us to treat these disks like the last piece of bread on the planet; that is, with a lot of reverence. I do not condone disk copying for the sake of piracy, but I do condone the option for the end-user to make a copy of the disk so in the event it is damaged—and not replaceable—we have a backup copy, and can get back to driving.

It isn't as if we are dragging the disks behind cars or trucks. Quite the contrary—but bad things happen to good disks. For example, just two nights ago, I wanted to play a bit of Oblivion for the XBOX 360 as it is one of my favourite role playing games. The last time I had the disk in the machine, it worked perfectly; this time, and however, something was amiss. The XBOX would not play it. Upon very close inspection I discovered the problem—the disk was developing hairline fractures that started at the center and extended well beyond the midway point of the disk. I was stunned—this was the Collector's Edition, and as such was packaged in a very secure manner. Regardless, it was now useless. But I had a couple of options: For a small fee, I could get a replacement disk, or, for about the same fee, I could simply walk into the store and pickup the nearly year

old 'Platinum Edition', and resume my career as a wandering role player.

But with GTR, we have no such option, and not all of us are fortunate enough to own four copies of this outstanding simulator. Well, three if you don't count the one I gave to a friend so he could enjoy the simulator as well. I walk into an American Best Buy and notice a double box with GTR2 and GT Legends ... and wonder why one more disk couldn't have fit into that box. I find it difficult to believe that the three best commercial sims of the past few years could not be packaged as some sort of 'Grand Edition' pack or something along those lines. While I am not at the pit of despair, it is a bit hopeless knowing that if one of my disks is slightly defective—like my Oblivion disk obviously was—well, before too long, even a multiple-copy owner like me will be out of luck and forced to watching the box on the shelf as opposed to playing it proper on the PC.

With this in mind, I would humbly ask that one of two things happen; first, allow us to backup the disks like we could in the old days of PC gaming. Secondly, if the first thing won't work, then can you get it back into our hands as some sort of specially priced re-release? I suppose things like this are inevitable in the grand scheme of IP rights and StarForce, but I feel that GTR has a lot more life left in it, and it would be a shame to not only force the 'old timers' to new ground, but deny the new users as well. Some may feel that GTR2 is more than enough, and they would have a point—GTR2 is stunning, and a simulator I play quite often.

But, alas, I miss my GTR, and worry, like many other folks, about what will happen when my last copy of this sim suffers a scratch or some other form of damage, or just simple wear and tear due to using the thing.

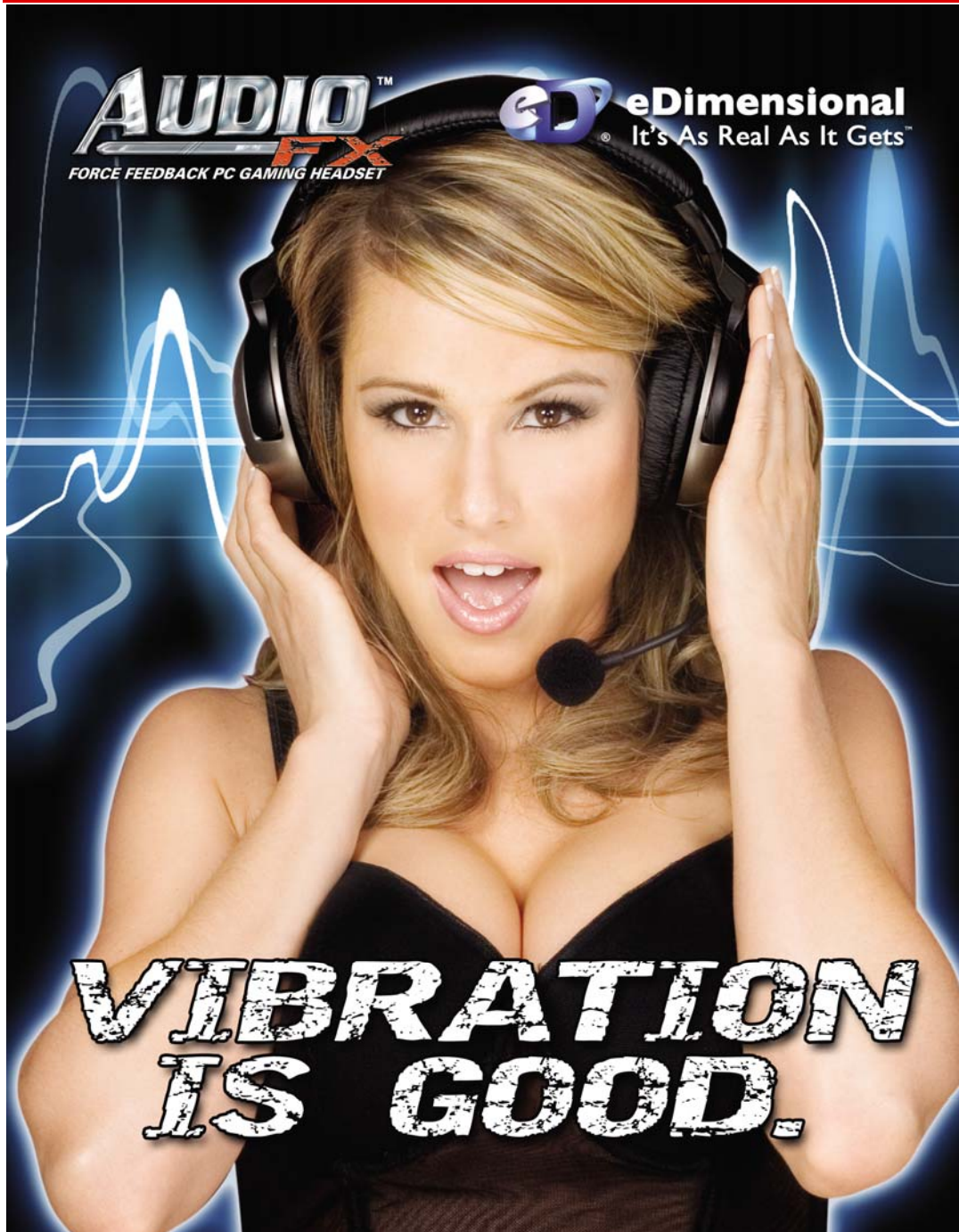
I hope that you consider my request.

Signed:

A faithful early adopter of the SimBin mod team commercial enterprise effort.

Bob Simmerman





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BAH HUMBUG

Fortified Whine

Never work for anyone who is named after a cheap alcoholic beverage that fourteen year old girls get drunk on, for they are unreliable and stupid. Erm ... Not the fourteen year old girls, they are all sweet kids I am sure. But no, the people named after their tippie of choice. You send them stuff and *lol*! It's like zapping an empty wand in nethack: "Nothing happens".

rFactor 1255XYZ

ISI updated rFactor to 1255. Issues addressed in this patch are:

—**Security:** The well publicised server exploit has been closed, making the internet a safer place to host a server, although no protection from lunatics who think they can overtake anyone who qualified ahead of them on cold tyres and brakes going in to T1 (and yet strangely not coming out of it) is offered.

—**Lack of whining:** The bug which meant that whiney bitches over at RaceSimZilla had nothing to complain about has been found and fixed.

Currently, a side-effect of spiralling pings and warping in the dedicated server executable when running twenty-plus cars is being experienced, and a fix is being worked on. There is a temporary fix over at some forum or another—links can be given to those who can't find it themselves on request, but I imagine most of you aren't interested—and it may be worth a shot.

Bury Me In A Y-shaped Patch.

The LFS crowd all eagerly await the fabled 'Y' patch promised before Christmas. No World War One comments, please.

As developer Scawen says on the official forum: "We are pleased to announce that there will be a new patch

before Christmas. This patch will contain AI and physics improvements, updated Blackwood and South City tracks and ... a new real car—The Formula BMW FB02!"

Apparently, this constitutes selling-out to The Man. Or BMW. One or t'other.

RACER F1 2007

The R.A.C.E.R. F1 mini-season is under way (heck, by the time this gets out it's probably already finished) and is looking to be *hot*! [PSRTV](#) are broadcasting the races, so go watch some! At the time of writing, after two races, Theo Gort leads the driver's championship by four points, and FTW—that would be my team—are running in a very-close-to-first second place. *Go Team!*

Power & Glory

Holy cow. The P&G mod for GTR2 is unbe-xpletivedeleted-lievable! If you have GTL and GTR2, get yourself this little *gem* of a mod for Christmas—you will not be disappointed. It is a work of total amazingness. Sliding an old GTMobile around Donington in the rain was the best Saturday afternoon fun I had had with a few guys in ages—even better than that other thing I do with guys on rainy Saturday afternoons!

In fact, even Andy Mahood landed up waxing-lyrical (not to mention the Triumph) on *PC Gamer US*'s January Issue of his Sim-Column ... which would mean AUTOSIMSPORT scooped *PC Gamer* by a few months, *and* we released the damn mod to boot ... and did we even get a cursory mention? Not one filthy word!

In other GTR2 news, MethylEthyl (get better soon, mate!) has released an update to GTR2 called 'Sounds of GTR2 b.0.7.5' which I guess is a beta. If you thought GTR2 had good audio before, be prepared to kick yourself. Hard.

Christmas

The only good thing about Christmas is the now-traditional (hey, it's happened once before!) 'Race The

Truck' Friday Nite Fight. For one hour, on Friday twenty-first December, a bunch of total nutters will be racing UPS trucks around Wanneroo, in an attempt to ruin Christmas for everyone ... yes, all your presents are in the back, and we expect nothing to remain unbroken by the end. FNF races are usually very clean, but things can get a bit lairy in a UPS truck. Anyone who has *rFactor* and is interested in taking part (practice session starts at 8PM EST) should [email me](#), and I will send you the server password.

Happy New Year everyone!

Virtual Grand Prix

T1

LxMartini

A checkered past has seen this decade-old simulator evolve practically unnoticed by the sim-racing community; but its third iteration, featuring a sophisticated physics engine that may be ahead of the curve of anything currently on the market, along with an innovative approach to its business model, promises to set matters right, and place VGP3 where its creator, Paolo 'the alien' Cattani, believes it should always have been: Spoken of in the same breath as the greats ...





While doing some research on this article (yes, we're known to sometimes bother checking facts, though rarely do we relate them accurately), I was astonished to find that almost every sim-racer I spoke to confessed to having no knowledge of the *Virtual Grand Prix* series of sims created by Paolo 'the alien' Cattani. The sim seems to have slid effortlessly under the radar of popularity, which is peculiar since it is now a decade old. This tragedy—and it *is* a tragedy, if you speak to the small but dedicated fan-base which the sim enjoys—is about to be set right, though, with the imminent release of the sim's next installment: [Virtual Grand Prix 3](#).

I had a chance to test-drive a beta version of the sim, and I can confidently report that something exceptional is coming our way. Before revealing some limited impressions, though, of this sim in action, I had the opportunity of having a few questions answered by Paolo Cattani, the man responsible for the *Virtual Grand Prix* series that had its debut way back in 1998 on the Amiga platform.

Before I asked him how the series—which, judging by the beta of *VGP3*, is at the very cutting edge of simulation-design—has gone so unnoticed for so long, I had to start by finding out how he landed up with the moniker 'the alien'.

The Alien

Turns out, it has nothing to do with his speed: When he was fifteen, and studying at a classic lyceum (an Italian school that concentrates more on classic matters than on scientific ones), Cattani was already intrigued by computers (in general), and videogame programming (in particular). "I was a proud owner of a glorious Amiga 1000 computer," he recalls, "and I was learning how to program in C, and 68000 assembler. Well, as you can imagine, my classmates—who were studying Latin, ancient Greek, history, philosophy, Italian literature, and such things—were quite unable to simply turn a computer on (remember, this was in the 1980s, and here in Italy computers were not so common), and they began calling me 'the alien' because I was really an alien to their eyes; I was showing them things, and speaking a language that they simply could not understand! So, the 'alien' joke went on all the way through the lyceum, and, given the fact that it was a joke, in one way, but also respectful in another (I was an 'alien' because I was simply coming, for them, from a far advanced galaxy!), I began to use it as a personal nickname, 'signing' my programming efforts with it ..."

Cattani, who is in his mid-thirties, is a graduate of Milan's Polytechnic, with an Electronic Engineering background that saw him ply his trade as a software engineer for a couple of medium-sized companies after graduating in 1996, before transferring to Sun Microsystems, where he was employed as a Java specialist.

Cattani is currently a professor at Padua University, where he teaches courses in 'computer graphics and multimedia', as well as 'digital image processing', and, in his spare time, writes for an Italian motoring magazine as both a test-driver, and journalist. This, of course, is rather useful experience for a coder who has spent the better part of a decade creating simulators; especially, says Cattani, since the magazine pays for him to drive real cars, as fast as possible, around real tracks.



Cattani describes himself as an 'old-style' programmer (he started programming for the Commodore 64 before he was a teen), with roots in the golden age of videogames: Indeed, by the time he'd graduated from the Polytechnic, he'd already had a fair-few games published on the Amiga platform (*ThunderHell*, a *Xenon-2* clone shoot'em up, had just been released), and had started to develop—at least in his mind—the foundations of a motor-racing simulator for the Amiga, based on his newly-acquired experience in real-life racing.

"I had the possibility to take part in some minor car races in the mid 1990s—they were private races (that is, not for professional drivers), set up by some friends of mine with very basic stock cars (the idea was to just have some fun while keeping costs as low as possible, using cars that were to be demolished, and using old tyres from friends that had plenty of them; we were racing on private, off-road country roads)."

With the passion for racing now deep in his veins, and coding part of his background, Cattani was about to come face-to-face with destiny: It came in a box labeled *Indianapolis 500*, a simulator for the Amiga, coded by Dave Kaemmer's Papyrus.



Cattani—like most of us who were around at the time—was simply floored by what he'd found: "*Indy 500*," he tells me, "simply set the transition milestone between 'racing games' and 'simulators': Many people consider *Grand Prix Legends* as Kaemmer's masterpiece, but I think that his real masterpiece was *Indy500*; the degree of realism was simply unbelievable if you consider that the sim was made for computers equipped with something like 8MHz CPUs or less!"

Cattani was inspired; could he, he wondered, create a simulator based around Formula One with the same degree of realism as Kaemmer had achieved with *Indy500*? "It would," Cattani says now, "be both a real coding challenge, and a way to try to drive—at least virtually—cars that very few people have the possibility to drive. During those years," he continues, "{Geoff} Crammond wrote *F1GP*, but—from a simulation point of view, if compared to *Indy500*—it was really poor."

Cattani's inspiration would turn into the project known first (and predictably) as *Alien F1*, before—once a publisher had been found (Epic Marketing)—being re-branded as *Virtual Grand Prix*, a simulator that was released for the Amiga platform in late 1998, and featured sixteen of the 1998 Formula One season circuits.



VGP was really a challenge, not only because computers were not that fast, but also because it was difficult to find information—"real data" (especially tyre data)—on Formula One cars. However, thanks to the internet, some friends of mine who were racing in minor open-wheeled Italian series and had access to some interesting data, and my little 'racing' experience, *VGP* became a really interesting product; maybe," Cattani adds, with ten years worth of distance, "it was not exactly a Formula One car, but at least it was a realistic open-wheeled car with realistic behaviour (weight transfers, proper understeering/oversteering behaviour, full car setup, and all the 'real' things that were there in *Indy500*, but not in *F1GP*)."

The release—and subsequent fate of *Virtual Grand Prix*—was, alas, intimately tied to the Amiga platform on which it was released: The Amiga, by the late 1990s, was not so much on the decline as already dead in the water, but a takeover by a Gateway 2000 seemed to offer the platform a new lease on life: "We (the Amiga

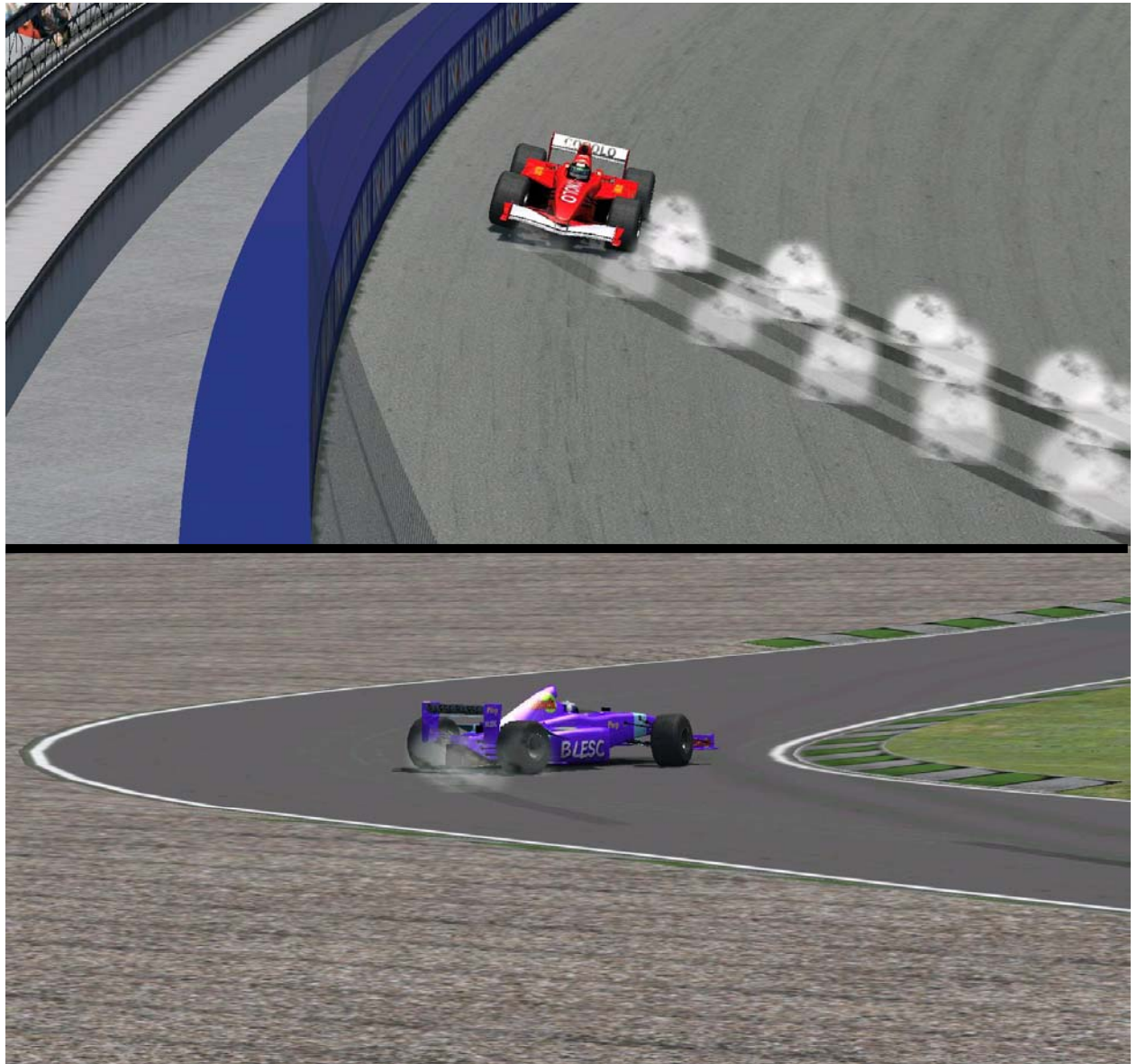
programmers) were thinking that some sort of 'Amiga resurrection' could be possible," Cattani recalls, "and many top-quality games were released in the late 1990s. I like to consider *VGP* a top-quality product," he adds, smiling. "Unfortunately, such a resurrection never happened, and all those projects, including *VGP*, suffered from the fast contraction of the user base."

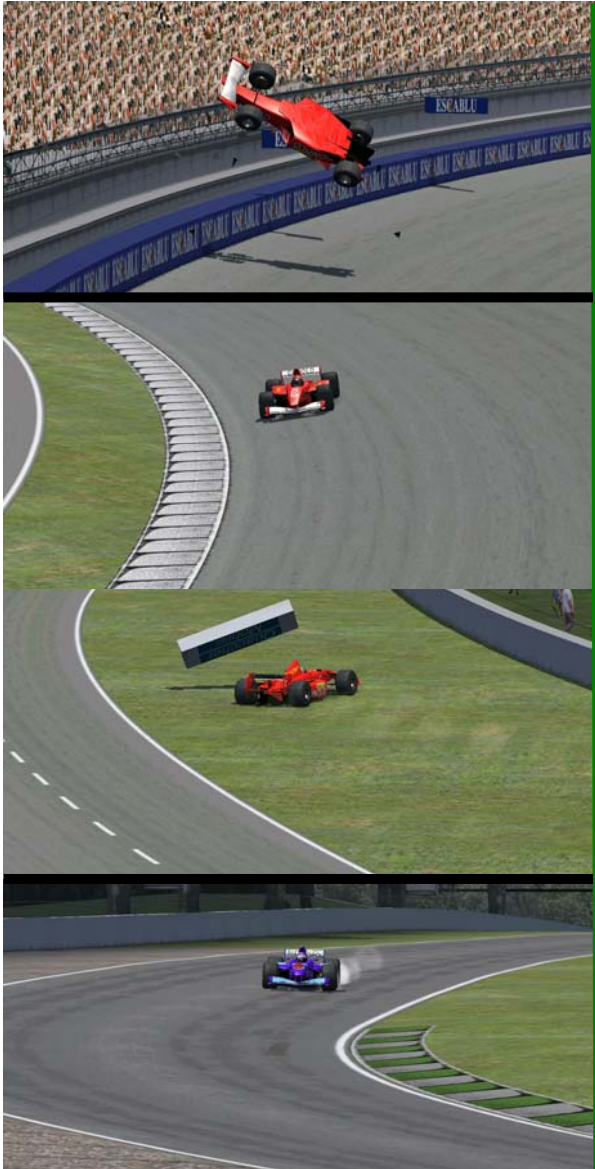
Notwithstanding that, *VGP* sold well, given the small Amiga community; but that, sadly, was that, since anyone outside the tiny Amiga community never got to hear about (much less play) *Virtual Grand Prix*.

The onset of the new century saw Cattani employed by AlasSoft—a firm specializing in designing software for the simulation of mechanical components (with emphasis in the automotive field)—as well as working part-time on a motoring magazine: With the technical experience he gained from both fields, and his background in coding, thoughts inevitably returned to *Virtual Grand Prix*.

"I had the possibility of testing many interesting cars {at the magazine} and, most important of all, the magazine paid for me to be instructed at advanced driving courses taught by ex-F1 or ex-Rally drivers (there are many fast driving schools here in Italy, and the magazine sent me to most of them!). This experience offered me more insight into the 'fine art of racing', and this, coupled with what I was learning at AlasSoft—experience about the simulation of 'real stuff'—pushed me to write a new version of the original *VGP* dynamics engine, taking into account new concepts, and simulating old ones in better ways."

Two years later—in 2002—*VGP2* was done. And, yet again, circumstances beyond Cattani's control would arise that would sabotage the new sim. This time, it was not the market, but the publishers who would cripple Cattani's first, multi-platform simulator, at least on its (in theory) most popular platform: The PC.







"Those guys," Cattani says, referring to the PC publishers, "messed up quite *everything*: first of all, they complained that the game was too difficult, and forced us to release an 'arcade-ized' version for the final product; second, when the game was on the shelves, they refused to send us any royalty reports, and forced us to sue them in order to stop them from selling the game (there's still an ongoing legal action by us against them)."

The result of this mess was that the sim (also titled *Grand Prix Simulator* in certain markets) was limited to the shelves of only two or three nations (Italy, and France, in particular), and only for a limited time: For Cattani, though, the real heartbreak was not the loss of revenue, but of reputation: "People asking for a real sim were really disappointed by the final level of realism, and VGP2 was considered 'a bad, low-quality arcade' product."

Cattani quickly released a patch that, he says, "'reverted' the game to its original realism, and those who downloaded and installed the patch were really amazed by the original degree of realism of the sim." Sadly, though, very few people did since the patch went unnoticed—and so, indeed, did VGP2 on the PC. "All the same, there is still a little community who like VGP2 very much, and consider it a very good sim."

All was not lost though, because Cattani, having learnt the hard lessons of the past (the Amiga fiasco), had coded VGP2 for multiple platforms (VGP2 was developed for Windows, MacOS Classic, MacOS X, and MorphOS [there were early experimental AmigaOS4, and Linux ports, too, which were never finished nor released]), and, he says, "VGP2 was published for the Mac market by a different company, Virtual Programming: They published the original dynamics version of the sim, and they were really good at promoting and selling it; many Mac magazines gave it good coverage, and Apple itself hosted VGP2 ads on its website (in the top-rated Mac games). Unfortunately, the Mac racing-sim market itself is not so big (there are really few Mac gamers that play racing sims, probably because there are few racing sims for the Mac—however, this is probably the well-known egg-and-chicken problem!)," and VGP2—despite its success on the Mac—made no impression on the sim-racing community who were, at the time (late 2002) anticipating the next version of Papyrus' NASCAR series.

And this tale of frustration brings us neatly up-to-date—the cold winter of 2007—which sees VGP3 undergoing final tuning in preparation for its projected 2008 release. Only *this* time, Cattani is determined that VGP will get the plaudits that are a decade overdue: The lessons of the past (platform-related, and publisher-related) that saw the two previous VGP sims sink through no fault of its own merits have been learnt, and solutions implemented.

Something Exceptional This Way Comes ...

Virtual Grand Prix 3, the third chapter in the VGP 'saga', will feature—apart from additional improvements in the dynamics model, and a totally rewritten 3D engine—a complete change in the traditional business model for both Cattani—and for the sim-racing community. It will be coded for multi-platforms (Windows PCs, and PPC Macs—and, Cattani adds, porting it to other platforms/OSes is more than a possibility if there is enough interest), while the traditional publisher-route has been completely erased from the equation, at least for the sim's initial release: The publishing woes of VGP2 has convinced Cattani that retaining complete control of his product, as well as its development, is absolutely key to success.

The business model means that—at least in the first phase of VGP3's multi-stage release—the sim will be a download-only product; "We don't want an external publisher that may mess everything up (as was the case with VGP2). We want to involve, as much as possible, the sim-racing community by giving them a product that suit *their* needs, without having to trade every little change with some stupid marketing guy who only thinks about mass-markets."

With the full acknowledgment that the sim-racing market is a niche one, Cattani believes that new approaches—in the way simulators are offered for sale, and developed (a combination of *Live For Speed*, and *rFactor*)—is both necessary, and inevitable: "The idea behind VGP3 is not to develop a full, 'closed' product and then, like it or hate it, you get it the way it's made: On the contrary, VGP3 will be a 'continuously developed' product. That is, you don't actually 'buy' it, you buy a (one year, probably) account on the VGP3 website where you can download it in its current format, along with any additional improvements, play it, discuss it with other people in the community, maybe add your own content,

give suggestions, ideas, and so on. We hope to work in close collaboration with the community, adding, as an example, features most requested, or producing content that people ask for.

"We want to develop *VGP3* as a niche product, made by (virtual) drivers for (virtual) drivers; we don't plan to sell millions of copies, we don't care about that, we want to serve the community of people, all over the world, that consider racing a fine art, that maybe have some experience with real racing, that don't care about eye-catching graphics but want to (virtually) drive a car that behaves and *reacts* like a real car. This is a thing that many 'big companies' usually don't care about—we know this fact from bitter experience—so we don't want any more 'big companies' in our business: We don't plan to become millionaires from this; all we want is to develop something that people who really care about simulators will like, asking, of course, for a little, reasonable price that can simply sustain future developments."

A novelty in sim-racing, this sales approach, but a route, I suspect, that will become well-travelled in years to come: With the costs of developing a single simulator in the millions for the big developers, it makes little sense for small developers like Paolo Cattani to create a product for a niche market, and then set about working on a successor: The time to create just one sim—without the vast teams enjoyed by the bigger development houses—is measured in years, and is constantly being extended as PCs and simulators become ever-more complex. A product, on the other hand, that enjoys an accurate physics model, and is open to modding, can last a decade or more, meaning that the developers can work on improving the simulator, as opposed to creating new titles with the massive overheads that this requires.

VGP3 will be totally open to modding in a way that is completely transparent, as Cattani explains. "This is one of the key points in *VGP3*; it's designed to be moddable,

and, in fact, we plan to release documentation on every little file of *VGP3* so that people will have the possibility to transform *VGP3* into anything they like. We plan to release, as soon as possible, a track editor tool, some 3D object converters, and documentation on the car dynamics files—the idea is to give people not just an F1-like sim (which is what *VGP3* currently is), but a 'generic-car sim-construction set', a powerful virtual reality you can use to bring your personal racing league, either inspired by real races, or fantasy, to life. Our idea is to give modders not only documentation and tools but, maybe, if time will permit it, our direct support for their own creations—in other words, *VGP3* will not be a closed product, but, instead, we think of it as a sort of 'middleware' that other people may use to build many interesting projects, maybe with our direct help if we consider such projects really good."

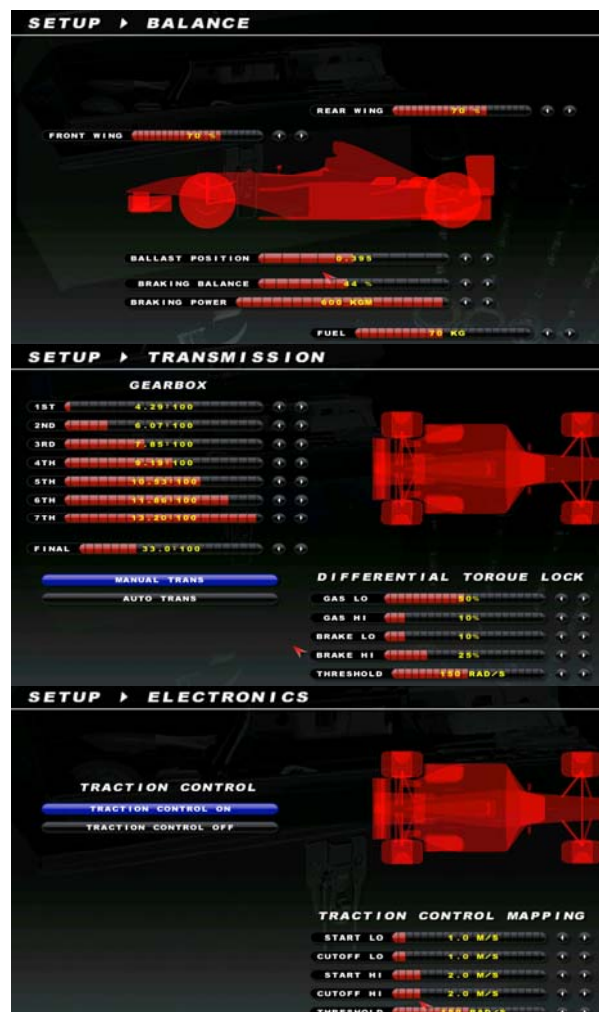
VGP3 will also feature a strong netcode, and, Cattani says, "We plan to release a GUI-less server (maybe freeware) that you can install on your server to host your personal championships or leagues. At the moment, we are not hosting races ourselves and, probably, we'll never do so because we want to involve the sim-racing community, and not 'impose our law'; we give you the technology, and you choose what to do with it (of course, as with modders, we may give our direct support to interesting online projects)."

VGP3 will be a two-stage release. During Phase One, Cattani explains, "We plan to release *VGP3* in the form of a 'beta status', with some startup content (three or four tracks, and one carset, the open-wheeled F1-like car)." At this stage, the cost for an account will be kept to a minimum, reflecting both the lack of content, and the lack of user-defined improvements. "We plan to use this phase to begin collecting feedback from the initial community to add some fine-tuning to the project, adding more content, and beginning to release tools and documentation useful to mod the game."

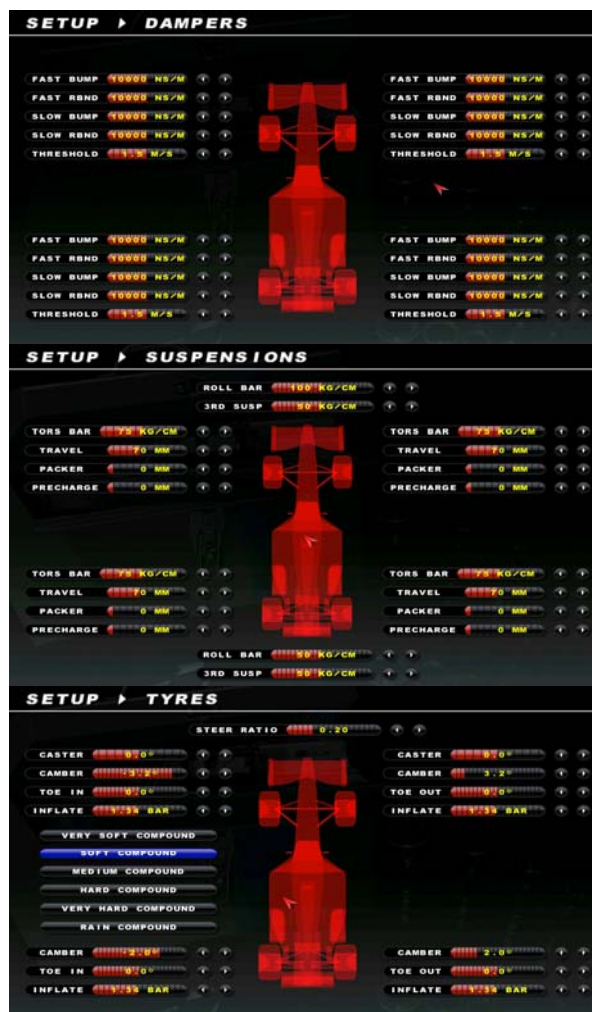
As the project matures—with 'enough' content, and a stable product—Phase Two will see *VGP3* offered at a higher price, but, Cattani assures me, "People who have already registered with 'beta' accounts will continue to have access to the *VGP3* website, so that they will have the possibility to download the stable version of *VGP3* at no additional cost as a thank you for their initial support."

Phase One—originally projected for Q3 of 2007—is now imminent; "We have been busy with a couple of parallel projects," Cattani explains, "so we had to delay the launch: Realistically, the first quarter of 2008 is now our goal."





Setups are involved: If you choose to run traction control, much experimentation is required to creating a setting that will match your driving style. Equally, the setup screens we've been accustomed to in sim-racing are all much expanded for VGP3 ... note the differential torque ... Note also the rain compound; no weather in the beta but here's hoping!



What Powers VGP3

The carset that will be featured in Phase One is the extremely challenging Formula One-inspired open-wheelers that were made available to me for this article. Cattani, while admitting that he has had no personal experience with real-world

Formula One cars, explains that, "I do have experience with a really large number of cars, and I think I know what 'common things' a sim should have in order to really simulate a car. The sim is currently being tested by some friends of mine who *do* have experience with open-wheel cars, so that, while perhaps we cannot guarantee that VGP3 is a Formula One simulator, we can certainly state that it is a realistic single-seater experience."

Indeed, Cattani is not that interested in creating a Formula One sim: What he wants is to create—for the carset that will be made available in Phase One—an accurate open-wheel simulator using cars that are powered by 2.4 litre engines pushing around 740BHP, weighing about 600 kilograms, with high downforce, and grippy tyres. "The 'numbers' in VGP3 come from different sources, the most basic ones from public sources, others from more specialized engineering papers/magazines, and some interesting data came from, again, friends that have access to ... erm ... real telemetry."

Cattani, however, is reticent when asked for details. "Sorry, I cannot reveal the sources!" he jokes, noting that, "we are more concerned about the simulation itself rather than simulating an exact car model: Whether it's like an F1 car or not is not important," he says, adding that the carset specs makes the initial cars, "fun car to drive."

In order to achieve this, Cattani has created a physics engine that features, in particular, an integration method—designed for VGP2, and now evolved considerably for VGP3—that, when applied to mechanical differential equations, and to a tyre model that may well be the most advanced ever seen in a commercially available simulator, offers some startling results.

"There are many differences between VGP3 and the majority of other sims on the market," Cattani says. "However, the most notable difference from the 'virtual driver' point of view, as you point out, is in the tyre model that, in our experience, makes up eighty percent of the realism of a car sim."



“Many sims use some form of the ‘Magic Formula’ approach to tyres; in other words, tyres are simulated by storing (in memory) data on their steady-state behaviour under a particular set of conditions (as an example, longitudinal grip versus slip ratio, and lateral grip versus slip angle). This approach may work well under steady-state conditions (if you’re running through a turn at a constant speed with a constant steering angle), but has lots of problems under, firstly, combined longitudinal/lateral forces, and secondly, transient behaviour. Combined situations are difficult to simulate because you only have data regarding pure longitudinal or lateral slip, and you must somewhat ‘mix’ these values in some manner, while transient behaviour, again—usually simulated by ‘filtering’ the slip input—is a very rough approximation of the complex ‘visco-elastic’ internal mechanics of tyres.

“VGP3, on the contrary, uses a more physical approach to the problem. The tyre is simulated—think of it as being composed of a number of ‘bristles’ that can move in the three dimensions, connected together, and to the rim, by some ‘visco-elastic’ constants. These values, coupled with data that control the single bristle static, and dynamic friction coefficients (depending on pressure, temperature, and so on) are the ‘tyre coefficients’ in VGP3. When the tyre moves in respect to the ground, bristles are pushed/pulled around, they build up forces, and when forces exceed their grip, some bristles begin to slide. I call this model a ‘quasi-finite element’ approach because, even if such ‘bristles’ are only a first approximation of a real tyre complex finite element structure, they can simulate the fact that the tyre is not a rigid body, but rather, a flexible and deformable thing. The final tyre behaviour is simply a consequence of these bristles interacting; the interesting thing is the fact that the steady-state behaviour closely matches the steady-state ‘Magic Formula’ curves, but you get a far better transient and combined behaviour that simply ‘pops up’ from the model itself.

"As an example, the transient tyre grip peak value may be higher than the steady-state one (as expected from real {experimental} data), a thing that usually 'Magic Formula' models cannot predict because they can only filter (in other words, interpolate between) steady-state data."

Taking A Spin ...

The consequence of this is clearly evident in the way the physics engine is kicking out feedback in the sim. Albeit in beta state, the first impression I had when driving a lap was—this is something that feels quite unlike anything that has come before.

The initial setup that comes with the sim is, as one would expect, made for understeer; this, coupled with traction control—which I kept activated after learning that 18,000RPM, and a heavy right foot, are not mutually agreeable—made my initial foray at Imola a little frustrating, but also instructive, giving me a sense that



VGP3 is a simulator that is taking itself seriously: Understeer is very accurately modeled, and nailing the throttle caused the car not so much to 'wash' away as 'push' wide.

The sim is, in a word, tricky —challenging in a *Grand Prix Legends* kind of way, in that there is something—unique, and original—in the way it behaves. The actual *driving* of the car, with its traction control, grip, and balance, is not that demanding of itself, but driving *fast* most certainly requires a set of skills that I haven't yet learnt in any other simulator (I expect *nKPro* would have offered this, had they modeled cars that were anywhere as quick as these things). I came away with a whole new respect for Formula One drivers: The sense of speed is accurate but, more than that, the actual 'feel' of the car makes driving these things enormously rewarding, and difficult. Apexes happen quickly; missing them even quicker. I am not the slowest sim-racer in the world—on a very good day, I will lap a second or so off the fastest in the world—but after a week with *VGP3*, I was a solid seven seconds slower than the AI at Imola, and five down at Indianapolis.

These are the two tracks which are currently available for the sim, Imola, and Indianapolis, an Imola has never been this taxing. These cars are tremendously quick, powerful, enjoy a sickening amount of downforce, and brake as if they are attached to some sort of inch-long elastic band. Finding a rhythm, as you attack a track as complex as Imola, requires skill—more skill than I could muster in a week. Finding the apex—understanding the apex—is key to building a quick lap because these cars are too fast, and too grippy, to sit and wait for you to flounder around finding the line. The smallest error in turn-in, on braking, will destroy your time—that is normal. What is abnormal about this sim is that finding that apex, finding that turn-in after slamming on the brakes at a distance which your mind is quite certain is about 100

metres past the point of no return, is complex, requiring both precision, and razor-sharp reflexes.

After a week of floundering around like a lost trout (yes, I know), I began focusing on setups, and lines. Being way off the limit, the first thing I had to find was smoothness; the brakes being what they are, I was either over-braking (turning in way too early, or, even more embarrassingly, having to reapply the throttle to pick up some speed to the turn), or braking too late, (missing the apexes by some distance, and coming out with the traction control strangling the engine revs as I imposed as much lock as I could muster). Now I realize many of you are thinking—yeah, 'cause this guy is crap but—take it from me, this sim is complex when you're running fast. Tremendously difficult; made even worse by the car itself which, when it decides it's time to lose traction, does so with the patience of a geriatric on speed. Not to mention the fact that the AI were whizzing past me as if I was standing still; and yet, I wasn't—not really—I was all hog-sweat and arms and elbows trying to find a tenth when actually another *second* is what I should have been trying to find!

The cars are responsive to setup changes. First thing I needed to do was get rid of the understeer. The setup options are involved, and offer a litany of options that outshine virtually any other sim on the market: In about an hour or so, I had developed a car that was pointy (when you 'esc' from the track, you can mess with the setup before returning back to the track—at the same place as where you escaped from, be that on a turn, or anywhere else, making setup work {and experimentation} a fast enterprise), and now I could actually slide the car into the turns. With traction control altered to suit my driving a little better (the TC is completely adjustable, should you choose to run it—and I mean adjustable to a degree never-before-seen in a simulator), I could power out of the turns without washing away into understeering hell.





Indeed, managing the traction control is crucial if you want to run with the AI. At default, the TC is very forgivable; if you get spin, TC will all but cut the engine in its haste to make sure you don't make a fool of yourself. Eventually, though, I had the TC working in such a way as to give me a little 'bite' even when over the limit, and power-sliding—while making me even slower—was joyful.

As for the oversteer I built into the car; fascinating! The sense of oversteer and understeer is as accurate as I have ever felt it in a sim. You will be left with no doubt about the car's behaviour; the feel that comes off the tyres is

quite startling, and the Force-Feedback is solid on the G25. Once I had the car pointing the way I like it, the downforce of these cars made itself readily apparent: Anyone who has seen a Formula One car in action, live, will no doubt have been left with a sense of raw awe at the extraordinary angles in which the cars will dive into turns without losing traction, and here I was doing precisely the same thing, and thinking—how the hell did it not flip away into a massive slide? So the next lap, I would go in faster, in a higher gear, and still I'd come out the other side, with the car biting the track as if sucked by some sort of vacuum. Another lap, even faster, and this

time the downforce is not enough, and I go off, collecting the wall at a rate that actually hurts my pride.

Amazed, I was, by this simulator. Even in this beta phase, this is an accurate Formula One simulator; and no, I have never driven a Formula One car, but I've read enough—and seen enough—to believe this is the way they behave. That is, they are fast—so quick that only a handful of people on earth can drive them on the limit—and are just plain challenging in every department *because* of their speed. Braking, turning-in, accelerating—all happens so incredibly fast, and yet building a lap requires not only complete commitment, but a precision, in the midst of blistering quick moments, such as I have never experienced in a sim before.

After a month of testing, I had finally managed to get my times about a second off the faster AI ... and the sim just getting better as my mind became sharper. VGP3, I have no doubt, will be a welcome addition to our sport when it is released next year, and I will be one of the first in line to pick up my copy. As the Italians have it—the sim left me *'impressionato'*.

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To See What We
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AUTOSIMSPORT

Side-by-Side

Ian Bell

Blimey!Games are a busy crew nowadays: With their new arcade-racer Kart Attack seeking a publisher, their ultra-secret simulator Project Falcon nearing completion, and their much-touted and anticipated official-Ferrari sim all in simultaneous development, Ian Bell was kind enough to find time to give AUTOSIMSPORT a few tantalizing details of what we can expect from the makers of the GTR-series ... and their first foray into the console-market ...

AUTOSIMSPORT



AUTOSIMSPORT: You're announcing a new product from Blimey!Games—*Kart Attack*—can you give us a description of what we can expect? And will it be so arcade as to give the hardcore a, erm, heart attack?

Ian Bell: Sure. This game is fun-fun-fun all the way. We're setting out to redefine what XBLA/PSN {*XBOX Live Arcade*, *PlayStation Network*} etc. can provide. Something that's truly next gen', as opposed to a rehashed 1980's arcade game. So alongside the easy pick-up-and-play style of handling, we've got environments that look more like *MotorStorm* in terms of quality than *Galaxian*. We're also having fun making it. It's a departure for us, and is being taken care of by our new Blimey!Arcade branch. We're wedging as much content in as the memory limits allow, whilst also providing ongoing expansion tracks as downloads.

The engine is fully multi-threaded, and utilises all of the cores of next gen' systems. We are also holding out for a huge payday, and a publisher exclusive. We think it rocks, and we think publishers will too, so the release platforms are not final. One of the big boys may want it all for themselves. And who are we to refuse their wads of cash?

AUTOSIMSPORT: So this is primarily an arcade-style racer featuring karts?

Ian Bell: Well, partly featuring karts, and partly featuring characters of all shapes and sizes which affect the handling. Hugh Jeers, for example, weighs more than Wilma Cargo, but he tends to get more grip in the corners. Lucy Lastic gets some mean downforce from her hair ...

AUTOSIMSPORT: Wilma Cargo? Reminds me of *Revs* ...

Ian Bell: Well... we're still auditioning drivers.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So why this departure from sims? Is this the future for Blimey!Games, or just a fun byproduct?

Ian Bell: It's a fun byproduct—it's something to fill our weekends, and those six hours some of the lazier of the

team like to call sleep. We felt this was a terrible waste of potential resources ...

AUTOSIMSPORT: What physics engine will *Kart Attack* be using?

Ian Bell: We're using our new engine. It's multi-threaded from the first line of code, and runs well on all next gen' platforms. In fact, it doesn't run well on single core processors at all. We're using karts to force those guys to upgrade! Ten quid for the game, 1,500 for a new PC. We don't get any of the 1,500 though, which is a shame ...

You can certainly get a very realistic sim working well on consoles, and that is what *Falcon* is all about: It has an arcade mode, but a fully fledged sim mode also.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What platforms will it be released on?

Ian Bell: As above, we're planning XBLA, PSN, PC Download, and possibly Wii Ware, but we're also using this information as blackmail to force the highest bidder to get it all for their console.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So there's no publisher lined up yet?

Ian Bell: Nope. We're taking it to Lyon GC next week {*first week of December*} to let the chosen few glimpse it. We'll then sit back and let them fight it out.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So what can we infer from this as it relates to the sim we are all really waiting for—*Falcon*? You say the same engine that will be used in *Falcon*?

Ian Bell: Well, a lot of it yes; *Falcon* (we have a name now, but I must get publisher permission to go to the loo) will have some extras to make sure it's slightly better than *Gran Turismo 5*. We've decided to stop there. Karts will look and play like a forty pound AAA game, but will make some concessions to performance.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So can we infer from the kart sim that *Falcon* will also be a multi-platform release?

Ian Bell: Let me say that ... the engine we have is multi-platform ... the rest is up to the publishers, and licensing issues.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So coding for the different platforms: Can you tell us what your programmers are saying about the differing processes? And how you're adapting to the consoles—and whether you think a serious simulator is possible on either console, and whether we'll ever see one that is as 'real' as those on the PC?

Ian Bell: We didn't really need to adapt. We have twenty-two coders, and about fifteen of them have been working on consoles all their lives. Well, not when they were three, I suppose, but you get my meaning. The coding team has an average of twelve-point-four man years of experience each, on multi-platforms, and a lot of the artists have come off the back of some major console titles like *Burnout*. The Xbox 360 is the easiest to get stuff up and running, as it shares a lot of standard PC components. The PS3 is a bit trickier with all of those SPUs, each with a small amount of very fast memory; it requires very careful thread work and memory control, but can be blazingly fast when used properly, and our engine does this. The 360 has a more flexible memory architecture, as well, so often you can allocate a bit more to graphics. You can certainly get a very realistic sim working well on consoles, and that is what *Falcon* is all about: It has an arcade mode, but a fully fledged sim mode also.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will the fact that console users don't have wheel/pedal setups affect the basics though? Or is that what the arcade mode is for?



Ian Bell: Nope. I don't think any of that is needed. It's crucial that you sort your IO code so that, what the player is attempting to do with the pad is translated cleanly to what the car is doing on-screen. Very few punters in the big scheme of things have a wheel, and although I think it's important that they are fully supported with specific input code created for them, it's equally important that you nail the input on the most common peripheral, which is a pad. In fact, a lot of people on the hardcore racing side play with a pad for jollies, since it's not always convenient to set up a wheel. Eric Boosman was blazing fast with a 360 pad, and look at Wolfgang Woeger, he nailed *GPL* with a joystick. Many of my world records in *F1 2001* were set using a Thrustmaster joystick. So, in short, the basic game-side remains the same, unchanged if you're doing things right.

The IO code and things like the steering ratio and speed sensitive input reduction are where you should be making the changes to support each peripheral.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So you have *Kart Attack* looking for a publisher, *Falcon* which has a publisher, and the Ferrari sim which has a publisher, too, correct?

Ian Bell: You took a hard left off the kart road when you heard it was arcade fun ...

AUTOSIMSPORT: I was coming back to it!

Ian Bell: Will this interview ruin your reputation?

AUTOSIMSPORT: I don't have one ... I didn't even make it into *RACE07*—though everyone else bloody did ... Even Dom Duhan made it into that one ...

Ian Bell: I won't hold it against him, we all make mistakes ... hi, Dom, by the way.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So—*Falcon* has a publisher, yes?

Ian Bell: Not saying.

AUTOSIMSPORT: But it is not the Ferrari sim—which is going to be a 10Tacle published sim, correct?

Ian Bell: Correct

AUTOSIMSPORT: And will *Kart Attack* have the same multiplayer that will be featured on the Ferrari sim?

Ian Bell: No, we're trying to make it a bit worse as the game is cheaper!

AUTOSIMSPORT: So how many will be online for *Kart Attack*?

Ian Bell: We have eight drivers. We even have ovals in, so some Americans will buy it. Although they are set in ancient Rome (Rovals if you will) to try to snag some Italian punters at the same time. We got you twice.



AUTOSIMSPORT: The console market, though, sees a million sales as a bad day in the office—what do you see as *Kart Attack*'s major selling point?

Ian Bell: It's great. It gives the mass market something a little more 'simmy' to learn, and gives the hardcore punters something fun to play as a respite from the sweat and wrinkles we give them with *Falcon* and *Ferrari*. They think they will pick it up for a throwaway few laps, then they'll realise they want to do that very often, and before you know it, we have them addicted.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So the catch is in the game play of the actual karts? Can you tell me a little about the karts themselves—and why they're addictive?

Ian Bell: They're addictive because we're very good at making games. Beyond that, we have three levels of kart: Level One is a bit of a trainer, 50cc-style, with very little boost, or it overheats quickly. Then the mid-level is a full-blown shifter-kart capable of 100MPH. Then we have Level Three, which is a nutjob with wings and an insane top speed. Then, whichever character you plonk on the kart varies its characteristics in terms of weight and BHP: Some characters are better at tuning their kart than others, some eat less, and so forth.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Does Dom Duhan make an appearance?

Ian Bell: We have him in the pits, making tea and stuff. He loves it, likes to spill a bit on his dungarees to look a bit pit-messy.



Touching **Legends**

We get to know a few of the wonderful talents behind the Power & Glory mod—surely one of the top five mods ever created for any sim—and preview some of the beauties about to be unleashed with Part Two, coming sometime in January or early February ...

AUTOSIMSPORT





Nickname: Aristotelis

Name: Aristotelis Vasilakos

Age: 35

Role: Team leader, physics, packaging

Bio: Always a car freak, been online since 2000 with *GPL*. Mostly active in the Italian community. Beta tester for *GTR1* and *GTL*, physics for *Netkar* free, and initial development of *NetkarPRO*, founder of [Flyingpiggedia](#), and cofounder of the [SIM-MIN](#) sim-racing driving school. When not modding the Power&Glory mod, I like joining track-days with my real-life car—that is, when my beloved wife gives me green light for it!

Favourite Car: I really like them all, because every car has such a distinct character, and demand completely different driving skills. If I really had to choose one from the already released cars, then it has to be the Jaguar E-Type coupé. It's not a really fast car, but with a nice setup it is perfectly balanced, has good power, and is great fun to drive ... plus the drop-dead gorgeous looks means I can't help myself looking at the car in the replays. Still as nice as the Jaguar is, there are tons of much better cars coming with the second release, but I better not tease your readers!



Nickname: DucFreak

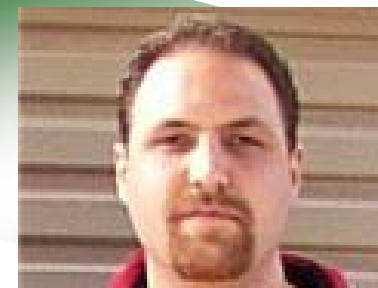
Name: Lucio Marques

Age: 32

Role: Sound engineer

Bio: I'm a true motorcycle fanatic (sport-bikes, Euro ones please!), but with a soft spot for older sport/race cars. I've been playing PC racing games since Accolade's *GP Circuit* (1988), and have been online since late 2002 with *F1-2002*, *GP500*, and occasionally *GPL*. These days it's mostly *GTLegends* and, of course, the Power&Glory mod for *GTR2*! Dedicated to sound-editing/modding—for various sims—since 2002, with a small, but enlightening, experience in-between as a sound-engineer for Blimey!Games. When not modding for the Power&Glory mod, I enjoy racing other people online or riding my sportbike whenever possible (go the 'trumpet'!).

Favourite Car: I like them all, honest! The thing about these old cars is that each one featured in the P&G mod (released or not) has something that makes it special over the next one; character, driving, sound, shape and form, a soul of its own ... something really hard to see these days with modern machinery (as good as it is today), wouldn't you agree? I'll try to be here until the very end, attempting to give myself—and you—the same 'music' you'll find in real life from these glorious machines ...!



Nickname: HR186S

Name: Luke Fomin

Age: 28

Role: Car Skins, Textures, 3D Editing

Bio: I've loved cars for as long as I can remember, and much of my youth was spent gazing through car magazines, and building and painting model cars. Classics have always appealed to me more than later models, and my shelves were filled with models of classic American muscle cars.

I started playing games on my Amiga 500 in 1988, the first car game I can remember playing being *Test Drive*. This led to other games such as *Gran Turismo*, and its sequels.

Looking for a racing sim to play on my new PC, I bought *GTR2*, and loved its customization-ability which inspired me to try my hand at modding by painting new car skins. My first car took about three months to complete, learning how to use Photoshop in the process. Things kind of snowballed from there, and I found myself painting cars and modding more than playing the sim.

Favourite Car: Porsche 911 Wide Body. I've always liked Porsches the 911 in particular, ever since those days playing *Test Drive*. Power sliding out of corner with an arm-full of opposite lock is great fun, and it's just urging you to push harder. It's such a fun and tricky car to master, but when you get it right, it's very satisfying. Push it too hard, though, and it will chew you up and spit you out into a wall or sand trap.



Nickname: InsaneDruid

Name: Alexander Kagel

Age: 32 (on some days, that is)

Role: 2D texture Artist/3D modeler/gofer

Bio: I'm a vintage (mechanical) engineering fan. Cars, planes, trains, bikes, tanks—as long as it's vintage, it rocks. I've been racing sims since the days of the Commodore 64 (*Pit Stop*). My sim racing 'career' started with the demo of *GPL*, which became my favorite sim for many, many years. Mostly offline, in LANs with my clan-mates, but nevertheless, we had *tons* of fun drifting in those cars. Later came *GTR*—and my first online racing experience behind the wheel of a 360 Ferrari. Then came *GTL*: Those beautiful cars ... just heaven. It replaced nearly all my car sims.

I started modding with some skins for *Red Baron 3D*, *IIRC*, and some (private) skins for *GTL*. Later came *Life For Speed*, and *IL2 Sturmovik* for which I did some work.

Favourite Car: There are many in *GTL*, and *Power&Glory*. All have their distinct character, a soul, what makes *GTL* and *P&G* so great. These are still cars, not flipped around aeroplanes on wheels. But while I can surely enjoy a blast down some straights in thunder-casting cars like the GT40, or sliding around in a Cobra, my true love are the small and nimble cars. Fiat Abarth, Lotus Elan, Austin Healey, Lotus Elite, Mini ... absolutely fabulous beauties. There is nothing better than blitzing corners with such cars on a twisty track like Cadwell Park, or the Nordschleife. Well ... at least there is not much better!



Nickname: David Wright

Name: David Wright

Age: 46

Role: Historical research, physics feedback, and contribution

Bio: Always interested in cars, my PC simming began with Crammond's first PC sim. Modding began with *GP2*, though only for my own use. I didn't buy *GPL* until 2000, but this introduced me to researching 1960s motor-sport, and releasing my updates to the public. I joined the *GPL* Mod Team fairly early in the development of the '65 Mod. While I spent some time with *Rally Trophy*, and *EAs SuperBike* series, *GTL* was the first racing sim to really distract me from *GPL*. It was a sim I'd been dreaming of since *Rally Trophy*, but I'm still amazed SimBin actually made it. Before joining the *GTL* Workshop, I was involved in beta-testing *GTR2*. Researching 1960s and 1970s motor-sport has become my hobby with eBay being a great source of material.

Favourite Car: Impossible question ...



Nickname: Wessy

Name: Dave Weston

Age: 54

Role: Apprentice car skinner

Bio: Always enjoyed racing sims starting from my Amiga days back in the 1980s. I had a brief flirt with *GPL*, and then discovered *GTL* after joining the RSC forums. I fell for it straightaway, having discovered it featured the MK2 Jaguar, my favourite car. The first thing I wanted to do was to make a skin for it! I call myself an apprentice car skinner, because that's what I am, compared to the fantastic painting talent this team has, in a word, amazing. I enjoy the painting just as much as the driving of the cars, in particular the classic British cars.

Favourite Car: For looks, it has to be the Jaguar MK2 followed closely by the E Type. To drive, it has to be the Lotus Elite, just fast enough for me



Nickname: Spin Doctor

Name: Jeff Knox

Age: 54

Role: Physics assistant, historical info, mechanical reference, general kibitzin

Bio: My first Matchbox car was the MGA. I've been a fan of racing, and cars ever since. As a former mechanic and current fan of vintage sports and touring cars, I've had some very interesting conversations with many of the people who race in SVRA, and other vintage events at Virginia International Raceway. It's amazing to listen to Lee Holman, or Jim Downing tell it like it really was.

I got into sim-racing with SCGT and went online with the DTM Mod for *NASCAR HEAT*. Since then, I have worked physics magic on road-racing mods for *NASCAR HEAT* including: V8SRS, Vintage Trans AM (VTA), Super Trophy, Classic Can AM, WGTG Championship, and Formula Renault 2000. As a mechanic and car person, I have driven, repaired, and occasionally even owned a number of the cars we are now modeling in Power & Glory. I enjoy cars that can be driven with the throttle, without wings and other extras keeping them glued down, so the P&G mod has been fun to work on. I also enjoy sharing in a mod project with people who care so much about the way real cars were.

Favourite Car: Tough choice, though I have a soft spot for the Alfa GTV in our mod. Best looking car: The Ferrari 330 P4. Most fun to drive: 1969 Opel Rally (1900) on a muddy road in the middle of a Vermont Spring, or BMW 2002 anywhere, anytime.



Nickname: Zoomie/AUS_Zoomie

Name: Muhsin Schroeder

Age: 23

Role: Skins, file organisation, some physics research, a little basic 3D model editing, jack-of-all-trades

Bio: I've always loved racing—didn't matter if there was a vehicle involved or not. I've raced bikes and boats and myself, but never cars, and only recently have I rediscovered my interest in motor-racing. I'm hoping to restart my bike racing soon too. As fun as sims are, the real thing is still much better.

First modding experience was with *NeedForSpeed3*, four years ago. Spent many afternoons trying to get realistic behaviour out of the cars, and I realise now what a glorious waste of time that was. Still, I learnt more about a car than most thirteen year olds, as well as various skills. I later discovered SCGT, not realising it was a sim, and that got me hooked on GT racing. I was very happy when I found the *GTR* Press demo, which is what launched me into sim-racing. For some reason, *GTL* really sparked off my interest in vintage race cars. I really have no idea why I find these cars so attractive, and I prefer not to analyse that too much because it just kills the magic.

I'm still not quite sure how I got into the *GTL* Workshop, but I'm glad I did.

Favourite Car: I'm a bona-fide Alfista, so it's the Alfa GTA for me. After that, it becomes very difficult to choose a favourite. I think maybe the Falcon, because it's so different from the Alfa GTA. My real life favourite is the Alfa 156, 'cause I got one!



Nickname: C-one

Name: Francis Kelly

Age: 41

Role: 3D

Bio: I loved cars before I could walk. I loved the classics when they weren't even classics yet, and now I love them because that's where you will find the best racing on four wheels. I love bike road-racing too—best vibe you can find, and it doesn't cost you an arm and a leg to go see them.

My first mods were mostly solo adventures with help from some wonderful people that I am proud to have known. I came late to computers, so my first foray into virtual racing was *Gran Turismo*, when I was laid-up with a back injury (got the Gold License though!). My first PC sim was *IL2Sturmavik* when that came out, then one of the guys mentioned *GPL*, and as soon as I saw it I was hooked. Then there was *N2002/3*. I'm delighted to be working with this crew, because they love the subject matter so much and, they're just a great bunch of guys.

Favourite Car: Varies from day-to-day, some days I feel like manhandling the big brutes, some days I love the handling of the flyweights. But that's the beauty of this mod, there's a car for every occasion ...



Nickname: Ron (AKA Ferrariron)

Name: Ron Rogers

Age: 49

Role: Early conversion physics and file organization, first online testing.

Bio: I have been around cars since childhood, now I work for Ferrari, and Maserati in the collision-repair side. First taste of sim-racing was back in 1998 with *GPL*. Learned all about PCs at the same time. Gave away my first store-bought PC, and started making hot-rod gaming rigs after the first six months. Now I build sever PCs for a second job. Just started web design, and that's my new challenge.

Steve and I joined Randy back in October 2006, and never thought it would turn into this. Aris was the perfect choice to take over when Steve couldn't continue.

Favorite Car: Without question, the GT40.



Nickname: Iain.T

Name: Iain Traynor

Age: 36

Role: Skins, some research, and a little 3D work

Bio: I've been fascinated by racecars for as long as I can remember, particularly old race cars on unspoiled tracks. My first serious introduction to sim-racing was with *GPL*, which opened my eyes to how well a past era could be captured, and how intense the racing experience could be. *GTL*'s classic saloons and GTs were a natural progression, and got me started on skinning, which led to an invitation to join this great team of enthusiasts.

Favourite Car: I've a big soft spot for the Falcon, but a lighter, nimbler car is where I get the most pleasure. A 911 at the the Nordschleife, or a 2.6 Capri against the big boys at Crystal Palace.



Rollin' With Roland

Roland Ehnström has had quite a year sim-racing: The man who would make any cognoscente's 'greatest all-time sim-racers' list started the year by winning the Swedish LAN Championship, and ended it by taking first prize (US\$16,000) at the Swedish Motor Sport, and FIA-sanctioned 'Virtual Grand Prix' ... Ivan Askew caught up with the super-Swede to find out more ...

IvanAskew



Useful Links

In-car video of Roland driving his Honda at the track:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVvw0M3-jo4>

The big slide he had in Alx's private Porsche:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRsD0UKrUGw>

In-car recording of Roland riding with Alx in his race car: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3mK7-Yevxw>

[Virtual Grand Prix](#), an event sponsored by SimBin, and sanctioned by the FIA-licensed [Swedish Motor Sport Federation](#), went down in history as the largest-ever sim-racing tournament, featuring a staggering 26,000 hopefuls who were eventually whittled down to one overall winner after a grueling competition that featured both online hotlapping, and filmed-in-a-studio championship events. {For a preview of the event, please see *AUTOSIMSPORT Vol3 Num6*.}

The final events—featuring the fastest online qualifiers—took place in a TV-studio in Stockholm where ten half-hour shows were recorded on five different days every other week during September and October. The ten shows were then broadcast weekly for ten weeks, running from September to November, on Sweden's TV4+.

Qualification to the main events was via an internet hotlap competition which saw the 26,000 wannabes churn out their fastest laps at Brands Hatch using either a RACE SEAT or a BMW. After 180,000 registered hotlaps, the top thirty-six runners were invited into the quarter finals: Roland Ehnström landed up with the fastest overall time, and, alongside his main-event qualification, took home a rather cozy Nokia n95 mobile phone worth about a grand, U.S.

The six quarter-finals featured six drivers in each event going up against one-another live in a Stockholm studio, with only the top-two from each event progressing to the semis.

Roland's Joyride Alongside Alx Danielsson

The test with Danielsson Motorsport was a great experience; it was very interesting to see a professional racing team at work. I could see plenty of similarities with the way we organize our test-sessions in my sim-racing team ([Virtual-Games](#)), and also a few differences; the most important difference being that everything really takes a lot more time in real-life: A setup change that takes two seconds in sim-racing can take half-a-day in real-life racing. Also, in sim-racing, we have an unlimited supply of tyres, whereas Alx's team used the same set of tyres on each car over the whole test day, and had to take into account that the tyres were getting more and more worn over the course of the day, as well as taking into account that the track got better and better grip from the rubber being laid down. The engines, too, developed more power in the afternoon as the ambient temperature dropped. So making a direct comparison between a laptime set at mid-day, with high ambient temp' and good tyres, and a laptime set in the afternoon, with lower ambient temp', a grippier track but more worn tyres, was of course very difficult, not to say, impossible to gauge. Same thing if you make a setup change: Was it the softer springs that gave the car less understeer, or are the rear tyres wearing out, or perhaps the handling has improved because the track temperature has dropped? In sim-racing, we are a bit spoiled in this regard.

As for a comparison between the Porsche GT3 Cup car, and the one simulated in *GTR2*, that's difficult to tell since I never got to drive the GT3 Cup race car, only the normal 997 Carrera road car, which is totally different. The 997 Carrera I drove was understeering quite a bit in the middle of the bends, and was pretty tail-happy when you applied a bit too much throttle too early on the exits. From what I could see from the passenger seat in the GT3 Cup car, it felt glued to the track, and was perfectly balanced at any speed. But that could also be because Alx is a superb driver. Interestingly, the sound of the GT3 Cup car from inside the cockpit was much closer to what you get when you drive the Lister in *GTR2* (and crank the sound way up) than what you get from the GT3 Cup car in *GTR2*.

As for my own driving during the test, first off I got a chance to push my own road car (a 1997 Honda Civic) to the limit, but it really showed that a road car is not made for racing: The understeer was pretty bad, the tyres were squealing constantly, and 114BHP carrying 1,400 kilograms does not give a very impressive performance on a race track! It was also only possible to go fast for one or maybe two laps at a time, before the brakes started overheating pretty badly. It was, however, enough to give my father, who rode along with me for a few laps with a video camera, a few healthy scares!

After this, Alx gave me a chance to drive his own road car, a brand new Porsche 997 Carrera with 325BHP, the most powerful car I have ever driven outside of a sim. Alx rode with me in the passenger seat, and gave me some good advice. After switching off all the driving aids that clutter modern cars, I could push the car pretty hard, and at one point I very nearly spun it on the exit of a long medium-speed right-hander. The heavy rear-end of the Porsche swung out and threatened to overtake the front, but I saved the big slide with a healthy amount of opposite lock and a steady right foot on the throttle. If Alx was even remotely worried that I was about to bend his Porsche, he certainly did a good job of hiding it: but then again, Alx is not one who gets easily rattled considering his chosen career. But I'm glad my father wasn't in the car at that point, I'm not sure his weak heart could have coped with going sideways in a car worth 100,000 Euro with me at the wheel!

Finally, I got to ride with Alx in his race car, a Porsche 997 GT3 Cup. I was duly impressed, especially with the absolutely awesome noise from the engine and gearbox (*GTR2* does *not* do this car justice!), and the incredible G-forces in the corners. I'll tell you this: When you get a chance to feel what one-and-a-half, perhaps two Gs feels like in a race-car over the course of four or five laps, you grow a *lot* of respect for Formula One and Champ Car drivers, who must cope with double or even triple that kind of load for hours! I swear I will never make fun of Sakon Yamamoto again.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Alx for giving me this opportunity to get a taste of real-life racing; I learned a lot, and had a great time! Thank you!

"The studio had a circular podium with six Playseats in a ring facing the middle, each equipped with a Logitech G25 wheel and pedals, and cameras and spotlights all around," Ehnström explains. "The drivers wore racing overalls in the same color as their car in the sim, so that the viewers could easily see which driver was driving which car. The atmosphere in the studio was very special, as this was a new experience for me and everyone else, including the producers of the show—as far as I know, sim-racing for TV has never been done before anywhere in the world. For sure," adds Ehnström, "all drivers were very nervous, with all the cameras and spotlights registering their every move—a big change from sitting at home in the dark racing over the internet! Having to handle pre- and post-race interviews was also an added pressure, not to mention the knowledge that the whole thing would be watched by thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of viewers on national television. Everyone felt big pressure to perform at their very best, both in the interviews, and on the track, and it was soon clear that some drivers were better at handling the pressure than others. But it was also lots of fun to meet up with other serious sim-racing drivers, some known and others unknown, and chatting about tracks, cars, setups, and so on."

The races were short sprints, featuring a specially designed SimBin SEAT: A demo-version of *RACE07*. The SEAT was the front-wheel-drive SEAT León, not the rear-wheel-drive *GTR2* SEAT Toledo GT, and the tracks in the quarter finals were a mixed affair, meaning that Quarter-Final One featured Monza, and the rest, in order, Brands Hatch, Anderstorp, Istanbul, Valencia, and Brno. Ehnström participated in Quarter-Final Five, at Valencia, and he won the heat quite comfortably after taking pole-position. Some way behind, Peter Eriksson and Marcus Strandh enjoyed a hard-scrap for the scraps, with Eriksson finally securing the second semi-final berth.

But was it as easy as it looked for Ehnström?

"For sure the combination of prize-money and TV-cameras meant a lot of extra pressure and extra motivation," he says. "All drivers tried their very best to win, and no-one ever gave up. The racing was hard, sometimes very hard, but most of the times fair. Considering that the races were very short, you couldn't afford to give an inch of extra of space to anyone, but everyone was also very afraid of doing something stupid in case they would be seen as (w)reckless by the viewers, or race stewards. My own approach to the competition was that I knew I had a chance to win the great prize, but most of all I simply wanted to prove that I am the fastest sim-racer in Sweden. I think I succeeded with that goal, and that's even more important to me than winning the prize-money."

Indeed, Ehnström's case for being Sweden's champion sim-racer hangs not only on this win, but on a career that stretches back close to a decade: This year, though, has seen him come into his own by winning not only the VGP, but also the Swedish LAN championship.

"This is the first time that I have won money in sim-racing, though," says Ehnström. "Previously, I have won sim-racing equipment, such as wheels and pedals, Track-IR, headphones, shirts, caps, and games." But strangely, winning the VGP, and the sixteen grand, does not make it into Ehnström's top-ever prize: "I won a track-day at Mantorp Park with Formula One prospect Alx Danielsson, and that's the greatest prize I've won in sim-racing," he says.

The LAN event, held in April of this year, was hosted by Alx Danielsson, together with SimBin, and the Swedish Sim Racers headed by John Sjöstrand, and saw Ehnström claim the big-prize—a test-day alongside Alx, and his Porsche Cup team. The prize included not only the opportunity of driving his own car around the track, but also a chance to drive Alx's road-car (a Porsche 997

Carrera). To cap the day off, Alx gave him a spin in his Porsche 997 GT3 Cup race car. {See *Sidebar*}

"Yes, 2007 has been a very good year for me!" says a clearly delighted Ehnström.

But it is the VGP win that has seen Ehnström become somewhat of a minor celebrity in his hometown: Despite the TV-shows being aired at 11:30 on Sunday nights, the viewing figures were solid, and the response from the public and media has been better than expected.

"In my hometown," says an amused Ehnström, "I'm quite well known by now, as the local newspaper followed me through the competition from the quarter-final all the way to the win in the final. Most importantly, the terms 'sim-racing', and 'virtual-racing' are now better understood by the general public, and for me personally, this means that I can now better explain what I do in my free time, when someone asks me about my interests. Sim-racing is finally becoming an accepted sport in Sweden, and that makes me very happy."

Ehnström's win has also seen him enjoying the limelight: "I've had to do a few media appearances and interviews, like this one, both during the competition, and after I won. It's actually quite fun, I'm glad I am not too shy. However, sometimes I can also get a bit upset when they've misquoted me badly, or when they write that I am a 'gaming' champion rather than a 'racing' champion. But you have to live with that," he says ...

The semi-finals—broken down into three events—were again broadcast as half-hour shows, with six drivers again featured in each event. Semi-finals One and Two saw the twelve direct-qualifiers from the quarters go head-to-head, while semi-final Three was a 'wildcard' draw, composed of drivers who were knocked out of the quarters but had qualified themselves back into contention through a special hotlap-competition on the 'net. To give the show a little more spice, one driver was also voted back into the semi by the television viewers.



The semis expanded on the format used in the quarters; each heat was now two short sprints, with the grid order reversed for Heat Two (the winner of Heat One starting from the back). The two drivers with the best combined position would secure themselves a seat in the grand final, and a chance at the \$16,000 prize.

As in the quarter-finals, the car was the special-demo SEAT, while the tracks were Brands Hatch, Valencia, and Zandvoort. Ehnström participated in the second semi-final at Valencia, where he won Heat One in typical fashion—that is, from pole to flag, though this time only a few tenths ahead of Andreas Dennerman, and Rickard Hellsten. The competition at this stage was hotting up, and only the best were still around, as Ehnström was to discover in Heat Two.

Starting at the back of the grid, he immediately got stuck in fourth place behind Fredrik Tackman, who drove very defensively: Ehnström, usually the calmest under pressure, finally found a way past, but in so doing opened the door for the second-placed driver from Heat One, Andreas Dennerman, to slip past him, and Tackman, leaving Ehnström out of direct qualification for the final: To advance, he now *had* to pass Andreas, and he managed to do so with just over one lap to go.

"A very tough race that left me both mentally and physically exhausted," recalls Ehnström, who saw this race as the biggest challenge of the entire event. The other driver

to advance from this semi-final was Magnus Säfström, who won Heat Two ahead of Rickard Hellsten.

The final event then featured the top-two from each of the three semis: Six drivers competing for sim-racing's greatest prize, and again broadcast as a half-hour TV-show. The track was Brands Hatch, and the car, once again, the SEAT. From 26,000 drivers, these were the six who had fought their way through the online hotlaps, through the grueling quarters and semis under the Klieg lights, to finally have a shot—one shot—at claiming the overall championship.

Two heats were scheduled, with the same format as the semis, and again Ehnström won Heat One from pole, after a hard battle with the Austrian Norbert Sulzer.

Austrian? Yes: Sulzer, who hails from Vienna, was a surprise runner in the final, as the competition was held in Stockholm, Sweden, and the competition website was only in Swedish, while the competition itself was backed by the Swedish Motorsports Federation, and SimBin. A very Swedish affair, making Sulzer's inclusion in the final somewhat of a surprise for all involved.

Be that as it may, Norbert Sulzer participated in the hotlap qualifying competition that did not restrict the runners to Swedes-only, and, having then secured a quarter-final berth, decided that the chance at winning the sixteen-thousand dollar pay-day was worth him jumping on a flight from Vienna to Stockholm. As it turned out, Sulzer's self-confidence was well-founded: He was both quick and reliable, and won his quarter-final in dominant fashion, not only in front of a fistful of Swedes, but at the Swedish home track of Anderstorp as well!

Buoyed by the result, Sulzer returned for the semis, where he again won, thereby secured a berth in the final, on Swedish TV. How he managed to communicate with the TV audience remains somewhat of a mystery, but, as it turns out, Sulzer would end the day but a lap away from claiming the grand prize.

Having won Heat One, Ehnström, keen not to repeat the mistakes from the semis, and now only a solid-finish away from the grand prize, focused hard on his start for Heat Two: His strategy worked; as the six cars came into the hairpin for the first time, he was already up to fourth: Even better, two drivers in front collided, and he slipped past them both into an event-winning second place.

Peter Eriksson led, with Ehnström now keen to get past: On lap three, Ehnström tried for a gap which quickly shut, and he and Eriksson tangled, allowing the only non-Swede in the group, Norbert Sulzer, to close right up. Going into the next turn, Norbert attacked as Ehnström defended his position; Ehnström was hit in the rear, and his slide caused him to fall back to third place.

"At this point," Ehnström recalls, "I thought all hope of an overall win was lost." Even more astonishing, the only non-Swede to have qualified for the televised events was about to win the entire event!

Norbert, though, needed to get past Peter, but he too, like Ehnström, could not find a way past; and on the very final lap, with everything on the line, Norbert went for broke, made a mistake ... and ended up in the barriers!

"I, meanwhile, fended off a challenge from Magnus Säfström to finish Heat Two in second place, which was enough to win overall. Peter Eriksson's win in Heat Two meant he was second overall, while Magnus Säfström was third, and Norbert Sulzer only fourth after his costly mistake."

A happy Ehnström could now lay his hands on the 100,000 Swedish Kronor, and title of VGP champion, and ending what has been a glorious year on a rather high note. As it turns out, though, the year's highlights package is about to get even better: "In just over a week I am scheduled to become a dad for the first time, so this prize-money couldn't have come at a better time!"

Congratulations, Roland!

Obutto oZone

*Troy Dalton reviews the Obutto oZone multi-purpose cockpit simulator ...
Designed for Logitech's G25, the oZone was tested on a heavy and demanding
ECCI 6000GT with some surprising results ...*

TroyDalton





I first discovered the [Obutto oZone](#) by accident: A little bored one evening, I decided to do some random searching on the web and, before long, I stumbled upon an article at [askmen.com](#) entitled 'Top 10: Gearhead Gifts'. The list contained all the obligatory gear-head type gifts—Momo Shift knob, Fabricator Gloves, Tools, and so on—but when I got to the final page of the article, I was quite surprised to see a sim-racing chassis listed as the number two gift.

I have been a sim-racing enthusiast for many years, and I have constructed four homebuilt cockpits myself, so I like to consider myself somewhat of a subject-matter expert—or at the very least a fairly well informed hobbyist. However, I must admit that I had never heard of the oZone before stumbling onto it, and its reasonable price tag demanded further investigation.

At first glance, the oZone appeared to have everything that I was looking for in a race-frame cockpit; a built-in monitor stand, adjustable keyboard tray, adjustable wheel mount, and a fully adjustable racing seat. Yes, there are many other commercially available race frames out there that offer all of those same features, but none are nearly as affordable as the oZone, whose base price is an extremely accommodating U.S. \$249.

While visiting the Obutto site, I noted that they were also offering a full oZone cockpit with G25 shifter mount for only \$185. Sufficiently impressed with the product, I sent an inquiry via the Obutto site, and less than a half hour later I received an email from Chris Dunagan, 'Chairman & Managing Director' of Obutto.

Chris immediately made clear that some of his U.S. inventory had some flaws with the surface metal, but that the blemishes were merely cosmetic. He even sent me pictures of the models in question, and explained that the blemishes would not affect the durability or performance of the cockpit. He also explained that the shipping cost would be approximately \$60 for anywhere in the U.S., and that my total costs would be a very reasonable \$245, with everything included.

The Purchase

After looking at the pictures very closely, I was comfortable that the minor blemishes were, indeed, of no consequence, and the \$185 price tag was enticing, to say the least; however, I was still a bit skeptical that unit would support my [ECCI 6000GT wheel/pedal combo](#). All of the pictures of the oZone depicted the race-frame being used with a Logitech G25.

Now, I have nothing but the greatest respect for Logitech's products, and those who choose to use them, but there is just no comparison between the ECCI 6000GT, and a Logitech G25. The ECCI 6000GT is simply a piece of engineering artwork, and since it retails for

around \$1,200, it is usually reserved for those, like myself, who take their sim-racing just a little too seriously. Furthermore, the combined weight of the ECCI 6000GT is a whopping twenty-four kilograms, and the wheel assembly alone is thirteen kilograms!

My initial concern was that at some point my heavy and expensive wheel might actually snap off the wheel mounting plate and land squarely in my lap: Which would be more painful—a damaged wheel or damaged sim-racer—remains debatable ... but ensuring that the ECCI stayed in place, and that the frame didn't fail under stress was, therefore, the determining factor of whether I would sign on the dotted line.

Chris explained that the wheel plate supports came to a 'V' underneath the mounting plate, and that this design would indeed support the weight of the wheel; he could, however, not guarantee that the plate itself wouldn't flex since much of ECCI's weight would be hanging well over the front edge. He then offered an alternative solution that involved using a discontinued acrylic G25 shifter mount (like the one depicted in the photo).

I agreed that would most likely do the trick, but unfortunately he didn't have any in his U.S. stock at the time, leaving me with a simple choice: Either trust the oZone would do the job, or back away from the order. Chris informed me that in the future they may offer the original acrylic G25 shifter mount as an option, but it is not available at this time.

Convinced my ECCI would fit well in the oZone, and satisfied that it was sturdy enough to stand up to the rigors of some serious abuse, I placed my order on November thirteenth, and DHL delivered the package exactly seven days later.

As a note: The ECCI fits very nicely on the original wheel mounting plate with the additional acrylic shift mount, and there is virtually no distinguishable flex.



Delivery And Inventory

My package arrived a day early with the DHL guy showing up with my oZone on a hand truck. Before I could tell him where to put the enormous box, he had to ask what was inside.

"It's a sim-chassis, but please don't ask me to explain it," I told him.

He shook his head, laughed, and promptly dumped the fifty kilo' box in my garage, completely ignoring the 'This Side Up' instruction on the side of the box. He wished me a happy Thanksgiving, shook my hand, and gave me the look that any self-respecting sim-racer has no doubt endured at some stage or another ... Oh well, I didn't care, my oZone was here, and it was time to open my early Christmas present. The box was pretty beat up, to say the least, but everything on the inside was securely bubble-wrapped, and upon closer inspection, all the parts were present and, to my great relief, undamaged.

I stripped away the bubble-wrap, wiped down all the parts, and brought them inside to begin the assembly process. This is when I noted the substantial weight of the individual parts: They were far heavier than I was expecting, and I was instantly reassured that, while this may be a big-boy's toy, its construction was far from toy-like—the unassembled assembly rig is impressive.



Assembly

It is at this point that you are probably expecting a detailed account of the assembly process along with photos with me at work. And indeed, I did have every intention of doing just that, but the thing is, anyone who can operate a toaster should have no problem whatsoever assembling the oZone. All you need is a couple of simple tools, and about ten minutes. Seriously, it really couldn't be easier: After the two front and rear portions of the frame are bolted together, the only tricky task that remained was to attach the seat. After that, attaching the monitor, wheel, keyboard tray, and shifter mount is just a matter of slipping them inside their appropriate receptacles and tightening the locking screws as needed.

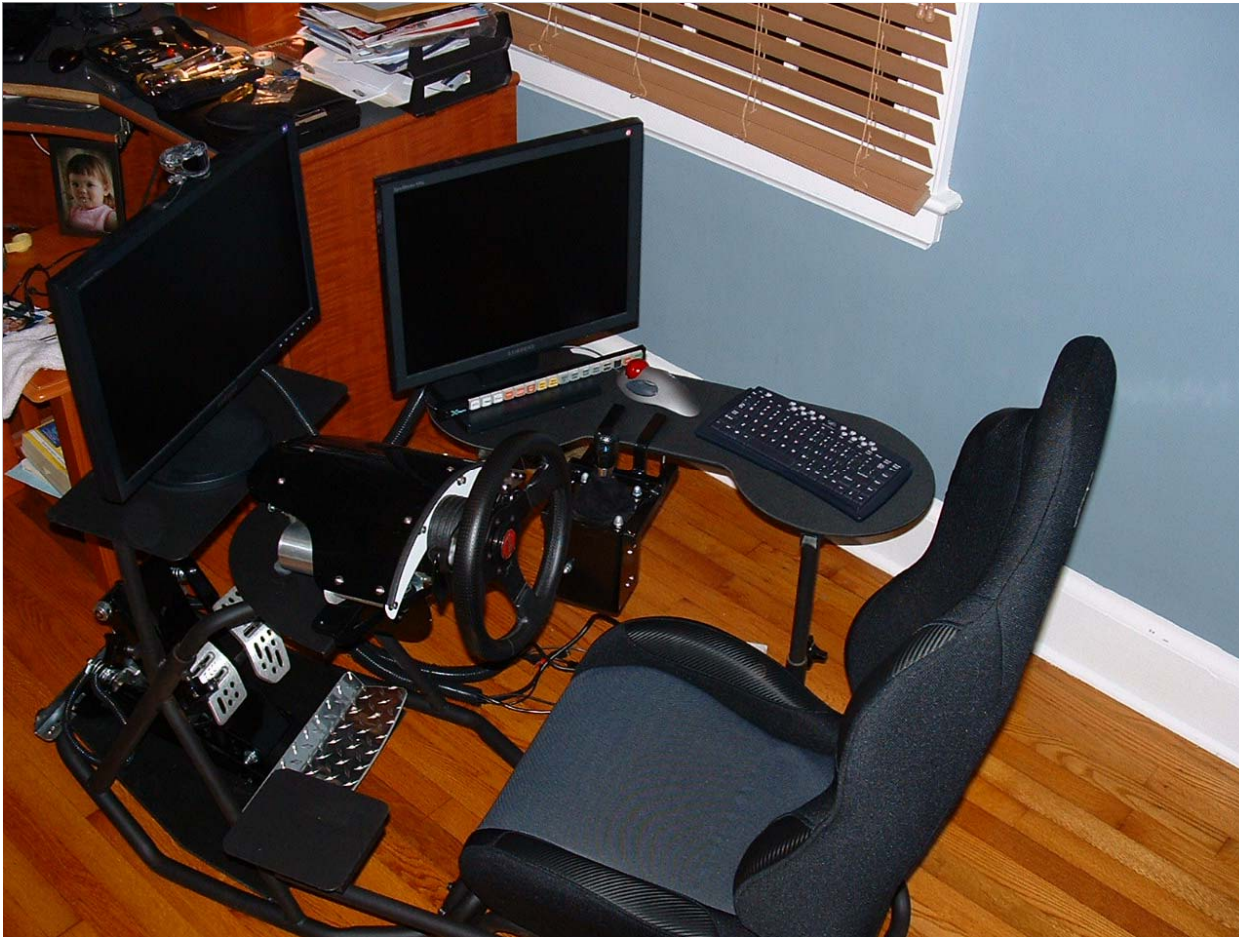
I completed the entire assembly in less than ten minutes. Honestly, it took me longer to dig through my tool box and find the proper Allen wrench. And speaking of tools; there are only two essential tools required; a thirteen millimetre open-ended wrench, and an Allen wrench. All the parts fit together solidly, and the connections are snug, but not too tight. Adjustments may require a bit of muscle, but if you apply a light lubricant

before assembly, that should allow you to make fine tune adjustments later with far better precision and ease. Personally, I didn't find it necessary to apply any lubricant to the connections, but I did use a small brush to clean out some paint overspray inside the welded nuts to minimize the possibility of crossthreading the locking screws.

ECCI Users

If you own a G25, Momo black/red, Driving Force Pro, or anything similar, stop reading this review, and just go order your oZone. The oZone was specifically designed with G25 in mind; consequently, the oZone will readily accommodate the G25 and any similar model wheel/pedal combination, and I assure you that you'll be more than happy with your purchase.

For ECCI owners please read on ... First, you should know that the oZone's wheel mounting plate and the detachable floor plate are perfect for mounting your ECCI wheels and pedals. No holes or trimming are necessary, although you may want to place a small block of wood in the 'V' notch to allow for the small gap between the support pipes and the wheel mounting plate: That way, when you apply torque to the ECCI's locking mechanism, you'll be confident that it is secure. You will most likely find it necessary to re-adjust your pedals, but they fit so perfectly on the floor plate that you really don't have to do anything else besides set them in place. The weight of the pedals on the rubber mat is enough to keep the pedals secure under most conditions, but it would very easy to drill a couple mounting holes if you felt the need. I used a couple of long wire ties to attach the pedals to the front of the rig, but that was just to hold the pedals in place while I was making final adjustments, and I don't have any intention of doing anything else to secure the pedals.



Unfortunately, the ECCI's center locking mechanism on the wheel extends below the mounting plate by nearly six inches (fifteen centimeters), and that prevents the oZone keyboard tray from swinging across your lap as intended. I tried every possible configuration, but there just isn't enough clearance, and I finally abandoned any thought of using the keyboard tray in that manner.

Nevertheless, this little problem was actually a blessing in disguise: Since I could not swing the keyboard tray across my lap, I decided to use it as a support for my TSW Speedshifter. The only reason I even considered this was due to the rigid construction of the keyboard tray. After I mounted the shifter in the desired position, I realized that the keyboard tray was large enough to provide ample room for my second monitor, trackball,

and my wireless keyboard as well! Amazingly, even with all that weight cantilevered over the end of the keyboard tray, there was very little flex. Yes, there was some noticeable deflection, but nothing that would lead you to believe that the tray would fail in any way. For additional stability, I placed the PC and UPS underneath the keyboard tray, and inserted a small, padded wedge which essentially eliminated any flex.

I really like this setup because it allows me to arrange the shifter in a very natural position, and I still have the use of my second monitor for TeamSpeak, GTRPD, and so forth ...

Lastly, I never intended to use the G25 shifter mount, but I may temporarily use it as a drink holder, or a spot for my Gyration wireless mouse. In the future, I plan on adding a small, carpeted shelf on the G25 shifter mount so that I'll have a place for taking notes, keeping my setup binders, or just for use as an oversize armrest.

Summary

I've looked at a lot of sim-racing rigs, and I must say that I was a bit skeptical that the oZone was going to support my equipment: As it turns out, everything fits like a glove. Honestly, for the money, I don't believe there is anything currently on the market that has all the features of the oZone. The fact that it can easily support an ECCI wheels/pedals is astounding, and I just can't find any faults with the construction. I think the oZone is simply fantastic, and I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for an inexpensive and versatile sim-race-frame solution.



AUTOSIMSPORT

GreenFlag

World Super GT Mod

The WSGT Mod for GTR2, which was previewed in these pages back in January of 2007, has gone through a change, as Arnold Carter Wong explains ... but fear not, because it's back on track and will soon be running on yours ...

ArnoldCarterWong







"Things have changed a lot since the team was reformed," Arnold told AUTOSIMSPORT earlier this month. "The original team founder, Andrew, left the team, and went to team AutoArt. Then the whole team was 'broken': When everything cleared, only Klaas and I were left working on the mod."

With Klaas now the de facto team leader of the renamed team (Racers Modding Team), work began once again on the mod, with Arnold and Klaas recruiting new members as they went along. The change in leadership also saw a change in direction for the mod: "We wanted to focus on top quality scratch-built cars," Arnold explains, "and so we scrapped all the conversions that had been in the original mod."

To help them build the scratch-built cars, 'Wix', of the Belgium Sim Racing (BSIM-RACING) Mod team joined the project: "He provides much support, and is giving us tons of quality textures," Arnold says. In addition, the former URG members, Marek and Alison, also joined to work on the mod,

mainly concerned in 3D Modeling and making templates; there work can be seen on the McLaren, Maserati Trofeo, and Ferrari F50.

Arnold notes that the cars are now, "totally different to those in original WSGT Mod. Also," he continues, "some members such as Aaron of Madigital Media, Ben of (Bsim-racing) have offered tremendous help and technical detail. So, all-in-all, I would say it is definitely a new mod."

The mod, whose release-date remains unconfirmed, will feature a range of top-line sports and GT cars that have been racing in GT and sports car series all 'round the world in the past ten years. All the cars will have same features as the GTR2 original cars.

The cars that are expected to appear at launch are: Aston Martin DBR9, Aston Martin DBRS9, Ferrari F50 GT, Ferrari FXX, Maserati Trofeo Light, McLaren F1 GTR Longtail, and the Ultima GTR. Some bonus cars may make the initial release as well.



The advertisement is split into two main visual sections. The left section shows a close-up of a RevZalot Motorsports P35R racing simulator pedal set. It features three pedals with blue and black Sparco grips mounted on a silver aluminum base. The right section shows a virtual racing car, a black and white Formula 1 style car with red accents, driving on a track. The car has 'REVZALOT MOTORSPORTS' and 'www.revzalomotorsports.com' on its side.

revZalot P35R

revZALOT
MOTORSPORTS

“Taking one apex at a time”

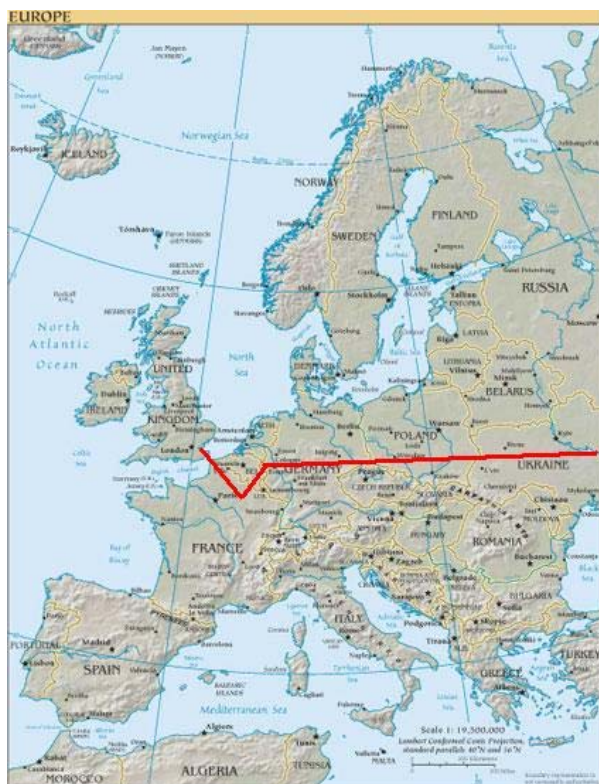
REVZALOT**MOTORSPORTS**.COM

My Summer **Holiday**

Sim-racer Michael Enness, along with a tiny AUTOSIMSPORT logo and a twenty year old Nissan, decided to drive to his holiday destination: Mongolia, as a competitor in this year's edition of the Mongol Rally ...

Michael**Ennes**





After six long years at high school, I decided to take a gap year before university; the decision left me with plenty of free time, along with my ever-present thirst for adventure. So it was perhaps inevitable that the day I heard about the Mongol Rally—a car journey across the globe with its starting-point in London and finish in faraway Mongolia—I began hatching a plan to participate. I loved the idea from the off, and despite initial resistance from my parents, I started laying the foundations for entering this event, whose proceeds went directly into a charitable venture.

A year later, I found myself in a slightly rusty (and totally inadequate) twenty year old Nissan Micra with my friend Matt, leaving Hyde Park along with almost 200 other cars—destination, Mongolia ...

In the first thirty-two hours of the rally, we drove 950 miles in a desperate bid to make it to the first major checkpoint: A party, as it turns out, in Prague. We were only a couple of hours late, and arrived in style, after getting hopelessly lost, and no doubt breaking all the rules of the Czech Highway Code.



The route—14,000 kilometres long—took them through numerous countries: The order in which they were visited was as follows: England, France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Rep., Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia (again), Mongolia

Previous Page: Matt takes a Mongolian river crossing a bit quickly

Left: The edge of the road was often a much smoother surface, but wasn't without its hazards. Here our friends dropped a wheel into a hole

Top Right: South West Kazakhstan



Two days later, we were in Poland, visiting the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp, and what an incredible experience that was. That same day—and in rather sinister fashion considering—our exhaust failed, making it unbearably noisy for the short drive into the city: Our Nissan had shift-shaped into an America muscle-car, though, sadly, the noise did nothing for the performance.

We had it repaired for twenty quid the next day, though, and we were on our way east—always east. Later that week, I was caught speeding in the Ukraine, and, for those interested in local customs, the fine was fifteen dollars, and payable on the spot. Which I suppose would make this a 'fine', as opposed to just a fine ...

The most frustrating and time-consuming part of our journey was no doubt all the border crossings at which we were forced to wait ... and wait ... Waiting to enter Ukraine, I should add at this point, was one of the most exciting and yet boring few hours of the whole trip: Tired and on edge, we sat nervously at our first-ever customs checkpoint watching the military officials search everybody's car. It was perhaps the first time since we'd left London that we felt distinctly foreign—a situation not aided by the suspicion we engendered in the locals. However, it wasn't long before we were experiencing the depth-charge-like heat of the world's largest landlocked country, Kazakhstan, through which we passed without incident on our way to Uzbekistan a few days later.



The road through Uzbekistan is, without any doubt, the worst road I had ever seen up 'til that point in my life: absolutely bloody awful it was, and it started with an unfinished stretch in Kazakhstan which featured—along with its unbelievably hideous construction and maintenance—the occasional stretch of four-foot-deep sand-banks lying across the road like dead giant worms: Even the occasional Russian 4x4s appeared to struggle across them, and digging our car out of the cement-dust-like sand into which it had all but vanished at ten PM with nothing other than a flip-flop was quite an experience!

We eventually rolled into the next town, at three AM, and decided to pull-in and get some much needed rest. The following day, we drove across fifty kilometres of camel track, before a five hour border delay was followed by a road that made us pine for the road into Uzbekistan: This, I think I can state unequivocally, is the most horrendous road ever constructed by man or pack-beast: I can best describe it as tantamount to driving over thousands of speed-bumps laid one after another after another ... Constantly. For fourteen teeth-breaking hours.

Which brought us into Kyrgyzstan; in case you're wondering, this country has amazing roads, although the car did misfire quite a bit in the 3000 metre altitude as we began climbing into the Tien Shan Mountains. The air was so thin up here that the mixture in our fuel proved too rich, and we stuttered onwards in a convoy of three dusty, tired cars, for safety; everyone chipped in with food, spare parts, and company to keep spirits high as we now—very slowly and tentatively—made our way toward, and finally—finally into Mongolia.

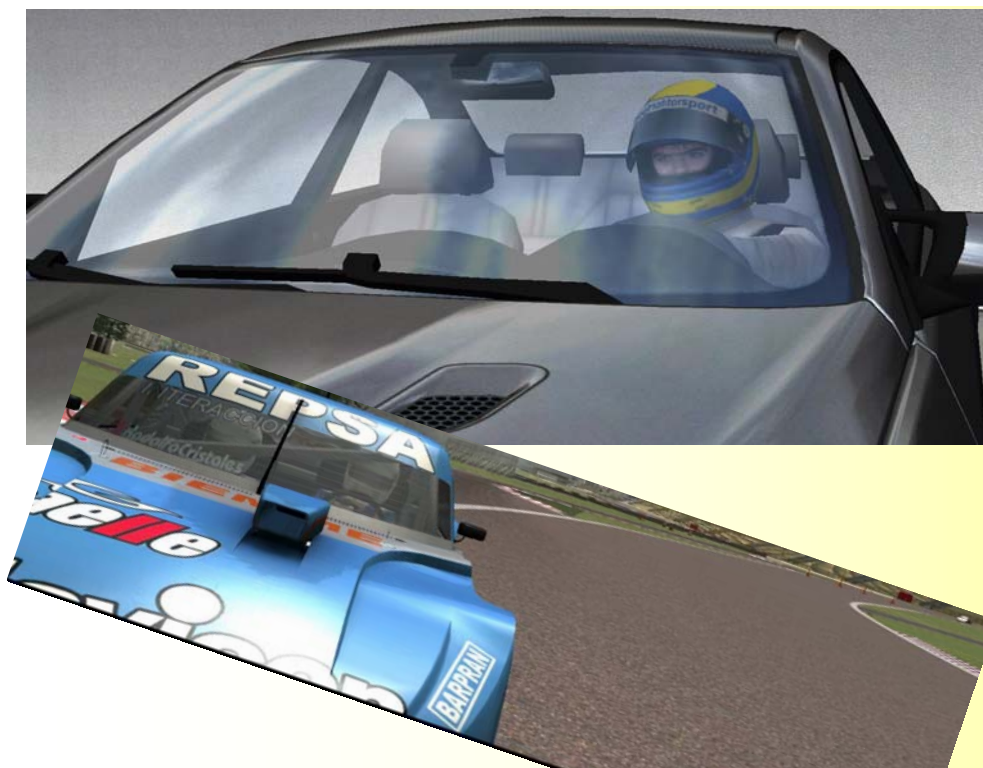
Mongolia is perhaps the most beautiful country in the world—I say this because it remains completely unspoiled due to its geographical location, and the fact that there is so few access points into it: The lack of roads, however, also makes navigating through it something of a challenge of the highest order. At one point, we

managed, yet again, to get completely lost, and landed up driving into the endless Gobi Desert; we did not realise our mistake until we had reached a waist-deep river. Not wanting to turn back, we drove forty miles north, following the river off the beaten (or perhaps slightly used would be more apt) track (and getting stuck in mud, grass and sand in the process). It took six hours, but it was one of the highlights of the trip for us all, perhaps because we could almost sense the end of the adventure ... we were so close and we all knew this would be our final moments after so many days and weeks on the road.

And indeed, that day we finally made out way to the finish line after five long, hard, and wonderfully rewarding weeks; a staggering 8,550 miles (13,757 kilometres) lay behind us, and it was, I am not ashamed to admit, with a little sadness that we left our Nissan in Mongolia to catch our flight home...

I'd like to thank AUTOSIMSPORT for their support, and if you would like to know more about our adventure, check out our website www.turtleracing.co.uk. I'm now back to work studying motor-sport engineering at Oxford Brookes University ... Looking forward to my next adventure!





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simREVIEWS

AUTOSIMSPORT

RACE07

Bob's Review

Bob Simmerman on SimBin's return to form ...

BobSimmerman

Scores *RACE07*

83%





As I write this, I can't help but be amazed by the fact that in less than thirty days a full year will have passed with the release of but two commercially licensed racing simulators for the PC. Have we finally reached a point where our market is now a niche among niches?

Yes, I know, there's apparently a lot on the drawing table, but those remain far on the horizon and, in the meantime, SimBin remain our most prolific developer, and their [RACE07](#) slides into town with nary a serious competitor in sight, leaving many to wonder whether this will be the first year on record that anyone's 'Sim of the Year' award will be awarded not to a sim, but a mod.

Amazing as that would be, let's not be too hasty in doing a rendition of 'Chicken Little'—keep in mind that

there are still those among us who fire up *Grand Prix Legends* more than once a week, nine full years after its release. It is probably a mixed blessing that the community will stick to one product pretty much until something better (note, not *newer*) comes along. Mixed, because a developer will need to constantly improve if they're to get the punters to consider buying their new sim—since even sims they themselves may have produced will have been modded extensively in the time between releases. For an example, look no further than SimBins last release, *RACE*: Does anyone think it enjoyed even a modicum of the success that *GTR2* enjoyed?

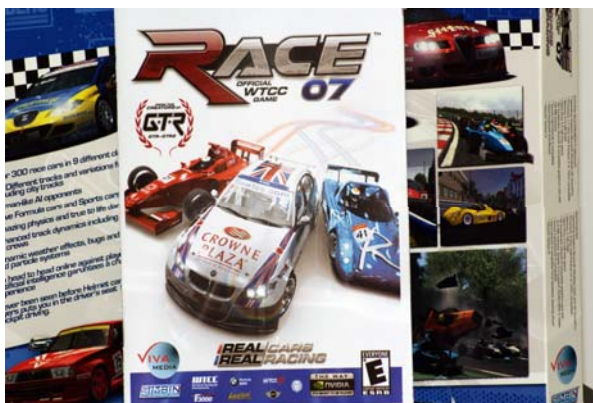
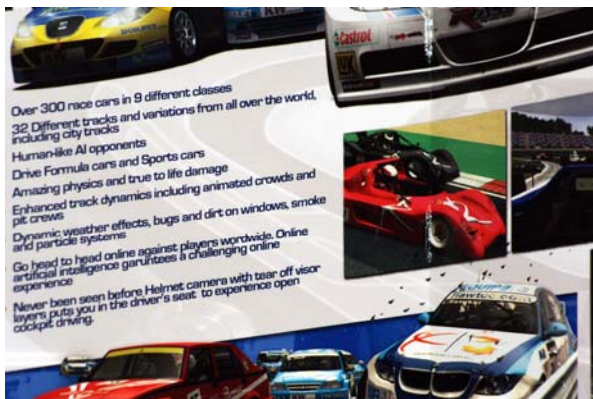
Admittedly, a simulator—or even game—that causes the punter to ignore anything new from the same—or

other—developer(s) is something of a rarity, but it does exist: I have lately found myself installing and thoroughly (re)enjoying the Bioware masterpiece, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, one of the best RPG games ever coded, and further proof that a great game, like a great movie, will be enjoyed years after its initial release.

But okay, enough of that, and more of this: Is *RACE07* a serious competitor to *GTR2*? Will it make people evolve away from that seminal SimBin product (albeit coded by a whole other group of people now known as Blimey!Games), and readily embrace *RACE07*? (I'll tell you straight off the bat that it's a vast improvement over the slop that was *RACE*, no matter what you read to the contrary.)

RACE07 Bob's Review

continued



First, some confusion—*RACE07* is a STEAM product, as well as something that you can walk into any Best Buy store and pick up (in a nice box) for a mere twenty U.S. dollars. That's like eighty-eight cents in Mexico, and even less in Canada.

Twenty bucks. Clams. Greenbacks. Sawbucks. Simoleans. Smackers. Say it any way you want, a poorly valued dollar still won't impress the French. But wait, there's more—not only was the price at the retail shelf ridiculously low for U.S. customers, for some odd reason it was also priced substantially differently—as in higher—on the STEAM ([U.S.\\$29.95 as of this writing](#)) service upon initial release. Even more strangely, our European cousins—you know, the ones that seem consistently unable to comprehend our need to blow stuff up every few years—were paying an even higher price, which, I suppose, just goes to show. What, I'm not entirely sure, but there it is. Of course, this is not a unique situation: The price point of all SimBin products have always been substantially reduced in the U.S., and a new copy of *GTR2*, with *GTL* included, retails at \$17.99 at most major outlets. What this means for SimBin's bottom line—when it sells cut-priced products in what is the world's biggest market—is anyone's guess, but I don't imagine for a second it does it any good ... but then, I work for free, so what the hell do I know anyway?



A STEAMing Pile Of Doo-Doo

STEAM. Those of you who read my *RACE* review—and actually remember a word I wrote—will recall that I was enraged by the whole process engendered by STEAM activation, and I cannot tell you how happy I was to be able to walk into a store and actually buy a DVD of *RACE07*: The last thing I needed, or wanted, was another STEAM-code stream imbedded in my arm.

How wrong I was. STEAM, it turns out, is not to be under-rated: It will find a way to get its twisted tentacle-like arms around you, as, indeed, will SimBin, (who have a history of this sort of thing—anyone remember the dedicated server issue with *GTR*, or the StarForce protection with *GTL?*), and I, alas, was not to be spared a whole load of SimBin-STEAM-induced pain.



Why, you ask? Well, let me tell you why! The only way I was able to play my 'retail version boxed copy'—that is, what was already on the DVD I *purchased* and could *touch and feel* was ... yes, you guessed it—to go to STEAM ... *and download the damn thing*—all over again!

See, *RACE07* would *not* install from the DVD (the offline version). And yes, you heard correctly: I bought the DVD, then had to download the very same content—off STEAM—in order to get the thing to run ... and before you say it, no, I was not alone, and yes, there is apparently some convoluted solution if you're one of the unfortunate people who will experience this asinine and utterly unacceptable nonsense.

I had quite the hissy fit during the multiple hours-long download of content that I had bought, on a friggin' DVD! And how was I able to get it to work? Well, once the download was done—six hours later, by the way—I used the code—*stuck to the inside of the retail version DVD case*. So what, you ask, was the point of the DVD, and the packaging, and the case? I haven't a clue: For what I had to do, they could just as easily have given me a slip of paper a Best Buy with my code, and told me to go home and download the stupid thing off STEAM.



The online version was a different matter, as it did install from the retail disk, albeit after a dozen or so attempts: For some reason, it would just hang during the DirectX install/update portion. Whatever the reasons for these things, I was finally able to get *RACE07* to a playable stage—about ten hours after having stuck the DVD into the tray ...

Browsing the forums revealed I was not alone with the installation problems, but there are, as I said, workarounds to be had, and, in general, I should add for the sake of honesty that it is a minority that suffer this idiocy.

That being as it may, this certainly does not relieve SimBin of their responsibility to ensuring that, when I buy a DVD of their product, with my money, from a shop, off a shelf, that the contents of that box should actually work—not inspire *me* to work to get *it* to work. Am I really asking too much here?

Add to this the odd price structuring, bizarre release methods, and functionality issues with retail disks, and what you get is the impression that SimBin remains—as always—a developer that seem always determined not to miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity to screw up a release. The market segment that buys these things is too small—and fickle, I would think—to tolerate much in the way of problems with a sim before it has had a chance to so much as crawl out of the box.

The Featured RACE

RACE07 is one very obvious thing, and that would be 'feature filled'. Apparently, the lack of any serious competition for the sim-racers' money has not caused SimBin to rest on their laurels; rather, and in a reversal of what we would expect, the lack of competition seems to have propelled the Swedish development house to try a lot harder, at least in terms of just how much it is willing to provide to the end user in terms of sheer content.

It was a nice surprise that SimBin saw fit to provide (what they claim to be) nine racing classes, two of which are officially licensed open wheel series cars, the F3000, and the Formula BMW. Also offered is the Radical—a fun as hell to pilot open cockpit screamer that holds the current all-time record around the 'Ring—Mini Coopers, Caterhams, the full list of cars and drivers of the 2006 and 2007 WTCC series, and, finally, two beauties from the late 1980s, the 1987 Alfa Romeo 75, and the BMW M3.

And yes, for those of you who are counting—and are able to count to ten—you will have noted that there are indeed only eight classes, although the box says nine: Either there is a secret class of car somewhere, or a class is something other than what I would associate with class (not having any myself, this is probably the truth), or someone in Sweden is having problems counting (wouldn't be the accountants, would it?). Regardless, toss in subclasses—the Radical has six alone—along with livery changes, and it's readily apparent there are a lot of different babies to drive and explore in SimBin's latest and greatest; it's not all just paint changes and minivans, kids, but 300 pure-bred *race* cars.

They didn't skimp on the tracks either; all of the official Touring Car 2006 and 2007 tracks are there for the breaking, along with alternates, reverse layouts, and non-season tracks as well. There has also been quite a bit of beating with the beauty stick as the tracks, with a few exceptions, are vastly improved over their *RACE* counterparts.

SimBin claim that the in-game audience is now '3D ... and more than double the amount of track-side objects', and a quick drive around the gorgeous offerings of Zandvoort, Macau, or Anderstorp will illustrate this quite nicely. Some tracks may appear a bit bland, but there has definitely been some improvement in how the tracks look, and kudos to SimBin for the effort here. The lighting is superb, and the track surface convincing. At times, however, there is a very annoying stuttering effect that can pop up, and disappear just as quickly. High shadow settings can drastically hit frame rate numbers, too, so play around until you get a setting that works. Replays seem to suffer the most from the stuttering issue, especially at higher detail settings.

Car modeling, graphically, has also seen a substantial amount of improvement. Although the cockpits remain, oddly, sparse and with low functionality (how long must we wait for a major developer to copy *nKPro* in this department, or, indeed, any flight-sim produced this century?), the outside of the cars are well crafted in terms of shape, and, perhaps more importantly, lighting. Far from cartoony, the cars of *RACE07* look good standing still, and feature all the things we have become accustomed to over the years; fully moveable suspensions from a visual standpoint, windshield dirt buildup, bug splatters, and a solidly implemented damage model. Granted, we are all probably more worried about the physics of the thing, but it is a good sign when the effort is put into making the cars look not only better, but more realistic. Again, the lack of competition is not being exploited by SimBin, and they are working hard at delivering quality content, and should be applauded for doing so: A lesser developer would certainly have settled for a less knowing the dire straights the community finds itself in, at least in terms of new, licensed, purpose-built sim products.

Gentlemen Start Your Engines!



Making your way past the sexy fast-action intro sequence of events, a bit of familiarization is in order. Those who have already played *RACE* will have no problem at all here as the layout is practically identical, albeit with a few new bits-and-bobs here and there, such as the fantastic 'car filter' portion of the sim that allows the user to select from several preset filters, or create one of their own. Want to see how those Mini Coopers do at Monza Short with a bunch of F3000s running around? Go ahead, it is now completely configurable.

Graphics settings, control settings, audio settings, and online activities all have their place in the User Interface portion of the sim, and there are really no surprises to be found here, not any problems: You can

turn off every single one of the aids and helpers for a full-blown simulator experience.

Thankfully, fully dynamic weather makes a return, but LiveTrack appears to have been fully left out, and one can only wonder as to the reason. Let's face it, LiveTrack is quite possibly the most innovative feature to have ever been integrated into a racing-sim for quite some time, and you definitely notice it not being there. On the other hand, the races are rather short, and given the extremely well done treatment of the track surface visually, the absence of LiveTrack, although not easy to overlook, is not a show stopper. To help with the immersion factor, count on working wipers—and you *will* need them to get rid of grime and grit, as well as gooey bug splatters from your windscreen. For the open cockpit crowd, a restricted view visor/helmet cam, fully fleshed out tear-off system, and accompanying animation to go with it will provide for some functional eye candy. In other words, while the track itself is not a dynamically changing entity, the world inside the car certainly is. Toss in a bit of rain, and you have plenty to worry about in terms of 'reality'.

The Intelligence Is Artificial: But What Happened To HAL?

The AI suffers from, how best to describe it—unassailable moments of gross stupidity that would make even the 'editor' of this magazine come across as intelligent. While that is not necessarily a bad thing (in either case), since even humans miss a shift or hit the wrong button at times (I did not say Lewis!), or just do something really dumb for no reason at all, the type of idiocy that the AI exhibit is of an all-together unforgivable kind: That is, we are not in the realm where the AI sometimes messes-up a turn, or does something vaguely human like out-brake themselves

but, instead, they seem to insist on making multiple mistakes at the same damn time at the same damn place—time and time and time and time again. Turn One, gentlemen, has not been this tricky since the last time you went online at 3AM in the Stinker Car mod.

Once things get strung out, though, the AI is not so bad, but ... they are still pretty awful, all things considered. In one instance, during a practice run, I tested them by pulling fully off the racing line and slowing to a sedate pace. Not one, not two, but *four* AI cars eventually made their way to my rear bumper, as opposed to simply driving by me, causing one heck of a log jam at Macau. The first one hit me; the next one hit that guy, the third plowed into that bumper, and so on. Some, though, made it by no problem.

I simply don't understand this. I am by no means a programmer, and wouldn't know a one from a zero on most days, but I *do* know this—Geoff Crammond, and Dave Kaemmer managed to programme decent AI over a decade ago, and things are just getting progressively worse in the department. Long story short—expect the unexpected, and plan on Turn One issues. *Often*. Naturally, like in *GTR*, and *GTR2*, for example, simply driving with the AI on the track eventually seems to 'improve' them as you become familiar with their idio(t)syncracies, but *RACE07*, in my opinion, falls rather short of previous SimBin offerings. In other words, things have gone backwards in the AI department; *RACE* was awful, *RACE07* is even worse.

If you ask me, however, I have a theory on this; the AI has been modeled on sim-racers. There can be no other explanation: and judging by the luminaries of the sim-racing world that have made their way into this sim (the greats at RSC, for instance), the sim-racers on which the AI has been modeled leave a bit to be desired. Either that, or the AI programmer at SimBin is a sadist.

So How Does It Drive?

I am not going to pretend to be a sim physics/tyre model/slip curve expert, but this time around, I thoroughly enjoyed my time on-track; even the 'sedate' WTCC class was not disappointing. In *RACE*, I often felt that I had more fun driving my real life Monte Carlo than the WTCC offerings. I didn't dislike driving them, mind you; it just didn't feel like I was in a born to race car—at least in terms of 'feel'. But I can't say the same for *RACE07*, and I must confess to having enjoyed the WTCC classes quite a bit.

I don't know what it is, exactly, but something—some intangible thing is going that provides for a much more enjoyable driving experience. Nowhere is this more apparent than taking any WTCC 2006, or 2007 car out for a spin around Zandvoort. Whatever voodoo is taking place at the contact patch in terms of code, it results in a rewarding sim-drive: Simply stated, if you liked how the WTCC cars drove in *RACE*, don't even think about it, get *RACE07*. Everything is improved, and the cars are now far from glued to the track, a fact the wise will keep in mind as even the 'low power' of a WTCC car is enough to carry you violently into a wall if you take a place like Zandvoort a bit too lightly. Even more precision is required at the city tracks, and what tracks they are—SimBin have shown some fine craftsmanship here, and the claustrophobic and confining nature of the racing lines will mean practice and memorization is strictly required in order to get the most of the WTCC class around any of the city tracks.

RACE07 is also SimBin's first foray into the world of open-wheelers, and it is a welcome addition, indeed, to their repertoire. It wasn't long after installing the sim that I made my way to the much-touted F3000, as I had been anticipating driving it since reading the Alx Danielsson interview in these pages some months ago. Indeed, Sweden's best-placed racer to enter Formula One in a decade or more was employed by SimBin specifically for

this car, and that authenticity shows. Danielsson is clearly that rare breed of driver, one who is comfortable both in real and simulated cars, and can obviously convey the feel of the real to the simulated with precision.

Featuring a full-face helmet view that folks appear to love or hate (cutting out the view of our already restricted simulated view may not be the wisest choice, but it is also an immersive aid, so choose your side of the fence), this car is, simply, one hell of a great time. From the sounds flying out of the motor to the fantastic sense of speed to the best F3000-like car dynamics since *nKPro*, don't be surprised if you find yourself grinning as your driver reaches up to pull a tear-off from his visor at some safe location during a Monza run.

More than powerful enough to give a seasoned veteran pause with aids turned off, this F3000 can get downright cranky at times. Expect to spend some quality time with the setup on this one, but make sure that you start out with the excellent default setup—with functional gearing ratios—that SimBin, thankfully, has seen fit to provide. Indeed, SimBin have found time to include a setup for every car, at every track, rain or shine, with gear ratios that actually make sense! This is one hell of a welcome surprise, and hats off for the effort. The default setups, while certainly not about to make you the quickest steed out of the block, are certainly a very useful base from which to begin the process of perfecting them to suit your style. Although oversteer is not too prevalent with the default setups, don't be fooled as the car will behave poorly if you behave poorly.

Other great rides are the Radical, and Caterhams offerings. From the modeling to the vehicle dynamics, it would appear that the abundance of cars in *RACE07* is not some half-hearted Codemastersesque attempt at 'value for your money' but, rather, an attempt to improve on what has come before (in *RACE*), as well as respecting the valuable licensing permissions.

Interestingly enough, SimBin have not skimped on the damage either. Convincing bits of who-knows-what can be seen flying from cars during impacts with trackside objects or other cars, and if you hit something hard enough with your F3000, expect to find some rather substantial damage to your car; like half the car going in the opposite direction from your helmet cam. Simulators based on ISI engines (I can think of only two sims that haven't employed the motor1 or 2 engine in the last five years) have come a long way in terms of the representation of damage (okay, so you won't see your injured driver slumped, motionless in his seat a-la *nKPro*), and it is definitely appreciated. *RACE07*, more often than not, convinces one of the destruction of delicate composites and thin metals, and along with the visual, you can expect a significant drop-off in performance should you car still be running after a big one.

Another element of *RACE07* I liked was the wet weather representation. Great spray plumes from the cars, and while perhaps a bit underdone, the tracks have a very realistic 'wet race track' look to it. And it certainly had the feel—make sure to properly outfit those tyres; for even more fun, start from the back of the grid in the wet. The crazy and unpredictable AI behaviour at Turn One, much less grip, and the blinding spray of twenty-three drivers in front of you all add up for some interesting driving. Just make sure to be extra careful when you grab for the tear-off, or wiper button!

There is not much fanfare during a pit stop; however, pit stops are not really that common with the short race length of the WTCC. But don't worry; should you want to make one—although you will not be met with *Grand Prix 4* or *GTR2* type pit animations—your car will be attended to. And you are going to need it if you find yourself doing what I attempted—having a go at Zandvoort in the Formula BMW with about fifty laps worth of fuel (which appears to be the maximum number of laps adjustable

by the user). More than plenty to get a good taste and feel for any of the well-done car models.

Sadly, no telemetry system that shipped with *RACE07*, and while it was perhaps forgivable in *RACE* given the limited number of car classes, I had fully expected to see some sort of system in this latest offering considering the offering of much higher performance open wheelers, and the Radical classes. It may be the case that MoTeC is simply not available due to a licensing or permission issue, but there must be other telemetry software available, or, perhaps, an in-house version. An annoyance, but not a show stopper. If I want my fix of telemetry charts, I head for *GTR2*.

Multiplayer.

Let's face it, we've been spoilt by *rFactor*, and *Live For Speed*. SimBin aren't saying what version of ISI's motor they are using, but I suspect it is motor2 (for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the designations, gmotor2 is the graphics engine, not the physics engine which uses a different assignation); sadly, and for whatever reason, they have not licensed ISI's *rFactor* MP code, so it is difficult to be 'fair' here. As always, make sure you have a good connection, don't push it in terms of amount of drivers, and my guess is that you will probably enjoy yourself. There is no setup exchange feature a-la *GTR/GTR2/GTL* (another step backwards, sadly), but with the inclusion of decent setups, this is easy to overlook.

Closing Thoughts

RACE07 does so many things well that it is easy to overlook the shortcomings, of which there are many. Any review of a sim product must—this being a community that does not move from sim to sim with gay abandon—be compared to previous sims, and in SimBin's case, anything they produce will also be

compared to their seminal product, *GTR2*. *RACE07*, for instance, does not feature LiveTrack, it does not have a telemetry module, it does not have the setup exchange feature, its AI is far short of *GTR2*'s standard, and it is not open to modding. Why this should be the case is beyond my understanding; it's almost as if SimBin have decided to abandon some of the core features that made its best-selling sim such a massive success.

Of all the *GTR2* comparisons, though, it is the AI that is most difficult to forgive. Let me make it clear: The AI is poor at extremely important parts of the race. Yes, they can be dealt with by sheer avoidance, or by just giving them the position and hanging back while they leave you behind, but that shouldn't be the case in this day and age of quad cores and quad video cards and quad this and quad that. If a sim of nearly a decade ago can have ultra-brilliant AI—not to mention an ultra-brilliant physics model—it is almost laughable that we find ourselves ten years on in hardware, seventeen years backwards in AI programming. That is of course a bit severe, but there is some merit to the thought that as time progresses, so does technology, and not just the hardware stuff. One can only hope that a future patch by SimBin will address that issue.

So yes, it fails in its comparison to *GTR2*. But ... and this is an important but ... on its own merits, SimBin seem to have crossed the chasm left behind by Ian Bell (or, more succinctly, by the departure of the talent that is now Blimey!Games), and have created a solid, well-crafted, and sometimes fantastic product. There is nothing adventurous here; nor is there the almost casual brilliance of *GTR2*. *RACE07* is not open to modding, either, so don't expect *GTR2*'s longevity. But all-in-all, it is a worthy entry into the annals of sim-racing products, and the price tag—at least in the U.S.—makes it a sim you should probably not avoid.

Pro

Excellent vehicle dynamics
Improved graphics a welcome touch
Full licensing of WTCC 2006 and 2007 seasons
Thirty-two tracks, including all 2006 and 2007 WTCC offerings, alternates, extras, all with enhanced surroundings and crowd representations
Extra cars not just fluff—compelling additional content
Ridiculously low price in some markets makes the sheer amount of excellent content the biggest bargain you're likely to find for some time
Wipers, tear offs, bug splatters, and dynamic weather all add up to great immersion
Solid damage model, excellent sense of speed

Con

AI atrocious all too often
LiveTrack Technology missing
Occasional stuttering, more prevalent while watching replay modes at high detail
Telemetry missing
Cockpits are rather lifeless, and boring
DVD installation issues could thwart even the offline only "I don't want STEAM crowd." While STEAM might be the only way to get a patch, to have to download content you actually possess, legally, for hours, (...dear Lord, the dial-up folks ...) may upset some if they are unlucky enough to run into that particular install issue

AUTOSIMSPORT

RACE07

Jon's Review

Jon Denton takes SimBin's latest on the road ... and finds some curious behaviour ...

JonDenton

Scores *RACE07*

74%





RACE07 is the latest in what is becoming a rather long line of sims released by Simbin using their licenced ISI engine. This engine—motor2—first seen in *rFactor*, has been tweaked, done-up, greased, and bent into something quite a bit more than its original guise, mainly by SimBin, but also by other commercial licensees.

Following up last year's similarly imaginatively named, *RACE*, *RACE07* throws more cars and more tracks at the tried-and-tested routine of racing simulators dating back millions of cyber years (about fifteen human ones). So, in short, you know what to expect.

With the exception of *nKPro* and *LFS* (both realistically long term WIP projects), there has not been a sim released since 2003 that used anything but ISI technology. In other words, were there no ISI, there would have been two simulators released in this market in four years ... a worrying sign.

The scene was set with *GTR*, a title that enjoyed enough commercial success to spawn two successors, the under-appreciated *GTL*, and the well-received *GTR2*, both using the same engine as you'll find beneath the skin of *rFactor* ...

SimBin added rain, Live Track, prettier environments and developments to the tyre model (said developments eventually finding their way into mods for *rFactor* itself), but what we have with *RACE07* is what we've had for five years now in various stages of make-up.

Now ... is this a bad thing? Well, obviously we have our free practice, single race, championship, or Multi-player options (*not*, it should be said, the *rFactor* MP), we have lots of customisation options, and a load of cars and tracks. What we don't have is telemetry, animations, (not even visible pit crews), a replay system worth its salt, or a coherent online structure. (Though I should add that there are .PLR hacks which will enable MoTeC: This involves decrypting the files, and is strictly not supported by SimBin ... For those who will inevitably want to try, I have been told this actually works, though.)

Still, when SimBin is working with someone else's engine, we can only expect so much. The question, and the reason you're probably reading this review is—is *R07* worth buying?

The answer is a tricky one. You see, this is one of only two racing-sims that have been released in 2007, which is a sad state of affairs for us all, and what it really means is that this market is at risk of falling into the same world as fans of submarine simulators. With the only problem being that *RACE07* has nowhere near the longevity, depth, or engagement that *Silent Hunter 4* can offer.

So what have we got? Well, we've got WTCC (both 2006 and 2007 fields) cars, which we remember from *RACE*, as with the 'lacking in licences' depleted WTCC 1987 field. To add to its value, we've had some Radicals and Caterhams thrown in from the club circuit, a bunch of old Minis (also resurrected from *RACE*), a Formula BMW (which seem to be turning up everywhere), and finally some lovely F3000 cars.

Taking them all for a test drive is a lengthy task, but there are some you will fall in love with notably more than others, mainly because the tyre modeling, and vehicle dynamics feel remarkably different on all of them: While the WTCC and F3000s seem to be well done efforts at vehicle implementations in the ISI engine, other cars seem to have been thrown in almost as an afterthought.

Not least the Radicals, and the Caterhams which, despite sporting liveries and teams from the RSC Racing Club (I think!), and featuring some familiar names from the sim-racing community (one inevitably wonders why they forgot to contact AUTOSIMSPORT—then one talks to Alex Martini for twelve seconds), really fail to match up to their free-to-download modded counterparts available for *rFactor*.

Alas, the modelling of suspension seems decidedly suspect in these two cars, as a certain lack of movement is apparent in the chassis. The driving experience of the Caterhams specifically—a car I have notable real-life experience with—is considerably humbled by Cubit's excellent *rFactor* mod. When you consider that they are working with the same technology, and *rFactor* is completely open, you really have to wonder why one guy, working in his free time for fun, can get it so right, while an entire development team—with what one assumes is total access to the cars themselves—can get it so wrong. Not only is there not enough pitch in the car, but one fails to get much feel for the slip curve of the tyres; drop off occurs strangely, more severely at the rear of the car than it does at the front, with a surprisingly large amount of turn-in grip.

The Radicals are not much better, seeming to be even stiffer; one feels a little like one is driving a piece of sheet metal along with wheels and an engine, albeit probably stiffer. The Radicals also lack much in the way of inertia; this may be a lightweight racer, but they weigh more than Formula BMWs, and in *R07*, they don't feel that way. The Formula BMWs are nicely done, and feel very similar to the IDT *rFactor* mod, albeit the first version. The geometry feels right, but the tyres have an odd quality on the limit. At or just below the limit, where one spends most of their time, the Formula BMW is a fine drive.

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The Minis and the WTCC'87s feel largely unchanged from *RACE*, though the improvement in *R07*'s tracks shows up their responsiveness to bumps, and makes the WTCC'87 cars some of the most pleasant to drive. While the Minis would seemingly prefer a billiard table to race on, this is not necessarily lacking in realism, but one wonders if the stiff suspension, high centre of gravity, short wheelbase, and ridiculous weight distribution combination that the Mini presents is a little beyond the physics engine; oversteer is too keen, whilst setup modifications to promote understeer result in not quite enough oversteer. Front wheel drive cars present quite a challenge to any current physics engine, and the Mini is a whole new challenge in itself.

This leaves the current crop of WTCC cars, and the F3000s, which are by far the best vehicles in the sim. It seems quite a bit of attention has gone to the tyre model of the WTCC cars since *RACE* to make them a little less forgiving and dull. One felt that *RACE* was a direct port

from *GTR2* tyre-wise, and allowed far too much of a forgiving slip curve allied to a fuzzy relationship between slip angle and self-aligning torque at the front-end. While this seems to have been worked on with *R07*, the tyre model still seems a little forgiving over the limit, but the behaviour over bumps and general performance of the WTCC cars, especially the BMW (which does not suffer from inherent issues the ISI engine has with torque steer from front wheel drive cars), is superb.

The F3000s are really the first time we have had the chance to drive a high powered open wheeled car in wet

conditions using this engine, and it acquits itself well to the task. As with the WTCC cars, the behaviour is slightly odd when pushing beyond the pale, and one often finds that you can bring the car back from lurid slides that in real-life would have you winging your way towards the scene of the accident. One wonders if the simplified aerodynamic model is not a contributor here, the reality being that an F3000 car at anything approaching a serious yaw angle would lose a tremendous amount of its rear downforce which, at the given cornering speed, would mean an almost guaranteed off. One feels that SimBin have left these cars a little more forgiving that they ultimately should be in this respect. However, if you manage to drive 'normally' and not exploit the engine to your own means, this car feels nice to drive, and is an awful lot of fun, and can be truly challenging on wet, bumpy surfaces.

The forgiving feel presented by SimBin here is understandable if you look at the realities of commercial racing simulator production in this day and age. Not

everyone has the level of precision equipment I do, let alone the money or space or time to commit to it, and they need to make a sim that appeals to a wider scope than just the hardcore. History shows us that sims such as *Richard Burns Rally*, that go all out for hardcore realism, fail to sell because, well, if people wanted to crash they would buy Bugbear's *FlatOut*.

So, okay, it's a bit of a hoot to drive, there is a coherent offline sim in there, and some adequate ISI online to play with? Right? Well ... Hmmm ...

The AI ... Let us talk about the AI. A lot of people don't bother with AI, preferring to race online only, and fair enough, I say. I am mostly an online person, but when offline, building setups or practicing in general, I like to be able to throw some robots on the track to race with. I don't expect miracles; these are not going to be the most intelligent racers I have raced against, but what I *do* expect is for AI to improve upon sims that have come before it. Now, this is a trade off, of course; we want all the processor cycles we can get for physics, and these days everyone seems to want everything to run on hardware that is two hundred and fifteen million years old. So basically, the design brief for any new sim coming out is: 100 percent accurate tyre, suspension, drivetrain, internal combustion, and aerodynamic model for forty cars, Lieutenant Commander Data at the helm of every AI car, and it all to run happily on a 486SX 25Mhz box with 4MB of RAM.

Well, that sounds like a piece of cake to me, I wonder what they are all busy doing back there at Simbin, ISI, or wherever? The reality, of course, is that each sim must trade off what it wants to give to the customer versus what it can give to the customer. So, is there a school of thought that says it is okay for the AI in *R07* to be worse than the AI in *GP4* because *GP4*'s Multi-player was rubbish, and it was basically an offline sim?

In a word, no. *GP4* was made five years ago, AI simply *must* have come on by now; I mean, men with beards

produce small, mental robots that make people tea when they visit Honda in Tokyo, so is it really beyond us to put together a gang of lads on a race track that can manage not to hit each other at Turn One?

Now, if I were Mr Simbin sat afore me right now, I would jest that ninety-five percent of online pick up races result in a smash at Turn One, and I would be right. Alas, I am not, and ninety-five percent of the buffoons that seem to inhabit most of the pick up races I had a look at in *R07* were far from professional racing drivers, and if I were Andy Priaulx, I would be rather upset that I was being represented in a sim as someone who cannot stay away from the back bumper of the car in front of me.

Oddly, once you clear the first corner and get down to some good old tooth and nail fighting, the AI is great. Like, seriously d00d, some of the best I have seen. They give you room (as long as you are respectful as well), and they don't give up their places easily. I really had a great time racing the AI at any point after Turn One; the sad part being that all too often half of the field was removed at that point.

Okay, so you get the picture. What about the online side of things? Well, if you have done much racing in *GTR2* then you know what to expect: Not as good as *rFactor*! Sad but true I'm afraid, and I am not sure as to the complete cause to this; maybe ISI hang onto the latest version of their netcode when they licence the engine. But on the whole, with a decent and well set up dedicated server, you will get a good online experience with *R07*, and while I experienced some lagging from time to time, I never once got booted for no apparent reason, and it definitely won over *rFactor* on the old 'type mismatch' front. Pick up races were naturally filled with keyboard players and lunatics with the odd serious racer in the mix, and finding a good one was time consuming and dull, so do what every other sim-racer has done over the last few years and join a league!

It really is about time that the developers took over league management and made it a built-in part of the sim,

but I don't think that is going to happen while everyone is using the same engine.

Okay, so back to the question, should you buy it? Well, I would say that if you really want to drive WTCC or F3000 cars, then yes. I would say that the tracks would be a good reason, but we all know that they have, or will be, converted to other ISI engine sims in due course, so you can get them anyway, regardless of the moral situation afoot (Pau is gorgeous and superb).

What I could say is that the fact that it is one of only two sims released this year would be a damn good reason to buy it, but if you're happy with what you've got in whatever ISI sim you're running, then you may not agree since it is, realistically, more of the same. And if you're a diehard *LFS* or *nKPro* driver, then you are probably not that fussed about anything released using this engine anyway.

This sim won't be the last one released using this engine—one other, smaller project has been released in November, and more are coming, but as the future dawns, it is becoming clear that the bigger developers, such as Simbin, are making their own engines to be able to really push the envelope forward as bigger and better hardware starts to abound. If you're a 'completest', buy it, if not, then there is better out there on the whole, but nothing that does WTCC so well.

A fine effort in some areas but fundamentally flawed in others, and really nothing new here.



TC Review

Turismo Carretera

Ivan Askew goes Touring, Argentine-style, and finds a world of bland textures mixed in with a somewhat vulgar but astonishingly spine-tingling ride ...

IvanAskew





It's doubtful that [2Pez](#)—the developers of *Turismo Carretera*—had Adorno in mind when they created their (first) simulator, but all the same—since, as Derrida holds it, intentionality is generally irrelevant—they have tipped their hat toward the dialectic by creating a simulator that, in its very aesthetic (unpolished and rough), replicates the rough-and-ready, Argy-bargy (oh, a pun, too!) reality of what one expects from a series such as *Turismo Carretera*.

But whilst a philosophy student might give them kudos for this aesthetic purity, the sim-racer is going to find himself at once both thrilled and annoyed ... and probably in equal measure.

The [Turismo Carretera series](#) is Argentina's local stock-car series (think Aussie V8s, with less power, and more responsive cars), and it enjoys a very healthy and passionate following (for background on the series, please see AUTOSIMSPORT Vol3 Num4). 2Pez's offering is an officially licensed version of this engaging series, and features all the tracks (twelve), all the cars (four), all the drivers (sixty,

including you), along with a faithful recreation of a TC weekend (four practice sessions, three qualifying sessions, and four race heats), all incorporated into a licensed gmoto2 engine from ISI—in other words, an *rFactor* mod with a license, and a price tag.

And that is where things start to get problematic. No fault of 2Pez, of course, but one of the biggest issues with *rFactor* is its lack of atmosphere, and this carries straight into *TC*, warts and all. 2Pez have tried to clean up the User Interface, giving it a more—modern—take, but it'll take about a fraction of a second for the user to recognize this as *rFactor* with a wig—it's ultimately a Clousseau-like disguise, and does little to impart that missing sense of place that is *rFactor*'s most glaring problem. It isn't pretty, it isn't engaging, but—it does get the job done in the most functional way possible.

rFactor, of course, is curiously devoid of any 'setting', and 2Pez have not been able to recreate an authentic sense of time and place that one finds so readily in *Grand Prix*

Legends. But then again, not many have using the ISI engine ...

This is 2Pez's first offering, and it shows; there is no SimBin-like (in the Ian Bell days anyway) caress, no drastic changes from what you've come to expect from an *rFactor* mod. The screens are all pretty identical to *rFactor*, barring a change in colour, and a few buttons here and there, and the replays, the sounds, the general feel is that which most of us have become accustomed to in *rFactor*: In a word, uninspiring.

On the other hand, the gmoto2 engine is singing along like a well-tuned V6 nowadays, and this sim gets a whole lot right, too, using that engine ... but before that, just a quick word on this review: I don't think it necessary to describe all the minutia since you, dear reader, can download a sixty minute free-demo of this simulator ... and if you're one of those who have a short attention span, I would highly recommend you do exactly that ... for those of you, however, who care about what I have to say, let's move swiftly on to the flesh and wishbones of *Turismo Carretera*, which retails at \$33.00 (with tax), and is downloadable via the web from [here](#) ...

Vista Woes

I'm using Vista nowadays; no fault of mine, since it came pre-installed in my new gaming laptop. Yes, of course I am a fool—but a word-to-the-wise on Vista and installing *rFactor*—and *Turismo Carretera*—is necessary. First-off, if you install into the same directory as *rFactor*—that is, the default location, program files—you will find that Vista thinks *TC* is actually *rFactor*—and when you first run *TC*, you will find that all your settings—controllers, and what not—are already present in *TC*. I thought this was a rather nifty feature ... but alas, the sim has become very unstable as a result, both off and online. Worse still, the problems keep mounting, and I have come to deeply resent Vista.



Another thing you need to realize about installing *rFactor*—or *TC*—on Vista is this: Vista will not allow the Trymedia software to write your license keys into the correct directory ... in other words, when you buy a license, Vista won't allow the license to become active on your sim because Microsoft have decided that their Operating System knows better than you, the owner and user, about your intentions (did we cover Derrida already?). Run the thing as an admin', however, before you buy the license, and chances are it may work ... or, as happened to me, it will hang there, making repeated inputs of your license necessary until you finish your five strikes and you're out routine, and at which point you'll need to contact Trymedia for a few more licenses.

Of course, this being Vista, it will inform you that you have bought the license; but next time you start the sim, you will be asked to re-input your code ... all very frustrating, though no fault of 2Pez or ISI. But if you're thinking of going

Vista anytime soon on your sim-racing machine, I'd hold off. Then again, you're not me, and you probably have an advanced degree from MIT, in which case, go right ahead (and send me your number, because the only vista I'm getting from Vista are the fires of hell) ...

I have not heard of any such problems with Windows XP, but Vista has proved to be difficult and challenging, not only securing the license, but also in terms of what has become a very unstable simulator. Many CTDs have resulted, and when it does happen, Vista helpfully informs me that *rFactor* has crashed, even though it was *Turismo Carretera* that was running at the time. Ho-hum ...

The Cars

Turismo Carretera features four beautifully modeled cars: the IKA/Renault Torino, the Dodge GTX Coupé, the Chevrolet Coupé SS, and the Ford Falcon. But when I say beautifully modeled, I don't mean beautiful cars: In fact, I

don't quite know *how* to describe the way these things look; they are certainly not the type of car you'd see on Argentine roads, and—at least to my eye—seem rather clumsy, graceless beasts, with Mad-Max-like air-intakes on the hoods, long, unhandsome backsides, and a front-end that appears to have been ripped-off someone's hot-rod. I am told the front-end of the chassis is deformable, and therefore adds to the safety of the cars, but they do look odd with the front tyres sticking out of the body. The intriguing design, though, amounts to a very responsive front-end, so—looks aside—these cars are racing thoroughbreds, and anyone coming in expecting the bus-like ride of a NASCAR is in for a rude—but all-together pleasant—surprise.

Inside the cockpit, things are rudimentary to say the least; the tachometer is of the numbered kind (no LCD stuff here), and the gear-stick is a long broomstick number that goes through a five speed gearbox. The view through the windscreen is restricted, too, especially in the Torino; with that big-ass air-intake cutting off much of the vista (no!) that is already obscured by the sloping windscreen, you're left with precious-little vision out onto the road. There's no onboard readings either, except for a box that will count out the laps for you, and the sim is hardcore enough not to allow any HUD displays (if you want to turn it on, you need to modify the .PLR file as follows: 'alowhudincockpit=1'). Pit-to-car radio has yet to make an appearance in the sim, either, though 2Pez have noted to AUTOSIMSPORT that this may be coming in a future patch: One can only hope we don't get that *rFactor* redneck bastard speaking in Spanish ...

So, having sat there in the pits for a few seconds getting accustomed to my new ride, my first thought was ... God, have I come down a long way from my days as a Formula One driver ... a thought, I imagine, not too far removed from those of Norberto Fontana, one-time Sauber F1 driver, and now *Turismo Carretera* star ... of

course, like Fontana, I too am getting old, and perhaps the instant-inputs of the world's premiere racing series now exceed my reflexes ... whatever the excuse, I find that I am seriously ready for some saloon-style racing ...

The engines are all three-litre, six-cylinder jobs pushing out about 350BHP. However, each car does feature a different engine, meaning that RPM will range from the 9,500 to the lower 8,000, and horsepower from about 340 to 360 (see sidebar). In the pits, though, the engines, when you rev 'em up, sound very sweet indeed; bubbling nicely at low levels, and then whining appreciatively when you go up to the red-line. Very nice—the in-game engine sounds, coupled with the noises inside the cockpit, are excellently conveyed; top-notch.

Out on the track, the lack of visibility becomes a non-issue because you'll find yourself—in very short order (warm-up the tyres and be gentle with the throttle for the first lap)—extremely busy trying to keep this brute between the white lines. The cars may look ungainly, but out on the track, where they belong, they transform themselves into very manageable—and fun to drive—babes who like it a little rough. The brakes are refined, the cars turn-in very well, and are extremely responsive to both throttle and wheel inputs. The engines, on the other hand, are anything but refined—we are talking about dumb-power here, and there is a bucket-load of low-down torque that will snap the rear out like a ten-dollar hooker: you'll find wheel-spin in third, and using the inside of the kerbs at many tracks to rail your way around becomes a rather thrilling experience.

The cars weigh-in at just over 1,300 kilos, making them light enough to throw around, and the 350 horses are more than adequate to keep everything singing along nicely when the rear steps out—as it most certainly will.

Martin (an ex-racer himself)—along with many of the TC drivers—has brought much real-world experience to the sim, and it shows. The cars are well-crafted, and they feel very racey indeed.



What we have here, I decide after twenty laps, is American muscle bolted onto a European-style, lightweight chassis, and the result is one of the best rides you'll ever experience: We are in the world of *race cars* here.

The Force-Feedback is one of the most engaging and responsive I have ever tried, and it feels years ahead of the stock *rFactor* F-F. At once heavy and positive, it is one of the highlights of the sim (tested on a G25), and the car feels alive in your hands, kicking and bucking and really trying hard to swap ends when you nail the power and listen to the bubbling boil up into a kettle-like whine. Which is a good thing, because you're going to be spending a lot of time reacting to the car's incessant desire to hurt you; fighting the car's wanton desire to show you her plump backside is very much part of *Turismo Carretera*.

I was expecting something very different, but an hour into the ride, I landed up forking out the thirty-odd dollars for the license; I was that addicted, and I must confess to not

having enjoyed a sim this much in a long time. It's odd, of course, because it isn't very good looking, and comes with a lot of problems, but what sells it, for me, is the driving model; the vehicle dynamics are excellent and, while I have never driven one of these cars, they behave very much as you'd expect ... challenging, yes, but equally, the cars can be tamed, and once you're used to the way they handle, big power-slides become very much part of your daily regimen ...

They are light(ish), they are powerful, responsive, with fine suspensions, rigid-chassis, and they are—ultimately—utterly stupid and ruthless beasts. Unlike their European cousins, they enjoy no refinements; they are primitive, and the power comes in big fat dabs of uncontained enthusiasm. And unlike their Aussie cousins, they are lighter, and easier to chuck around. The brakes, too, are not terribly advanced but, at the same time, precise, meaning braking distances are long, and racing is therefore sweetened up.

Turismo Carretera has been made by people who seem to have placed the feel of the cars way-up on their agenda, and the excellent vehicle dynamics model is the high-point of the simulator. Now whether front-engined cars have this kind of bite is open to debate: Having, however, neither seen, nor indeed driven these cars, I can only believe the developers' word on this one ... after all, they have driven these beasts, and are clearly in a position to know.



The Tracks

Twelve of them, in all, and, unless you're an Argentine, or a fan of the series, you will probably have heard of none of them—aside from the Buenos Aires circuit that once hosted the Argentine Grand Prix. Interestingly enough, this track—arguably Argentina's most important facility—is named not after any of Argentina's Formula One stars (they've had a few, by the way, not forgetting one Juan Manuel Fangio), but after one of its most successful Turismo Carretera star, [Oscar Alfredo Gálvez](#) (who raced back in the 1950s). They take this series seriously in Argentina ...

2Pez have, they claim, used GPS for the recreation of the tracks. And the layouts, bumps, and nature of the tracks are well-crafted, and, more importantly, well-suited to the cars. A lot of challenging and new tracks to learn adds further value to the thirty-buck admission ticket ... but ... this is also a wasted opportunity since the tracks are, ultimately, disappointing.

A lot of work has clearly gone into the track layouts and surfaces—and comparisons to real-world videos of the TC cars in action are positive. But the surroundings are unpolished, the textures, in many cases, rather poor, and some of the trackside graphics astonishingly ugly. Trackside objects are rendered in an unsophisticated way, and the vagueness of the 'grass' and textures are not on-par with the tracks we have been used to getting from SimBin, Blimey, and even *nKpro*.

Having said that, you won't be spending much time not-enjoying the surroundings once you're on-track. All the

same, it takes away a sense of engagement, and the lack of polish is unfortunate, and a big let-down.

The AI

Like the tracks, the AI is both very smart—and very stupid. On-track, they behave rather well; the user is able to play with the 'aggression' of the AI, and at 150 percent, they react well to your driving. They will try and pass, but, get them on the outside, and chances are they will lift rather than having you into the wall. Indeed, at 150 percent, the AI are surprisingly respectful ... but, should you try and muscle your way into the inside of a turn, you can expect them to muscle-back, leading to some rather exciting duels!

Sadly, this is counter-balanced by the AI being unbelievably dumb in other situations. Since a Turismo Carretera weekend sees sixty cars entered for the event, the pits—understandably—are rather complicated things (some tracks will require you to start from a tent at the back of the paddock, meaning you'll be winding your way around the pits for a minute or more until you get to the track), and the AI are not always able to find their way out. With sixty cars, wheels and pieces of body-work will be scattered all over the shop as the AI dumb and grind their way to the track; many, sadly, will never quite make it ...

So, again, a lack of polish means that, on-track, the AI will provide for some good scraps, and you will begin to recognize some of the big players in the series: Ledesma, Fontana, and others—but alas, getting to the track seems to challenge them no end. And getting back into the pits, during a practice or qualifying session, seems equally challenging for our AI friends: the chances of them making it into the pits—rather than crashing on their way in, in spectacular fashion—seems about fifty-fifty so, if you're cruising into the pits, keep your eyes on the mirror, and don't follow them in too closely either because anything can—and usually does—happen.

The AI have been clearly modeled not on the real-world drivers of TC, but on sim-racers, and it's a nervy experience ... but again, once you're into a race, they will fight, and will provide you with a lot of challenges, especially when you crank up their speed.

The Race Weekend

Turismo Carretera is a little complicated in the way the weekend is set-up, so, if you're thinking of taking the sixty-minute demo for a spin, listen up, or you will spend a lot of time trying to fathom the way things work.

The way things shake up on a weekend is as follows (on full settings): Four practice sessions of twenty minutes, followed by three qualifying sessions of twenty minutes (or twenty laps maximum), followed by a warm-up, followed by four race heats, three prelims of about six laps—and one final heat of twenty-five or so laps. *And no, you won't be taking part in all the sessions*; the practice sessions are not mandatory, and you can skip through them if you wish. But once the qualifying starts, you'd best pay attention because you will be involved in *only one session*, the other two will be for the other competitors. Skip the qualifying session in which you are scheduled to run, and you will be out of the race weekend—end of story—because there are sixty cars trying to qualify, and they will do so in batches of twenty per qual-session. Clear?

Right, now, here's the rub, so pay even more attention: If you have made the race weekend—in the options—to the mirror the real-world weekend, it means that you will need to be within 103 percent of the fastest time in qualifying to move on to the races. If you don't have the 103 percent in the settings, you can skip the qualifying and start your race heat in last place. If you have it on, you will need to qualify within 103 percent of the fastest time of the weekend to move on to the races.

Races, yes, plural, because there are four of them. The first three races see the pole man—that is, the fastest man in

Qualifying One—start in first position in heat number one (six laps if you're running at 100 percent race distance), the pole man in Qualifying Two starts in pole for heat number two, and the fastest man in Qualifying Three leads the pack in heat number three. And so on. (Whether you're in Qualifying One, Two, or Three is dependent on your position in the Championship Standings.)

If all cars are within 103 percent, what you have is twenty cars in every heat. Clear?

Starts are rolling, and they are frantic; these Argentines are a tough crowd, and you better get used to a bit of ye old 'how's your father' Argy-bargy. Much is on the line; only the first sixteen from every heat—that is, the three race heats—will qualify for the final event of the day, the big race when men become heroes in front of massive crowds. The winner of heat one will start in pole, the winner of heat two in second, the winner of heat three in third, and so on down the line for a big field come the final heat of the day—a twenty-five lap or so race where you do *not* want to be starting in mid-pack.

For MP purposes, the weekend has been simplified; the top ten in every race will make it into the final race of the weekend.

So pay attention to when your name comes up in qualifying, and make sure you post a time, if you have the 103 percent rule in effect: If you don't, pay attention to which race heat you'll be running in because if you miss this race, you won't be in the final race of the weekend.

Damage Model

The damage model is adequate. Pieces will fly, including your wheels, and there is a finely tuned model featuring dynamic variation of temperatures, breakages, and wearing down of parts. The damage is adequate if not brilliant; over-revving on downshifts can hurt the engine, and these cars are quite brittle so don't think you can get away driving into other cars—you won't, your suspension, and worse, will break pretty easily.

The cars also feature some nice dents when you use the guy in front for some trail-braking, and the windscreens get nice and dirty after a long run.

Multiplayer

What more need be said; this is *rFactor's* MP, and it's the best-in-class. The servers at the moment, however, are very few and far between—in the two weeks I've been testing the sim, I have seen no more than ten servers running at a time (it has its own MP component, and it doesn't link to the *rFactor* server list), and about twenty drivers, max', are strutting their skills. The 2Pez server is by far the best of the lot, and it is stable, fast, and reliable.

This is also a small community at the moment, and the racing is generally clean and respectful; kinda like the glory days of *GPL*, really, except everyone will be speaking in Spanish so practice your *Ola!*

Since there doesn't seem to be servers running out of many other places other than Argentina, though, I'd be careful on the ping-front; 1,700 pings make even the *rFactor*-MP-code stutter.

Racing online is brilliant, should you be lucky enough to get a race. The cars are designed to run very close to one another, and they are slow enough to make passing a frequent occurrence.

Conclusion

The sim needs polish; there is a patch coming, and it may be out by the time you read this review. The track textures are dull, some of the graphics poor. The price is on the steep side considering the amount of cars and tracks available. But aside from that, this is a notable entry from 2Pez, and it features four cars that are immense fun to drive, along with excellent vehicle dynamics, eleven never-before-seen track layouts, an official license, brilliant Force-Feedback, stunning multiplayer, and a whole new world to explore.



Track Record: Juan Maria Traverso, Torino, 1:34.890

Some 1,600 kilometres north-east of Buenos Aires lies the jewel in the crown of *Turismo Carretera* tracks. Built in 1974, the track winds its way around a verdant, hilly vista, in a series of natural, medium-speed corners cut out of the landscape. It's a short track, and fairly quick with meandering straights that go up and down over a series of blind rises, and blind turns are both fast and tricky. The shortness of the track makes learning which way it goes simple enough; after that, though, comes the tough job of finding braking spots into turns that you won't be seeing until you're already committed to your line ... the surface affords a lot of grip, but the gear-ratios are crucial here, as is the suspension because the car will be doing a lot of rising and falling, with some turns viciously off-camber, and others sucking you in faster and faster until you take just too much speed in—and the barriers, close-by, will do their job.



Track Record: Matías Rossi, Chevrolet, 1:38.133

Situated 2,500 kilometres from Buenos Aires, the track is only used in the early months of the summer due to its extreme weather, and the layout is very similar to Río Cuarto: The turns will become faster the longer you run here, but they are mostly second-gear corners, and the lack of any decent straights—you'll see fifth gear probably once or maybe twice depending on your setup, and that only for a very brief moment—makes this track a start-stop, change-up, brake, change-down place without any really challenging turns. Technical and slow, and very bland to look at, this track is not inspirational and will reward the technical driver most of all. Getting out of the pits, however, depending on where your stall is, could provide the biggest challenge of all: You go left to the end of the paddock, then turn right and go round the back of the paddock, do a U-turn, and then go up the pit-lane and out onto the track ...



Track Record: José Ciantini, Dodge, 1:28.633

When first reconnoitering the track, it comes across as yet another slow, modern designed format, but closer inspection demonstrates that first-impressions can be deceiving; the turns are much faster than they appear, and the track itself is pretty as it winds its way through the trees. The flatness of the layout does nothing to lessen the technical, and challenging nature of the turns, many of which are constant radius jobs that require good setup, and good technique; technical drivers will be quick here, and the more you drive it, the faster the turns will become, not only on entry, but on exits as well. The technical and modern nature of the circuit means it is one of the most used tracks in Argentina, hosting rounds of Formula Three, as well as Formula Renault, and a litany of other local series.



Track Record: Matias Rossi, Chevrolet, 1:21.833

An oval, built in the mid-1950s, which has been slowed and severed by the inclusion of three very difficult chicanes that require total commitment to the quick entries; the chicanes then tighten-up considerably, thereby making great demands on the brakes and setup of the car. The super-long straights make it ideal for close racing, and the chicanes provide great passing opportunities: The banking is at fifteen degrees, and the right rears are going to take a hammering as the speeds around the banking are very elevated indeed.



Track Record: Christian Ledesma, Chevrolet, 1:31.746

This is a super, undulating, dangerous track that oozes personality: Situated about 500 kilometres inland from Buenos Aires at an elevation of 4,000 metres, the layout connects a slow, finicky infield to two wicked-banked turns at the end, and the beginning of the lap. The final turn is a Carousel-like job taken in low gear that spits you out—in what will be a very vicious slide unless you've spent some quality time adjusting the shocks, dampers, and suspension—onto the main straight and the Monza-style, foot-flat banking at Turn One that leads to a narrow shoot, and a viciously bumpy braking zone for Turn Two that you'll be approaching at upwards of 250 km/h. What follows—should you keep it all together—is then a challenging series of infield turns that are not only of various speeds, but bumpy as hell. Along with the climbs and dips, this track demands not only respect, but a lot of setup work, and a fair amount of bottle.



Another modern, purpose-built facility which is a bland, mostly second-gear, flat track that lacks the technical bits that make Mar de Ajo a challenging ride; the best bit is driving out of the gates and onto the track, and it has been dropped from the 2008 season: Not knowing much about the history of this track, I hope I don't offend anyone when I say good riddance ...



Track Record: Guillermo Ortelli, Chevrolet, 1:40.865

A very new facility purpose-built in 1998 specifically for Turismo Carretera, and situated about 300 kilometres from Buenos Aires, this is yet another flat track like La Plata, although this circuit demonstrates even more the evils of modern track design, both in looks and layout: fastidious slow turns, short shoots, and excessively technical featuring either turns that require precise braking, or turns that open up and require a solid setup that will allow the car to sit on the power. Indeed, this is possibly the most technical track on the schedule, and you could do worse than choose this one for the sixty minute demo: A good setup here will be useful for many of the tracks on the schedule.



Track Record: Sergio Alaux, Chevrolet, 1:30.389

This is a flat, short, dirty looking track on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and is used primarily as a test-track during the off-season due to its proximity to the capital. Built in the early nineties, it features all the hallmarks of a modern circuit: A series of un-engaging second gear corners made a little more challenging by the judicious use of massive kerbs that can seriously unsettle the car. Turn One is the biggest challenge, with its very quick (fourth gear) entry, and its constant variation all the way through calling for a lot of throttle input at a very quick clip.



Track Records: Guillermo Ortelli, Chevrolet, 1:24.875

The track is located about 1,700 kilometres south of Buenos Aires, and is both bland and suffering from homogenous textures. But don't let this dissuade you from spending time here because you will fall in love with this place. Turns One and Two are very similar to the same turns at Silverstone, while Turn Three requires trail-braking of much precision before you hammer down the throttle in third and deal with the tail-slide: This is a crucial turn because it launches you into a 'straight' that culminates in a flat, no lift, sphincter-fisting left-hander which, right at the exit, requires you to hammer down the brakes for a really tight left-hander taken in second; que locked-up fronts, trail-braking deep into the turn, and funneling into an even tighter right-hander that immediately opens up for yet another blast down another straight; you will get oversteer coming out of here—get the rear sorted sharp because every moment fiddling about with an untidy exit will slaughter your laptime; follow the straight as it winds into two terrific right handers, both blind, and one with a bump at the crest which you use to unsettle the car in order to get more forward bite ... an absolute blast ... A final note: This is the track that took the life of one of TC's best-known drivers, Guillermo Castellanos, in April of this year.



Track Record: José Ciantini, Dodge, 1:42.690

The most famous track on the schedule, having hosted rounds of the Formula One circus, and a lengthy layout at just over five kilometres, the track is an ugly thing that seems to have been built in an industrial park with the skyscrapers of Buenos Aires a tantalizing backdrop in the distance. Dating back to the early 1950s, the track is bumpy, narrow, and features a combination of low-speed and fast turns that makes finding a setup something of a challenge when combined with the long straight that leads into a right-hand turn that is the highlight of the track: The turn is taken in third, but it winds for what seems to be an impossibly long time and you're coming out of the turn flat in fifth gear—very challenging. As a result of the straight, cars will be optimized for speed, which results in nervous handling. One of the only tracks to feature massive grandstands, this is obviously the home of Argentine racing, and like many such tracks, has been amputated of its spirit by the demands of Formula One.



Track Record: Omar Martinez, Ford, 1:43.541

A lengthy track—over four kilometres—situated about 400 kilometres from Buenos Aires that features a unique figure-eight contour (the bridge cuts over the track a-la Suzuka), this is a charmer that meanders around what seems to be some sort of mountain in a series of challenging, mostly slow, and often off-camber second-gear turns that go on for a long time before sending you out onto short straights in enormous power-slides. Braking is tough due to the elevation changes, and it is, despite the tight turns, a rather quick circuit. Finding a setup for this track is difficult, though things became easier after the chicane was installed in 1999, slowing the speeds into the treacherous Turn One.



Track Record: Diego Aventin, Ford, 1:32.341

The track is situated roughly 240 kilometres from Buenos Aires, and it is an extremely bumpy, challenging layout. This is a bleak, sad looking place, featuring a combination of second gear turns and long, sweeping third-fourth gear winders that open up and get progressively quicker. You need to find a good rhythm here, but beware of the entry to turn one: There is a bump right as you turn in that is so severe that it will literally lift your car off all four wheels and throw it into the grass. Braking for this turn is not about the ideal line for the turn itself, but how to get over this bump without losing all traction and contact with the road. The lack of trackside objects makes the location of braking points a challenge, though the groove is spot-on (on all tracks), and you can trust them to be excellent indicators on when to slam on the anchors. The layout is flat—massive bumps aside—and this is a rhythm track, and a good place to find a setup that can be used on many of the other tracks.



The Cars



Chevrolet: 13 Titles (Reigning Champions)

A very different proposition to the other three cars: The engine is a little underpowered, but the chassis itself is sweetly balanced, and is certainly the best handling car in the series. In 2006, the car was routinely beaten—but in 2007, with some changes in the technical regulations of the sport, the Chevy won the championship at a canter in the masterful hands of Ledesma.

Weight: 1,330 Kg
Engine Capacity: 3,150cc
Cylinders: 6
Power: 355BHP@9,500RPM
Front Track: 1,628mm
Rear Track: 2010mm

Pro

New series, new tracks
Excellent physics implementation
Great cars, fun, rear-wheel driven beasts
rFactor code is mature and hassle-free
rFactor MP is best-in-class
Brilliant Force-Feedback

Con

Ho-hum track textures
Twelve tracks, and four cars is little for the admission price of thirty-odd dollars
AI can be a bit less than brilliant

Dodge: 8 Titles

This is the best handling car in the series, and boasts probably the most refined—and therefore the best—engine. (It is, in fact, a re-badged Chevy Cherokee unit.). With a well-designed chassis, the balance of the car is superb, and the power comes out in a far more precise and smooth manner than the all-together more mucho Ford.

Weight: 1,390 Kg
Engine Capacity: 3,100cc
Cylinders: 6
Power: 350BHP@8,500RPM
Front Track: 1,600mm
Rear Track: 2010mm



Useful Links

Official Turismo Carretera website can be found [here](http://www.actc.org.ar)

The website also features a free-to-download .PDF magazine in Spanish [here](http://www.actc.org.ar/php/magazine.php)

You can watch some Turismo videos [here](http://www.actc.org.ar/php/magazine.php)
<http://www.actc.org.ar/php/magazine.php>



Ford: 35 Titles

The Ford boasts what many regard to be the best engine in the series: Running at about 360HP, at 9,000RPM, however, also means it's the most difficult to drive. Finding a good, balanced setup is difficult due to the nature of the engine that enjoys giving the driver dollops of wheelspin out of turns in anything under fourth gear.

Weight: 1,330 Kg
 Engine Capacity: 3,100cc
 Cylinders: 6
 Power: 355BHP@9,000RPM
 Front Track: 1,614mm
 Rear Track: 2010mm



Torino: 5 Titles

This is a bit of a mix-match car, boasting the Ford's challenging chassis, and the Dodge's Chevy Cherokee engine (with five extra horsepower). A good mix, since the more refined Chevy engine will not be as brutal as the Ford on the chassis which, itself, is a more stable unit. However, due to its mix, the car is generally difficult to setup.

Weight: 1,330 Kg
 Engine Capacity: 3,100cc
 Cylinders: 6
 Power: 355BHP@8,500RPM
 Front Track: 1,614mm
 Rear Track: 2010mm

M3 Review

BMW M3 Challenge

Eliot Earle spends some quality-free-time with Blimey! Games' first sim, purpose-built for the BMW M3 Challenge, and concludes that this GTR2 clone's substance is not in the sim—but somewhere else entirely ... did anyone say prizes?

EliotEarle



M3 Review BMW M3 Challenge

continued



BMW and 10Tacle (which means Blimey!Games did all the actual work using their, by now, well-tuned and ubiquitous ISI engine for the last time ever) have jointly released a free sim for general download: The *BMW M3 Challenge*. That said, I should probably add at this stage that the sim appears to have evaporated from BMW's website entirely (perhaps a reflection of its marketing-gimmick-ability?). Luckily, though, you can still find it here: www.m3-challenge.com. And even luckier still, the 'Challenge' continues every night of the week ... but more on that later ... first, I should probably give you a quick tour of the sim itself.

In terms of content, the sim is sparse: It features one car, and two tracks; or, rather, one track with two layouts.

The car is a wonderfully modelled BMW M3 Coupé, with a choice of two kinds of wheel/tyre, and two types of suspension units. The car is available in all sorts of colours—like blue, red, and silver—and there may even be a black one in there somewhere for those of you who like to pimp-out your ride.

The two available tyre/wheel combos are the M260 ZR18, and M220 ZR19. To me, the difference was mostly cosmetic. Suspension choices, however, that come in Standard, and Bilstein B16 PSS10 flavours, are not: The difference in laptime, on the shorter circuit, seems to be around a second a lap.

The track is, of course, the Nürburgring, and the layouts are the full GP circuit, and the Nürburgring-short configuration. Both layouts should be well known to any sim-racer by now, and the quality of the tracks well known to anyone who has spent any time with a SimBin/Blimey!Games sim over the last two years or so.

There are several game modes that the player can select, and all are very standard fare: Single Player allowing for Open Practice, Race Weekend (against AI), and Time Trials. Then there is the multi-payer offering

Local Network and Internet, all fairly self-explanatory, I trust you will agree.

So with all that covered, what's the actual sim like? *GTR2*.

Thanks, goodbye. See you next issue.

... So as not to make this the shortest game review in the history of computer games, however, I should probably expand on that statement a little: That is, find something that is different between this sim and *GTR2*: And we won't find it in the UI, which is basically identical to *GTR2*'s, as is every other aspect of the sim. In essence, what you're getting (did I mention it was free?) is a *free*, albeit cut-down, single car, two-track version of *GTR2* (although, to spice things up a bit, it is, allegedly, built around the *GTL*-engine).

But while it is a *GTR2*-clone, there is no Single Player progression at all here—that's one of the things left on the cutting room floor. There is weather, though, and there are light changes, too, and there are some amazing graphics you will need to turn down on any computer that isn't NASA-spec'. Even the chit-chat, as you're parked up in the pits, is *GTR2* chit-chat.

But think about that for a second: *GTR2* was actually really good, right? So being basically identical isn't such a bad thing at all, is it? And hang on! I paid good money for that sim—or rather, someone else paid good money on that sim for me after I fixed their computer for them, but it amounts to the same thing: A free, cut-down version of *GTR2* is nothing to scoff at, is it? Even if this was all there was to it: Which it isn't ...

As for why BMW would do this, well—what's the other option? Release an official mod for an existing sim? It wouldn't be the first time BMW has gone down this route—think of *rFactor* and *Live For Speed*'s BMW F1s (or the alleged new F1 BMW in the soon-to-come patch for *Live For Speed*). ... Or ... was that Intel?



Well, whatever, this is a great, and a pretty original marketing gimmick for BMW to showcase their cars, and expand on their last marketing master-stroke, the 'famous director' directed short movies of some years ago. And while that idea was sheer brilliance, since they included their own media-player to screen the movies, you probably have to wonder how many people, this

time round, will be able to get the most of BMW's marketing ploy: How many, for instance, have a decent wheel/pedal controller setup? That said, this is still a worthy sales-play, and if it's only a few sim-racers that benefit, who are we to complain?

Going back to *GTR2*, though—what else is different? The game lacks configurability in the UI. There's not all

that much you can change, considerably less than is assigned a spot in the options sections of *GTR2*. But thankfully it uses all the same .plr and .ini files that we know and love, so opening up Free Practice to get some AI in there, for instance, was a cinch.

I found that the AI laps at about the same sort of pace as I do, on my first day of play. That is, until I worked out something crucial: The bots like to keep all the wheels pointing forwards, but these cars lap faster in this sim if you slide them around 'like it's Initial D' as one guy on a forum somewhere said.

But that, alas, does not tell us what is so different between this sim and *GTR2*. And yet I was convinced I could find something that was completely different, and after sniffing around for something that made this a bit more than *GTR2* without the options, I made an amazing discovery; and what amazed me most was not so much *what* I found—but where: On the sim's official website! Yes, a computer game, in this day and age, that actually uses its official website for something other than telling you why you should buy the sim, and no, we aren't going to support it, and thanks we're enjoying our new life in the Bahamas snorting your cash off of ladies of negotiable virtue. Remarkable!

So what is it then, what is it that makes this sim different to *GTR2*? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? It's the word 'Challenge' in the title! Now, wait, yes I know—you've seen the word 'Challenge' before—probably in every *rFactor* mod ever made—but no, this, I am here to tell you, is a very different 'Challenge' all-together. You see, 10tacle are hosting race servers—they are running races online; at 18h00 and 19h00 UTC (we use the 24hour clock since this is Europe). Two servers run simultaneously (that adds up to four sessions per day, in case you missed maths 101), and the results and replays are available on the M3-challenge website; there are 1,005 entry slots available for drivers, and

M3 Review BMW M3 Challenge

continued

prizes will be awarded to those who finish first through fourteenth.

The first place prize, in case you're wondering—and I certainly hope you are—is a speedy laptop. Which is nice ... but frankly, you could go out and buy one of those. Not much of a 'Challenge' there then, unless you're skint, of course ... But it's the second place prize—and indeed the third place prize—that really makes this 'Challenge' well-worth a try.

Second place will get you nothing less than a "BMW Sauber F1 Team Wheel" developed by Intel and Logitech, and based on Logitech's already legendary G25 (and that includes pedals). A special blue USB display has been integrated, as well, and the base plate of the wheel is one hundred percent carbon-fibre. And, to make it even more enticing, and unlike the first place prize, you can't go out and buy it because it is, yes, special. A custom-modded G25 wheel with some seriously nice toys attached; nobody you know will have one of those, or be able to get one, either. Very nice indeed.

The third place prize, though, really made me do the double-take. "Original signed race overall of Nick Heidfeld." What? The only way you could possibly get a set of these is if you're mates with Nick Heidfeld, and he probably doesn't go round signing his own clothes. And if you know someone who is mates with ol' Nick, then you're definitely slumming reading this magazine, even if you do come here just to look at the pictures. Or maybe Nick does sign his own clothes—he *is* an F1 driver, after all. Whatever, this prize—along with the wheel—are both really outstanding, and more importantly, unique: Makes me almost want to drive for second or third!

Fourth place onwards is where it all gets a little cheap: caps, a toy car (two sizes—the larger one going up to ninth place), and a keychain.

So all in all, it's a pretty slick offering of a sim, and well worth a look. And *free!* And you could win some truly

amazing stuff! But mostly, it's just a nice sim that's fun to drive that won't cost you a penny. Kinda like *GTR2* then—with prizes ... so go get it while it's luke-warm!



AUTOSIMSPORT

GPC Review

GPC F1 1979 Trackpack v2.0

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Item: Grand Prix Classics's 1979 Formula 1 Trackpack v2.0 is a companion suite to their spectacular 1979 Formula 1 v2.0 carset. It contains all fifteen tracks used in that year's real-world Formula 1 Driving Championship. Question: Is this the real deal? And what's the difference?

Buenos Aires should come as a pleasant surprise to the sim-racing community. By my count, there are at least sixteen variations of this circuit (a stone's throw from South America's most cosmopolitan city). The only previous model of this track depicted a far simpler version than the one offered with GPC's most recent

offering. The 1979 layout has a marvelous diversity of turns, from the amazing T3 (called 'Curvon'; it's more than 180 degrees, but taken nearly flat out) to a variety of slower turns of varying (sometimes irregular) radii and cambers. There is little in the way of elevation change, but the graphics are well-detailed, the kerbs are gentle, and off-course excursions won't bog you down. In the off-season, this should also be a great venue for big, torque-rich GT cars like the Corvette and Aston Martin.

Interlagos in Brazil seems to go on forever (almost five freakin' miles!), nothing like the tidy modern layout. Each turn seems to go on forever too ... and there are far too many of them. The track itself is well done and wide enough for some three-abreast racing, although with only a couple of long straights, there are not too many places to pass.

Kyalami is the best track since the late, great Monza (last seen *sans* chicanes in Papyrus' immortal *Grand Prix Legends*). Fantastic layout, great sight lines, good cambers, nice elevation changes, a fabulous straight, good overtaking opps, and drenched in retro vibes—it adds up to a perfect online venue.

Long Beach seems bleached of any of the grit and soot of the original (the town itself looked fairly shop-worn until recently, and it's still not exactly pretty). Its best feature is the two sharp elevation changes, unexpected in most street circuits (save Detroit and, of course, Monaco). Honk if you love Trenton Barriers.

Jarama looks like the prototype of all the modern Hermann Tilke tracks you love to hate: take a boring tract of land and see how many first and second gear twists and turns you can squeeze into it—in other words, the opposite of a 'natural terrain' road circuit, like Spa, where the layout follows the actual contours of the land. GPC's Jarama's turns are nicely banked and cambered, however.

Zolder is a pleasant enough little track, unpretentious, with only one really annoying chicane (at the end of the

back straight), but who in their right mind wouldn't prefer Spa-Francorchamps (in any of its many iterations) as the venue for the GP of Belgium? Would that the GPC crew had taken this liberty (as Papy did when they moved the GP of France from the despised Bugatti parking-lot layout, where the race was actually staged in 1967, to the much more interesting Rouen public-roads circuit in Normandy, which had been the site of the French GP the year before). But noooo ...

Monaco is the mother, father, and sixth cousin of all street circuits. It's tons o' fun in real life, where your God-given peripheral vision takes in almost 180 degrees of panoramic European-ness. In racing sims, tho, it's just 'tunnel' vision (pun unavoidable), a crushing cockpit workload, little or no opportunity to pass, and the likelihood of never finishing a race because one little mistake and you're toast. Bring your elbow pads.

Dijon is the industrial park of race circuits, built on an unwanted plot of hardscrabble land criss-crossed by ugly powerlines and unsuited to much else. The layout is simplistic and boring, and in truth not nearly as much of a 'road course' as the Phoenix oval. 'Nuff said.

Silverstone. It may not be historically (or even politically) correct, but I much prefer the 'Silverstone88' release already out there. Both have the damnable Woodcote chicane (ruining one of the best turns in motor-racing) but I find the '88' version's less intrusive ... and the '88' mod's track surface (camber, texture) is certainly more interesting. Even better would be a version that combined the pre-1975 Woodcote with the post-1991 Maggots/Beckets/Chapel complex, arguably the best modern turns ever ... but that's just my fantasy.

Hockenheim was originally built (in secret) by Mercedes-Benz as a test track for a one-time Voiturette race in Tripoli in 1939. After the war, an Autobahn cut off the west end of the original track, causing the 'stadium section' to be built. Jim Clark's death in an F2 car caused

the north and south chicanes to be built, and after Patrick Depaillier was killed in 1980, a third chicane was added in the Ostkurve. (Subsequent butchery by Hermann Tilke has since rendered the original sections unrecognizable.) Grand Prix racing began there in 1977, but I would have preferred Germany's transcendent Nürburgring in 1979. Nice for drafting contests, though.

The Österreichring (that's an 'O' with an umlaut) is another track ruined by safety zealots. The original Ö'ring was a long, flowing track with a great rhythm. Unfortunately, Mark Donohue was killed in T1 (named Hella Licht after a lightbulb sponsor) in 1975 driving a March for Roger Penske, so the Austrians stuck a chicane there (and later reprofiled the track so drastically as to destroy its basic character, after which it was known as the A1-Ring for a telephony sponsor). The GPC version still needs work (way too bumpy, although the Alpine mist in the far draw-distance is a nice touch).

The **Zandvoort** depicted in this mod is basically unchanged since John Hugenholtz designed it a quarter-century before. The track is really too narrow for online racing (it would be hard to pass even if it was wider). The track surface of the GPC version is also un-cambered, and far too bumpy, and looks kind of unfinished (although the surrounding scenery is lush enough, considering it's mostly sand dunes).

Monza is sadly a butchered version of the Monza we all knew and loved from our GPL days ('Our own private test track', as Alison Hine put it). The great flow of the old place has been chopped up with a series of brainless chicanes exactly where they shouldn't be (just before the Curva Grande, just before the run down into the Lesmos, etc.). Of the late, great Monza, only the second Lesmo and the Parabolica remain to be approached as they once were. What's worse, the chicanes are not at all conducive to clean online racing.

Montreal is one of the few tracks that has improved with age, despite major changes in its layout. The track was built in 1978 on an island in the St. Lawrence river, and the pits were originally right after the final hairpin (they were moved to the present location in 1988). The whole south side of the track was originally a series of high-speed switchbacks, accurately modeled in GPC's version (although the developers seem to have put Montreal on the wrong side of the river). The 1979 layout was much busier than the current version but has much the same character, and is a ball to drive.

Watkins Glen. A fatality in the famous Esses led to the hasty insertion of a chicane halfway up the hill at the Glen. It was there for only one year, but unfortunately that year was 1979, so GPC, in their zeal for uncompromising accuracy, included it (it was later removed and replaced by the infamous 'Busstop' chicane). As to the rest of the track, I live nearby and have driven it often, and GPC's version has none of the real-world track's look and/or feel (except the fall foliage; a nice touch). Specifically, the racing surface has no camber and little texture detail.

Conclusion: 1979 was not a great year for F1 tracks. We have 'Sir' (he was then just a bloke) Jackie Stewart to thank for the safety awareness he promoted in the 1960s, which ultimately led to the emasculation of many of the great old tracks, sacrificed on the altar of safety. His zealotry saved many lives, but ruined the ebb and flow of these classic tracks, which in turn led to the bloodless F1 racing we have now, where passing is rare and championships are won or lost while the cars aren't even moving (pit stops and courtroom battles were not a major feature of Formula 1 in 1979). Still, if it's historical accuracy you're looking for, Grand Prix Classics's v2.0 Trackpack certainly delivers the goods. All the goods ... and in one package, as promised.

See you at the races! (Remember: slow is smooth and smooth is fast.).

Pit-Stop

I'd Like To Buy The World This Book ... But I Really Can't Afford To!

Steve Smith takes a trip with legendary photographer Bernard Cahier whose ever-present and snapping Leica captured some of the most defining moments in motor-racing history—beginning in 1952, Cahier not only framed—but enjoyed friendships—with legends...

SteveSmith

Bernard Cahier was the Selig of motor-sports journalists from the 1950s to the 1980s. Here he is clowning around with the usually taciturn Fangio; there he is lighting Castellotti's cigarette; now he's table-hopping at Peter Collins' wedding; then attending his funeral. He insinuated himself socially with the talent-rich and famous, literally living with them away from the track and partying with them in their pits. He did some writing in his native French (his name means 'note-taker' and he quipped that it rhymes with 'Yippie-Ay-Oh-Cahier') but he was best known for his photography. In his most famous stunt as Enabler to the Stars, he was at Sebring's treacherous hairpin with his ever-present Leica on a boiling hot day during the 12-hour enduro. Stirling Moss, in an open car (a Maserati 300S, if memory serves), signaled Cahier that he was thirsty. Cahier found an ice-cold Coke, took the cap off, and tossed the bottle into the cockpit the next time by. A lap later, looking refreshed, Moss tossed back the empty.

In 2006, Cahier combed through his vast treasure-trove of

negatives and selected more than 1,300 photographs to be published in a massive, 768-page, two-volume, coffee-table book—with forewords by Phil Hill, and Dan Gurney—called 'F-Stops, Pit Stops, Laughter & Tears' (he may have acquired a taste for ampersands from working for *Road & Track* for years), and despite the clunkiest title since 'A French Kiss With Death', it is an absolute must-have for any car guy interested in the warp and woof of that era.

Cahier also penned 142,000 words of fascinating memoirs, poignant anecdotes and ribald tid-bits to go along with 'FSPSL&T', but the feature attraction is the photographs: candid moments with ... and intimate portraits of ... the drivers, and keenly observed scenes of auto-racing from all over the globe. Here is the tragedy of Portago's and Levegh's wrecks; there the triumph of Fittipaldi winning the World Championship, and Porsche finally victorious at Le Mans. His camera peers almost straight down into Fangio's 250F in the Ring's Karusel as El Maestro becomes the first man to break the ten-minute lap. Hans Herrmann's Mercedes streamliner

Pit-Stop I'd Like To Buy The World This Book ... But I Really Can't Afford To!

continued

blows up spectacularly at Reims. Felice Bonetto looks the picture of health one minute and the next clutches a cross in death. A shirtless Gene Hackman poses in front of his car, stripped by thieves while he was filming 'French Connection II'. Steve McQueen isn't acting as he shows all the strain of trying to beat Mario Andretti at Sebring. Cahier was everywhere, and his images well and truly capture the spirit and the substance of his time.

I'm no businessman (ask me about the Swiss Army Watch Company sometime ... no, better not), but I'd be amazed if this book isn't selling on eBay at impressive multiples of its original \$150 price within six months. I bought my copy from the well-stocked shelves of <http://www.motorsportscollector.com> (they publish adverts here ... and no, they didn't offer me a discount).

Don't believe me? Browse it at your local Waldenbooks. Yeah, right

BERNARD CAHIER

F-STOP, PIT STOPS, LAUGHTER & TEARS

MEMOIRS OF AN AUTOMOTIVE PHOTOJOURNALIST



AUTOSIMSPORT

RFO

Well On The Road To Glory

Domenico Veneziano's RFO league is already reaping a whirlwind of success—with a TV-show filmed in their own studio, a guest spot on SKY-Italy's biggest motor-sport channel, and their own mod reviewed and scheduled for release on the pages of a big-time PC games magazine, an invitation to join this club would be a coup for any league ... which is just as well, because RFO is expanding, and nine international championships are being sought to strengthen this already renowned league ...

AUTOSIMSPORT





Twenty-six year old Italian doctor Domenico Veneziano, who hails from Reggio Calabria, has enjoyed a passion for cars most of his life: In 2005, along with Dario Molino, and Luca Denaroso, he fuelled this passion by founding the [RFO league](#).

RFO is currently composed of three championships, RFO F1, RFO F2, and the newly formed (due to popular demand) RFO F3. Each series—run by two admins, one webmaster, and a press admin—features its own specially-designed mod created by physics-designer

Marco Rossi, and with models supplied by mod-group MMG. The mod remains private, although, as Domenico confirmed to AUTOSIMSPORT when we spoke earlier this month, it will soon be released both on their site, and simultaneously on a PC games magazine in Italy.

The mod simulates Formula One vehicle physics for RFO F1, while RFO F2 enjoys a similar—though less powerful—mod. “The two mods are made to be a bit difficult and ‘selective’,” says Domenico: “That is, they need very good setups to gain maximum performance on-track.”

The magazine that will release the mod is *The Games Machine*, which tested and reviewed the mod on their pages, and, Domenico explains, “Also extends its name to our F1 championship. They’re just waiting for the final version before releasing.”

(*The Games Machine*, this month, is releasing a free copy of *GTLegends* with their magazine if anyone happens to be traveling through Italy while reading this ...)

RFO, while free to participants, has some very attractive prizes on offer courtesy of the sponsorships they have managed to organize: “Our RFO F1 prizes have been given to us by Asus—via *The Games Machine*—and their value is about US\$1,700,” Domenico says, “while RFO F2 has Multiplayer.it as their main sponsor, and they provided the first prize. Other RFO F2 prizes are given by some Italian shops like Erregierre, which are RFO F2 partners too.”

With this kind of professionalism, championship-spots in all three series are understandably much-in-demand: RFO F1 has twenty-two drivers racing for eleven teams (along with eleven test-drivers), while RFO F2 has twenty-four drivers. The season features twelve events, with the opener scheduled for the fourteenth of January, 2008. The format is simple enough: Half-an-hour qualifying followed by a one hundred percent (Formula One) distance race.



Georgio Pantano meets the RFO Crew ...'

"This year our roster is probably the best ever seen in an Italian championship," says Domenico, insisting that the top-line drivers have been enticed not only by the range of prizes, but because of the general organization of RFO. Equally, the drivers and team managers are professionals, which Domenico sees as key in the expansion of RFO itself.

One of the most attractive features for RFO is their TV show—'RFO Studio'—which, Domenico says was, "the main advertising machine for RFO last year. Marco Rossi and I thought long and hard on how to combine the real with the virtual; the result was a virtual studio, using the 'croma key technique' with which we recorded a real TV-like show."

The concept immediately proved a popular one with the drivers: "They were looking at real guys in a studio who were talking about their championship," says Domenico. To add to the show's popularity beyond the drivers themselves, they also added feature segments, like interviews, and other spots: "We interviewed drivers,

as well as videogame experts like Elvin from *The Games Machine*," says Domenico, "and our show made us really famous on the Italian scene."

The show is broadcast on [Gametribes TV](#), "a great TV-on-demand channel. The episodes are in Italian, but if we have enough foreign viewers, we could start thinking of subtitling them in English. For the new season, we thought about live-streaming races, but we concluded that the 'normal' viewer won't ever follow an entire sim-race, not even on-demand so, instead of having the Gametribes server saturated with 1,000 people watching a live race, we will develop our TV show with race syntheses. 1,000 viewers don't justify the resources needed for a good live event, with replays, adverts, and so on."

The show is a forty-five minute broadcast with a twenty-five minute recap of the latest race: "Something like 'Top Gear', but based on sim-racing. We also enjoy the aid of a great portal, [Drivingitalia.net](#), who give us the race servers: We work together to always give drivers the best, and to fill both amateur and pro-driving needs with our portals."

The popularity of the show was not restricted to sim-racing circles alone, however: The quality of the show has seen 'RFO Studio' now being filmed on location, as it were, in an actual TV studio specifically designed for RFO. The studio is a stepping-stone for Domenico's ambition of expanding even further—into television itself.

A big leap forward, but one that was—at least in part—achieved at the end of this year when Domenico was invited, as a special guest, onto the 'Nuvolari Channel'—one of Italy's premiere motor-racing TV channels: "The biggest motor channel of the SKY satellite group," says Domenico, adding, "you never know ... sim-racing on satellite TV ..."

The invite was as a result of Domenico's role as RFO's public relations man: "Francesco Romeo—who is one of

the presenters on our show—and I went to Rome, to the studio of the 'Nuvolari Channel' after we'd phoned them up and introduced our concept. They took a look at our promo video and, being interested in our format, decided to invite us to a show called 'L'arena Lab', presented by Mauro Coppini, who has been the head of the famous *Quattroruote* magazine for ten years. [The show](#) focused on the real and the virtual, and we brought a Manu Factory racing seat with our mod installed. The show was a great success: Everyone was impressed by what we do—also because I wanted to present everything as a real sport, not as a simple game—and when all was filmed-and-done, they told us the possibility of future partnership exists, although at this stage we don't have any more details."

Domenico and his crew, though, are not resting there: This month they have introduced their [RFOportal](#) concept, which opens this successful organization to other international championships in order to strengthen the overall package for the benefit of all involved.

"RFOportal.com, our website, opened at the end of November," Domenico says. "Its concept is to be a pro-driving portal specifically designed to host not only our, but eleven distinct national championships. It has twelve different areas designed to showcase each pro-driving championship (eleven national, plus one international World Championship), and guy who created it, Francesco Biacca, spent about three months working on the design. The site enjoys a lot of functionality, from calendars to track schedules, and everything an admin needs to present his championship in its best light. Our idea is to give every single area to eleven pro-driving national championships, with the eventual goal of bringing the best national championships closer. What we offer them is free space, and our RFOportal premium structure, a professional structure which will attract further sponsorships."



"Eleven championships on one portal means that our viewers will discover other championships: Every national championship will maintain its own site, which is obviously linked to by easy-to-see buttons; the site also offers double language (mother-language of national league, as well as English), videos, tutorial sections, schedules for drivers and teams, along with pics, and everything else."

The national championships enjoying a slot in the TV show, Domenico says, is certainly a possibility: "Sure, why not—they could, but we have to consider the TV time we have, and the language we have to broadcast something the viewers are interested in, but why not?"

As for the mod that all the championships would be using, this depends entirely on which direction the eleven national championships want to go: "If I had my way—" Domenico says, "we would decide with the other eleven admins what mod to use selecting, every year, the best modding group on the basis of their latest work, and assigning them the task to produce our season's 'official' mod for all the championship."



The RFOportal is consequently seeking nine professional national championships: Two slots are already taken, Italy, and Portugal. "Italy we have, of course, RFO, and Portugal's slot has been taken by Sim-Racing Portugal; this is the national league where FSR (one of the world's—and perhaps *the* world's—premiere Formula One Sim-Racing championship) World Champion Bruno Marques races."

This leaves slots for another nine world-wide championships. Domenico's wish is to have the nine slots taken up by championships from North, and South America, Asia, Australia, and ... well, the rest of the world in order to create one World Championship comprised of the eleven national championships, should the admins wish to head in this direction. The final decisions, though, would be up to the series themselves: After all, Domenico concludes: "I would have liked AUTOSIMSPORT to select the leagues, because we don't want people to have the opinion that we want to run their leagues: Leagues will be completely self-regulatory, but, because of the mutual ties, we will have a stronger product to attract viewers, and sponsorship."



If you are interested in filling one of these slots, you can contact Domenico directly here: domenico.veneziano@alice.it. Alternatively you can contact Domenico on MSN—rfof1@hotmail.com being his handle.

rFactor: So Many Mods, **So Little Time**

Joseph P. DiPino, along with three of sim-racing's luminaries—Zerkel, Kohl, and McArthur—explain what you should consider before spending time with the latest mod-du-jour at rFactorcentral ... with an oversight committee for rFactor mods long-since abandoned, the newcomer to ISI's venerable sim can face a level of frustration, along with an overwhelming amount of choice, that will see all but the most determined leaving for pastures a little more simple ... so what should you look out for?

JosephP.**DiPino**

I only share our projects with people I trust, and they know that if they were to leak anything, I'd hunt them down and shoot them ...

You wake up at 5:30AM on a Monday morning, put in a hard day's work, and, stuck in the rush-hour on the way home, distract yourself by thinking about how the evening will go: Eat dinner with the family, maybe catch some news to see what's going on in the world (hell, meet hand-basket), help the kid with her homework and, after all of the responsible adult stuff is out of the way, turn some laps racing your buddies with *rFactor* (which you successfully updated {yet again} on Sunday).

So, with the responsible stuff out of the way, you turn on your sim-rig, get to the online lobby, click your favorite server, and ... you get rejected. Some sort of mis-match that you know, by experience, will likely take you an hour or more to sort out ... either the mod with which you have been practicing has been updated during the day, or it has been pulled because it was not appropriately released, or perhaps it's the track version that is at fault ... whatever the cause, you're left sitting there with one thought running through your mind: Something along the lines of, 'So much for my Monday evening plans then ... wonder if there's anything worth watching on the 1,000 TV channels?'

In its own right, *rFactor* is a terrific sim: The in-game tracks and cars are excellent. However ... being an open platform, *rFactor* has also led to an explosion of mods created by a veritable army of enthusiasts, and, as of the middle of November of 2007, [rFactorcentral](#) lists seven different track categories, eleven different race series, and nineteen different car-types, while The Work In Progress list, too, grows with every passing day.

You can find anything from joke-cars like the [Stinker Cup Cars](#) to highly-researched and authentic Formula One sims like the 79GP.

Feeding the explosion of additional content is the collection of mod-tools currently available: At [rFactorcentral](#), eighteen modding tools are freely downloadable, meaning that anyone who has the creativity and the willingness to do

the work can mod *rFactor*. The only limits are a modder's imagination, and commitment to do the work. All of this makes *rFactor* far more than a sim, as we traditionally view them: It is a purpose-built medium for modders with a set of tools readily available for anyone to shape the medium however they wish.

The ordinary sim-racer, therefore—who is neither a computer expert nor a modder—has plenty of choices: He buys *rFactor*, and from there enters a world that is driven by the consumers themselves. The scope of the choices that confront him, however, can be overwhelming, and two additional concerns tend to complicate a sim-racer's decision further when the time comes for him to decide which mod/track/series and so forth he should download and spend time racing. First, is the mod finished, or is it a preliminary version? Second, is the mod legitimately available, or is it being surreptitiously leaked?

The average sim-racer wants nothing more than to race. Most are not remotely interested in spending time organizing files, downloading the latest iteration of a mod, or trying to figure out why the latest download works, but has no sound. After all, our hobby is called sim-racing because we love to *race*. So how should the average sim-racer decide whether to download that newest gem of a mod?

The easy answer, of course, is to simply download what catches your eye. However, this approach can lead to massive frustration as you find that getting online with it—without mis-match errors—will require dedication to pursuing solutions other than the one we are most concerned with: How to go faster than your racing mates.

So, is there perhaps a better way to go about filling up hard-drive space, minimizing time reconciling files, and maximizing seat-time? Further, perhaps the decision to download can be made without being an unwitting accomplice to content which was leaked during a modding group's breakup (which happens with all the frequency, not

to mention antipathy, of 1960s rock bands), or inappropriately converted?

These concerns were put to three elders of our hobby: Brain Zerkel of [teamtundra.net](#), Jan Kohl of the [USPits.com](#), and Tim McArthur of [Race2Play.com](#). These three men have helped build the foundation of the hobby we now know as sim-racing, and each, in his own way, continues to push the genre forward. Their insight gives the ordinary sim-racer a context in which to view the modding scene, and their guidance can perhaps also help the average sim-racer make an educated decision about whether to download that brand spanking new mod.

Mr. Zerkel is a pioneer in sim-racing circles: He operates an online racing organization that runs everything from Beetles to F1-05, and he is also the leader of the modding group which created the Lawnmower mod.

Your thoughts on rFactor modding? Too many? Too few?

I think it is about right. I have heard some people say that they are too many, but in the end, you only see the better quality ones being raced online. It's an open modding platform, and everyone deserves a shot at contributing to the community.

What do you look for in a mod? Any particular qualities?

The quality of the car/truck model, physics, and race-ability. Usually mods that were thrown together tend to show it, and most of the better mods out there take a long time to make. The subject matter might make you think that it is going to be good, but you can usually tell if that's the case after spending some time with it. The online fun-factor is very important to me as well. Well executed mods tend to be a blast while racing with a group of your friends.

How you do keep security on your projects to avoid leaks?

I only share our projects with people I trust, and they know that if they were to leak anything, I'd hunt them down and shoot them.

However, there comes a point where modding can become a hurtful thing to both the consumer, and the developer. The quantity of mods on the market today can be highly confusing to newcomers to sim-racing. The lack of quality checks, release packaging, and uniformity in the file structures paints modding and sim-racing as a whole as an unorganized community ...

Thoughts on unauthorized conversions, and does such a thing exist in your eyes?

There are a few of them out there, and I try to discourage my forum members from doing questionable conversions. It's a practice that always ends up making someone mad, and there is really no need for it.

Thoughts on modding groups that implode? Who should get what when that happens?

Luckily, in our site's history, this has never been a problem as it has with some other groups. As we have all seen, it can get quite ugly. I think that when this happens, the best thing to do would be to let each individual creator keep what ever s/he has brought into the mod.

The accomplishments of Jan Kohl at the USPits is the stuff of legends. Like Mr. Zerkel, Mr. Kohl and his colleagues have always found a meaningful way to advance or enhance every sim going all the way back to *Grand Prix Legends*, and is now heavily involved in *rFactor* modding. Their latest gift to sim-racers is the TPSCC stock car mod.

Your thoughts on modding?

I really think that it's going good. I would like to see more high quality mods, I get some mods complaints from my TPTCC admins Kevin and Jim because they have to throw out mods that are unfinished or have glaring bugs, and it really narrows the field for what we can run in TPTCC ... including tracks ...

What do you look for in a mod that you use?

I primarily start with basically the simple premise of 'do I like it? If it is something I think I'll like, that is what gets me to download it. Probably the modding group may have a little to do with that; if I know that they have done good work before, that would make me more likely to download it. Presentation has a lot to do with it as well, believe it or not—when mod teams do stuff like they did for the Le Mans rebuild, that certainly impacts whether or not I am going to look for something.

Then it comes down to driving and graphics ... more so the driving. If it drives good and realistic, and the graphics are decent, it stays. If the car displays some unwholesome grip level, or has really poor graphics somewhere, that makes it very likely that I'll delete it very quickly. Same with tracks; I don't have to have tracks that display massive photo-realistic graphics, I'm more impressed with decent framerates, decent graphics, and track layouts.

That is not to say I don't enjoy driving tracks that are heavy with large graphics, but if people can't race on it, then it's not going to be visited very often.

How have you managed to avoid leaks of projects on which you guys are working?

Well, that is a really good question, and one that no-one has ever asked me!

We have had three leaks over the past three years of projects that we started (maybe four) ... and we're typically pretty careful. But we have to be even more careful now ... and it gets worse since the larger the project, the more beta testers you need.

All of the leaks occurred through beta testers. Luckily, none of them were real bad like full release of a beta mod, months before it was finished, but they were annoying, and it just makes you angry that some people are such pond scum that you can't trust them for a minute.

I am not sure what drives people to act like that ... ego or greed? I would much rather that people said 'Hey, Jan can do anything with my stuff cause I know that he'll take care of it' than someone pointing their finger at me and saying 'Watch him, you can't trust him further than you can throw him'. I think people trust The Pits, as we've always tried to make sure everyone gets credit for their work and tried to stick up for the authors/editors. Hey, if you don't get paid for it, you should still get credit.

I will not name names (event though they deserve it), and most people will know who some of them are anyway.

One person posted a beta mod in another website in a private area, I guess for his friends to download. The next one was a person who came in as a beta tester, and even though several people informed me otherwise, I let him do it since I did not have any problems with him, and he had always been fine with me. Instead, he stole our stuff and put it in his mod. I suppose I should feel a little flattered, but I don't. Last was someone who snatched an early version of our NAGT Mustang and posted it as their own.

One wonders why modders continue to do work when you get wimps who want to sneak around and steal stuff; {This means that} unfortunately we've had to implement a few techno-wiz-bang ways of determining who stole stuff now ... if just to know who actually did it so we can avoid them, and warn other mod groups in the future. Or who to take to court if they try to sell it.

For the most part, our beta testers are awesome ... we get really good feedback, and we can trust them with everything. We have gotten some of our beta testers who have been testing our stuff for years now. We have other editors, editing groups and authors who we have worked with over the years that we also trust implicitly.

What do you think of unauthorized conversions?

Not much. As I said in the post that I made today at The Pits, it takes virtually no effort to contact someone and ask their permission. If they say 'no', which is rare, respect their wishes. Now if you can't get a hold of the author, that is another matter, and one that I am currently working on with someone to try and resolve with a project that he's doing.

What do you think of modders breaking up?

Due to disagreements? I dunno ... guess if The Beatles can do it, modders can too!

The remarks of Mr. Zerkel, and Mr. Kohl suggest that a significant key in determining whether a mod is worth the trouble of downloading and running is to be found in the mod's quality. They also suggest it is better to wait for

completeness rather than an early version of a mod. Additionally, since the goal is to race, installing a mod that has either conversion or leak issues associated with it ultimately only ends up hurting someone.

The always colorful and sometimes controversial Tim McArthur operates Race2Play.com. Mr. McArthur, and his partner, Todd Weiss, created Race2Play, and its growth as an administrative service provider for sim-racing has been phenomenal. Similar to the average sim-racer, Race2Play continually has to decide which mods to support for the mutual benefit of their service, and their clients. Mr. McArthur himself has been a part of the sim-racing scene from its birth up to the present.

Your thoughts on rfactor modding?

The concept of modding is great for both the consumer and the developer. It brings new forms of motor-sports to the consumer, and adds to the life of a developer's product. However, there comes a point where modding can become a hurtful thing to both the consumer, and the developer. The quantity of mods on the market today can be highly confusing to newcomers to sim-racing. The lack of quality checks, release packaging, and uniformity in the file structures paints modding and sim-racing as a whole as a very unorganized community. This may result in newcomers getting confused and simply walking away. How that impacts the consumer and developer over a long span is yet to be seen, but I think we could all do better as a community than our current state.

As an administrator, what are the key criteria that determine whether Race2Play will feature a particular mod? And what are the criteria that will see a mod cut?

As an administrator of Race2Play which organizes and operates more online races per month than most operate in years, mods can be difficult to deal with. Not only does Race2Play represent the National Auto Sport Association, it represents sim-racing as a whole to the general public. Because of this, we are very selective of the mods we choose to support at Race2Play, as they speak for who we are as a community.

I have to ask myself, and other trusted individuals, a simply question, 'Will you still be racing this mod next year?' If the answer is not an emphatic affirmative, there is no reason to download, install, schedule, organize, and operate the events. Mods that come from tenured and experienced modmakers are much more prone to getting that affirmative. Those groups have proven themselves in the past to make top quality addons that people enjoy over a long period of time. iDT, CTDp, and the US Pits, to name a few. Still, you do find some great things from other individuals as well. Look at Scott J., Lo, Madcowie, MMM, and numerous others who continue to do great things with very limited resources. If the mod is not going to be dripping with quality and excellence, then it should not represent the hobby/sport of sim-racing.

As a general Rule, Race2Play does not support the following:

1. Unfinished or beta products. We would rather just wait for the group to complete their work before we bring it on board;

2. Products with patches upon patches upon patches. Think of the average sim-racer who is still very new to sim-racing, or even to a PC. How are they going to cope with six patches in a week?

3. Conversions. A large chunk of the mods now are conversions of older mods or software. These conversions come with all the same issues and bugs as the original, and in many cases, lack the quality to impress.

Any recommendation for modders to avoid leaks?

Stop. Yes, stop. Stop modding and start developing. Make that step from a modder to a commercial developer. Take a look at another niche community: the flight-sim community. There are dozens of commercial mod developers with titles on the shelves helping their community survive and flourish. Short of that, leaks will happen unless you are a solo modder like Scott J., Lo, Madcowie, Noonan, and so forth.

What should happen when a modding group implodes?

How should things be split up?

This should all be drawn up ahead of time, on paper, and signed by all members complete with a monetary value set for a breach

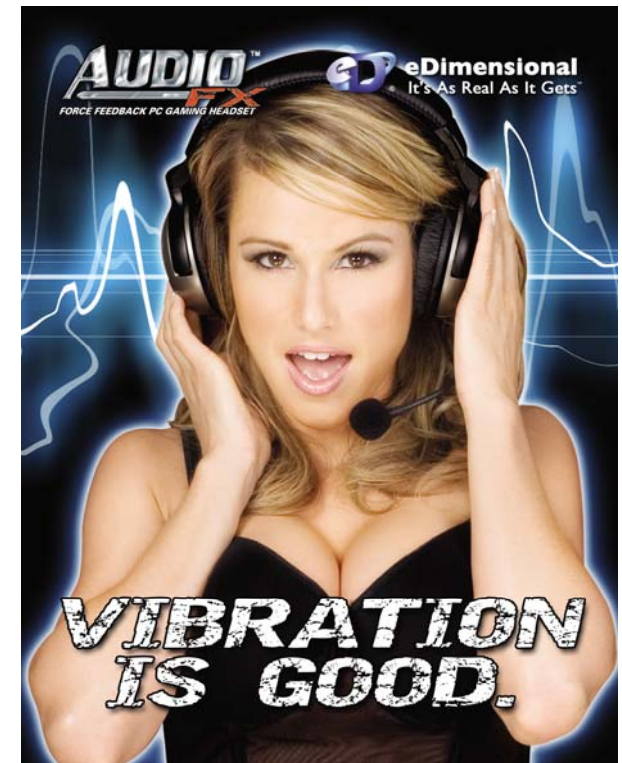
of that contract. If you are putting together a group of modders without a legal contract of who 'owns' the files and name, then anyone can claim ownership, and do what they want with your work.

What should a newbie look for in a mod?

Most importantly, they should look for whatever they feel is fun and enjoyable to them personally. Otherwise, look at the details of the mod, not the hype. Is it compiled in a self-installer complete with un-installer? Does the mod group have to use MegaUpload or Rapidshare to release it? Is it a beta or unfinished version? How many patches/fixes have to be installed for it to work properly? Does the mod group have a well designed web page complete with an active support forum? These are all clues as to whether the mod is worth your time to download or not. If you are someone who wants to avoid the not-so-great and only get the true 'hall of fame' mods, these questions will filter out ninety-five percent of all mods, and leave you with only ones worthy of your valuable time. By the way, Race2Play is more than happy to help the modding groups, at no cost, with self-installer software, webspace, forums, and even unlimited bandwidth for those large file releases. Heck, it's all about doing what is best for the community, so please everyone, take me up on that offer.

Certainly the sim-racing community has never had it so good: At least in terms of quality mods, which is, when you look at it, the only thing that is keeping the community thriving since purpose-built simulators, from established developers, are very thin on the ground right now, with SimBin's RACE07, and 2Pez's Turismo Carretera the only two sims released this year. rFactor's 'modability', together with the array of tools, ensure that our hobby will stay fresh and vibrant. However, the advice of Mssrs. Zerkel, Kohl, and McArthur helps to sharpen your preferences with the goal of being able to actually race. In other words, you can use their guidance to help you avoid the 'kid in a candy store' syndrome where you download everything, are continually repairing files, and end up racing nothing.

This is a great time for the sim-racer. The rFactor universe is loaded with mods. Hopefully, this article will help you make good decisions about which content to add to your rFactor folder. Because other than an overseeing body that will evaluate and rate rFactor mods (an idea that was shot down by the community when it first raised its head some years ago, and an idea that would have seen so many of the problems now being faced by rFactor easily solved), it is up to you, the user, to determine how much work you want to take on before you get online to actually race.

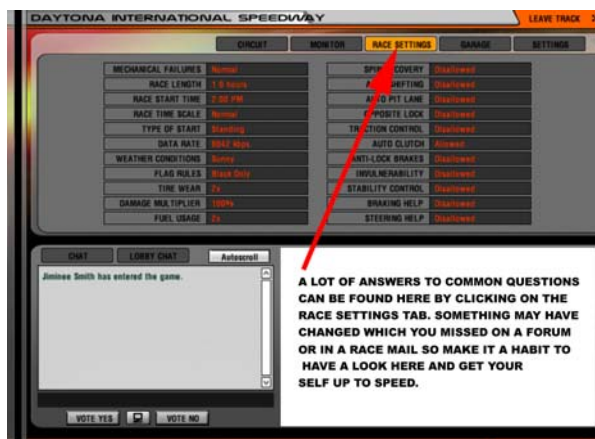


Helping The **New Guy**

Jiminee Smith examines the steep learning slope faced by newbies entering sim-racing and the community ... and finds a lot to be desired ...

JimineeSmith





Hopefully for everyone, sim-racing is continuing to grow, and reaching new racers, many of whom. I would imagine, are people stepping up from arcade-type games to a higher level of competition. Often, for these guys, it's a big shock when they first step up to the plate, so to speak, and realise just how high the bar is set in online competition. That can very often be enough for them to pack up their joypads or wheels, and be lost to the community—either out of frustration, realization of the amount of time and dedication required to be even mildly competitive—or from a sense that the sim-racing community is a closed one where newbies are not exactly welcomed. Welcoming these guys (and girls), and getting them to stay, requires work from both sides, and from what I have seen recently, the sim-racing side may need to re-think its welcoming handshake which is, generally, a shaken, frustrated fist ...

Which leads us on to what I consider to be the most important thing: Everyone needs to learn to be patient. Everyone makes mistakes—rookies and experienced sim-racers and even Greger Huttu—and I don't think it is unfair to suggest that rookies will make the most mistakes of all, especially if they are new to racing: And I

include following racing on television in that, because watching for ten or twenty years before you get your hands on a G25 tends to teach you a lot, remember the line from *Days of Thunder*? "ESPN, the coverage is excellent you would be surprised how much you can pick up."

Everything from the meaning of yellow and blue flags to a basic understanding of under and oversteer can be gleaned from those hours in front of the TV, but don't always assume that the new racer joining your league has that same knowledge. But by the same token, you would not turn up at your local gym or sports field and expect to get into a game without at least a basic knowledge of what you're getting into: All of which is to say—if you really are completely new to racing, spending a little time getting up to speed with the basic way of doing things is basically mandatory if you want to make a decent impression and not annoy everyone else.

All the racing knowledge in the world though is not going to help much if you know nothing about making use of your chosen sim. Not just making it *run* right, but knowing how to make use of things like the car tracker in *rFactor*, for example, or knowing how to activate virtual mirrors to help your situational awareness and hopefully help avoid any incidents with your new track mates. However, thanks to the frankly poor documentation that's comes with *rFactor*, or any modern racing sim for that matter, learning that those tools are even available, or that some valuable members of the community have written manuals or guides, is something rookies will only achieve if the veterans can actually be bothered to lead them in the right direction.

Another crucial element newbies need to consider is the attitude they bring into the event. If you are abrasive, rude, and demanding, don't be surprised when your questions—or needs—are ignored by all and sundry. On the other hand, if you present yourself with a little humility, and are polite, then not only will you be

much more likely to get that much needed assistance, but your mistakes will be far less likely to create any ugly incidents. Sim-racing—or perhaps, more specifically, online sim-racing—has been around for a while now, and many leagues have been running for a number of years which has given the long-standing members a chance to become great mates, and with that, there is bound to be plenty of ribbing and joking: It may take a while, then, to become 'one of the guys', but be patient, and soon enough you will be in on the jokes too.

Also, don't leave it till thirty seconds before the race start to realize that you're not prepared as well as you thought, causing you to start firing off panicked questions. If possible, jump into the server a few days beforehand to see how things work, make sure you understand the order of events on race nights. Some leagues have to use a few 'workarounds' to get things running as they want, such as running qualifying in the practice session, and a shootout in the qualifying session, so send off some emails, or get onto the forums, and be prepared. Things to be aware of are race formats, server passwords, formation laps, compulsory pitstops, chatting restrictions, user names, and driving aids—just to name a few. So there are a lot of details you should be aware of before the flag drops, but most guys will be only too willing to help as it is in their interest to have you ready to race safely.

So hopefully that will provide a little help in expanding the sim-racing community and keeping people on the track, trading paint and battling for wins which is what we all love doing. Sim-racing may take dedication and work, but it is also a great sport, and a good way to make friends and enjoy some hard competition: But for it to grow, it means new blood should always be welcomed with friendliness, and helpfulness.

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The Final Chapter ...

Magnus Tellbom writes his last entry as the curtain shuts on NASCAR Heat ...

Magnus**Tellbom**





For the last two years (give or take a month or two) I have covered any and all *NASCAR Heat* related news and releases here on AUTOSIMSPORT. This small column of mine has been fairly appreciated judging by the mails I've gotten, and only rarely have I had to read emails of the bad kind regarding my reviews. Not even when I've picked out the

really bad stuff in a release and shone a light on it did the feedback turn negative—because, I think, most understood that I was one of *Heat*'s most passionate fans ...

NASCAR Heat has been around for pretty long—since 2000, in fact—and it has always been able to hold its ground against other sims, even in the good-ol'-days when Papyrus

and EA were going toe-to-toe in the NASCAR-sim market; more than that, though, *Heat* has proven its worth by remaining, for all these years, competition to many of the currently-released sims.

But, equally, because of the greats with which it was chosen to spar, *Heat* never did reach the same status or the same fan-base willing to mod and care for it: It never became as hyped as *SportsCar GT*, or as praised as *Grand Prix Legends*, and it never got the same attention as *NASCAR Racing 2003*.

And this, I am sad to notify regular readers of this column, is what has made it become obsolete.

Today, *NASCAR Heat* is—as near as can be defined—dead in the water. I can count the number of sites creating stuff or running series for it on one hand and still get fingers left over (yes, plural). And when I count the number of active drivers that come to the grid, I count perhaps ten at the most for the road-racing crowd, and less than twenty for the oval crowd. When I go through the forums looking for posts about *NASCAR Heat*, I find them to be quiet, lonely places. Few questions are asked, and those who know the answers sometimes take days to post a reply: weariness, perhaps, or perhaps because there is such lack of interest that checking forums, for *Heat*-heads, has become as infrequent as races.

Because of this, you are now reading my final article about *NASCAR Heat* in AUTOSIMSPORT. It is the article to end them all, and its only purpose is to say goodbye. I will, however, tell you that I think *NASCAR Heat* went out with a bang. Thanks to the most important release since its release, it goes out on a high, and has become a true race simulator. I am, of course, talking about the Sportscar GTS mod. This mod could easily have been a life-saver, but sadly it seems to have come just too late to save the sim. Had this kind of mod been released two years ago, I bet things would have been different. Now, this amazing mod will perish, avoiding the attention and plaudits it so needs and deserves, because *NASCAR Heat* is itself no longer loved, cherished, or played.



So much, though, has been done during the past eight years. The first really important mod that came must have been DTM 94/95. I think this was the mod that proved road-course racing could be done with this sim, and if memory serves me right, it was even used for TPTCC for at least one season. Not long after its release, the International Sports Car Heat mod

picked up the road-course flag. It was a beautiful mod with some of the best sports cars ever made, like the Nissan Skyline, and the McLaren F1 GTR, and so on. Simply a stunning mod. On the oval side, there have been even more releases, and there are now hundreds of tracks, both dirt and paved; so many mods that it will set your head spinning.

So ... *NASCAR Heat* is all washed-up ... and yet, looking at it, as I have done for so many years, I cannot, for the life of me, figure out why ... When did the numbers that would give the sim a 'critical mass' dwindle to nothing? Why did it always remain such a peripheral sim? Why didn't the modders pick up on it? Where are the online racers to drive the mods? Why, why, where? ... I mean, it is just as easy to mod for as *Sportscar GT* (I even did a mod-and-a-half myself), and that sim was incredibly popular. More than that, though, *Heat* enjoys a tremendous netcode to rival—and maybe even surpass—modern sims like *Live For Speed*, and *rFactor*. It can cope with all kinds of racing, and that includes motorcycles, and powerboats, not just road-courses and ovals. It doesn't suffer from any of the restrictions seen in *Sportscar GT*, and *NASCAR Racing 2003*.

So what did it lack? It lacked, as I said earlier, enough interest from the sim-racing community: Buried, as it was, in the glory days of sim-racing, when big developers were creating very big products, *Heat* was a niche product in a niche market. It lacked people back in March 2006, when I wrote my first *NASCAR Heat* article for AUTOSIMSPORT, and since then it has sadly gotten worse.

Well ... I can go on and on about this forever, but fact remains ... we have come to an end of an era, and there is no longer enough to justify the continued presence of this column in these pages. I'll still be here writing about other stuff that I find interesting, of course, and should anything new happen in the world of *Heat*, you can be assured I will cover it ... but this, alas, is a sad farewell to *NASCAR Heat*.

And so, without getting too emotional about it—because I already am—all that is left to say is thank you—to the readers, but also to those that have loved and enjoyed *Heat* as much as I ... and goodbye!

AUTOSIMSPORT

Chequered Flag

If you would like to see your series of league featured in these pages, please contact us at alex.martini@autosimsport.net.

RacingTimes

All the best action from the best championships and series in sim-racing ...



Porsche Cup Club Challenge

Written by Jiminee and Evil Karl

Edited by Schmickle

November the 11th saw the running of the inaugural Club Challenge for Australian rFactor racing leagues. Organised and run by AusFactor the three races saw teams of four drivers from AOR (Australasian Online Racing), RFL (rFactorleague), TMF (The Monday Factor), AV8RL, Team Addicts and of course AusFactor. The event was designed to create a chance for racers from different leagues to match their skills and styles against each other and to add some variety to the racing calendar.

The high graphic loads that the 2007 PCC mod is infamous for meant that the racing had to be split across the two servers to accommodate the 38 drivers which increased the work load for the admins but did not seem to take anything away from the racing. This did mean that teams were split into two groups so the emphasis was on consistency and getting a solid team result.

With high quality customs skins through the grid and fast times in practise it was obvious that many hours had been put in to prepare for the event both on and off the track. Some close racing was the expectation and a quality field of drivers meant pre-race practice was close and the big names fired early with AUS-Duke setting fast times and AUS Racing drivers Alga, Buzztard and DRAIK looking to be a threat. Ausfactor was represented by Dave, MadMatt, YLDCHLD, Duke, EvilKarl, Webber555, Nathan Bond and Andy Ticehurst.

Slipping in late to pre-race practice were the drivers from AOR and they quietly went about their business putting down some warm-up laps while the organisers prepared for the 30 minute races.

Goldenport was first, a small but interesting track in China. The track has something for everyone with hard 180 degree turns and faster sweepers. Tyres were always going to be a factor though the short race made stopping for a fresh set a tough strategy.

AOR stamped their authority early with some blistering times during qualifying, times that held throughout both sessions and the races with a performance that caught the field napping. 1st 2nd and 3rd in Server 1 and the four top positions in Server 2 was the end result. AUS Racings Alga started from the second row and eventually finished 6th while Schmickle from RFL was 5th followed by a bunch of RFL competitors and Addicts Motorsport drivers Pedro and Ron Menzies.

Next stop was the famous Jerez circuit and this classic Grand Prix circuit which offers allot of grip in a GT3 Porsche and rewards the brave just enough to justify a big effort from the driver.

It was a case of fighting back for a lot of people for the Spanish round and Duke secured a front row start in Server 2 with Ted_NZ on pole. Dave also drove well to secure a row two spot while in Server 1 EvilKarl and Dizzo (AV8RL) also earned second row starts however it was all AOR again at the front with Brett B on pole.

The race once again took on a distinct AOR flavour. The only change came from a great performance by Dizzo who charged very hard late and took victory in Server 1 while Ted NZ, Darren Marsh and John Baldwin came 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in Server 2. Ausfactor driver Duke picked up a steady 4th with Andy, YLDCHLD and MadMatt all finished the race and scored strong points.

By this stage you're probably thinking these AOR guys are dang good, and you'd be right as their speed was once again evident at OLDRing. Qualifying was very close and Montah Steel (TMF) took it to the AOR boys as did 9metal (RFL). Pole positions were secured by Darren Marsh and Alex Kaos however this race was sure to be tight with drafting playing a role.

The races got off to a steady start with drivers being careful on cold tyre sets and many cars close together. A few early incidents saw RFL drivers Jiminee Smith and Bwana fall to the back after taking avoiding action while a small breakaway formed up front. A few of the more

experienced drivers started rising to the top towards the middle and a fierce battle raged between Dizzo, Brett B and Vail Richers. Meanwhile in Server 2, there were two groups forming, John Baldwin and Darren Marsh were fighting it out for overall honours while 9metal and Ted traded blows for the final podium. Montah Steel had a disappointing run and DNF'd while Duke and Liftalot (TMF) were steady.

In the end Server 2 finished with AOR 1, 2 and 9metal in 3rd place while Server 1 saw Dizzo take the glory for AV8RL ahead of Brett B and Vail.

There was no doubting who dominated the night though and AOR set a fantastic standard to have their 4 teams going home with the top four positions.



Pos	Team	Team Name
1	Australisian Online Racing	PCCA07 AOR2
2	Australisian Online Racing	PCCA07 AOR1
3	Australisian Online Racing	PCCA07 AOR1
4	Australisian Online Racing	PCCA07 AOR2
5	Ausfactor Racing	Ausfactor Team 1
6	rFactor Addicts Motorsport	PCCA07 TeamAddictsMotorsport
7	Ausfactor Racing	Ausfactor Team 2
8	TMF Racing	PCCA07 TMF Racing 2
9	RFL Racing	PCCA07 Team RFL Racing #45
10	TMF Racing	PCCA07 TMF Racing 1

Full results can be seen at

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~karl/results.htm>

The concept certainly has a lot of potential as a way for different leagues to race and learn from one another. Anyone up for a night of sideways action in one of the recently released Speedway mods or maybe a Mt Buller Sprint type event with the Lexus and Corvettes at Lienz?

STES Season III, race 2 Brno

The second round of the third Scuderia Twente Endurance Series season for GTR2 was held at the Brno circuit in the 2004 layout. A massive 3 hour, changeable weather, race was organised by the STES organisation to keep the races at highest level after the intensive 3 hour opener at Road America. More then 20 racers joined for this event which saw the absence of champion Rickard Hellsten but his rival Enzo Amico was there to aim for the championship after having missed the first race. In the NGT class the field was almost fully complete with all the main players at the grid, including John Dixon who won Road America and Scuderia Twente driver Chris Smit.



The new pointsystem for this season proved it's success again, and the extra bonuspoints for slower cars made many drivers take different cars again for this race. Almost every competitive car in GTR2 was at the start of this race. As pre-qualifying was not necessary the full field headed into a slightly wet qualifying session that dried out near the end. For most drivers that meant that they qualified their first laps on intermediates, and changed to slicks towards the end. All in all it was a tricky session and Swede Gugge Hultman took his first pole ever in the STES in his Ferrari 550, followed by Anders Nillson in his Corvette C5, and Steve Walsh in a Lister Storm. Scuderia

Twente driver Dennis Glaasker took 4th spot in his Maserati MC12.

In the NGT class the pole was for John Dixon, followed by Darren Blythe and Scuderia Twente driver Chris Smit.

The warming up showed some light rain and therefore many drivers decided to take the gamble for a drying track and go for slicks. That proved the wrong decision. At the start of the race it was still raining a bit, and the skies weren't exactly improving. The first laps showed mayhem for already many drivers. Steve Walsh and PeterL got an unlucky incident, while Anders Nillson, Gugge Hultman and Dennis Glaasker were fighting for the top 3 positions. The first cars came in after a handful of laps to switch to wet tyres, including both Scuderia Twente drivers. With the complete field on wets the first 15 laps were rather stable until Darren Blythe was second the retire after Trevor Catt had already left the game after 2 laps. Lap 31 saw the exit of John Dixon, in a period where the track started drying and the first drivers changed to slicks and took the gamble of a long stint to gain time. But the track was still very wet outside the raceline and many drivers had big difficulties with that, but between laps 35 and the finish nobody had major those problems any more that would have forced a retirement.

After 86 laps Enzo Amico crossed the flag first taking his second STES victory driving the Lamborghini Murcielago. Second came Anders Nilsson doing a superb job in his Corvette C5-R followed by Swede Gugge Hultman taking his first STES podium in the Ferrari 550.

In the NGT class Scuderia Twente driver Chris Smit took his first victory in a Porsche 996 GT3 RSR, followed by the two Ferrari 360 Modena's from Rob Bakker and George Pol, both taking advantage of the new pointsystem.

Next race will be at Anderstorp, on the 15th of November for a 3 hour changeable weather.

Formula SimRacing Silly Season 2008 – Facts and Speculation

The 2007 of [Formula SimRacing](#) continues high for another couple of weeks, but the team managers and recruiters have already drawn focus towards the coming season, in order to catch the biggest free fishes from the wide sea. The markets are there both to satisfy the drivers and the teams: for the talented driver it's all about securing the best possible contract, whereas the team tries to catch the best possible driver. There are a number of reasons that make a driver choose a certain team, the biggest and most concrete of them, money. Formula SimRacing has grown into a full scale racing circus, with independent teams running their own business, where money is playing an increasingly big role. Money usually correlates with performance, but that's not always the case. A large salary comes as a good bonus, but ultimately drivers seek performance from their team.

Although the 22 cars on the grid are completely similar in terms of mechanical performance, plenty of small details could differ between a top team and an average team, most obviously the setup development process. Sim racing is, as is most forms of racing, considered mainly as an individual sport, but the hard job is done in between races. Team crews share their knowledge, analyze performance via detailed telemetry and lay up the strategy and, of course, try to spy on the other teams. Last but not least, a team with a good atmosphere could play the decisive role, as because of the mental challenge of the sport. When the crucial moment arrives, race drivers are ultimately alone with their car - a psychological advantage could make all the difference in the world. Even with the so-popular one year contract policy in Formula SimRacing, several drivers have enjoyed staying longer in certain teams, not lastly because of emotional reasons.

The early bird catches the worm, as the saying goes. The lead duo in the FSR world championship, Bruno Marques and [David Greco](#), has already secured contracts for the following year. Greco, after an excellent season at Roaldo Racing, decided to continue in his "home" team for yet another season, which is less surprising. On the contrary, Marques, who's currently driving towards a second consecutive drivers' championship, accepted a new challenge from GhostSpeed Racing, a team currently doing its debut season in FSR. Luckily, most of the remaining seats are still wide open. Drivers such as Roy Kolbe, Artur Mlodzinsky, Ondrej Kuncman, Patrick De Wit and Ernesto De Angelis are still officially free agents; racers that most teams would like to get a hold on for any price. Behind the experienced war pilots plenty of new names erupt from nothingness, certainly thanks to the increased interest in the league. Domagoj Malezic, Darius Trinka, Bono Huis and Klaus Kåg have already shown their potential, and in a couple of years the new generation might take over the old. To closer examine the current contractual situations, let's take a look team by team. Twister-Racing

[Twister-Racing](#) has had a controversial season behind including both ups and downs. After a stellar start in Malaysia, the lead star Roy Kolbe has suffered from numerous hardware problems, resulting in the team officially admitting championship defeat in July. Nevertheless, with two races left Twister-Racing has managed to score four wins, including a home victory at Nürburgring. Considering the team's resources, it would be no surprise to see the team back in the strongest championship fight in 2008, not lastly thanks to a dedicated team manager and renewed internal structures, possibly combined with a focus towards a smaller group of drivers: quality instead of quantity.

Twister-Racing has traditionally focused a lot on getting the best possible line-up into the races, but in 2007 the

internal rivalry situation probably cost a few points. Throughout the season Twister had a clear leading star, Roy Kolbe, whereas a lot of different names occupied the second seat: Ernesto De Angelis, Domagoj Malezic, Joakim Bengtsson and Sebastian Schmalenbach. Considering 2008, odds are high that the team will feature a revised line-up. Roy Kolbe, after a mixed season, is still undecided about his future and bound to seek new challenges. If the aforementioned scenario takes place, Twister is certainly going to apply an aggressive market policy in order to find a new lead star. Of several names former champion Artur Mlodzinsky could be the strongest bet. In Domagoj Malezic the team has a developing future talent, who is very much likely to drive the second car in 2008.

Team manager Dennis Hirrlé:

As a team manager you may not kill your budget by trying to get a driver by all means, for all costs. It is important to keep your budget healthy, because you don't only need to make plans for next year, but also for further years. A misinvestment now can ruin your team for a couple of years. So, we will invest in drivers of which we think are realistic options for our team in terms of inputs and outputs.

Candidates: Domagoj Malezic, Artur Mlodzinsky, Joakim Bengtsson, Andreas Spengler

Roaldo Racing

The former Hernj Grand Prix team saw a new morning, when David Greco was confirmed to drive in 2007. After a few difficult seasons Greco proved to be the needed piece in the puzzle to bring the team back into the front fight. With the help of Greco [Roaldo Racing](#) performed with excellent consistency throughout the season and would without Diamond's Bruno Marques have finished the year with a drivers' championship. With the lost chance, the team is bound to try even harder to achieve its first championship in 2008, once again through Greco.

Similar to Twister, the team had plenty of competition in 2007 for the second WC seat, with numerous potential drivers, leading to a lot of drivers driving being on loan for different WC teams. Although this turned out to be a good emergency solution, the team's harmony was somewhat interfered. While Danny Davison certainly has got the potential, he's unlikely to continue in WC due to scheduling problems as result of the Australian time zone. Yannick Lapchin finished his 2007 journey with Roaldo on a high, but the precocious Frenchman has already declared not to continue with the team. A probable 2008 candidate would be Ondrej Kuncman, who after serious discussions is strongly linked with the Dutch team.

Team manager Roald Reurink:

My dream team would be David Greco and Greger Huttu. Both drivers have an enormous talent to race and to know the car. Greger drove for the team some years ago and I would love to see him back, but that is quite impossible unless he gets loaned out again by Team Redline. David is a good friend of mine and is an ideal teamdriver.

Secured driver: David Greco

Candidates: Ondrej Kuncman, Patrick De Wit, Danny Davison, Hans-Bodo Kohl

Diamond Racing Team
[Diamond Racing](#) could not have played their cards better when they managed to acquire Bruno Marques for 2006 and 2007. In two years, the Portuguese has won almost everything possible for the team, including drivers' championships in 2006 and 2007 and teams' championship in 2007. After a magnificent year Diamond doesn't have much to improve on, but in order to keep the number one position team manager Steve Kasimatis is probably forced to change the somewhat conservative salary policy. Diamond still has the knowledge and know-how in order to win races in 2008, but in order to

maintain the advantage that Marques brought the team will need to find successful replacers. After the release of Bruno Marques into GhostSpeed Racing, Diamond has been active on the market. Ondrej Kuncman, although shadowed by Marques, drove an excellent season, meaning the Czech would be a safe bet for the team to build on for another season. Nevertheless, Diamond still needs a top driver to step into Marques's shoes, and there aren't too many available. One option would be Roy Kolbe, who often found himself admiring the Diamond car setups and pace.

Candidates: Roy Kolbe, Ondrej Kuncman, Artur Mlodzinski, Patrick De Wit

Faster Than Speed

The Argentinian [Faster Than Speed](#) had a record season in 2007 in terms of performance and results. Much of the honour can be put on one factor, Patrick De Wit. The Dutchman had a real breakthrough season, scoring his first win and numerous podiums for a team, which we used to see fighting for the last point positions in WC. Whether Faster Than Speed really is capable to continuing on the same path in 2008, is much a question of Patrick De Wit. Considering the team is operating on limited resources, the odds are small that another top name would be joining Faster Than Speed. The team is unlikely to continue with the current lineup, Patrick De Wit - Giuseppe Marconi. The latter always fought in the shadows of De Wit, and after an inconsistent season is bound to search for new challenges. The future of De Wit is very much decided by himself, but maybe the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. On the other hand the Dutchman owes a lot to the team, which was the only one to offer him a driver seat after his difficult 2006 season.

Team manager Gabriel Garivaldis:

Of course coming off our best season in the series ever, we only want to aim higher. It's difficult to know what to

expect though, there are too many complications at the moment unfortunately and we will have to wait till closer to the season before we can state our expectations. Our goal will always of course be to aim for the title, but if we want to be realistic, I don't see it happening for 2008, but as I said, we don't know this yet.

Candidates: Patrick De Wit, Sebastian Schmalenbach, Blair Disley

GhostSpeed Racing

After a slow start, the Portuguese [GhostSpeed Racing](#) has gradually climbed up towards the top as the season has passed on. The team found a surprise performer in Blair Disley, who after driving successfully in the Ace category has approached the very top in the WC. After acquiring the biggest and probably best driver on the free market, Bruno Marques, GhostSpeed can build on towards a very solid 2008.

Considering the 2008 line-up, GhostSpeed has most of the job done already. Signing Bruno Marques was a huge step for the debutant team, and the single most important factor in helping the team to up their performance in 2008. As for the second driver seat the team has plenty of solid options, including the current lineup Rouault-Disley and a number of national group drivers.

Team manager Pedro Rodrigues:

I would like to keep all my current drivers. I'm happy with them. And they have the potential for more. I totally trust on them and hope to continue to work with all of them, now with the addition of Bruno. We will work hard to fight for both the drivers and constructors championships, not only in the World Championship but also in the World Series ACE.

Secured driver: Bruno Marques Candidates: Blair Disley, Stephane Rouault Kiwi Virtual

The former giant, [Kiwi Virtual](#), has been fighting on a wide front for the FSR championships, but towards 2007

the team cut down its resources and focused on one team in the WC. With a new line-up the team has suffered from somewhat inconsistent performances, including a couple of visits on the podium. The future of the WC team is still in the grey zone, with multiple options and outcomes. Darius Trinka and John-Eric Saxén have driven in the team on loan contract from Roaldo Racing, and the duo hasn't yet commented on their future in the team. Anyhow, the future WC line-up would follow similar trends as the past year, with room given for young talents.

Virtual-Games.com Racing Team

The other Portuguese team, Virtual-Games.com has a long history behind, culminating in the championships of 2001 and 2004. During the ongoing season the team hasn't been able to replicate the performance of former years, but as usual the team has shown solid pace from time to time. In order to improve Virtual-Games.com is in the same dilemma as Faster Than Speed and many others: the increased business and professionalism puts up an extra challenge to the teams operating without a special budget reserved for their drivers. Sergio Casalins has belonged to the teams' line-up the whole year, and the young Spaniard is likely to extend his contract for another year. Considering the second seat there has been some turbulence after veteran Denis Kiriakopoulos' retirement from the circus. The candidates for 2008 are plenty, and the outcome ultimately depends on how much the team is ready to focus on the WC.

Team owner Rogério Barroso:

Virtual-Games.com is owned by an actual Real Company, since it's a foundation. Like in any Company, our team owner wants to get return if he decides to invest actual money. We believe that FSR is close to achieve visibility enough to make it true, but at this moment that still isn't the case, mainly because there are already "heavy paid" drivers. So, if nothing changes, the 2008 WC Line-Up,

material speaking, will only be entitled to the totality of the Prize Money that FSR will make available and the team secures.

Da Silva Net&Eagle Rex

The former DaSilvaNetRex acquired a double license for 2007 with the hopes certainly high. But when the season started the harsh reality showed its face. The occasionally promising pace was shadowed by the fact that the line-up was changing for most of time, and on top of that the team suffered from bad luck. Manager and former champion Ernesto De Angelis jumped in as driver in mid season, which indeed helped the team to gain ground in the championship table. Nevertheless, Da Silva certainly has higher hopes on 2008, where the first step would be to find the right driver duo without huge investments. The 2008 line-up of Da Silva will almost certainly include drivers from the own junior mill. It takes time to become the next Greco, but that's why the team wants to give young talents the needed experience of top level racing. A logical decision would be to pair one of the young Italians with an experienced driver such as Fausto Pappalardo.

Team owner Ernesto De Angelis:

When you decide to bet on young talents, you can't have too high expectations, especially not in the short period. I hope we can find drivers who show good speed but also a good reliability and give the team a top 6 in constructors, while would be great to have both drivers in top 10 for the first season.

Candidates: Ernesto De Angelis, Fabrizio Pescali, Fausto Pappalardo, Gianluca Menna, Klaus Kåg Torrent Motorsports

For the 2007 World Championship, [Torrent Motorsports](http://TorrentMotorsports) managed to acquire a license, and ever since then the American team has been filled with the right amount of shameless ambitiousness. After thorough preparations the hard work started to show

results at Bahrain, but to keep the performance up in world's hardest racing series proved to be difficult. However, the team has still been able to score regular points, thanks to a constant driver line-up throughout the year. But knowing the resources of Torrent – the team has recently made a sponsor deal with RaceSimCentral.com - the targets will be put higher for 2008.

The duo Andreas Spengler – Petter Kaasa did the best job during the teams' pre-season qualifying and deservedly got the seats for 2007. As of the coming year, the team will go through a renewal process, but the final line-up remains still ultimately to be decided. Rumours have been circulating that the team has put plenty of dollars on the table for Ondrej Kuncman and Patrick De Wit, but apparently the duo has not yet moved to enjoy the midwestern Ohio sun. Behind the curtains, plans have also been made to draw another North-European world-class driver towards the team; a process we probably could be hearing more about later on. Concerning the teams' American drivers, the time zone dilemma will lay out a problem for WC participation, but rumours tell the team has been in preliminary contact with Scott Arrington and Wyatt Gooden. Whatever the outcome will be, Torrent Motorsports doesn't fall short on its budget and should be able to enhance its performance towards the very top.

Director of Motorsport - Richard Hylands: "Torrent Motorsports eagerly awaits the 2008 season at FSR and preparations are currently underway to make this campaign a successful one. Returning drivers Petter Kaasa and Andreas Spengler remain our cornerstone and their dedication will be the foundation on which future successes will be built."

Candidates: Patrick De Wit, Ondrej Kuncman, Roy Kolbe, Andreas Spengler