

AUTOSIMSPORT

Volume 3 Number 1

Slidin the Sport into the Sim



**The Future of rFactor With ISI's Gjon Camaj
The Greatest Track Ever Made—GPL's Targa Florio
Indy500 Winner Buddy Lazier
ARCA RE/MAX Sim With ARCA's Daren T. Havens**



Plus 107 Pages of Winter Wonder Including: Snakes on a Plain, Autodromo Riccardo Paletti, National Auto Sport Association's Sim-Racing Rankings, plus so much more!



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AUTOSIMSPORT

HeadOpEd

LxMartini



Hey Joe, where you goin' with that Datsun in your hands?

What A Difference A Year Makes

So we start where we left off (for those of you who are paying attention!): This is Volume 3, which means we're now in our (erm) third year ... really unnerving, this, since I can still remember putting together the very first issue.

Our last issue was in December (yes, it's all very obvious this month!), and we've taken a nice long break—a break that was sorely needed by all. You'll also notice that I'm saying 'we' and 'us' a lot, and there's a reason for that: Many of our writers and contributors have come and gone through the years, but some—the core of those that came onboard by the second issue, in February, 2005—remain a very big part of this magazine. So I would remiss not to say thank you to those guys—and also the guys and girls that keep supporting this magazine month-after-month, making it into what it is—and beyond anything that I had imagined when we launched our first issue ...

Kan du stava till SimBin?

Okay, so it's not hip (and neither is hip hop, nor cool), and it isn't right to make fun of people who can't spell ... but ... would it be too much to expect a sim-racing developer to release news to RACESimCentral with some sort of spell-checker running? "To be," says their official statement, "allegeable for inclusion ..." I doubt AUTOSIMSPORT will be, but if you want to, SimBin is offering to include your team in their next sim—RSC has all the details, and you'd best hurry because many 'allegable' teams have—allegedly—already signed up ...

The AUTOSIMSPORT AWARDS That Weren't

Yes, those of you who voted for 'other' gave us all a good chuckle ... well done! But the awards, alas, have been cancelled this year: Why? Well, before I get into that, I would like to extend my thanks—and sincere apologies—to all of you who took the time to vote ... sadly, some decided to take a bit more time than we would have liked.

It seems that certain individuals (we've been unable—and frankly unwilling—to determine how many) decided to vote more than once for their favourite website, and

sims ... indeed, one person voted over 800 times for one site, leaving all of us here with a simple problem: Either compare every vote with individual IPs, or scrap the 2006 Awards all-together. We chose the latter since we have better things to do ... like tossing (steady ...) our 79GP cars around Kyalami.

The GP79 Manual

Those of you who have been waiting for it since December 17th are owed a huge apology: The manual, however, is ready in all its seventy page glory, and will be released along with GPC's upcoming patch ... it will feature an introduction by GPL Manual writer Steve Smith, and a host of fantastic sections ... please look out for it at the end of this weekend, and enjoy! But wait, there's more from us this month!

The netKar PRO Skinning Manual

Julian Dyer's amazingly put-together skinning tutorial (not just for netKar) is now available in the Downloads section at AUTOSIMSPORT.net ... go get it and learn! If you have any questions, Julian is also available at our forums to help you out ...

More?

Much more—thanks to a unique partnership between AUTOSIMSPORT and GPLEGACY, we will be featuring an exclusive 'book' showcasing Auto Shows from around the world. And we're not talking about a guy with a digital camera here, but hundreds of photos from official media sources, and partners. Look out for our first issue sometime in the middle of February, that will feature the biggest show in Latin America: SIAM 07.

How Much More?

Not much—except for this one hundred page-plus Issue that you're about to—we hope—read ... please enjoy, and don't forget to visit our [shop](#)—and support our sponsors! Thanks and see you on-track soon on rFactor.org!

News

**Got Milk? How nice ...
Got Juice?
Then send it to us!**



Your New Mother

Bob Simmerman

Christmas hit from all kinds of directions this year, and some of the bounty in the bag was the release of what is most likely the best looking *Nordscheleife* to date. See the thread posting by [raceking](#) to find more information on this stunning new addition to the rFactor platform.

Rod McLeod vs. Benito Guerra

GPLEGACY

'Motor Review', Fox Sports's TV show produced by Farfan Films Entertainment, featured a special race between drivers Rod McLeod and Benito Guerra Jr. which took place virtually at the SALON INTERNACIONAL DEL AUTOMOVIL MEXICO (SIAM) Auto Show in December. The race was held with the fantastic Zonda mod.

Don't miss the GPLEGACY page in this Issue for a full round-up of the SIAM Motor-Show in which AUTOSIMSPORT enjoyed a fine moment of fame, and Tech4PCs specially-designed unit for GPLEGACY managed to pump rFactor out at 276 Frames Per Second!

1979 GP Season Fully Open

Bob Simmerman

Perhaps the greatest gift in recent sim-racing gift-giving is the 1979 GP mod released to a huge download rate, and an even larger approval rating. No doubt you have seen our coverage of this mod for some time now, but now you can have a look and find out for yourself what we have been rambling on about. Featuring every car, driver, and livery of the 1979 season, there are also several of the tracks from that season included in the companion track pack, and the mod has been created in such a way that each race of the 1979 season will determine which car model is loaded—so don't look very hard for that FW06 at the Kyalami season opener. If you just want to drive, there is also the option to forgo history altogether and race any car at any track.

It was quite an honor to be able to follow this one along during beta-testing, and I can only give the highest recommendation here. Another must-have addition to the sim-racing world's biggest sandbox.

Terrible Omission

Bob Simmerman

With a full dose of humble pie finely digested, I must express sincere apologies to Brian Zerkel and all the rest of the fine folks at the [Team Tundra forums](#). Due to my colossal ineptitude, they were left out of the voting for the yearly awards. Please stop by and give them a shout as soon as you can because those forums are, by far, some of the best of any genre, and deserve to be in anyone's 'Best Of' list.

SIM:RACERS:LIFE

Dom Binz

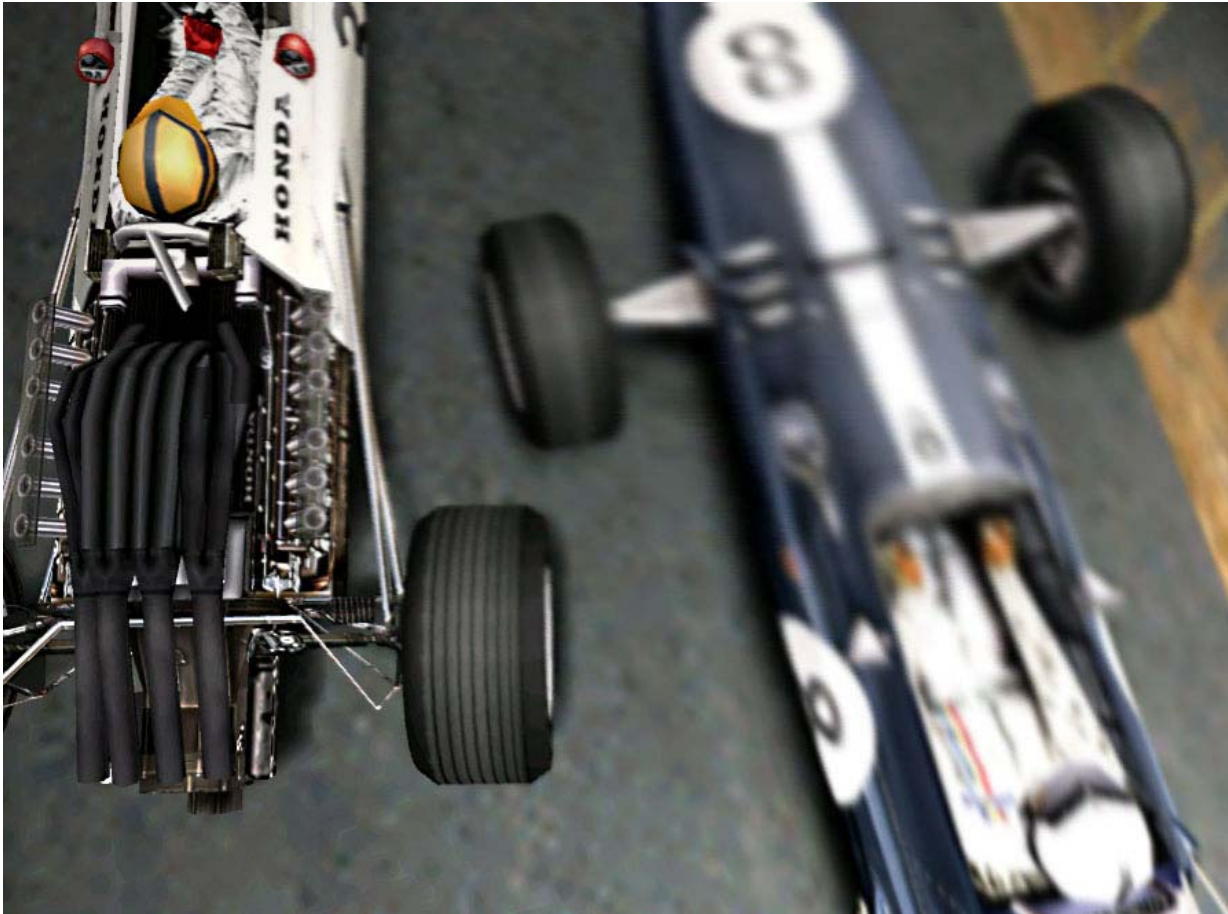
After some hard months of work, the [SIM:RACERS:LIFE](#) site is finally online. S:R:L is a site where sim-racers can store their online racing career results, and features a user-driven system that can support all racing-sims. The site, with the community's interest and active participation, will soon have a database boasting thousands of drivers, teams, leagues, sims, results, and a host of other stats.

The site contains a myriad of features such as the ability for leagues, league series, tracks, track versions, sims, mods, and teams to be added, by the user, to the common database, as well as the ability for individual drivers to add, view, or delete career results (or team managers' to do likewise for their teams). Drivers can also add results to certain teams if they have the team password, and a fully customizable profile with pic'-upload, logo upload, and so forth is already up-and-running.

1967—2007 Anniversary

Nihad Gluscic

The 1967 '[40th Anniversary World Championship](#)' is a virtual Formula 1 Championship using the Grand Prix Legends racing simulator to celebrate the classic 1967 F1 season, perhaps the most exciting time in the sport's history. This Championship will emulate the 1967 season, and features full-length online Grands Prix with races following the original calendar to the nearest Sunday, as well as using the same points system and rules used in 1967 (counting only eleven of the seventeen races, and scratching the two worst results from the overall tally).



Drivers are free to choose any car they wish, but must retain that car throughout the season. For every event, two separate races will be held to accommodate a worldwide field, along with their differing time zones. Best lap times from pre-qualifying will determine who gets a place on the primary, and subsequent servers.

Anyone is free to join the championship at any time—all that's required is for you to have an account with [GPLRank](#), and have signed up via a message at GPLRank. Alternatively, you can sign up for the races at a [designated forum](#) thread on RaceSimCentral with your GPLRank name, car preference, and helmet color.

Osella PA21 For NetKar PRO

Netkar website

According to the [netKar PRO](#) website, Simone Faggioli—who won the 2006 championship driving an Osella PA-21 prototype—has assisted the netKar PRO crew to accurately simulate this car in the netKar PRO engine.

“The great thing,” the website states, “is that the netKar PRO crew made sure that the new content will also be made available to all netKar PRO customers. The hillclimb racing challenge will be included in a future official release of netKar PRO.”

Go to the website to see the video of this wondrous offer from sim-racing's most unique and challenging simulator.

Grand Prix 4 Circa 1995

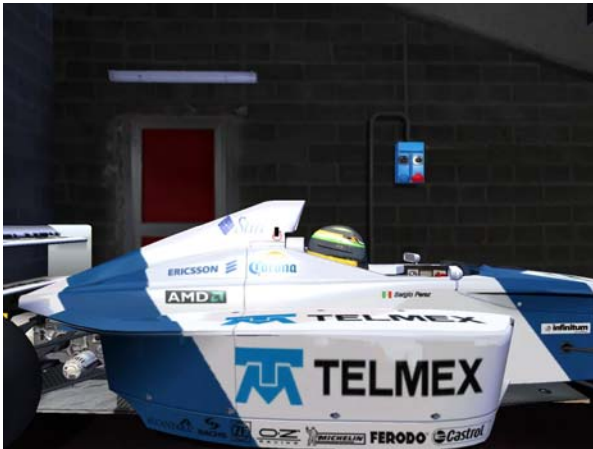
Bob Simmerman

Our good friend Tony recently unveiled the latest addition to Grand Prix 4—the 1995 season! Not just a tack-on, this mod is packed to the brim with features including all teams, all drivers; all pit crews, and track specific liveries and cars. And if that wasn't enough, you can expect each car to have unique and individual physics and handling characteristics. Fully designed to utilize the Car Set Manager (CSM), this is yet another must-have Grand Prix 4 add-on for fans of this great sim. Thanks again to Tony and the rest of the gang for keeping the GP4 flame burning brightly.

Holy Palomino Hot Pants On Fire

Bob Simmerman

iDT. The recent Formula BMW mod. Damnit, I have said too much already ... 156.88% score. It got bonus points and review modifier enhancements. Oh yeah, and they also turned out the Lamborghini Gallardo mod, and the Toyota Atlantics as well! Hats Off to iDT for their prolific and top shelf offerings for the fans of rFactor.



Holy Palomino The Whole Damn House Is On Fire!

Bob Simmerman

As if the sheer brilliance of the iDT offerings were not enough, the sim-racing community was graced with one of the most beautiful—and accurate—real-world track representations to date for rFactor. Magnificent in its creation, Gabriele Bonora and Giovanni Mangione have given us a Varano, Autodromo Riccardo Paletti that is as addictive to drive as it is pleasing to look at. And to sweeten the deal even further, track administrators Mr.Maestri and Mr.Manfredi were appreciative of the

effort, and fully in support of the project. Make sure to check out this month's article in AUTOSIMSPORT for a more in-depth look at the genius and beauty of this very special rFactor addition.

A New Blip On The Radar

Bob Simmerman

This just in and hot off the presses—Indie developer Exotypos has announced their upcoming racing simulator, [X Motor Racing](#), and it looks like those guys have a winner on their hands—go now, not later, and give this one a look! Here are some great screenshots, and in-game videos that provide more than enough proof that the Indie effort is alive and well. Thanks to Mr. Eugene Cojocar for showing us the way!

New Racing Simulator Site Opens

Blackmyst & Guyver.

[SIMURACER.COM](#) was conceived and developed by two racing enthusiasts, Neil 'Blackmyst' Baker and a very close friend, Ro 'Guyver1' Jong en Eel. The SIMURACER.COM website is the love and labor of both of these sim-racers who have spent more hours than they care to remember uploading files, producing graphics, and creating the basic function and administration of the site itself.

"We do this because we love racing and racing simulators, and want to give something to the community," they said. "We started out with an idea of putting a website together for our league or something of a racing team ... or clan, if you want to call it that. Then we started getting bigger and bigger ideas, and got a bit carried away—all of which was encapsulated into what today: SIMURACER.COM. A website which provides a place for (serious) race simulator fans to come together, share information, news, and get the latest downloads."

One of the fundamental concepts behind [simuracer.com](#) is to provide free solutions for racing leagues to have their own place on the World Wide Web. "SIMURACER.COM will provide those people with sub-

domains, web space and private facilities such as private forums in the main SIMURACER forums," they state. "Further to this, one of our goals is to attract developers of mods and ultimately even full-blown race-sim games to SIMURACER.COM, and become a launch platform for their work. We aim to be as accommodating for any future partnerships as we can be, including, but not limited to, providing web-space, or even hosting entire websites, and dedicated support forums. We plan to implement a steady and trustworthy platform for advertising for developers, hardware and any other 'guy with a mod' that needs their name to be made known to the community."

Their hope is that SIMURACER.COM becomes an established name and resource in the race-sim community.

The Sitecom 24 hours of Spa Francorchamps

By Guido Trampe

In cooperation with title sponsor Sitecom and with Simworld Almere, DigitalRacing.nl presents a [24 Hour race](#) on the famous Spa Francorchamps track. Simbin's acclaimed racesimulation, GTR2, will be used. Forget about races that take seventy-five, ninety, or even 120 minutes: this will prove to be the true challenge! 1,40 minutes, over 600 laps, thirty pit-stops, real driver changes, dynamic real-time day-night transitions, and compromised car setups that have to suit you and your teammates.

Date: weekend of 3 and 4 March 2007

Race start: 3 March, 14h00

Race finish: 4 March, 14h00

AutoSimSport would like to offer our condolences to the family and friends of Bobby Hamilton Sr., and Benny Parsons, two racing greats who have left us much too young. They thrilled us on the track,, and off the track, they made the world a better place. Godspeed, Gentlemen, you will be terribly missed.



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DRIVER—OVERALL

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	Tim McArthur	7.619	22	21	89	6712
2	Kent Welker	6.707	10	13	49	4247
3	Conor McCarrell	6.503	21	14	68	5392
4	Dean Shackleton	6.363	4	6	87	7281
5	David Banta	6.062	4	5	32	2504
6	Todd Weiss	5.907	3	1	49	4628
7	Adriano Manocchia	5.623	1	3	37	3033
8	Jerry Chen	5.453	1	0	55	3506
9	Fernando Deutsch	5.362	2	5	54	2567
10	Larry Anderson	4.154	0	0	37	1855

DRIVER—SPORTS CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	Wilfred van den Brink	9.401	3	1	8	1828
2	Craig Hattingh	9.068	2	4	8	1896
3	Claus Juel	9.021	14	14	26	3515
4	Samuel Krueger	8.588	7	9	25	3902
5	Ari Nieminen	8.517	3	5	21	3430
6	Tolga Incekaraoglu	8.010	2	0	7	578
7	Steve Smith	7.874	5	3	19	3522
8	Janko Glavac	7.783	3	6	7	544
9	Nuno Coelho	7.754	4	4	19	3232
10	Darin Boyd	7.484	2	2	8	1182

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DRIVER—TOURING CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	Claus Juel	9.249	5	5	8	466
2	Ari Nieminen	9.217	0	2	9	621
3	Kent Welker	8.907	4	3	14	847
4	Tom Studans	8.674	2	1	8	587
5	Bas Zwartebol	8.654	3	2	8	719
6	Kirill Izotov	8.630	1	1	6	479
7	Rogier de Klein	8.531	0	0	8	744
8	Tim McArthur	8.439	3	5	18	1054
9	Axis Experience	6.656	0	0	10	821
10	Conor McCarrell	6.602	5	3	11	437

DRIVER—OPEN WHEEL

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	Samuel Krueger	8.783	3	1	7	450
2	Conor McCarrell	8.236	12	7	20	747
3	Tim McArthur	8.127	9	5	28	1089
4	Darin Boyd	7.337	2	3	9	386
5	Aubrey Windle	7.296	0	0	11	541
6	David Banta	6.897	3	4	15	597
7	Tommy Regan	6.636	4	2	9	326
8	Dean Shackleton	6.554	0	4	29	1140
9	Peter Holt	6.535	0	0	7	280
10	Fernando Deutsch	6.378	1	3	27	947

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DRIVER—STOCK CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	Mike Maloney	7.903	3	3	7	1114
2	Todd Weiss	6.479	2	1	7	965
3	Rick Bisconer	5.221	0	0	7	1135
4	John Turner	5.083	0	0	7	1058
5	Bob Maloney	4.545	0	0	6	824
6	Kyle Lamb	2.131	0	0	6	574

TEAM—OVERALL

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	GTNDC	8.126	48	46	142	16082
2	McArthur Motorsports	7.890	12	9	51	2481
3	SoCal Motorsports	6.252	8	8	36	3159
4	Race2Play Blue	6.223	9	14	69	5784
5	Western States Motorsports	6.193	4	5	45	2057
6	Over The Hill Racing	6.038	8	6	90	9943
7	FSR Sim-Gear	5.116	2	6	48	2714
8	Slow Moving Objects	4.881	2	1	41	2802
9	Eagle Racing	4.667	1	0	36	1787
10	Race2Play Red	4.645	7	7	78	5949



TEAM—SPORTS CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	GTNDC	8.146	31	35	87	13070
2	LMTC MotorSports	8.119	5	1	10	1868
3	Team ECCI	7.591	4	2	21	4532
4	CoDa Competition	7.245	1	2	12	1546
5	Vorshlag Motorsports	7.123	2	1	18	2037
6	McArthur Motorsports	6.814	2	2	15	838
7	Race2Play Blue	6.633	8	11	40	4281
8	HM Racing	6.616	5	6	16	2706
9	SoCal Motorsports	6.368	3	4	19	2245
10	Western States Motorsports	6.009	0	0	17	823

TEAM—TOURING CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	GTNDC	9.058	12	7	28	1766
2	McArthur Motorsports	8.664	2	3	12	735
3	Russian eXpansion	8.208	1	2	12	863
4	Feint Motion MotorSports	8.013	1	1	11	920
5	CoDa Competition	7.766	2	1	9	655
6	Scuderia Bollesnegro	7.742	2	2	17	1483
7	SoCal Motorsports	6.948	2	2	9	658
8	Over The Hill Racing	6.217	1	1	15	1238
9	TL Racing	6.173	0	0	14	1388
10	Race2Play Blue	6.033	1	1	14	911



TEAM—TOURING CAR

	NAME	RANK	WINS	POLES	RESULTS	MILES
1	GTNDC	9.058	12	7	28	1766
2	McArthur Motorsports	8.664	2	3	12	735
3	Russian eXpansion	8.208	1	2	12	863
4	Feint Motion MotorSports	8.013	1	1	11	920
5	CoDa Competition	7.766	2	1	9	655
6	Scuderia Bollesnegro	7.742	2	2	17	1483
7	SoCal Motorsports	6.948	2	2	9	658
8	Over The Hill Racing	6.217	1	1	15	1238
9	TL Racing	6.173	0	0	14	1388
10	Race2Play Blue	6.033	1	1	14	911

What's this? Another so-called Rank? Actually, no. Any similarity between the Race2Play Ranking and other rankings pretty much ends at the use of the word.

The Race2Play Ranking is not about anonymously uploaded hotlaps. The Race2Play Ranking is a modified "winning percentage" of sorts, and the only laps that count are from official qualifying and race sessions at R2P (where all sessions are presided over by one to four live Event Stewards).

The Rank is calculated from a driver's finishing position, the number of other drivers in the field, whether the driver qualified on the pole or DNF'd from the race, among other factors. The result is a 0-10 value to three decimal places. The Race2Play Ranking is not just a measure of speed, but a larger measure of total racecraft as well.

The racing at R2P is built around a "one world" ideal: A sports car race is a sports car race, and the particular sim used is a matter of equipment choice. (For the record, the "equipment" from which you can choose includes rFactor, GTR2, GTL, NR2003 and WTCC—Race, and there are plans for including more sims in the future.) The Rankings follow this ideal.

There are Rankings for Sports Car, Touring Car, Open Wheel and Stock Car racing. Rally Car will be added later this year. Drivers must be ranked in at least three different disciplines to be ranked in the Overall. And what's good for drivers is good for teams, which are fully integrated into Race2Play.

A prime example of the statistical record underscoring a team's excellence is the GT Network Drivers Club, or GTNDC (<http://race2play.com/team/gtndc>). This group claimed two series championships in R2P's first points season, including the nGT crown with one-two finishes by Wilfred van den Brink and Claus Juel in the prestigious GT Invitational, a multiclass endurance series.

The GTNDC drivers are not only formidable in terms of raw speed, but very skilled at negotiating traffic and other aspects of total racecraft, and their Rankings bear this to be true.

The Sports Car Rank is dominated by GTNDC, with van den Brink (Netherlands) at No. 1, Juel (Denmark) at No. 3, Samuel Krueger (Finland) at No. 4, and Darin Boyd (USA) at No. 10. (Juel is tops in Touring Car and Krueger is tops in Open Wheel, as well.) Kent Welker (USA), who captured the last Porsche Challenge title, is the No. 2 ranked driver Overall and No. 3 in Touring Car.

Add it all up and GTNDC has much deserved positions across the tops of the team Rankings, and, yes, is the No. 1 ranked team Overall.



TO THE FACE



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COMMENT

Small Things!

Magnus Tellbom

For some time I have wanted to write a little something about Live for Speed. And since I like the sim so much—and have even administrated a couple series for it—and since a new patch was released in December, I thought this was probably a good time to get some thoughts on paper, so to speak. But, no sooner had I made the decision than I was confronted with what many an LFS-writer has discovered at the moment when finger-meets-key: What do I write about that isn't all-too-painfully obvious from the first moment you try this sim? You see, LFS is a victim of its own sheer brilliance: After all, there is a reason why LFS enjoys the biggest—and most active, and committed—community in sim-racing. And the reasons for that are just plain ... well ... *obvious*. It is one of the most realistic sims ever made, it's more system-friendly than notepad, and it's just, well, a nifty, fully-integrated and *functioning* piece of software. So, having said that ... what else is there to write about?

And that's when I realized that it is the little things that I should be writing about. The oh-so-smart solutions that you don't necessarily see when you first load the sim—and yet, taken as a whole, make this into sim-racing's most novel and, yes, clever simulator. Like what? Well, how about the fully integrated 'stats thingy' called LFS Desktop (or LFS World, in-game). Or, how about the fact that LFS's community-forum is also fully incorporated—in *real-time*? Pretty smart, huh? And what about perhaps the most stunning thing of all: *It works!* It works absolutely seamlessly so that most people don't even realize how absolutely brilliant it really is!

Let's take a practical look at this: When I'm on a server trying to improve on my personal best, for instance (LFS being an unashamedly online-only vehicle), anyone—be they my buddies or foes—can view my LFS Forum Profile,

and determine—live—what server I'm on. They can—by the merest click of a button—go from that forum to LFS Desktop, where they can either view my stats, or, if they want, actually connect to that very server to join-me for some testing or racing. Amazing? No, *brilliant!* LFS enjoys no equal in the little things that it does: As a sim racer, I have never seen such beautiful (and functional) integration of game, stats, and forum. It's simply stunning. And perhaps even more amazing is that there are only three guys working on this! *Three!*

So why, many have asked, is there so little written about LFS? Why aren't the big 'game magazines' (and trade mags like AUTOSIMSPORT) all over this like flies on a particularly juicy, freshly laid, and curled piece of turd? Where's the hype? Where are the awards, and all the articles that explore this novel, living world, that is LFS?

Well, two reasons spring to mind: The first is, as I have stated, that nothing much happens with LFS. By its nature—tightly controlled by the developers—LFS does not have mods, does not have third party add-ons, and does not have extra tracks, except those which come from the developers themselves. But over and above this, there is also that little matter of the word 'Alpha' in the title: We are, after all, talking about Live For Speed S2 Alpha. And 'Alpha', as we all know, usually means the software is in its early stages of development, and is (for those of us who know our Greek alphabet!) pre-beta: Which would indicate that the software is barely functioning, and would require a user to be skilled and schooled in the finer details of higher-programming skills to get any joy from running it.

Nothing, when speaking about LFS, could be further removed from the truth. It's actually so darn stable and system-friendly that even the test patches are more stable than most other finished products. But still, many see the word 'Alpha' in the title and think, 'I better wait until a stable version is released before I try this one'.



The 'Alpha', however, must be there for a reason ... so what is it about LFS that makes its developers think it isn't even in beta-stage yet? Well, to begin with, there is the matter of the AI which is simply not finished yet. As in, it doesn't really exist. And there is also the fact that Live For Speed, barring one or two exceptions (including the rather notable presence of an officially licensed Formula 1 car), only features fantasy cars, and tracks—a fact that makes certain people say, 'It can't be a sim since it doesn't simulate any real-world cars'. Indeed, even though the cars made for this sim look the business (those with a steady eye will see the real mirrored in the fantasy), and drive as realistic as anything one hopes to find in an 'officially licensed' sim (and, let's be fair, far better than what the majority of developers shaft out of the door with a 'license'), there will always be those with doubts.

Last on my list of not-so-good things (though it does not reflect on LFS's status as 'Alpha') is the lack of any type of mod-ability. The developers have stated that sometime after the release of S3 (the final projected update of the sim), there may be tools released which would allow third-party add-ons to LFS, but that promise is a little ... problematic. I say this because, firstly, we're

still awaiting a final S2 version, which means S3 is—if the wait between S1 and S2 is any indication—probably years away, and secondly, there is that word ‘may’ which would—and perhaps I am being a little cynical, but I think it ought to be said—indicate that it may also very well *not* happen. And that is, in my opinion, the ultimate nail in the coffin for any sim. Mod-ability is the one thing that assures a simulator’s longevity nowadays, and I personally know a couple of good modders who wouldn’t touch rFactor with the proverbial ten foot pole were they able to mod for Live For Speed.

Having now mentioned rFactor in the same sentence as Live For Speed, I should also point out that comparing these two sims is unavoidable: I say this because out in Cyberia, churning through the grind, are many that would make the assertion—and take it to their grave—that ISI copied many of the smart solutions from Live For Speed, and implemented them in an inferior simulation. I don’t really have an opinion on this one, since both sides of the argument have enough ammunition to win any given argument: But, having said that, there are certainly similarities—in particular on how the stats are kept by both sims—that make the two sims worthy of a side-by-side comparison. Live For Speed has its ‘Live For Speed World’, also known as Live For Speed desktop, and rFactor has its Racecast. The difference here is that Live For Speed World works, and is easy to navigate, while Racecast—for all its potential—still has me puzzled from time to time as to what it’s actually doing, and usually loads slower than Donkey Kong did on my old C64. Further similarities are to be found in-game, too, such as the ability to have real-time driver swaps, and the ability to send and receive setups while online on the server. The only real difference here is that Live For Speed makes it easy, almost intuitive, whereas rFactor does not. And, of course, LFS did it first.



But now the final, and difficult question that always rears its head when any serious discussion of the merits of LFS come up—is it *real*? Which is to say—not in its literal sense, but in its *simulated* sense ... is it a real-car simulator? Can something that mostly features fantasy cars, and tracks, actually be *defined* as a simulator? After all, the very definition of simulation would state that the software in question is simulating something from the real-world. So, does this quick-and-easy definition then render LFS outside the realm of a ‘simulator’?

The answer is not an easy one. Because a car may be called a ‘Murusama’, does this mean it is not simulating a real-life Honda? And, moreover, a car’s physics are easily quantifiable: The thing either ‘simulates’ what a car with four tyres and one hundred horsepower would do in the real-world, or it simply doesn’t. In the case of LFS, my judgement is that they have come very close to simulating the real-world forces at work on a car, and there is clearly far more to come.



In my line of work, I usually drive small, front wheel drive cars with moderate power—Toyotas, Renaults, Seats, Golfs, and so forth. I drive them on country roads, both on tarmac and gravel surfaces, as well as on snow and ice during the winter. If someone would ask me how they handle compared to LFS’s XF GTi—an in-game car with about the same (on paper) performance curve—I’d have to reply that it’s pretty darn close. Naturally, I don’t drive blazingly fast on any form of track in real-life, but I do get my share of moderate speed action at work. And if I take out the XF GTi on one of the rally cross courses in Live For Speed, I recognize the behaviour I have experienced in real-life. And that is good enough for me.

My bet is that when the final S2 is released, LFS will take another giant leap in terms of its physicality: That being so, it stands poised—with its NASA-like stable multiplayer code, along with all its surrounding ‘world’—to become sim-racing’s most complete product. Which, considering it is in ‘Alpha’ stage, is really quite astounding.

Now, if only they’d release some tools so we could get some real-world content in there!

AUTOSIMSPORT

T1

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The Future of **rFactor**

AUTOSIMSPORT managed—after much begging and cajoling—to secure an exclusive (and very candid) interview with ISI's Gjon Camaj ...



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rFactor's launch, in August 2005, was met with mixed reviews. Here at AUTOSIMSPORT, though, we were immediately convinced that rFactor's slogan—the *Future of Race Simulation*—was a pretty accurate way to describe Image Space Incorporated's new product: with a online code unmatched by any other sim (and

still by far the market leader to this day), and the possibility for content that was as infinite as the talent and imagination of the community, rFactor was a quantum-leap forward for our—then—ailing sport.

A year and a half down the sim-road, and rFactor has not just met with our prediction: It has positively

outmatched all our expectations. There was a time, before rFactor, when sim-racers had to wait years (and for open-wheel Formula 1 nuts, decades!) for a decent sim to hit the shelves. Nowadays, it seems as if every other day reveals a new sim (at the world's greatest shop, rfactorcentral, where everything is free and fun!) that would—but two years ago—have been launched with much fanfare (and not to mention a pricetag to match): Only this month we have seen the release of the IDT's Gallardo mod, Formula BMW mod, GPC's GP79 mod, and as close to an officially licensed Varano track as to make no difference.

ISI's experiment has, then, been a great success ... it has revolutionized the whole sport, while, at the same time, polarized the community even further: Which is to say, even if all sim-racers were to embrace rFactor, they would still not be racing against one another, since the sheer choice of cars and series available really does boggle the mind ... from V8s to Formula 1s (historic and otherwise), from rally cars to small single-seaters ... sim-racing has never been so rich in content ...

But what does this mean for ISI? Since all this goodness is available for about thirty bucks U.S., how is this impacting ISI's bottom-line? And have they enjoyed sales to warrant their continued—and pretty-much unheard of—support for rFactor?

"Pre and initial sales were okay," Gjon Camaj tells us, "but lower than I would have guessed. However, continued sales have surprised everyone."

Indeed, while surprising—since no-one could have anticipated the way the sim has been embraced by the mod community—it is, perhaps, the quality and the quantity of mods that sees rFactor continue to be a marketable product: Those who have yet to upgrade from Grand Prix Legends, for instance, may well give rFactor a look now that GP79 has been released—and likewise for those who are into smaller Formulas, or

Touring Cars ... with this in mind, though, we asked Gjon whether he felt there was a ceiling to the current sim-racing market and, this being the case, whether he sees that ceiling as closer to 10,000 or 50,000.

"I don't want to guess," Gjon replies, "but I do believe there is a decent percentage of people who haven't tried rFactor yet. I also think the right product brings new people in. rFactor isn't easy to get into, but I think {that} if we can continue to persuade people to give it enough of a chance, we could easily grow the sim-racer market."

The rFactor project—or experiment—came with its own risks, as well as rewards built-in to the product since it did require a leap-of-faith as to the creativity and know-how of the modding community: What, then, have been the highs—and lows—since release?

"Watching as people create, or be a part of something they are proud of, is a high for me every time," replies Gjon. "Just hearing about a group of people that get together on a regular basis to play rFactor is awesome! I have also greatly enjoyed getting requests from friends or spouses who want to purchase rFactor for a loved one who's been raving about it. For instance, recently I had a woman contact me who wanted to buy a full-blown racing simulator, and specific circuits for her boyfriend. She, and the recipient's father, were looking to put together a surprise birthday gift for this up-and-coming driver."

"The biggest low," Gjon confesses, "is not being able to hire all of the many talented people I have met over the years. Another low? rFactor has not yet bought anyone here a new car yet ..."

ISI had a vision with the creation of rFactor—we asked if Gjon could put that vision into words, and whether he feels ISI are on target to meeting them ... and whether (and how) it has been adapted or changed.



"First, we wanted the team's personal lives and well-being to be the first item on the feature list," Gjon replies (anyone who has run the credits page on rFactor will see this for themselves), before noting that, "working in the retail games business was not the joy it should be, and very hard on our family's lives."

"Second, we wanted to create a development environment that we had complete control over. It needed to be flexible enough to be the basis for future products. We wanted to change the way our products were sold and supported. We also wanted the development process to be less coupled with the release schedule."

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Finally, we wanted to build a place in the world where like-minded people could come together; a forum for everyone, whether they enjoyed the racing, building, tweaking, organizing, or technology aspect of our product.

"For the most part," Gjon continues, "rFactor has greatly achieved many of the specific company goals that we set out. By way of example: The week we released rFactor, the office was empty by early evening. The day after rFactor was released, some people started compiling the issues found online and addressing them, others continued on tasks that didn't make it into that release. We can get online night or day and see a growing community enjoying this emerging world. A year later, we are still doing much of the same. rFactor has really become the place to be for racing simulation. For those who are not yet a part of it, they are really missing out. Come, join us—give in to the mod side!"

The old dictum—publish or die—seems completely at odds with a sim-racing developer whose product is constantly being updated by the community (GPL is now nearing its first *decade*): how, we asked, does this translate to the financial well-being of a developer such as ISI, who are releasing patches for their product a year after it was released? Most developers would have moved on to a new (for sale) product after a year-or-so—how does ISI remain profitable by releasing free patches, and free add-ons like completed Formula 1 cars?

"It certainly plays a significant role," Gjon says. "It is important for us to try to find a good balance between supporting current products, and working on new projects to generate additional, needed revenue. We will need to start selling something new soon," he confirms. But *what*, he won't say ...



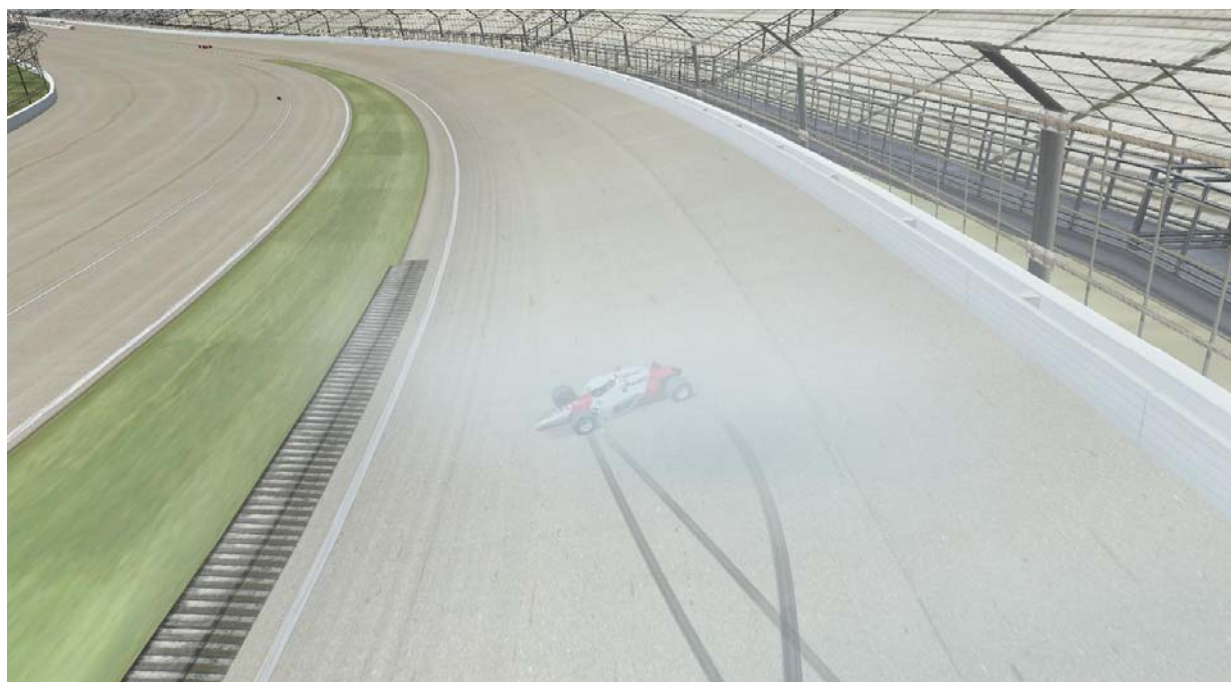
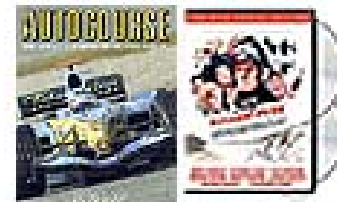
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In terms of profitability—and remaining in business—many of sim-racing's developers (both hard and soft) are extensively involved in the commercial sector, as well as—in the case of ISI—leasing their engine for use with other developers (SimBin, for instance). We asked whether he could elaborate a little further on how this impacts the business.

"I really enjoy the simulator/event side of the business. This has been fun to work on, and I anticipate more effort going into this in the future. It's unlikely," Gjon says, "that a week goes by without rFactor being used at some event somewhere in the world.

"However," he adds somewhat surprisingly, "licensing the rFactor technology was never a defined part of our

business. We have had many requests to use rFactor in various products. Some have made sense for both parties, so we moved forward with it."

The decision to continue supporting rFactor for so long after release with free patches and content would seem—at least to an outsider—to be counter-intuitive to a profit-making business model. Has it ever been considered, we asked, to charge for updates that feature content like the 1.150 update that introduced new tracks and an officially licensed Formula 1 car?

"Part of the rFactor world is the continued development of rFactor," Gjon explains. "Our support has been helpful, although I predict a long-lived rFactor world with or without ISI. We have considered pay updates, subscription models, retail, and others," he continues, "{since}without new forms of revenue, we will not be able to continue, so we continue to try and find ways to pay the bills while maintaining active development and support."

Mod and Modding

ISI's rFactor created a sim that was moddable from the bottom-up—we asked Gjon to explain how ISI came to this decision, and whether it was simply a logical extension from the open-code for previous sims like SportsCar GT, or whether it was a deliberate decision to add a new dimension to their product, to set it apart from the competition, and to create what is ostensibly the most democratic sandbox ever seen ...

"Ah, modding, my favorite subject (well, almost)," says Gjon. "It was certainly a deliberate and concerted effort for not only rFactor, but also all the way back to SportsCar GT. However, with rFactor, we were able to make it a priority for the first time. rFactor is our first legitimate attempt. It's also the first time multiplayer has been given some of the attention it deserves. Modding," he continues, warming to the subject, "is great. I wish I could stop there, but I realize there are issues. This is a very big subject, perhaps we can get a group of modders together to give their views on a specific list of questions."

Having created the canvass, though, how does he feel about the general quality of rFactor-world?

"I feel it's going extremely well. That's not to say it is trouble free and without frustration. It came as no surprise that, initially, there were many ill-configured and converted mods. However, each day seems to bring new surprises, and better and better mods. I'm also pleased to see the wide range of mods as well. With all of the variety and types and flavors of racing out there, I think it's just a matter of time before we see a simulation for each one."

The sheer volume of mods, however, can also prove to be overwhelming for the first-timer, and the varying degrees of competence by mod-makers presents unique problems of its own—does Gjon feel it is time for either ISI or the community to try and re-establish a 'board' that can perhaps judge them? Or will the 'market' will sort this out by osmosis?

"ISI is not going to attempt to judge mods," says Gjon, before adding that, "as a community, I think there is merit to the attempt to try and organize and classify mods. I look at the number of downloads, or a rating system before downloading a mod just like I would before getting a game or utility demo. I think that there needs to be more constructive dialogue about how to best tame this beast. Sure it's hard to manage, and many people have very differing viewpoints, but let's keep trying and do what we can. The future will thank us."

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A certain way of limiting mods is introducing a pay-structure already common in many other genres—would Gjon be opposed to modders charging, and thereby making money off what would remain, ostensibly, an ISI-product?

"No," Gjon replies, "I would not be opposed unless it somehow interfered with, or inhibited our future work. I would, however, be even happier if ISI was somehow included."

ISI remain very engaged in supporting their product—and tech' advice at any of its semi-official forums will generally elicit feedback in short order—but do the guys at ISI ever mess with rFactor for fun? And, if so, what do they race?

"I can only speak for myself," replies Gjon, "but I have really enjoyed being introduced to new or historical types of racing. Right now, if I had the time, I would try and get good at a new drifting mod I'm involved with."

What Next For rFactor

With the overall discussion of ISI done, we thought we'd give Gjon some quick-fire questions on the short-term future of rFactor itself. We started off by asking whether we will get any auto-skin updates in-game?

"I vote yes," jokes Gjon, adding that, "most of the low-level code is already there, and used {for} sending setups."

And what about driver switches in-game for endurance events—is this coming anytime soon?

"We have done more work on this, and a few groups are helping to test it," Gjon confirms. "Shortly, we hope to put out an update that includes this."

Those that enjoy messing about with rFactor's files will have noted that there is a folder with spotter-voices already present—will we be seeing spotters in the next update?

"We are testing a basic system now," he confirms.

One of the aspects that define rFactor—because of its very nature—is the huge amount of adaptability to the average user. This, however, can also be a turn-off to sim-racers who don't want to mess with settings like .plr files—will we ever, we asked, get these tweaks in-game with slider-scales, in the UI itself?

"The UI is already full-featured," says Gjon, before adding that, "I would be happy to expose any additional feature that is fully 'supported' and widely used. That might make a good poll. Actually, this may be a good time to take off those that are no longer necessary."



By this, Gjon means the 'stuff' that are the remnants from previous sims from ISI. What we have never seen, however, in an ISI-sim, is a track designer tool that would make track creation an easier process? Ditto with car paints *à-la* Papy N2003—will we see this in any future ISI-sim?

"ISI is not planning to create asset or skin creation tools," replies Gjon. "We would, and have considered, supporting additional third party tools. I think the current and future crop of community-created tools deserves more attention and support."

One can only hope that the excellent MoTeC telemetry add-on is foremost on this list ... as for graphics, will the community see rFactor getting a major update for DirectX10?

"I can't imagine a situation where we would not continue to support a new version of DirectX," replies Gjon. "Right now, however, there is a fairly decent list of features we want to investigate first."

If there was to be a poll amongst sim-racers, one of the biggest wishes would probably be for weather in rFactor—can we expect rain in the next iteration? And what about new cars, content and, finally, what about onboard animation like gear-changing as seen in GTR2?

"We are not done with wet weather, we haven't addressed animations yet, and for our next version, I think I'm going to be limiting it to a code update only."

Any licensed series planned?

"We are working with the SimFactory on a product supporting the ARCA racing series," Gjon confirms. "We have also been approached by others, and are currently in discussions with them."

What Next For ISI?

Clearly these are issues that he won't want to answer ...

"In that case," Gjon interrupts, "let me carelessly jump right in!"

In which case—can we expect further patches for rFactor?

"My strong prediction is yes," he says.

That being the case, how long can we expect ISI to officially support rFactor?

"Unfortunately," Gjon announces, "very shortly we will not be able to support rFactor to the level we have to date."

Does this mean we will see an rFactor 2?

"I hope so."



And does ISI have any plans to shift toward consoles?

"Now that there are the connectivity online, and mod capabilities, we are open to this possibility."

Will we see rFactor in a box in a retail store? If so, will it contain mods made by the community?

"rFactor does not fit the retail model well," Gjon explains, "but we would consider it if we can make it work. It is currently available on the shelf at Fry's Electronics in the U.S."

ISI have been at the forefront of the industry for nigh on a decade now—what have they seen change, what do they believe the future holds, and is this community large enough to sustain itself—or are we in a transitional phase that would need a whole new market being brought into the sport in order for the whole sport to gain further momentum?



"Communities such as ours build social capital," Gjon replies. "We hear some of the negative stereotypes about the kids that sit in their basements playing games until they blow a valve and their parents finally noticing. But from what I see, innovation and passion have helped to create a rich community where people of similar interests come together to be part of a healthy human experience."

"I feel that the basic principles on which rFactor was built help to facilitate this social capital, which is yet another reason I am very proud of rFactor, and the community effort around it."

"The current community could sustain itself, so it's hard to say we need growth, but I think it will happen, and ultimately we will benefit. Because of its nature, rFactor will allow new groups to join the community, and like any large family, we'll have relatives we wish wouldn't come to the reunions. We have our elders who help everyone, our organizers, our superstars, and our black sheep."

What does he feel will be the innovations that will mark the future of sim-racing?



"Speaking just about rFactor, we will continue to make inroads into providing rFactor as a training tool for professionals. This will help to further validate the simulation, and provide additional creative feedback."

"I can think of several important issues for the future of sim-racing. It will be important to find ways to more easily create and release mods, find and join stable races, and developing better ways to organize us as a community. Unfortunately these 'features' don't make for good screenshots, so the marketers hate them. But since we don't have a marketing department at ISI, we will continue to make progress in these areas. I believe innovation in these seemingly mundane areas can produce significant gains."

ISI's experiment has resulted in nothing short of a revolution, and sim-racing developers are finding themselves, today, in a curious position: Having to compete against free mods created by individuals who have a passion and a genuine love for that which they produce. With the exception of Papyrus' NASCAR 2003 Season, and the exceptional GTR2, it would be a brave man who would throw their hat into the ring of an 'officially licensed' product over that which has been created by the community itself using rFactor as a platform.



The results are yet to be determined, of course, but it seems self-evident that one major spin-off will see developers needing not only to secure official licenses, but having to up their game significantly should they want to compete with the modding community who are not only creating superb mods—but frequently, the very mods we actually *want* to race, and unburdened by commercial considerations. As sim-racing and real-racing form closer contacts, the mods we enjoy are also becoming more 'official' (that is validated by real-world stats and figures) in everything but brand name: With rFactor as base, moreover, the community gets to race them online using a multiplayer code that enjoys no equal at present. Which is all to say—whatever the future of sim-racing, the impact that rFactor has had on our sport will be felt for many years to come, by sim-racers, and, perhaps more importantly, by sim-developers who must find new ways to compete against competitors who create—and distribute—top-class products for absolutely nothing but the price of their passion.



(Officially) Licensed To Thrill

T2

Bob Simmerman reports on why the ARCA RE/MAX officially licensed simulator currently in development by the Sim Factory is—as the series' Marketing Director, Daren T. Havens, explains in an exclusive interview with AUTOSIMSPORT—not a promotional gimmick, but a major step-forward in the technical and sporting relationship between the simulated and the real.

Bob Simmerman

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Since its foundation in 1953 by John Marcum, the ARCA (the Automobile Racing Club of America) sanctioning body has enjoyed an enormous growth in popularity while, simultaneously, proving a fertile ground in the development of many of today—and yesterday's—stock car greats. ARCA's major competition—the ARCA RE/MAX stock car series—has provided the Nextel Cup championship with many of its current (and past) stars: Names like Ryan Newman, Tony Stewart, Benny Parsons, and Ken Schrader have all risen through the ARCA RE/MAX series.

In recent years, the ARCA RE/MAX series has gained a much wider audience, due, in part, to both the broadening televised coverage of the series, as well as the general growth in the popularity of stock car racing in the U.S., a rise that has seen NASCAR become the country's most watched sport. The ARCA RE/MAX series

has grown to become far more than just a feeder series into the stratosphere of Nextel Cup racing: It is an avidly contested championship where even the likes of Juan Pablo Montoya are given their first introduction to the world of stock car racing, American-style. Featuring cars that are very similar to their NASCAR cousins (indeed, many are previously used NASCARs), as well as being a part of a number of NASCAR teams' driver development programmes, the ARCA RE/MAX series is a key component in the U.S. stock car racing scene.

Thanks to the efforts of Bill Zimmerman and the SimFactory (who are producing the officially licensed sim based on this series), AUTOSIMSPORT was put in touch with Daren T. Havens, ARCA's marketing director, for a brief question and answer session—no small task since this is the time of year when things start to get very busy for the tin-topper crowd as they assemble at Daytona for

a month of racing bliss that begins with the Rolex 24-Hour and ends with the legendary Daytona 500, with the ARCA RE/MAX series opener sandwiched in-between.

Havens, however, found the time and, in so doing, made sure I understood that the ARCA RE/MAX sim (using ISI's physics-engine as base) was not just a marketing gimmick to promote the series: Indeed, as we reported some months back, the series itself is backing the simulator to an extent never before seen in our sport, promising a fully sanctioned online series, as well as unheard of technical support for the developers of the sim.

I started by asking Havens what he felt were the core strengths of the ARCA RE/MAX series that make it attractive not only to those already sold on the series, but also those new to racing.

"Benny Parsons, Jeremy Mayfield, Kyle Petty, Adam Petty, Kyle Busch, Davey Allison, and Ryan Newman have all used the RE/MAX Series as a jumping-off point for their stock car racing careers," Havens tells me, before adding that, "Tony Stewart, and Ken Schrader still race with us on occasion, just for fun. The ARCA RE/MAX Series provides a venue for a driver with limited experience to hone his or her speedway skills. There are," he continues, "only two sanctioning bodies that promote stock car events on super speedways, ARCA, and NASCAR. Given that fact, the RE/MAX Series provides an opportunity for drivers to learn how to pilot a heavier, high-horsepower car around some of the premier tracks in the country. For the veterans, it provides a place where they can race against some of the best teams in the sport on a regular basis."

A cursory look at the 2007 ARCA RE/MAX schedule shows the series racing at many of the U.S.'s premiere racing facilities, including Talladega, Daytona, Michigan, and the always entertaining Pocono. I ask Havens what he felt have been some of the major changes that have taken place within ARCA since the inception of the RE/MAX series?

Havens tells me that the questions would require an entire article on its own, before noting that, "The most significant changes that have occurred recently have all been in the area of safety. The changes have not only been implemented by the sanctioning bodies, (head and neck restraints, etc.), but by the racing facilities (safer barriers)."

ARCA, as a sanctioning body, runs more than its flagship RE/MAX series—I asked Havens to give us a little background to the bodies' other sanctioned racing series.

"ARCA sanctions the RE/MAX Series in which the cars are stock cars that are very comparable to Nextel Cup cars," replies Havens, as well as, "the Lincoln Welders Truck Series, which is a regional touring series using light duty trucks and six cylinder engines. ARCA also owns and sanctions two short tracks in the Midwest: Flat Rock Speedway near Detroit, Michigan, and Toledo Speedway in Toledo, Ohio. These tracks run late models, sportsman, street stock, figure 8, factory stock, and enduro classes. Toledo also hosts two RE/MAX Series events, as well as two Lincoln Welders Truck Series events."

One thing that I—and no doubt many others as well—would like to see is more television coverage, or at least re-broadcasts of the races. Is this likely to increase in the coming years?

"ARCA has an exclusive television contract with SPEED," Havens explains, "which runs through the 2007 season. However, we are currently in negotiations to extend that relationship long term. The 2007 season will have fourteen races telecast either live, or same day tape delay, all with re-broadcasts that will be determined. Obviously, ARCA would like to have all of the races broadcast live. With any luck, we will keep making strides towards that goal."

With Toyota entering the series this year, I asked Havens what he felt would be their impact on the series? Does he think it likely that in the future we may

see more Japanese companies get involved with racing in this country? What about European car manufacturers?

"We are not the people that decide whether foreign manufacturers become involved," Havens replies. "First and foremost, the manufacturers need to decide that stock car racing is a platform that is viable for their motor-sports programme. This," he adds, "is not the first time foreign manufactures have ventured into stock car racing. Jaguar, Volkswagen, and Porsche all participated in the sport in the 1950s."

I ask whether there are any road-courses on this season's ARCA RE/MAX calendar and, if not, whether the possibility exists that road-racing may feature in the series in the future.

"For 2007, there are no road courses on the schedule," Havens confirms, noting that, "We last raced one at Watkins Glen in 2001 {and} we are open to doing road courses, as long as the schedule permits."

With ARCA now having granted their official license to sim developers The Sim Factory, I ask Havens what this means for this half-century old sanctioning body, and what they hope to gain from offering their license to a simulator.

"ARCA's hope for the license would be for the simulation community to really support this particular racing sim," Havens says, and, "for the ARCA RE/MAX Series brand to become more recognized due to the game's popularity, and to create more ARCA fans. {The} Sim Factory coming to us for the license agreement means that both of us think that this is a viable series to create a simulation sanction that can be successful for all involved."

Why did they choose the SimFactory to be the developer?

"ARCA saw that this group was serious about not only making this game, but doing it correctly," Havens states, noting that, "When I was first approached about this project, I was very skeptical, but through their persistence, and my education, I could see that this would be successful."

With the nature of an 'official license' changing from sim to sim (what NASCAR grants the sim developer in terms of access would differ wildly from what would be granted by, say, Champ Car), I ask Havens whether he could give me a few details about the actual scope of the license—will it be all cars, tracks, drivers, and total access for the developers? And does the license extend to all ARCA-run series?

"Right now the focus is on getting the RE/MAX Series' online sanction up and running," Havens replies. "Once that happens, we can talk about other aspects of the license. I would love to see us create a Lincoln Welders Truck Series simulator, but that is in the future. As far as the drivers, I believe that The Sim Factory team has done an excellent job of getting input from them. I think they have generated a great deal of interest from the ARCA community, and that can do nothing but help in the advancement and promotion of this product."

And finally, how does he see the sim fitting in with ARCA's overall franchise?

Havens' reply is simple: "Let's get through the launch of the software before we make that determination."

Newcomers to the sim development world, The Sim Factory have managed not only to secure a real-world license, but have secured themselves what appears to be an unprecedented level of interaction with one of the world's biggest sanctioning bodies. With the stock car scene without a serious simulator since Papyrus' 2003 effort, and EA's official product unable to make the impact EA's Tiburon Studios would have hoped, the ARCA RE/MAX simulator is perfectly poised to fill the void, and judging by the talent involved in this sim—and the technical assistance of the ARCA RE/MAX series (along with the ISI-engine)—it would be a brave man who would bet against this title gaining some grippy traction on release.



AUTOSIMSPORT

Split Second

BobSimmerman

The Targa Florio

Bob Simmerman explores the greatest track ever conceived—the seventy-plus kilometre Targa Florio currently being developed for Grand Prix Legends by Sergio Loro along with his wonderfully talented team.







Some astute readers out there may have noticed, in our recent coverage of the newly founded Grand Prix Legends Preservation Society, that the Italian racing venue Targa Florio is being created for GPL by a team led by Sergio Loro. The Targa Florio, of course, has been run in various configurations in its endless history, and the one currently being developed is the, 'Piccolo Circuito delle Madoine'.

For those that don't know, or who speak a smidgeon of Italian, the piccolo (small) is to be taken in context: This layout is a little over seventy-two kilometres long, and would make it, once completed, by far the longest track every made for any simulator. But it is small when compared to the original layout of the Targa Florio that ran in excess of one thousand kilometres!

Richard Cooke, who is one of the developers of this track, and was kind enough to talk me through its evolution and creation, explains that, "This layout was run from 1932 to 1936, and 1951 to 1977. Since GPL is a 1967

(era) sim, it was natural that we would use that layout." The choice for this layout, however, was also a logistical one, since, as Cooke told me, "All {of} the other layouts are too long for GPL, even with the extended (track length) limit." He is referring to the track length limitation of GPL that, until the groundbreaking work by Nigel Pattinson, had been a major roadblock to recreating some of the larger tracks, such as the Isle of Mann.

However, don't expect to ever see the massive 1,000 kilometre-plus layout of the 1909 event, even with the track length limitation lifted. Cooke explains that, "Various people tried building long tracks, and discovered that twenty-five kilometres was the maximum, hence the shortened Isle of Mann track. Papyrus designed GPL for a maximum of twenty-five kilometers—that would be ample for the Nürburgring, but Nigel Pattinson found the arrays limiting the length, and increased them by a factor of four, so the track length limit is now 100Kms."

Cooke, however, notes that there are other issues that come into play when designing such massive tracks: "Assuming that we complete the track by May, it will have taken Sergio's team two years to complete the seventy-two kilometres. At that rate, 1,000Kms would take about twenty-eight years, so I don't think that is going to happen!"

Improbable yes, but surely not impossible ... there must be sim-track-designers out there who have nothing much planned for the next quarter of a century ... surely!

Before anyone gets to worryin' about anything silly such as a thought that a seventy-five kilometre layout is

too short (and yes, you know there will be those who will do precisely this), let me be the first to say that it is anything but short. It only takes about nine minutes on the Nordschliefe before I become a nervous wreck, but this did very little to prepare me for the Targa Florio where, after about nine minutes, I realized that ... I was hours from the finish at my pace!

For those of you out there who appreciate the allure of a long and challenging track, the Targa Florio will not disappoint, you have my word on that. And it only took me about nine seconds to realize just how amazing this work really is, even at this stage of the project, with the projected release still some months away.

The very instant you arrive in the cockpit of your chosen ride to tackle this masterpiece of history, tradition, and beauty, you find yourself immersed in a very detailed and intricate racing experience. For starters, there is that magical GPL-feel that remains, to this day, unchallenged by any simulator in terms of absolute atmosphere: The pit-lane is fully-staffed with men in jumpsuits standing besides stacks of tyres, and a throng of spectators lining trackside. All these details let us know right away this is a serious attempt at capturing more than just the layout of one of the world's greatest racing events. This is about capturing the spirit of the Targa Florio, and it is no coincidence that the historicity of the event should be featured in a GPL mod. The high-details, though, do not stop there—as you begin on what will be a lengthy trek taking you through small Sicilian villages and rugged mountain passes, you will notice the track is ultra-detailed in the objects department, with trees,

flowers, spectators, mountainous backgrounds, and—don't be afraid, you're here to go fast—carabinieri in all their pompous, paramilitary glory! And did I mention the incredible road surface textures?

Suffice it to say, there is going to be plenty of folks that, once they get their hands on this track, will most likely disappear for a few months as they tackle this magnum opus.

History

In order to fully appreciate the magnitude and importance of this project, we should take a look at the real-track in a bit more depth. In the decades since its inception, the Targa Florio (which took place on the island of Sicily) has been through numerous layout changes until the engines were shut for good in 1977 (due to safety concerns).

The very first Targa Florio race was created in 1906 by a young man named Vincenzo Florio, a wealthy automobile aficionado, and pioneering racing-car driver. The Targa Florio was not Vincenzo's first race, though—he also created the Coppo Florio in Brescia, in 1900. The first Targa Florio racing layout was approximately 450Kms (three laps total) through some of the most treacherous mountain roads Italy has to offer, and multiple climate changes were the norm, rather than the exception. With the specter of doom no doubt creeping into his mind at least once, Alessandro Cagno won that first event in about nine hours, at an average speed of around 45Km/h.

The fourth race that was held at the Targa Florio was almost cancelled due to the devastating earthquake of 1908 that hit the eastern coast, heavily damaging the city of Messina. Figures are sketchy, but it has been estimated that between 80,000 and 150,000 people lost their lives either during, or as a result of, the devastating earthquake. But Vincenzo preserved with his dream, and he eventually changed the layout to a single lap of around 1,100 Km as interest in the race began to wane in the aftermath of the earthquake. What nature could not do, however, man managed to achieve, as the Targa Florio was suspended during the 'Great' War.

Re-emerging in 1919, a much shortened Targa Florio was on offer for a shell-shocked post-war Europe. At around 110Kms, this edition was increased to four laps. On the starting grid for this race was a young man named Enzo Ferrari, in his Lancia ...

The Targa Florio flourished throughout the 1920s and, by the time the Golden Era of Grand Prix Racing dawned, it had become the motor-racing event on the international calendar. A list of the drivers that won—and battled—on this track is a who's-who of pre-war legends: One such man was Achille Varzi who, in 1930, created what remains one of the most enduring legends of that—or any motor-race in history.





Driving the same Alfa Romeo (‘though Varzi was in the experimental and longer-wheel-based P2) as his great rival (think Senna vs. Prost, and add a big spoonful of cold disdain) Tazio Nuvolari, Varzi found himself not only in

the lead with the finish-line almost in sight, but also in a bit of a jam, as his spare tyre began to jumble around on the dangerous and bumpy mountain roads. The errant tyre caused a puncture in the fuel tank, and Varzi was left

with a difficult decision: He did not have the time to pull-over to fill up his tanks (for Tazio was gaining on that final lap), but did not have enough fuel to reach the finish.

Varzi’s solution? He turned to his mechanic (in those days, of course, the mechanic rode shot-gun) and ordered him to fill up the tanks—while Varzi kept his foot deeply on the gas. The mechanic, fuel-can in hand, jumped onto his knees on his seat, and started chugging-in the fuel. Since this was done at speeds reaching 200Km/h, the mechanic inadvertently spilled some fuel on the hot exhaust which promptly caught fire. Varzi—who was the original ice-man—found little to concern him as he powered his flaming Alfa Romeo on toward the finish-line, instructing his mechanic to douse the flames with his seat cushion!

Varzi won the race, too, jumping clear from the flaming Alfa as he crossed the line, to watch, along with a cheering crowd, as the P2 burnt away to nothing ...

The names that ran this race resonate among the halls of history here—Fangio, Kling, Moss, Nuvolari, Varzi, Ferrari, Maserati, local hero Nino Vaccarella, and Eliska Junkova, the first woman to compete in the race as well as one of the best female Grand Prix drivers of that—or any other era. As much of a (sometimes literal) trial by fire as an auto-car race, the Targa Florio has been something very special since day one. And those Porsche guys, having won so many times there, decided to name their glass roof 911 Carrera convertible after the race, the Targa, which, as you already know, means shield.

It didn’t take much background work then for me to arrive at the conclusion that the Targa Florio was one of the most influential races of the last century, and deserves a mention any time one may be mentioning epic locations such as Le Mans, Nürburgring, Spa, and the Mille Miglia. Considering the rich tradition that is the Targa event, it should now come as no surprise as to why

someone would wish to undertake such a difficult track creation as this one is proving to be for GPL.

I asked Richard Cooke just how difficult it has been, and he makes it clear that it has not been without stress; "Its sheer length has meant that, at various times, we have all suffered from burn-out and taken small rests. Today, the area seems to have many more trees than in 1967, and mainly we have made it look like it does today. We only have video clips of short sections taken in 1965 and 1972, but a couple of guys who live in Sicily created a video of the entire seventy-two kilometres. They even made a video of about 700 metres that was destroyed by a landslide. If you put the coordinates 37 50 32.88 N, 13 55 2.73 E into Google Earth, you will see the land slide area north west of where the modern road takes a short cut."

I was fortunate enough to see one of the videos that the team used for reference, and they have, in the simulated version, captured more than a little bit of the feeling, tradition, drama, and—if I am not mistaken—you can almost hear the ricochet of Varzi's seat cushion-wielding mechanic echoing off the mountainous passes as you make your way through this true masterpiece. At this time, we are likely months away from a release, but every second of every day of that wait will be worth it a thousand fold when you see it for yourself.

And their plans after this, can we expect one of the other layouts? Cooke suggests the negative regarding the Targa, but does tell me that, "One of our Italian guys has a basic version of the Circuit of Mugello, which was a sixty-six kilometre road circuit active between 1920 and 1969."

Thank you to Richard Cooke, David Fletcher, Sergio, and the rest of the team for their help in giving me a look at this beautiful new track: Rumours (and they are, I can report, based on fact) suggest that we are also soon to be gifted with a 1930s car-pack for GPL, too ... and all of that

suggests that, by the time summer drifts along, many of us who have consigned GPL to our 'no-longer-used' drawers will be re-installing that epic simulator, and the servers will be abuzz with wannabe Varzis and Nuvolaris racing rear-engined Auto Unions through the mountains of Sicily. Nothing, surely, that has been scheduled for release this year can be quite so exciting!.



netKarPRO Skinning Tutorial

Julian Dyer introduces his definitive Skinning Tutorial, now available exclusively at AUTOSIMSPORT ...

JulianDyer

Tutorial 6: Applying and Manipulating Logos

In this part of the tutorial, we will be adding logos to our car. We will also learn how to manipulate their size, orientation and the considerations you have to make when you apply your logos.

1. Open your .psd skin file.

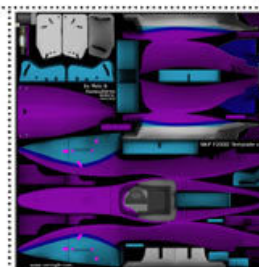
2. Now open the "elftrans.bmp" file from the logos folder in the resources pack. Do this by going to:

File -> Open

Now find the directory where you extracted the resource folder to, and open the file.

3. The logo should look something like this:

Lets see what happens if we try to apply this to the template in its current state.



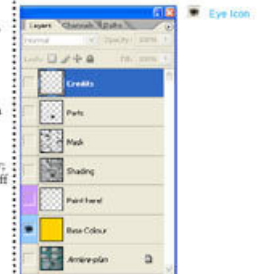
Now that our template is open, we need to change the Base Colour layer to the most common colour on our design. In my design, this is probably the purple colour which is on the main body of the car. Let's do this now.

1. Click on the Base Colour layer in the Layers Pane.

We need to view this layer on its own to change its colour effectively.

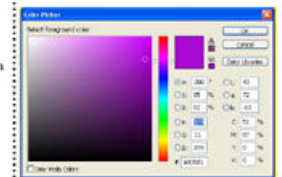
2. Press Alt+ Left Click on the Eye Icon which is next to the Base Colour layer in the Layers Pane.

Now our template is all yellow. Do not worry; all that is happened is that we have turned off all the other layers. We will turn them back on soon.



3. Double click on the Foreground Colour button in the Toolbar.

4. Now select the colour you want from the Colour Picker and click the OK button.



5. Now click the Paint Bucket tool from the Toolbar.

Note: If you cannot see this button, you probably have the Gradient Tool in its place. To change it to the Paint Bucket tool, hold the left mouse button on the icon. A box should appear, and you can now select the Paint Bucket.





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I have been a huge motor-sport and sim-racing fan for as long as I can remember: This goes way back to the days of Geoff Crammond's original Grand Prix, through simulations such as Grand Prix Legends, and right up to netKar PRO. I have been skinning cars on-and-off during this time, even as far back as GP1 (where only the colour of body panels could be changed). Before the days of the internet, my dad and I would create our own skins for GP2 using Windows Paint to make the real Formula 1 livery-designs of the time.

It was only during the summer of 2006, though, that I decided that I would teach myself Photoshop (using a book!), with the intention of applying this knowledge to netKar PRO. In no way-shape-or-form would I regard myself as a Photoshop expert, but I found that trying to replicate the real Formula Renault cars in the sim was a challenge that I was pleased to meet. I released my first

netKar PRO skinpack at the start of autumn, which was comprised of fifteen cars from the Formula Renault UK championship. Following releases included a EuroCup pack (consisting of twenty-six cars), and a second version of the UK skin-pack (which had almost thirty liveries in it). Creating so many liveries taught me the essential skills needed to write this tutorial.

I serve as Press Officer for the GPC netKar PRO league, and have extended my skills into highlight movie making using Adobe Premiere Elements. All the skills needed for doing this have stemmed from my initial, self-taught Photoshop experiences.

The idea of writing some sort of guide came from having seen posts on RSC, and other forums, in which posters would frequently say, "Gee, one of you guys should write a tutorial or something on skinning". This suggested that there was a market for this project—and with no-one seemingly prepared to take the time to do it, I decided to sit down and put the skills I had learnt onto paper.

NetKar PRO has a basic file structure which consists of one Targa file, a UI picture, and nothing more. With the edition of netKar's 'Doom-mode' (where the player can exit the car and look around it), a great platform was created for skinners new to the trade. Add to that some highly accurate car models, and it all makes for an enjoyable and creative experience.

So, with my interest in skinning, along with the need to learn how to use Adobe InDesign CS2 for college, I thought that this would be the perfect way for me to combine my education with one of my hobbies. I created the guide in a step-by-step format, from the initial design of the car (on paper), right up to the creation of the user-interface picture. I believe that this is the only way that readers of the tutorial will learn the important techniques needed for skinning. I had to cast my mind back to when I started using Photoshop, and find ways of highlighting

within the guide how to navigate around potential pitfalls as well as the more troublesome aspects of skinning.

There are a vast amount of techniques covered in the guide. These range from simple techniques like changing the colour of parts of the car with the paint bucket, to applying sophisticated decals to the body. I would advise readers to follow my guide, and create the car designed within it, and then move on to their own design. This way they will learn the techniques by-the-book (so to speak) before going on to applying that knowledge to their own designs. Wannabe skinners will find that learning the basic skills is a lot faster this way, and they can always refer to the guide as a reference on how to do certain techniques should they find themselves stumped at any level of the design process.

Of course, it should be added that, while this is a 'netKar PRO' tutorial, all of the techniques learnt can be applied to other sims as well. Skinning for simulations such as Live For Speed will be made far easier after following this guide. Live For Speed also has a car model viewer, which should make the process even simpler, as changes can be viewed almost instantly.

The tutorial can also be applied to other programmes too. The programmes which I demonstrate with the guide are all Photoshop-based, but they will work with pretty much any of the recent versions, including Photoshop Elements. However, programs like GIMP share a lot of the same features as Photoshop, and, unlike Photoshop, are freely available. I would also advise readers of the tutorial to download a free trial of Photoshop, and to learn the skills in the guide before trying to replicate them in a free program like GIMP.

I am also available to answer any questions that user of the guide may have: Feel free to drop me a post at the AUTOSIMSPORT forums, on this [thread](#), and you can download the manual at the AUTOSIMSPORT [webpage](#).

Green Flag

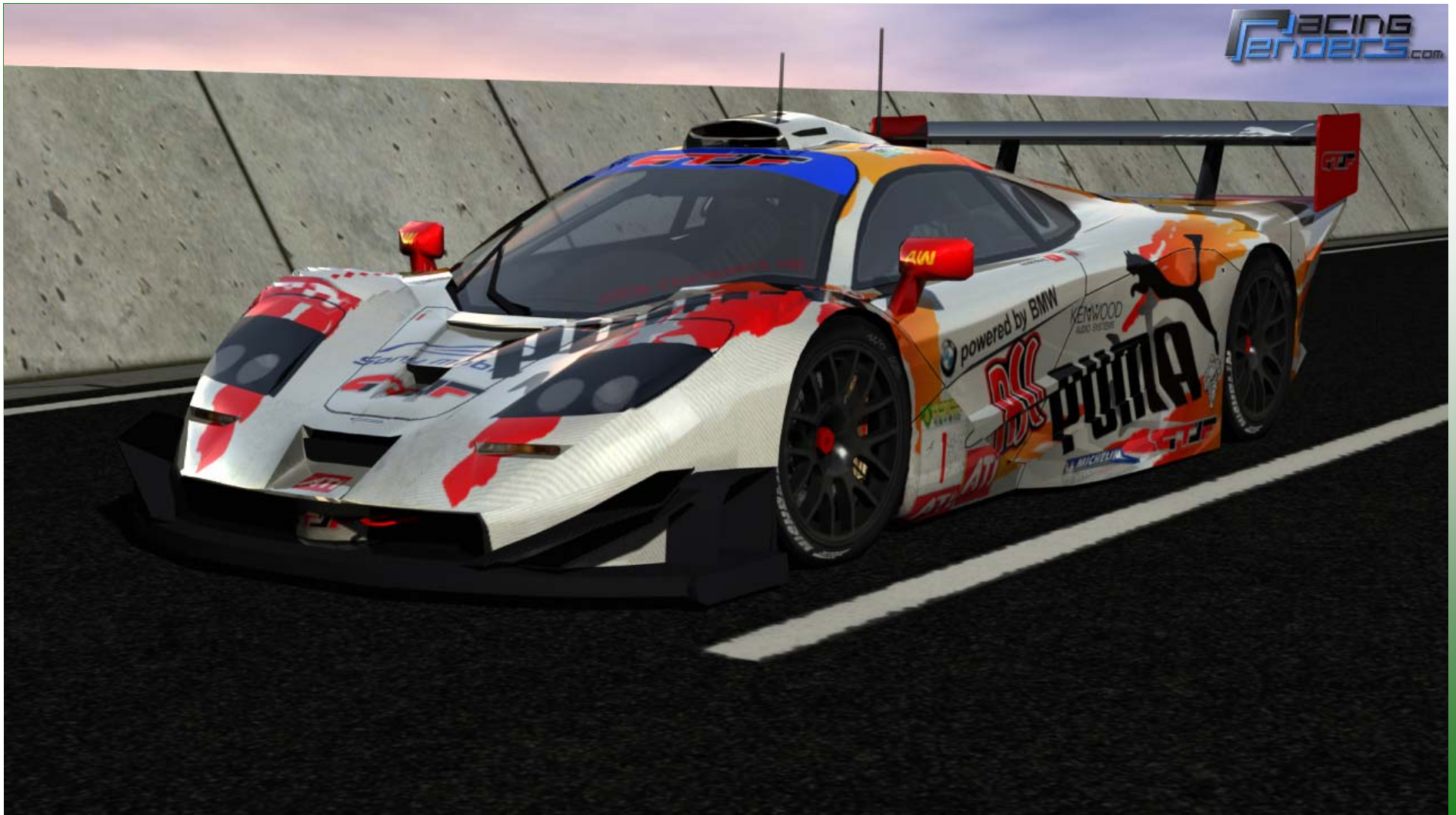
ArnoldCarterWong
Andrew(Rictus Grin)
Tim(Force-Feedback)
Renders by F1Racer

World Super GT Arrives For GTR2

HongKong-based Arnold Carter Wong previews the Racers Modding Team's World Super GT mod for GTR2—scheduled for release before the end of February, and featuring a bounty of cars (two bonus mystery cars over-and-above what you see here), plus the Nurburgring, and Jiading, this one's shaping up to be a keeper!



McLaren F1 GTR
Render by F1Racing



Aston Martin DBR9



Chevrolet Corvette C6-R



Lotus Elise GT1—
This is an early version kindly granted to AUTOSIMSPORT—A Work in Progress



The Racers Modding Team, RMT, founded by Andrew (Rictus Grin), and Tim (Force-Feedback) are: Rictus Grin, Klaasvh, Arnold Wong, Dimz, Catman, GTR Racer, Tech, Capi, ForceFeedback, SuperM, and Joao. RaceKing is responsible for the tracks

Porsche 911 GT1 Evo—
This is an early version kindly granted to AUTOSIMSPORT—A Work in Progress



**Pagani Zonda —
This is an early version kindly granted to AUTOSIMSPORT—A Work in Progress**



GR Ultima GTR —
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T4

Autodromo Riccardo Paletti— Varano de' Melegari

Bob Simmerman sits down with the MBTeam to explore exactly how they managed to convince the owners of a real-world circuit to allow them unfettered access to their superb racing facility in what is surely a first in the relationship between a mod-team and a real-world enterprise: The first fully licensed and official track made by an independent mod team ...

Bob Simmerman



T4 Autodromo Riccardo Paletti—Varano de' Melegari *continued*



Sometimes, this job is *difficult*. Not the sort of difficult that arises from not knowing what the hell one is doing—which I don't, really, but that has never really bothered me much anyway—but the kind of difficult that is somehow ... *pleasing*.

I want to tell you about a most wonderful track for rFactor—the Varano de' Melegari. Before we explore this track, however, with its simulated-designers, I think it best if I recounted a little background to the circuit's name: Having spoken to Alex about this track, he immediately told me about the history behind the man whose name is honoured in the circuit's official name: 'Circuito Riccardo Paletti'.

Riccardo Paletti was a twenty-three year old Italian whose debut season was in that dark year for Italian Formula 1. 1982 was the year when Ferrari's Gilles Villeneuve died at Zolder in May, and his arch-enemy, Ferrari's Didier Pironi, would suffer a career-ending smash at Hockenheim late that same summer. Paletti, driving an Osella, would add to that grim tally in the autumn.

Paletti was the victim of cruel luck throughout his debut season: The first three races saw him fail to qualify for the starting grid, and it was only at Imola (where only fourteen cars turned up for the race amidst the whole FOCA/FISA war) that he finally managed to start a Grand Prix. There was much famine at the Osella team thereafter until Montreal, when Paletti finally made the starting grid for a Grand Prix featuring the entire field of runners.

T4 Autodromo Riccardo Paletti—Varano de' Melegari *continued*



At the start, Didier Pironi—having been tormented by boos all weekend long at the track that was now renamed Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in honour of Pironi's Canadian team-mate (Pironi was—and still is, by many—blamed for the series of incidents that led to Villeneuve's death)—stalled his car at the front of the grid. But the green light was on and, from the rear of the pack, Paletti smashed into the stricken Ferrari at over 180Km/h. The young Italian had no chance of surviving: Even though the flames that consumed his car were quickly taken care of by the marshals, Paletti had crushed his chest, and was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. He would be the last fatality in a Formula 1 Grand Prix until Roland Ratzenberger's death at San Marino twelve years later.



The Autodromo Riccardo Paletti is located in Parma, near Paletti's hometown of Milan. It is used for many forms of motor-racing, as well as being extensively used for testing purposes by several well-known manufacturers of fine automobiles. But beyond that, Varano is special for a couple other reasons as well; in part due to the fact it has never appeared in a simulator before, and, also, due to the fact that it was created not only with the knowledge of track administrators, but with unprecedented levels of support from those very same track administrators. The results of such access are, for anyone who has driven it (and if you haven't, you're missing one of the highlights of the year already), very obvious to see.

The modders—the MBTeam—were formed about a year ago when fellow Italians Gabriele Bonora and Giovanni Mangione got in touch at the www.gtitalia.org forums.

"I had always appreciated Gabriele's work," explains Giovanni, "such as his Misano and Imola 2005 for rFactor. In June of 2006, we started thinking of doing something together ... making a new track was the idea—Varano de' Melagari! In order to do a very good work, especially with a track, it is very important to visit the place, take a ton of photos, and possibly make a video to refer to. At the end, we went to Varano two times—July and October—and we made some videos also."

I interrupted for a moment, just to give the impression I knew some kind of 'reporter stuff'. How many pictures did you take, I asked?

"About 2,500! Our digital cameras were smoking ..."

Work on the track began in September, between the two visits to the facility. Giovanni describes the process: "Gabriele and I are very complimentary in the work due to the fact that I'm able to use 3DS Max 8, and Gabriele is very good with GMotor 2 Materials, AIW creation, AI optimizations, and the rFactor public tools ... we can work together as a 'tank!'"

And now you not only know how the MBTeam was born ... but what you have probably gathered from this small 'behind-the-scenes' history of how the Varano track was made was the fact that these two guys had absolute *carte blanche* when it came to looking at every detail and surface of the track, courtesy of the administrators of the circuit.

T4 Autodromo Riccardo Paletti—Varano de' Melegari *continued*



Co-creator of the track, and member of the [MBTeam](#) modding group, Gabriele Bonora, explained to me exactly how extensive the technical support for the project was: "We had incredible collaborators 'on site', such as Sig. Manfredi, one of the track administrators, and Sig. Guido Maestri the (official) geometrician who provided us with official CAD data, orthogonal kerb profiles, altimetry changes, banking properties, updated photos of portions of the track, and closed circuit camera positions all throughout the autumn and winter months. Guido is now updating the official [Varano track website](#) with videos and information about rFactor, as well as a link to download the track."

Giovanni went on to explain that, not only did they speak with Sig. Manfredi, but, "While I was talking to him, he understood and immediately appreciated the idea." The idea being that MBTeam would mod the track—for free. Giovanni adds, with a hint of excitement, that this was, "Fantastic for us ... the first step was done!"

It just got better from there though, as Gabriele points out; "The first time we {went} there {to meet them}, we had Giovanni's laptop, and rFactor installed, so they could see the AI drive around a conversion of Adria, a track they knew well."

Gabriele describes their reaction as one of surprise, before they said the words both he and Giovanni so

wanted to hear: "We would like to do the same with your track"

Any skepticism that the track administrators may have felt quickly changed to appreciation, and full out support of the effort to bring this track to rFactor. In fact, that very afternoon, Sig. Manfredi was not only answering all their detailed questions, but, says Gabriele, "After the first track recon', he gave us all of the profiles in .PDF format, including the highly detailed 1:1000 scale track map with fire posts, marshal posts, type of kerbs, and first and second level of protection barriers." Gabriele goes on to explain that this was a, "Perfect start".

Seldom do we hear of this level of cooperation on a mod basis, but it gets better still as Gabriele explains to my once-again disbelieving ears: "Alessandro Balzan, who drove an Alfa 156 for Antonelli Motorsport in the CIVT 2006, as well as some WTCC events, gave us incredible {and} detailed feedback on the behaviour of both the road and kerbs, explaining how a touring car or single seater would react in a particular part of the track due to the stiffness of the chassis {and so forth}. I have worked very hard on this aspect; for me, it is more important than any other."

There are many sim-developers who would not be able to claim such active support from a real-world track owner ... and we are here talking about a mod, available for free, and created with nothing more than the passion and know-how of two enthusiasts. I had to catch my breath for a bit because this is truly a goldmine of information for any track creator, and I can't help but wonder how many other real-world tracks out there would be willing to do something like this, minus the expensive licensing fee?

This, however, is where Giovanni and Gabriele see the real-world connecting perfectly with the cyber: "Their sponsors, on walls or billboards, will be shown to a large mass of people at the end, for free," says Gabriele.

T4 Autodromo Riccardo Paletti—Varano de' Melegari *continued*

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The image shows the rFactor PC CD-ROM case and disc. The case features the rFactor logo and the text "CUSTOMIZE. CONTROL. CONNECT." Below the logo, there are images of several racing cars. The disc is partially visible next to the case.

It's a win-win situation: Whilst it is doubtful that major racing facilities would find any benefit from such a contract, the world is full of smaller club-circuits whose racing calendar features only local events, many of which are not even televised: With the track modded for rFactor, however, that particular track's sponsors are suddenly exposed to a global audience of sim-racers. "I really hope that someone follows our example," says Gabriele. "It may not be possible, or it may be possible, but with just a phone call it could start."

As I say, this sounds like a win-win to me, and MBTeam are one of the first to actively explore this commercial opportunity. Not, of course, that anyone made any money out of it ... this is sim-racing, after all, where everyone demands everything for free—*yesterday!*



As for the track itself, Gabriele expresses himself as being content with the overall product: "The final result is under the eye of many, and it is not perfect—in need of refinements—but perfection is divine, not human, and we haven't got a single Euro, and have actually lost some due to gasoline, highway fees, and so forth. But we are very satisfied."

Gabriele is not the only one satisfied; this reporter was hooked at the installation dialogue! This track hits on all cylinders for me—the level of detail is astounding, and the level of access during creation is clearly evident as one compares real-life photographs with screenshots of the real track. Gabriele and Giovanni have—with the full support of a real-world facility—taken us to the next level, and if you are a fan of rFactor, then this track is made with painstaking attention to detail *just for you*.

As we were wrapping the meeting up, I asked one final question, and got one final answer from Giovanni; what next?

"Stay simply tuned!"



Sim Motor-Racing's Premiere League

Bob Simmerman discovers the Sim Touring Car Cup: With 5,000 drivers vying for a berth on a starting grid which boasts thirty of the most elite drivers in LFS, Becky Rose's brilliantly conceived league—featuring thirty-minute long professionally broadcast races along with dozens of startling innovations—is setting a whole new standard in professionalism ...

BobSimmerman





I have been craftily avoiding the editor this past week, but he did manage to get a text message to me on my cell phone—no doubt illegal somehow—and it was not very clear, as it appeared to be hastily written, and the poor spelling indicated a heightened state of rage on his part. But I got the general impression it had something to do with my paycheck, and never working in this town again. It is difficult to tell for sure, but I imagine he was yelling as he typed the message, perhaps even using a bad word or two. But he is correct; of course, this stuff needs to get *done*.

But to be perfectly honest, this particular assignment has been a tough one for me; to be expected, though, whenever one dares to venture outside one's comfort zone—what if you didn't bring enough money for a cup of coffee? However, the assignment was not only a very rewarding one—it was also, and please stop cringing at the back!—a rather illuminating one too as I believe that I have finally come to understand just what it is that makes Live for Speed so damn popular, aside the obvious reasons—great physics, excellent graphics, and superb multiplayer—I mean the intangible reasons, the reasons that allow us to connect with something on a subconscious level, and then take that attention to the task at hand and find out if you have what it takes to finish up front. *Among Good Others*.

The one thing that Live for Speed does so splendidly well is that it allows for the nearly transparent and immediate transition from simulator to *state of mind*. What makes Live for Speed so special is that we are able to effortlessly be ourselves—paints and all—among a lot of others being themselves as well, with not a hint of sim-

writer intrusion to be found. In can be said, perhaps, that Live for Speed is successful not because it is a stellar product, but because it is a product that allows us to do *stellar things*.

Becky Rose being a case in point: A woman that is not only doing amazing things with LFS, but is able to verbalise what it is, about this simulator, that makes it arguably sim-racing's most used sim.

My esteemed and revered colleague, Jon Denton, recently introduced me to Becky and her league, [The Sim Touring Car Cup](#), and it has been a most eye-opening experience. During my chat with Becky, it became plain to see that Live for Speed is populated with users who are just as extraordinary as the simulator itself. Truly, I have just finished reading the interview with Becky for a third time, and without a doubt anything I have said will soon be forgotten, and anything I say from here on is simply filler—well, the stuff about me anyway—but Becky's unique insight into sim-racing really is a breath of fresh air, and her innovations will, without much doubt, set a new standard in how leagues—and pick-up races—are organized in the sim-racing world.

Testament to Becky's successful organization of her sim-racing league—and the open servers which she runs for LFS—is seen in the 5,000 licensed drivers that race on her servers. Public servers, mind you, and yes, you read correctly—*five thousand licensed drivers*. And, according to Becky, "...they are pretty much full up, 24/7..." Not only that, but her pick-up serves are all run using her own code which effectively dishes out (and takes back) licenses to every single racer on those servers. Did I say brilliant?

As for Becky herself, between coding a routine or two, and watching every round of Formula 1 racing since 1984, and producing her professionally presented race broadcasts, and running her mini-empire, and—uhm—messing around with machine embroidering, Becky is

also involved in real-world racing ... or rather, used to be. She will go as far as to say that she's raced a fair-few 'names', not all of whom have given her a "thrashing", but her real-world racing days are now a thing of the past (having succumbed to injuries from an accident), but that has not hampered her enthusiasm for motor-racing. Her ambition is only matched by the passion which she brings to her flagship Sim Touring Car Cup league, and her dedication to the league—and the drivers—is the kind of selfless dedication that makes the non-committed shake their heads in wonder. An 'out of the box' thinker with a sense of humor, Becky is laying down a foundation for leagues to aspire to—and she does this despite having been the victim of some seriously vicious attacks from within this community.

When speaking of herself, she is candid and honest, with an endearing hint of self deprecation, as you will see now because, without any further dribbling from me, let's turn it over to one of sim-racing's most fascinating personalities.



"I would say that my own race craft has improved as a result of multiplayer racing ..."

Bob Simmerman: What was your first exposure to, and experience with, racing-sims? Did you see them first on the PC, or a console of some making? What about your first experience with multiplayer sim-racing?

Becky Rose: Well, as computing has progressed, the simulators have got more complicated, and what was a sim then may not be considered a sim now. The first motor racing simulator I played,—and I guess I'm going to show my age here—was on the ZX Spectrum and was called Formula One by a company called Psion in Cambridge.

For me the 'simulation age' was born with Geoff Crammond—he's the founder of retail motor-racing simulators in my mind, because he elevated the genre to a whole new level and set the foundations for the games we have today. I remember my brother and I being really excited about Geoff Crammond's Formula One Grand Prix—so excited, in fact, that he saved up (I was school age) and bought an Amiga 500+ just to play that one game, then he had to save up afterwards to buy the game itself! When he finally bought it, I was so excited when we got home that I grabbed it off him and had the first go—I probably dribbled! I remember the race even now, I came sixteenth at Phoenix.

My first multiplayer experience would probably have been after playing Formula One Grand Prix, but actually using an earlier game by Geoff, Stunt Car Racer. Using a null-modem cable my brother and I connected up two Amigas and raced each other—we had such a blast—from that day on, I've found single player games dull and uninteresting.

Of course, if you count games played on one computer, there's games from the Spectrum era too, I remember Grand Prix by Codemasters being a favorite for quite a while, and there was one on the Acorn Electron before that which a friend and I used to play together.



I only rediscovered sim-racing last March, after a road accident left me sidelined from the KARTing I had been doing. When somebody mentioned Live for Speed to me, I dusted off the steering wheel (which had been under my desk for several years), and gave it a go. I soon dispatched the AI and tried it online—where I was duly humiliated by every Tom Dick and Harry on the server with a string of last placed finishes!

BS: Considering online racing, what are some of your fondest memories? What about any 'not so fond' memories you may have?

BR: Having done so many sim-races, it is hard to really pick out a fond racing moment, but it would be easy to pick out people I've grown fond of by racing them and getting to know them—unfortunately, the list of names

would be dull and uninteresting to read, but I have made lots of friends in sim-racing that I wouldn't swap for the world. I'd swap them for a drive in a formula car next year though, but then, there are a lot of things I'd swap for that!

Likewise, there're people who stand out as having 'made themselves noticed' in a not so positive way. It's amazing the extremes some people will go to over the internet, I've had all manner of abuse from pornographic videos made about me, an mp3, and group hate mail all from sim-racers. It's sad but true that with the good also comes the bad. The more you get noticed, and the more you do within the community, the more good and bad you find, and they usually come holding hands.

BS: In your opinion, what role might a simulator successfully play in the real sport of auto racing? Is Live for Speed being employed in this capacity to your knowledge?

BR: There is a lot of scope for simulation in motor-sport; the whole world is driven by computers after all. Pop over to Lola or March (both around the corner from me), and I doubt you'll find cars designed by laying out four seats on the ground and squeezing everything around them like the original Mini was made—it's all about computer design these days, but those simulations work because they deal with things on a simple level: If you analyze one part, like a front wing end fence, it's easy to calculate what is a good design and what is a bad design because you slap it in a virtual wind tunnel and all it's got to think about is the airflow and air temperature. The problem with the sims we play is they cannot deal with physics in such a simple manner, because when you add together all the working parts of all the cars on a full grid, suddenly the same complications are not that simple any more, they all inter-relate and there's far too many to calculate in real time.

As a driver training tool, simulators can be used to teach race craft, and they can be used to brush up on basic technique, but what you cannot realistically do though is practice for a given event: No matter how real you make it, you cannot expect to save on track time/costs by doing so. You could learn a basic layout of a track you don't know very well—but two laps of real driving later, and everything you 'learned' in the sim will have been replaced by real knowledge, and there's nothing in a sim that you cannot learn from a diagram of the track and arriving early enough in the day to have a look around.

I would say that my own race craft has improved as a result of multiplayer racing, but there is no way I'm going to hammer around Twickenham (LFS' South City track) in a race-about, and it's not because I can't afford to buy the car.



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BS: When was the Sim Touring Car Cup formed? What can you tell us about the league and some of the philosophies that are emphasized? How many drivers are currently running in the Sim Touring Car Cup, and how many different classes are found?

BR: To understand why I started the league, one has to know I have a long working history in the multi-media field. I work in I.T. research & development (and technical support) by trade, and throughout my career have worked in and around television, and I write computer games as a hobby. I love motor-racing, and I was enjoying sim-racing, and I'm a do-er, not a follower. If you add all these ingredients together, what you get is a high momentum flurry of creativity out of which the STCC was born.

I set out with clear goals, I actually have a mission statement for the series and the number one point is, "The STCC aims to please the spectator above all else." I

wanted to make a virtual television show like Formula 1. It had to be plausible, and for that reason I chose touring cars, because after Formula 1—which is unique, and there will only ever be one of—the next most popular spectator motor-sport is the various touring car formats, and there are enough of them for a simulated touring car league to be successful too.

To be honest, I didn't much like driving them myself at the season start, I've always loved formula racing, but I felt there was no way I could make a virtual broadcast league that would have any credibility with non-sim-racer fans by running formula cars.

As a real racer, and as somebody who has clerked a few club level events and marshaled at many others, I wanted a league that was run to professional standards. I didn't want to make the mistake of saying, "we're all experienced racers, so just be good on the track", and then expect clean racing—I've seen what that does in

sim-racing leagues, and it often isn't pretty. I wanted a formal stewarding and protests procedure with a team of impartial stewards who did not take part in the racing. I wanted clearly defined rules so there was no subjectivity in the decisions.

Finally, I didn't want to be just another league or do things "the way things are done". I didn't want to be constrained by standards set down by other leagues and use de-facto tools and standards. Right from the off, I figured anything that was needed for the league I would make; if the simulation software put on a constraint, I would remove that constraint myself; if tools out there did not do what I wanted or needed, then I would write my own tools. I've written tons of software to handle different aspects of the league now—for instance, I wrote a statistics generating tool because the stats output programmes available did not give me the lap-by-lap data I wanted. Recently, I introduced new server-side software that allows me to ban the use of driver aids which are otherwise undetectable, and the list goes on and on.



When my league drivers complained about public 'pick up' racing standards when practicing for events, I developed an automated race licensing system that filtered out the good drivers and promoted them to our higher servers where the league drivers could then practice with them. As things would work out, this basically introduced licensed pickup racing to LFS so people could log on, at any time, and get a fully licensed race with a formal complaints procedure. It's like having league racing only a click away twenty-four hours a day. The licensing system has proved so popular that I've had to open more servers to cope with demand, and still they are full almost '24/7'; we now have almost 5,000 licensed racers.

The league itself focuses on thirty of these drivers, although those thirty can, and have changed during the course of the year long season. The guys we have now are all bloody good, and I've learned so much from them, and yet I'm a veteran racer!

We have had some criticism in the past because not all of our drivers are widely known or multiple world record holders (although some are); I had a conversation recently where somebody came onto one of the public

servers whilst I was there and was very critical of the drivers, he named one in particular as "not that good", so I pointed out roughly how many world records the guy held, and he countered that they were easy world records to get, then logged off, I thought about this for a moment, and realized the driver in question was a mid-fielder in the STCC. The bottom line is that even the guys at the back of the STCC pack usually win public races in their chosen car; the standards in the STCC are extremely high.

Just take a look at the fierce entry criteria. If you want to enter the series now you must attain our 'Platinum' race license, which in itself is something of an epic quest to get, and then when a space arises in the series, you may enter a qualifying event which is designed from the ground up to test you under pressure to make sure you are both fast and clean when the heat is on. In a recent qualifying event, some well known LFS racers just couldn't make the cut—despite already having a *prima donna* complex from their previous sim-racing expertise. As somebody on the other side of the fence, it was quite amusing to watch the hissy fits that drivers wanting to be in the STCC have; they don't have the perspective of being in anything remotely like the STCC before, and expect it to work like any other league. At the end of the day, I'm giving these guys a platform to promote themselves on, and a great racing environment that they won't easily find elsewhere, and in return I want drivers who understand what the series is trying to achieve.

We run two classes of car on our servers, the 'STD' class which has a front wheel drive hot hatch and a rear wheel drive saloon; our higher servers, and the broadcast league itself, run with the 'TBO' class which has three cars, one with each drive train layout: FWD; RWD; and 4WD.

SB: Can you give us some information on the live broadcast feature of the league?

BR: The broadcast isn't actually live, it's recorded about a month before release and there is a very good reason for this. I've watched live broadcasts, and they suck.



I don't mean that in a rude way to people behind such leagues, but compare them to real racing on the television, and live sim-broadcasts have constraints on them imposed by the limitations of working with a single camera. Most feature 'tabbing' up and down the field which looks awful, or have periods where camera angles are being cycled through to find the right one. There are tools around which improve control, but ultimately a small team can do a much better job simply by not going out live.

At the end of the day, a race is only as 'live' as when you first watch it. Most broadcast leagues have very small viewing figures because they stream their race, and then afterwards it is lost to the world., STCC broadcasts are put up for download, and will be available until the project is lost in our memories. There really is no advantage at all to going out live, except perhaps for those leagues that have a television deal requirement to be live. From a technical perspective, so much more becomes possible, critically in regards having multiple cameras around the circuit.

One thing I felt most broadcast leagues get wrong is to just broadcast a race; the STCC is a show—the whole format, from the choice of tracks, to the safety car, to the racing rules, and the way qualifying works, it's all

designed to create action for spectators. There's always multiple battles going on around the track with lots of polite *nerfing*, and the occasional big crash—I put the drivers under tremendous pressure with the way the rules work, and it pays off in excitement factor. There are no dull races in the STCC, not so far anyway; if a broadcast is dull, then it's because I've failed to capture the action.

SB: What were some of the difficulties faced while designing the broadcast feature?

BR: There have been lots of technical problems. To start with, I needed a computer powerful enough to video edit with large streams. In order to get the camera's working the way I want, I record each one in full from start to finish in real-time; I then render each camera into a DV format file, and then I take all the cameras and edit them together—add captions, do the pre-show, and render to DV again, then I convert the stream to the various formats used around the web ... To a video editor it sounds simple, but I'm dealing with over seven hours of footage each month to make a show that lasts over half an hour; I have no script, and I have to make every moment exciting. It's a lot of work, but more importantly, it's a lot of technical work, and at the season's start, there are things I did not know how to do.

Look at the shaky onboard cameras in [Round 1](#), and compare them to [Round 2](#)—Round 1's onboard shots where a disaster, and we only had one commentator. The bits where I nervously interjected were added afterwards to cover mistakes edited out of Tristan's commentary—which he only made because at the time I was so short on webspace he had to use a really small, low quality version of the file.

Then the commentary at Round 2—I'm very thankful to the guys who did it—but we had terrible sound quality issues. I won't go too much into the technical aspects, but some of the sentences were constructed syllable by syllable from echoes in the recording. If we'd had time, I

would have got them to re-record it, but the deadline loomed and I didn't have the confidence to do the commentary myself. I couldn't get them together again, so I had to run with what I had.

In [Round 3](#), I had no choice, as no other commentators where to hand! I was absolutely terrified! I think I did okay though, and now I have the confidence to do it myself, and together with Tristan in [Round 4](#), I think it really works, although I need to let him finish sentences—but my enthusiasm gets in the way!

Throughout it all, I've been steadily learning and improving the production processes; in the forthcoming Round 5, the visual quality is leaps and bounds ahead, and I've had time now to design all new caption graphics—it's leaps and bounds ahead visually, but I still need to improve the audio, so I've started writing a surround sound environmental mod for Live for Speed that adds crowd noise and *tannoys* that rear into life when there is action on the track; the broadcast itself is only stereo, but using surround sound is the easiest way to achieve that in DirectX and ... it's damned fun firing the mod up when I'm racing too—it all works both in real-time and in replays. Turn 1 will never be the same again!

SB: Are there any other plans for the league and/or the site?

BR: My work is ongoing, the web site desperately needs redoing properly, but for all my good points, web pagecoding is not one of them! I've never much been interested in the web even though I've created some massive web sites with million plus monthly visitors before. The STCC isn't that big yet, and probably never will be, but I think it deserves a better website than the 'thing' that is online now. It's a nightmare to update, and the design is a bit, well, non-designer.

Soon I hope to expand upon the licensing concept; I want to offer a similar thing for league organizers as I do for drivers now, by teaching, examining, and marking

league organizers, and giving them a qualification to use to attract clean drivers to their leagues—and also to offer a higher impartial complaints authority if drivers wish to contest a stewards decision. It'll all be optional for the league operators, so maybe only a few leagues will use it, but I see it as a key step in formalizing the mid-to-top end of sim-racing. Too much precedent is placed upon finding clean racers for leagues but often it's the leagues themselves that fail because of not having the skills to effectively steward their events.

As for the STCC, I will continue to strive to improve the quality of the show in both the technical aspects and the content. I'm not afraid to take chances creatively, and I have the technical skills to make things, and I've already shown I'm willing to invest where necessary—this is my hobby (seeing as my race career ended with that road crash), and like anyone with a hobby, I'm happy to spend time and money on it.

My hope is that by the end of the season, we'll have reached 100,000 spectators—both from the sim-racing community, and just ordinary race fans. At the moment it is not on target to achieve that sadly—I need you guys to spread the word!

SB: As Clerk and Promoter, what are some of your duties with the league?

BR: Talking to you guys!

I do a lot, but the invaluable work that others contribute toward the STCC, whilst most of the burden falls on my shoulders, is essential. The fact is, without my race stewards Bobby & Matt, the league would not even be viable; Tristan has been invaluable in his contribution to the commentary, and I'm thankful to Mike for his help in Round 2, and to Tommy for the help he's offered in Round 5 which I should be recording with him in a few days time. Sam and the UKCT team have basically 'given' me five LFS servers, a huge amount of technical support, and quite a lot of bandwidth from having so many

packed servers! Then, of course, there are the server admins, one of the many called Chris is particularly dedicated, and of course the whole thing would be for nothing with the drivers and the spectators; I've gained many great friendships from the STCC.

As for myself, well I do all the rules, the race organization on the day, run our heat timing system, drive the safety car, film over fourteen hours of footage, and render them, edit it all together, caption them, commentate, write software, and every now and then I relax.

SB: Does the STCC ever challenge other LFS leagues? Are there any heated rivalries we should be keeping an eye on?

BR: We had a fun race over Christmas; for something different, I decided to hold a non-championship oval race over the holidays, and I invited an LFS team who spend most of their time racing on the oval; it was all very friendly. I'm going to broadcast the race though, so I won't tell you the result, but I think the STCC drivers put on a bit of a show.

There are 'rivalries' on a personal level, because I'm the very public figure, head of something quite big, {and} I basically get hammered publicly for anything that happens, even random accidents on the public race servers have been blamed on me, not in the literal sense, but because I provided the servers, and wrote the server management system, and am somehow responsible for the actions of drivers on it because of that.

There have been a few forum flame wars since the STCC public race servers began a few weeks ago; I think in part it's just because so many races are happening every day on the various STCC servers at the moment, and it'll probably die down in time as the servers lose popularity in favor of the next big thing.

When things turn nasty, I tend to bug-out these days rather than get involved, and I try to deal with disputes via personal messages, not public slagging matches, and

for most situations this works well, but some people have gotten the wrong idea, and I do seem to have a reputation for things I've been accused of even when I have not been involved. The name STCC seems to have become synonymous with my name, and anything that happens under one name reflects on the other.

Some of the disputes have been really quite extreme, I have even been faked in a few pornographic videos with vulgar words dubbed onto me, I've had an mp3 song made about me, had group hate mail, and direct personal hate mail (I should add I also get messages of support). Considering that sim-racing is fundamentally a game, and a leisure activity, some of the things that have been done are really quite shocking.

Then there is the stuff that is just plain annoying; when I first got into sim-racing, I often had people follow me around the track—they'd constantly pass me, and then let me through again, and if I pitted, they'd follow me into the pits, if I moved server, they'd follow me to a new server. It was quite horrible at the time, and I believe was just because I'm female, but ...

Now my reputation has grown beyond being a random/rare female online, and many people know me, so any abuse I get now tends to be very direct and personal, perhaps that is why some of it is so extreme. I hope it isn't all justified!

It does get me down sometimes, and because of that I have, in a few cases, compounded matters by snapping back—but to be honest, being nice doesn't work either! In one forum flame war, I did not take part at all save for one post where I asked them to take it to private message—it was just them shouting at me publicly for banning them off the server, which need not have been a public issue at all regardless of whether it was merited or not; they demanded I apologise, and eventually, out of desperation, I did and quite sincerely at that, but they only threw it back at me two posts later.

On the whole, the sim-racing community is a good and kind one, and I would not forgo the friendships I have built just to spare me from the abuse I occasionally get. But I have found that there is an element of the community that is totally undesirable. The kind that have S&M avatars on their instant messenger applications, offensive terms on their number plates, and crude display names in game, and, one imagines, probably wear swastikas when in their bedroom. Like any large community, sim-racing has its undesirables and, sadly, I have managed to attract the attention of a fair few by being a quite high profile woman who's into computers and motor-racing ...

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T3

PatDotson

Hamilton and Lazier Test the GS-1 G-Seat

Pat Dotson, along with his innovative GS-1 G-Seat, headed out to Indianapolis' Gasoline Alley to offer some free rides to two of the Sinden Racing Team's drivers, Davey Hamilton, and Indy 500 winner, Buddy Lazier.



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T3 Hamilton and Lazier Test the GS-1 G-Seat

continued



Two veteran Indycar drivers had a chance to test-drive the new GS-1 G-Seat from UltraForce Simulators. Davey Hamilton, and Buddy Lazier drove the GS-1 equipped UltraForce racing simulator to see how it stacks up against real-life Indycar racing. The UltraForce GS-1 G-Seat {reviewed in *AutoSimSport's* December Issue—Ed} provides for an ingenious 'seat of the pants' feel from the

virtual race-car to the driver of a racing simulator. Both drivers report that the GS-1 racing simulator provided a very realistic driving experience. Davey Hamilton commented that this was the, 'most realistic racing simulator he had ever tried'. Indy 500 winner Buddy Lazier, meanwhile, stated that the GS-1 G-Seat provided for, 'very realistic feedback'.



The event took place in the lobby at Sinden Racing Headquarters on Gasoline Alley in Indianapolis, Indiana, where the UltraForce simulator set alongside a Sinden IRL show car. The simulator was running rFactor, a racing simulation created by Image Space Incorporated (based in Ann Arbor, Michigan). The rFactor mod X-Race was used, which depicts IRL cars and drivers. The Indianapolis

T3 Hamilton and Lazier Test the GS-1 G-Seat

continued

Motor Speedway was the virtual venue for the simulator test. The simulator included the UltraForce GS-1 G-Seat, Logitech G25 Steering wheel, pedals, and shifter, and a Matrox Triple Head 2 Go three-monitor display system.

The Patent-Pending UltraForce GS-1 G-seat is a revolutionary new simulation feedback device that delivers that seat of the pants feel which has traditionally been missing from the racing-simulation experience. In the past, motion platforms were the only device available that could deliver the feel of the road to the body of the driver. Motion platforms, however, are generally large, expensive, and require significant maintenance. The GS-1 delivers high-fidelity motion-cueing directly to the body of the driver in a smaller, much less expensive package. The GS-1 features all-electric operation for maintenance-free ease of use.

The UltraForce GS-1 is suitable for use as a driver training tool. Handling G-forces, calculated by the racing simulation physics, are translated real-time into seat pad movements. The movements of the seat present realistic sensations that give the driver the cues as to what the simulated race car is doing at any moment. When using a Gs-1, the simulation driver can feel the weight transfer while cornering, along with the pressure in the seat-back when stepping on the accelerator pedal, as well as the weightless feeling as the car goes over the crest of a hill. It is also able to replicate the moment the car begins to move forward as the clutch engages while releasing the clutch pedal. All of this real-time feedback helps a driver learn proper car control methods, along with understanding how to use different racing lines, and how to set-up for a pass. The GS-1 puts the driver into the seat of virtually any form of race car from a racing KART to Formula 1.



All these handling force sensations are passed on to the driver by the innovative GS-1 system developed by Pat Dotson, President of UltraForce Simulators, LLC. Dotson is a long-time racing-simulator driver who grew tired of the lack of innovation in the field of consumer-level simulation hardware.

"Not much has come along to help the simulator driver feel the road besides the development of Force-Feedback steering wheels," Dotson explained. He also added that, "While Force-Feedback steering helps, it doesn't completely translate what the car is doing. After racing KARTs for many years, I found that I could no longer get the same thrill out of a racing-simulator. For me personally, the GS-1 has put the thrill of real-life racing back into racing-simulators!"

UltraForce Simulators, based in Kokomo, Indiana, will continue to develop innovative new products for the racing-and-flight-simulation user. Dotson said: "Our mission is to provide the most realistic simulation experience possible to the average computer-simulation enthusiast. Our products will continue to be refined to both lower the cost, and improve the realism of the racing, and flight simulation experience. UltraForce will provide a reasonably priced entry-level product that will let everyone experience the increased realism of G-Seat technology, and also provide an upgrade path to a full-blown, ultra-realistic simulator system."

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From The Real To The Virtual ... And Back Again

Ivan Askew sits down with Torrent Motorsports' Nicholas Morse to find out how this real-world team view 'Formula Sim-Racing' as just another racing division ...

IvanAskew





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[Torrent Motorsports](#) was founded in 2002 by Michael Theis, in Florida: Theis, looking to get into professional motor-sports, started off by renting some Honda race cars which he ran in SCCA private competitions at local tracks around his home state. The ambition, at that stage, was just to have some fun, as well as competing with race-proven professionals, and sharing in the thrill and the pleasure of racing.

Things got a little more serious, though, when Michael moved the small, under-funded team to Ohio, in 2004. The move coincided with Michael's decision to turn the team into a professional race team. The team has, since, experimented in many forms of racing, and many forms of racing series types, although their focus has been primarily on Autocross in SCCA. "But," Nicholas Morse (who is in charge of the team's PR) told me, "we have done all sorts of racing related jobs, from driving the cars,

to using the team to help out in the Grand Am Rolex series ... we don't just limit ourselves to driving."

Any small, under-budgeted team will be well-familiar with this route, and Torrent Motorsports are no afraid to get their hands dirty as they pursue their over-riding ambition: Professional motor-sports.

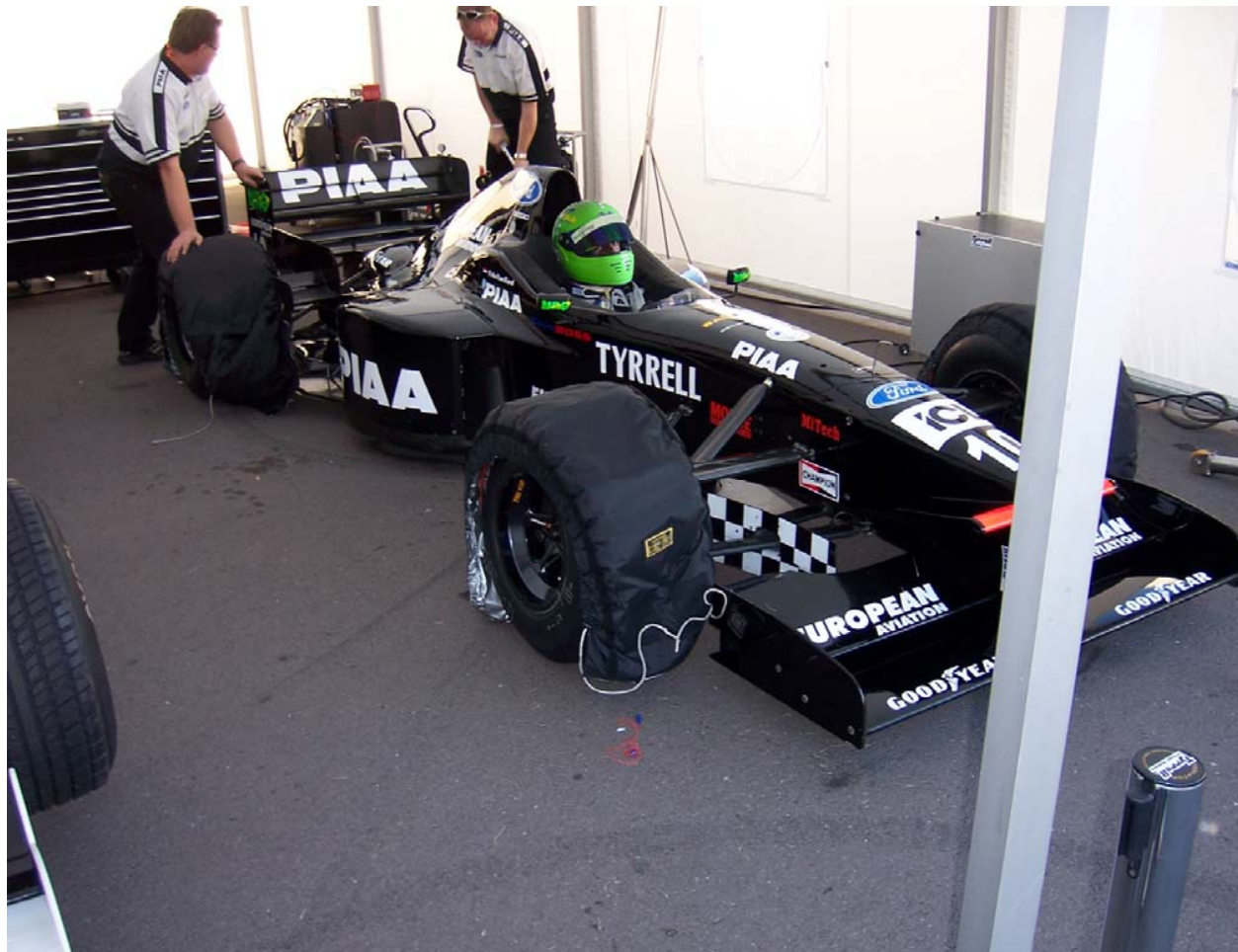
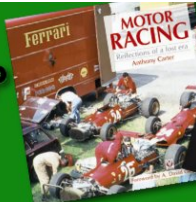
"The principle focus on being a professional motor-sports organization, whether or not we are racing full time, or not at all," Nicholas explained to me, "[is that we continue] to strive to work hard on gaining sponsorship, signing talented drivers with potential—{people} who are good-hearted, and can make a positive impact on and off the track, regardless of their situation. We want team members who know how to conduct themselves, whether they are at the movies, or in the paddock. We want to be the example of professionalism in sim-racing, and professional motor-sports."

Before we explore the role of sim-racing in the team's overall strategy, a brief history of their real-world experience makes for some interesting reading: Starting on the East Coast in 2003, Torrent Motorsports ran its first event at Limerock with two Porsches, before entering the prestigious Sebring Race, again fielding two Porsches. "Neither of the cars ran very well," their website states, "but for a new team, with under-prepared cars, it was a great learning experience." 2003 ended with the team running some privately sponsored rides in the SCCA, before 2004 saw them focus on two sanctioning bodies: NASA and SCCA, in which the team ran their own Audi A4s.

2005 saw the team ran exclusively in the NASA division, while, at the same time, their members helped crew for a team that fielded a Chevy Cobalt in Grand Am Rolex—they did the pit stops, and all the rest of the mechanical stuff, at Pheonix, Montreal, Mid Ohio, and other U.S., and Canadian tracks.



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Torrent Motorsports' Matthias Balanski gets to ride a Formula 1 Tyrrell, while below, does his stuff in a single seater: You can watch Matthias in the Tyrrell [here](#).



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The image shows the rFactor PC CD-ROM packaging. The box art features a fiery orange and red background with the rFactor logo at the top. Below the logo, it says "CUSTOMIZE. CONTROL. CONNECT." and displays several race cars. A CD-ROM disc is shown to the right of the box.

In late 2006, the team sold their two Audi A4s, in order, Nicholas explains, to prepare for what he refers to as a larger series. "Our cars were out of Spec', and it was pointless holding on to them if our plans for advancement were serious. Now that we are gathering resources for our entry into larger divisions, we are utilizing sim-racing to stay sharp, and find talent to help fill spots on our team for the future."

Last year saw the team run the NASA division, but not as Torrent Motorsports; they crewed, and also ran a pair of Audi A4s for Motorkars Racing.

I ask Nicholas for the highlights of last year's racing season, in which they suffered the usual hiccups of an underfunded team ... but then there was Mid Ohio ...



"The worst moment of the year had to have been at Road America," Nicholas recalls; "our car wasn't performing, and we were having failures with it. With the excess of boost, and new cams we ran, it caused some major timing issues which ended up shredding a valve train. Michael had to drive six hours back to the shop, then six hours back to the track, and the car *still* failed

during the race. It was a pretty bad moment for us not being prepared, and having our equipment fail on us.

"The best moment," he continues, "had to be when we got snowed out in April at Mid Ohio. It was a freak snow storm, and Michael's birthday as well. We were all working in the garage, huddled up tearing down an engine, and the ventilation system at Mid Ohio is above

the garage, so it was letting snow in through the vents into the garage. We ended up getting the car back together, running and doing well; we were actually passing GT class cars because we had all wheel drive! It was just fun because the team was working like clockwork, and we all went out and had a huge party that night for Michael's birthday."

Torrent Motorsports' break from racing (they are preparing to run in certain Grand Am Series events this year) sees the team turn to sim-racing. I asked Nicholas how the team had stumbled onto sim-racing, and what possible benefit this niche sport could have for a real-world motor-sports team.

"Our original plan for sim-racing was simply fun," Nicholas explains. "We looked around for different platforms, and found rFactor to be the most realistic racing simulation out right now. When we came into rFactor, we would run tracks like 'Birmingham' (Skip Barber) to get experience at race tracks we wouldn't be able to visit on a limited budget. It has allowed us to visit all sorts of tracks that we wouldn't be able to race on presently due to a lack of funding. rFactor has many great mods that have allowed us to really enjoy our love for sports car racing while we wait to get back on the track."

Nicholas believes that sim-racing is helpful when it comes to teaching young drivers certain key elements of racecraft: "Sim-racing helps develop young drivers mostly through {teaching them} patience, and the inability to get physically injured when wrecking. It helps us cost-wise also; if we have to constantly put drivers into race cars, even at a local track, it is expensive, and if they tear up a race car, we have to cover that, plus let the driver go. Sim-racing has allowed us to look at the key traits in finding quality race car drivers: Patience, car control, potential, talent, personality, marketability, and speed." But, he adds, "Not everyone will be able to step into a real race car for us. So we look for assets of character that will allow the driver or employee to stay on with the team for a long time."

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Nicholas sees sim-racing as just another form of motor-racing, and, he adds, "I think there are a few divisions out there that can teach drivers all the qualities they need to be successful on the track in a real situation, and I feel that 'Formula Sim-Racing' is one of them, which is why the team has been scouting for talent in that series. We also look around open servers for friendly drivers who are approachable, and are interested in racing careers."

We asked Nicholas whether he is aware of any sim-racers that have taken a leap into the real-world of motor-sports.

"It has already been done before, although not in an open wheel or sports car sort of dimension," Nicholas replies. "Kevin King won a stock car championship for a non-existent league now, but when he won that

championship, he went to a driving school, and was one of the fastest drivers there. He won a 'scholarship' to return to the school, and he had never been in a race car before that. Also, TJ Majors met Dale Earnhardt Jr. online, and Earnhardt put him into a late model, and now they are great friends. Those are just two stories of that possibility already becoming a reality, and both of those guys are great drivers, and great ambassadors for their leagues and teams now, which they learned through years of sim-racing."

Indeed, Nicholas and Torrent Motorsports don't have to look too far from home to find their own success fable: "Dennis Johansen is our inspiration story," Nicholas tells me. "Dennis is twenty-eight years old, and lives in Europe. He started by racing sims, and pursued his goal of real-racing while continuing sim-racing on the side. He had a

very successful test recently for a Danish Touring Car team, and was offered the ride if we could provide sponsorship for him ... we are still working on that, and it is a very real possibility, but if we cannot come up with funding for that car this year, then Dennis will have to sit out another year, or just continue subbing. He would have to be our most successful driver right now, and we continue to work with him, and hopefully we can get him fulltime funding in the DTCC."

Over and above that, Nicholas states that the team is exploring the possibility of, "placing drivers in BMW USA, Skip Barber, or a Formula series overseas within the next few years."

Torrent Motorsports, while not actively recruiting, are always looking out for talent—and some of this talent, Nicholas says, is to be found in 'Formula Sim-Racing'. "Drivers are always welcome to contact us," he tells me, quickly adding that, "we need more than drivers though ... people for some reason don't seem to take our [Jobs](#) page seriously when we have openings there that need to be filled."

One of the problems, of course, is that, whilst the sport of sim-racing is growing in its validation in the real-world, the stigma of 'video-game' remains, especially amongst the keyboard-brigade that populate certain forums that are—albeit peripherally—involved with the sport (as opposed to the 'game' element of it, an aspect that many of the sim-developers, such as iRacing.com, may be distancing themselves from, if Dave Kaemmer's now infamous statement is anything to go by).



Nicholas explains that, "we go out and look for drivers, but rarely find them; it is easy to contact someone, but they usually don't follow it up ... it happens, and that is just the way it goes. We have got a pretty good team now, and we are excited about 2007."

Torrent Motorsports are unique in that they are the first to see not only the benefits of training young drivers on simulators (even Mika Hakkinen, at McLaren, is doing that nowadays), but in exploring the commercial opportunities that this young sport has to offer. Whether they are successful or otherwise remains to be seen, but one thing remains certain: In seeing Formula Sim-Racing as just another division or series in motor-sports, the team demonstrates how far sim-racing has come in the last few years, and points to a frontier to which all those who share a common passion and ambition for this sport can already glimpse. We wish them all the success in the (real) world.

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The Return of Race Driver!

Bob Simmerman catches up with Andrew Winchester: Long time readers will remember him as the sim-racer who packed in the PC for some real-world action ... so how was his first season?

BobSimmerman





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Bob Simmerman: Since it has been a while since we spoke with you, perhaps you could refresh the readers' memories—what series do you race in, and what type of car did you use?

Andrew Winchester: I was racing in the Scottish Fiesta XR2 Championship. I was driving an MKk2 Fiesta XR2, which has about 100BHP, and weighs 845kg, uses the standard gearbox, and runs on a road-based, slightly treaded tyre. People may be familiar with the recently released French Clio Cup mod by fr-racers, and the British Clio Cup runs identical spec cars. As a comparison, a British Clio Cup car, which has about 190BHP, weighs 995kg, and uses a sequential racing gearbox (and also has the advantage of slick racing tyres), can lap Knockhill Racing Circuit in 57 seconds; the Fiesta can do it in 63 seconds, so they are faster than most people think.

Bob Simmerman: So last question first then—how good was your performance in this, your first season?

Andrew Winchester: I finished second in the Championship, and I was also awarded the Whyte Trophy, which is awarded to a young driver who has shown 'great ability and talent beyond their years'.

Bob Simmerman: Before the season began, what were some of the expectations you imposed on yourself for the season? How many of your goals do you feel that you accomplished? Did you ever think you would finish as high as you did, in second place at the end of the Championship?

Andrew Winchester: I didn't have any specific goals, but I really hoped I would be able to get onto the podium sometime throughout the year. It may sound like a bit of a cliché, but I don't think setting goals is a good idea as it's also a limitation, I just aimed to do as well as I possibly could.

I certainly didn't seriously think I would end up anything like second in the Championship, as most people at the front have been racing for years, and I was a complete novice, but I also couldn't imagine myself being anything else than a frontrunner as I believed I had the ability to challenge for wins.

Bob Simmerman: What were some of the more memorable moments you can recall during the season? Were there any times during the season that you would 'rather forget'?

Andrew Winchester: I have three memorable moments. The first would be the first race of the year where I took pole in soaking wet conditions, but thought I'd only been driving at about eighty-five or ninety per cent—we don't get a wet weather tyre, and in the wet, the lack of tread means there is not a lot of grip—I was much closer to the limit than I realized.

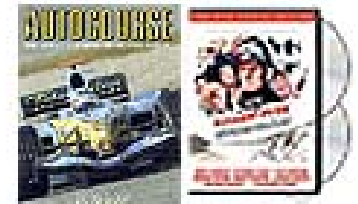


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The second was mid-season again a wet race, I started second, and swapped places with the leader about seven times over twelve laps (the race should have been fifteen laps, but there were a few separate incidents that left cars stranded around the track, so they decided to stop it early) with some really close but fair racing, and eventually I managed to hold onto the lead and took my first win by half a second.

The third would be in the last race of the year, another very wet race where I started sixteenth (the low starting position was due to me crashing out of the previous race on the last lap after a bit of a tangle as I tried to take the lead; the rules mean you start the second race where you are classified in the first) and finished second, which was

disappointing as I was about to take first when I was caught up in someone else's accident and T-boned in the door by an out of control car on the main straight. The incident caused a red flag, as the car which hit me then hit the tyre wall at high speed and rolled numerous times. I also managed to set a fastest lap that only one other car came within 1.2 seconds of.

I also have a couple of {things} I would like to forget though. Firstly, at the first race of the year, after starting on pole, I came into the first corner too fast on lap two and slid sideways into the gravel on the outside ... those of you familiar with the layout of Knockhill will know if you go wide or lose control at the top of the hill, you can end up coming back on track at the bottom of the hill in

front of other cars. Which is exactly what happened to me! I ended up crossing the track again almost facing oncoming cars as I slid sideways, and was hit by another car, putting us both out of the race. Worst part of it was the meeting was a double-header, and the car couldn't be fixed in time for the next race, so I lost the opportunity to score a lot of points.

The second one would be the meeting at Croft for Rounds 9 and 10. The Championship was still open at this point, because, if I scored highly in the four remaining races, and the Championship leader had three good scores but one bad one, it would be very close at the end of the year, and I could still possibly just take the Championship.



I opted to run just the afternoon testing session to try and keep my budget down while the Championship leader and most of the front runners had been testing all day. It has been sunny and dry all day, but about an hour before the afternoon sessions were about to start, it rained heavily and continued to rain on and off, so the only experience of the track I got was in the wet for two twenty minute sessions while my closest competitors had at least an hour's experience in the dry plus these two sessions in the wet.

During qualifying, I managed to place fourth despite only having one clean lap due to being held up by slower cars. But in the race, I had a fantastic start and was in second place before I even hit the brakes for the first corner. I closed right up on the Championship leader, who was leading the race, and was really pressuring him on lap 2 when I started struggling on left turns. Turns out I had picked up a slow puncture; the tyre wasn't cut, but somehow the valve had been ripped.

It got progressively worse, but there was no way, if I came in to get it changed, I would ever get back up the field. It's not expected you will make pitstops in these cars, as the races are only around twenty minutes.



It was half-deflated in the last few laps, and I was worried I was going to start damaging the car, but I was still managing to hold seventh place as there are only three left turns on the track where it was effecting me, and there was almost no lack of grip through right handers, so I pushed on to score points.

The knock on effect of this is that you start the second race where you finish the first, so I was down in seventh on the grid. I had a bit of an off during the second race when I was left with no room, and went wide when trying to go round the outside of someone, but I came in fourth.

The Championship was won as the leader took two wins, so I had to concentrate on defending my current second position in the last meeting of the season.

Bob Simmerman: Did you have any wins this season? What was your average placement for the entire season?

Andrew Winchester: I had one win this year, and four seconds. My average finishing position—including the two times I had mechanical failure but managed to finish (misaligned gear linkage, and a slow puncture which dropped me to tenth and seventh) would be fourth. If you discount the mechanical failures, it was third. Throughout the year, unless I ran into problems, I either

finished first, second, or fourth, with only one blip when I finished ninth after I ran hugely wide, went gravel surfing, and dropped from second to return to the track in sixteenth.

Bob Simmerman: Are you planning on racing again next season, and, if so, what class are you looking at?

Andrew Winchester: I will definitely be racing again in 2007, but it will probably be my last full season for a while, as I am starting university at the end of the year. It's looking increasingly likely I will be back in the Fiesta Championship, as I haven't managed to find a single sponsor yet to help me move up, but I was looking at the Dunlop Mini Challenge if I could raise the money as it's about five times what Fiestas cost per season.

Bob Simmerman: Can you give the budding racers among us some tips on how to get started with a similar situation to yours?

Andrew Winchester: I don't know about worldwide, but in the UK, it's pretty easy to get a racing license. You buy an MSA "Go Racing" Pack. Then you need to have a basic medical test, fill in some forms, and book yourself in at a racing circuit that does the license test. The test isn't too hard, the written part is basic common sense on standard rules and safety, and you need to show you know all the flags; the practical part is to show you can drive safely round the circuit at a moderate pace—you don't need to show how fast you can go.

For racers on a small budget, usually the best sort of series to get into is small tin tops where general costs are low, and the odd bit of bumping or contact with the tyre wall is more likely to have you straightening the bodywork out with a hammer than having to fit new parts!

Congratulations again, Andrew, and good luck in your future racing venture.

[Andrew Winchester](#) first appeared on these pages in Volume 2, Number 6...

DC Red Bull Goes KARTing

Join rock-band bassist Paul Harwood as he, along with fellow musicians Roger Legault, and Pierre Major join members of Virtual Online Racers league to take part in an all-star KARTing enduro' event at Montreal's Circuit Gilles Villeneuve.

PaulHarwood

Habitat 67 Pic By Moshe Safdie





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It was mid-October in Montreal. A crisp Sunday morning had event organizers warning drivers to dress warmly as the track, on an island in the middle of the mighty and windy Saint Laurence River, is susceptible to some extreme weather. Although a mere three minutes from downtown Montreal, the former Expo '67 islands chill quickly with the least bit of wind, or absence of direct sun. This actual GP track winds around one such man-made island called Ile Notre-Dame. To all participants' relief, it was not as cold as predicted and actually, the event weather varied from very brief hail and rain to gorgeous, rapid successions of partially sunny breaks. In my opinion, this was a perfect day to be getting into KARTing suits and helmets.

This event, a four hour KARTing enduro' around Circuit Gilles Villeneuve's east side, and organized by a fine local indoor KARTing center, Circuit 500, came to my attention last year while I was cleaning out my work inbox. I spotted the announcement email—unfortunately, a few

days late. So this year, I stayed tuned to their website, and got a team registered for the event with time to spare.

Joining me for the event were my DC Red Bull online racing team-mate, Hubert Cheyroux, and girlfriend Lori, drummer extraordinaire Roger Legault, and son Jonathan, along with guitarist-writer Pierre Major. Roger is responsible for getting me into sim-racing, while Pierre turned me on to indoor KARTing several years back. I was very pleased to be sharing this super event with these very dear friends. My original plan was to also invite rFactor mod sim devs, Dave Purdy (McLarenF1, All Cars Challenge 2005, and v2) and Francis 12 (Proton/Demon). Unfortunately, as the date neared, and due to their busy schedules, they could not attend, so Lori and Jonathan filled in admirably. We even had a spare driver; Lori's son, Tim.

I had invited these modders to shape this article for AUTOSIMSPORT into a real 'modders go KARTing' piece. Yet already with sim-racers Hubert and Roger along on

this outing, it was natural to discuss the subject. In addition, Circuit 500 KARTing have proposed to run several of these events next year, and it will be possible to have Dave, Francis, and other sim devs and modders join me for some on-the-spot sim-vs.-real discussions.

This enduro was yet another fine, real-world event connected to online sim-racing. This was capping off my best year ever in motor-sports, one which incredibly took me from Jim Russell racing school at Mt. Tremblant, to joining the famous D3 dev' team in Daytona for the Rolex 24-Hours, to the USGP LAN party and GP, and now, finally, this excellent KARTing enduro. All this came about from my participation in online sim-racing, and the excellent friends I have made through the sport.

My preparations for the event began a week earlier, as this one-time rock bassist tried to get on an early daytime schedule, as opposed to my usual nocturnal hours. It worked, and by race day I was wide awake and roaring to go with a 7:30AM wake-up call for the 10:30AM start. All

week, the organizers and participants kept an eye on local weather forecasts, praying for dry conditions. In case of rain, the race would have been held at the indoor venue. Luck was with us, though, and Sunday morning looked perfect for KARTing, with partly cloudy skies, and not too chilly or windy.

I drove up Park Avenue and picked up Pierre, whom I spotted pacing outside his apartment building already wearing his KARTing suit under a heavier bomber jacket. We then headed down this picturesque and famous Montreal street towards the track. For a racing venue, Ile Notre Dame is incredibly easy to access: An expressway from downtown takes us there in under five minutes. Once around the waterfront, the drive takes us by the wonderful Habitat 67 building, an outdoor concert venue called Place des Nations (where I got to perform often), and then over across the Concorde Bridge where—we had been instructed—we would meet up with the event organizers. Finding no-one from the event at or on the *Pont de la Concorde*, we guessed our way onto the GP track itself.

It is a thrilling experience to be able to drive onto an actual GP track: The Circuit Gilles Villeneuve is, in fact, used year long by joggers, bicyclists, and wheelchair racers, as well as by visitors to the Casino de Montreal. Here I was, taking Turn 5 and 6 in my 1985 Monte Carlo, with Pierre shouting, 'Boot it Paul!' Believe me, the thought was there, but also the realisation that we were quickly approaching the hairpin where the KARTing track was meant to be set up. We eased into the adjacent parking area to be greeted by a cigar-chomping Roger.

"Get that shitbox off the road!" he shouts.

"Easy," I reply. "Haven't you seen this car on the Sopranos?"

As we got our gear and made towards the event, a cheery, youthful Hubert and crew recognised me (we had never actually met before), and all was well. One of the

coolest moments in sim-racing is that moment when you finally meet friends, in person, that you have come to know and enjoy only as virtual online opponents, and the whole team was here except for Dave Purdy, who we were still hoping would join us.

Roger suddenly pointed at me: 'Look! He even brought Champagne!'

Sure. I had tucked a bottle in my kit bag just in case we did well, or just felt like celebrating at the end. 'Team orders for this race,' I explained, 'are—to have as much fun as possible.'

We walked around the tyre walls lining a very compact circuit, watching event-staff test out their final placement as they buzzed about in Circuit 500's 5bhp, four-stroke KARTs. With the thrill of actually being right on the famous hairpin, we were all smiles as we sought out the event-staff for final registration. There was already quite a crowd of participants as twenty-five teams with their stables of three to six drivers stood around chatting. Circuit 500 owner Fred Martel was scrambling to get everything done in order to get proceedings underway somewhere near the scheduled time. A second enduro, scheduled for 3PM (for kids and parents), was making his job even more complicated. But the 'gung ho' spirit of racing and motor-sports was definitely in the air, so tasks absolutely necessary to start the event got done, and soon we would be deeply immersed in the thrill of what would turn out to be more than a little intense competition.

Probably the most underestimated process for the event-staff was team registration. There was a quite a line-up at the booth where only one or two young ladies battled to get everyone signed up while collecting entry-fees. The original instructions were: *Meet us on the bridge at ten, and the race will begin at half past*. Fugget about it! The actual race finally began at noon! There was a brief practice, then a short qualifier where only one driver from

each team could run. I chose Pierre to lead us off as he is very light and very fast. He did well for our team, securing a decent spot on the grid.

Really, the longish delay was actually a blessing of sorts as it gave us more time to get ready, as well as to soak in the whole experience of being part of an *über-cool*, very exclusive motor-race. There were old stars and young talent all round. There is always great sportsmanship and camaraderie in motor-sports, but this was a motley-mix of very experienced racers alongside others who were obviously at their first real organized event. This, as we shall see, turned a 'fun' event into a broiling caldron of all-out action.

I love wearing racing gear. I slipped into my black Simpson KARTing shoes the moment we got into the event paddock, located at the run-off area for the hairpin. Around us were young Quebec Cup KARTing stars in awesome KARTing suits alongside seasoned veterans, and weekend warriors in all manner of sports and protective clothing. I spotted Rotax Formula Junior aces, Jean-François and Dominic Séguin, Sylvain St. Hilaire, a former KARTer now a Quebec GT star, and several young lady drivers.

Finally, Hubert gets word that Dave Purdy had worked really late on one of his mods, and was too wasted to race. What else could we expect from one of the sim-racing community's hardest working developers? Next year, Dave, next year ...

The magnitude of the experience was beginning to be felt as we realised where we were, and how unbelievably cool this all was. Even if event preparations were not all up and running, or up to the task at hand ... Yo! We're on the friggin' track, on the coolest hairpin on the planet! Look at the big sky. Look at this hairpin up close at eye-level! The track and KARTs were becoming factors in equations our minds raced to churn through. Me plus these KARTs plus this track plus velocity plus time plus twenty-five racers equals ... shit, this could get intense.



Hubert in foreground and Lori in KART about to begin stint. Nice sky.

Most of you reading this are already familiar with Montreal's awesome and very tight hairpin. Picture then, a KARTing layout going around the hairpin in a reverse direction and crossing over from the backstraight at the first utility road, about fifty to sixty yards from the hairpin apex, back to the straight leading to the pits. That's a fair size track with straights long enough to wind the KARTs up to around 50mph. There was the hairpin at one end, another blind apexed double left hander with a slightly downhill exit at the other, and all connected with wicked, Surfer's Paradise-like double chicanes on both straights. In other words: Two hairpins connected by two high speed chicaned straights. This was going to get funky in a jiffy.

If you're a junky for wild G forces, and intense side-by-side rib pounding, this track is purpose-made for you!

The Montreal hairpin itself looks puny in a KART. They want to run NASCAR here next summer? That'll be cute. No kidding. As Hubert advised after his stint: "Come in wide. Stab the brakes just before the apex, and drift out smooth. The far hairpin is a double apex, but take them in

one smooth motion. Stab the brakes going in to the first bend a bit wide, and stay in tight on the downward exit."

I can add here that KARTing on real asphalt generates far more grip than on other indoor surfaces, amounting to far more bone-jarring G-forces. Asphalt is very hard on the KARTs as well. The traction, too, is magnified, and the stress on mechanical bits along with the drivers is amplified compared to racing on smooth or rough concrete as used on most indoor KARTing circuits.

If it's just a slight stab of the brakes in a KART, imagine full sized cars like Trans Am and Champ Cars coming into the hairpin. In sims, this corner actually feels and looks twice as wide in radius than it is in real encounters with its apex; the crown (or tip of this corner) is barely the length of one of these KARTs. That's a pretty sharp point. I ask Pierre Olivier Lapointe, event manager, why run in reverse direction? He replied that it was the safer way. I could see that, as the exit to that double corner made by the utility road connecting to the actual track was quite tight if raced clockwise.

After chaotic practice and qualifying rounds, the starting grid took shape, and was about to take to the track. I settled Pierre into our KART. He wanted to change into a lighter top, and grab some liquids before his twenty-five minute stint. The mobile DJ had the James Bond theme playing, and the atmosphere was really getting electrified. The warm-up and qualifying had shown that the racing would be concentrated, especially going into these wild, double-chicanes at high speed. Already, in these first few laps taken by the racers, tyre walls and plastic barrier blocks went flying as KARTs did things the event planners had not fully anticipated. These episodes were in most part caused by the totally inexperienced that had shown up. As drivers emerged from their KARTs after these preliminary laps, the experienced racers were stating that this was going to be a pretty wild event with this mix of true and seasoned talent racing wheel-to-wheel with well-meaning, lead-footed, star-struck, and total novices.



Hubert is the 2nd KART at the hairpin

Last minute warnings from the marshals; two formation laps, and off roared the twenty-five KARTs. There were instantly ferocious battles due to the traffic density caused by so many groups of evenly-matched KART and driver units throughout the field. I had never been on a track with so many KARTs at once: Indoor KARTing usually has fifteen or less KARTs per session. This looked like a biblical multitude by comparison. Look at that gnarling field barrel through the esses and emerge flat out towards us! The sky! These fast moving cloud formations just above us; this looks so much like the track in sims. I am feeling like the luckiest guy on the planet as, after weeks of hoping that the event would not get rained out, here we all were, and it's a green flag to go.

I jotted down Pierre's start time, and had a notepad handy to keep track of each of our team drivers' track time. This was to split the time as evenly as possible between us. The entrance fee was a mere \$65.00 (Canadian) each. Even with the race length shortened by over an hour due to delays, everyone on the team got to drive about twenty-five minutes average. Pierre got a bit more in by taking the warm-up and qualifying laps.

Roger, our fifth driver, had a forty-five minute wait in the pits as ambulance staff tended to a young lady who suffered a rather violent off-track incident. Circuit 500 even offered a team rebate because of shortened race time.

Yes, folks. This is real motor-sports. Perhaps as tiny as it gets, but in real-racing, shit happens. And with this field, where perhaps one-third of competitors had little or no experience, shit was *definitely* going to happen. After a brisk, all-out five laps to start the event, the first of a procession of yellow and red flags waved the pack to a halt—already several drivers had really managed to get some of the turns very wrong indeed. Serious collisions were sending KARTs hurtling in all directions, and race marshals began warning of their immediate use of penalties if things did not calm down. Race stoppages became absolutely necessary when collisions and offs sent plastic Armco-style blocks completely off their spots. Many drivers got squeezed out at the chicanes, and would wind up sailing into these blocks with hollow thuds, scraping sounds, and tyre squeals.

These stern warnings were most reassuring for me to hear as I stood at the pit wall. Moments before, I had waved a clear slow down signal to some driver who had literally hurtled at full speed into a very narrow and short pit lane. He rammed into a parked KART at quite a clip, and had a track official scrambling for cover. Another had totally missed the main hairpin—which for this event was the widest part of the circuit—and nearly clipped a flagman as he tried to stay on the throttle. He ended up passing between the dodging flagman and the outside wall, and all this some thirty feet off the racing line! I am thinking someone really has to work on the AI files for this track and mod.

Pierre is driving very smoothly. He is fighting all manner of *squirmishes* with some of the front racers. Of

course, all the fun begins as they quickly encounter the back markers. The slower drivers now get a close-up taste of the quicker racers' line and tempo through the chicanes. This makes the novices begin to get over their heads, and within a few laps, a mild chaos spreads throughout the track's layout.

Those of us watching from the pit wall witness more and more incidents, and several happening simultaneously in the different packs swarming around the track. Race officials are overwhelmed several times, and at these moments, wisely wave red flags to temporarily halt the field. How are the scoring girls keeping track of all these KARTs, especially those with hand written numbers? How can anyone keep accurate count of laps during such a long event, unless they are one per KART? Turns out there were two or three young ladies trying to cope with all twenty-five teams.

Pierre keeps a wonderfully smooth pace. He has battled ferociously from every restart. He just drove one of the most intense stints I have ever witnessed. He fought at close quarters over several laps as the front runners stayed very tightly packed. His group of drivers kept ferocious battles going, as they snaked their way through the field. Amid all the novice pratfalls and drama, there was still great racing by many. The funniest were the 'angry fists' and drivers gesturing to others, pointing jaggedly at their helmets. Some resorted to bumping others' KARTs during the yellow flag slowdowns. Yes, NASCAR should have a real blast here, next summer.

As he eases nicely into the pits, Pierre hands Hubert, our next driver, a very nice track position. I was signaling our team drivers with five minute notice, and lap-by-lap countdowns to time their changeover stops. Pierre darted off the KART and a compact, determined, and pumped Hubert squeezed into the seat and briskly tore out onto the pitch.



Red Bull team boss Paul and lead-off driver Pierre Major

I really enjoyed being team manager of sorts. I always wondered if I could enjoy any other role in motor-sports other than being a driver. I was surprised how much fun it is to watch over, and help team-mates. I felt like Bobby Rahal ... sorta, as I pointed to the exact spot where the KART should stop for driver changes. In any case, having something to do while not driving is way better than just spectating: Here I was, keeping track of stint times, making final decisions on driver choices and driving order, and generally having a grand 'ol time at it ...

Hubert, on track, looked very smooth. He experimented with a few passes around the course, but quickly took on the streamlined appearance of a bullet. His style was really smooth and deliberate. He would come in just right into the hairpin, and I jokingly said to him that I could see heat ripples as he darted very quickly down the straight. But he was really hooking up on the exit. He would hunch down, mash the throttle, and just check out in a hurry. I was very pleased with the strategy of running our lightest, faster drivers first. The team was in decent top ten position. Mental note to self: "These guys will be real fast online in sims."



The next driver chosen was Lori Donaldson.

"Have you ever driven a KART?" I asked.

I was a little surprised when she answered in the negative. Yet there was something positive about her attitude. She was very athletic in appearance, and not at all hesitant in giving this a good try. I offered some pointers about finding her relative pace, steering clear of jerks, and told her to mainly have as much fun as possible. Hubert had also offered his quick tips on tackling the circuit while helping her choose a helmet. She was as ready as can be.

Hubert roared in, and Lori took little time in getting seated before stomping the throttle to join the fray. Within a few laps, some under yellow, she was doing really well, not losing any ground, or being caught up in the various incidents that kept happening around the track. She had one short spin, in her very fine, first twenty-five minutes of non-stop KARTing. All in all, she kept a solid pace and again, the team strategy of having the lighter drivers run first was paying off.

Lori eased into pit lane and handed over to Jonathan. Ooops! What's this? John has just lost a shoe, as it gets caught on the throttle pedal. Already sunken into the

KART seat, he can't quite reach his feet to do much about this small emergency. I managed to pry his no-laces Nike sneaker back on, but we did lose a lap during this change-over. A team manager must be ready for anything!

Midpoint in the race is already at hand. The event organizers finally begin to get caught up on various planned peripheral features such as the assembly of various sized tents and booths. The poor mobile DJ often has to struggle to keep his smaller canopy from being torn away by gusts of cold wind. Pizza and soft drinks somehow appear, and with more and more frequent sunny breaks, this continues to be a most enjoyable afternoon for taking in a motor-race, and indulging in people-watching in the pits. For Roger and me, such live motor-sport events are like rest cures in a spa compared to the quick-fix of sim-racing.

When life gets too pushy, we're off to that dark, quiet little corner where we slap in a CD, plug in the wheel, and within moments we roar off onto virtual tracks of dreams. We either quickly escape some stressful reality, or, at other times, try to spend 'quality time' with our beloved sims, where perhaps we can work on some progression in getting quicker and improving the overall sim-experience. Sims' only flaw is that it means sitting in front of a box, indoors. That activity—although requiring considerable physical and mental work—can be hazardous to overall health. By comparison, getting to and participating in an outdoor motors-ports event is a most healthy personal activity. I say healthy and personal, but in the same breath, (no pun intended), I don't mean healthy as in any global, environmental way.

Take three musicians, several friends, three of us sim-racers, and a very interesting if unexpected discussion takes shape. The parallels between touring rock acts and traveling racing teams are surprisingly numerous.



Pierre and Jonathan.

"A racing event is exactly like a rock festival. There, you'll find teams and 'acts' compete against one another, but also collectively put on a show for a public. Both have to get from point A to point B. When we get there, we get out our gear and 'rock and roll,'" I explain. "There are roadies and musicians. There are crews and drivers. Roadies and mechanics go about business sporting the latest promo' wear. Musicians and drivers get to prance around in colorful clothing, and tight little shoes and somehow ... perform. When we all get to doing what we do, and why we're there ... we burn massive amounts of energy, and pollute the bejeezuss out of our environments."

Racing events and live concerts boil down to this, environmentally: The music act and sponsors have spent dearly creating these plastic CDs—they are made of hydrocarbons, and some of the vilest chemicals in the known multiverse—and they will be sold to a public that will burn much energy getting to the event. This public will also purchase all manner of associated merchandising articles. The racing teams, meanwhile, assemble machines made of hydrocarbons and some of the vilest chemicals as well. Much merchandising will also

be consumed by their public. As with the concert, this event will make the attending crowd consume massive quantities of energy getting to and from the event. Whether at a concert or a race, ears will get a toasting at many decibels above thresholds of pain. Think of public art and sporting events that attract tens of thousands of fans at tens of locations: That's a lot of energy consumption.

The environmental consequences of artistic activities and sporting events is where a startling difference may exist between motor-sports and most other artistic, sporting, public, or commercial activities: Motor-sports are working on the problem constantly by their very nature. The racing of machines encompasses the need and quest for efficiency. In this general way, motor-sports are part of a 'good guy' or 'good science' project of going about fixing any environmental problems that will arise from racing machines around this planet's environment.

But we are sim-racers. Our activity, which is a simulation of one of these very polluting, public commercial activities, basically uses recycled photons and some electricity. In short, our favorite activity barely uses an infinitesimal fraction of the real-life model's energy consumption.

States Hubert: "I find it cool that we partake in a simulation of this sport that is racing, because it itself is such a great, wonderful experience."

Lori expresses a more Venusian view: "I see much in racing, sport in general, and pop art that has to do with the mating ritual and ages-old primal, tribal activity. There is much that is showing who is the best or fastest. Who is the best potent mate? Who is the finest hunter-warrior?"

I reply jokingly: "When we cocoon ourselves in our sims at home, we don't get to partake in this social interaction. Going online and competing with other real opponents goes partly towards entering some sort of real-world social realm. It's just that it probably won't ever get you laid, or anything."



Roger leads a trio of karts into hairpin. Clouds roll by ...

Motor-sport has been a mostly male dominated activity. Lori's participation in this event made me proud as a team manager. I am thrilled that my first real racing team includes a woman as driver. I was nevertheless breathing much easier when she made it back to the pits after her first great drive, in one piece, and smiling.

Sim-racing has its hazards in over or improper use, and the fact that it is an indoor and rather sedentary activity. But is sim-racing, overall, safer, and thereby healthier than its real counterpart, as a human activity? A tragic event on the track, during Jonathan's stint brought this debate to the front of the stage, and very much into the spotlight.

Jonathan's drive is a turbulent experience. The halfway point in the race brings about a transition to deeper level of competitiveness within the race. By now some teams and drivers have been issued penalties and even expulsions. Some teams, made up of more experienced KARTers, pick up the pace several notches. Novice participants try and make up time lost in incidents and penalties. Despite frequent laps under yellow, and red flag moments, the rush of competition swirls about the entire track the instant green flags are dropped. This is

not getting any easier or more organized. Struggling drivers continue to struggle, and faster talent keeps making this playground an ever-more frenzied and frenetically paced circus.

Jonathan is neither a regular KARTer nor a sim-racer. He is, however, quite athletic, has done some KARTing, and is no wallflower by any means. He manages to keep a very good pace and, like Lori, stays out of incidents and commits no fouls. His stint ends under a red flag: A young lady has had a savage shunt, and breaking her leg in the process. An ambulance makes its way onto the track to tend to her. She had badly missed the far double apex turn, and has slammed into some concrete blocks at a pretty fast clip. She had already been hurt in the event. As she sat at a table next to our team's, she was advised by many to not go back out for a second drive. She already had quite a cut and bruises on a leg, suffered by being run over by another KART as it rode up onto hers. This was clearly not this young lady's day.

As Roger climbs into the KART, the ambulance delay is actually giving us time to shove the KART's number plate over a few inches to help make more leg room for Roger's long and middle-aged legs. He was wearing the black Bell 'Shorty' biker helmet, and heavy leather jacket he dons when riding his Harley. With round goggles and a bandana over his lower face, he looked from a decidedly older vintage than the young Sparco-clad crowd around him. He was in for a rather long forty-five minute wait for a restart. Word was coming from the accident scene that the young lady was seriously banged up, and perhaps had even been knocked unconscious. In any case, there would be no racing with this huge ambulance parked just off the entry to the double apex. The site of an ambulance and this all-star KARTing event was causing quite a traffic jam as the island's usual traffic paused to indulge in a bit of a rubber-necking.



Karts hurtle around hairpin. Pierre in 3rd. Does this look like the sims or what?

Finally Roger gets a green flag and begins his very smooth drive. By this point in the event, most of the overall event positioning has been achieved by our team's fastest-lightest-youngest-first strategy. With Roger and me coming in well over two hundred pounds, and out-dating the other drivers by several decades, we wanted to drive as fast as possible, but we were used to KARTing's built-in weight penalty. Guys our size will not outrun lighter racers of the same talent. Not being real KARTers, our middle-age rhythm section needs to be realistic in its KARTing performance limits. This was an open event. In most non-enduro' KART competitions, guys our size and age would run in senior-heavy classes, and do pretty well—that is, once we both diet, and work out to be closer to the minimum class weight. I had to do this when I ran an open seniors class. At first weigh-in, I tipped the scales at over 220. Shocked by this, I worked hard to finish the summer series at closer to 195.

Within a few passes, I can see Roger getting very fluid in his line and pace. The procession of yellow flags continues, so Roger gets to run two or three lap sprints to the next yellow. The number of KARTs on track has gone

down to eighteen or so. Officials make every attempt at spreading the field out, and this they do mostly by waving yellows for every bit of sideways KARTing or contact with other KARTs, the tyre walls, or blocks. Although twice the size of Hubert, Roger has that same bullet-like shape as he hurtles around the hairpin in all manner of skirmishes and formations. The guy that got me into sim-racing originally—and was one of the few friends to come KARTing with Pierre and I when indoor KARTing began here—was doing a fine job. At this point, our job as the final two drivers was to just bring it all home. Our first four drivers had managed to get the team to a great overall placing.

As he pulls into the pits to hand over to me, our team suffers its second small yet avoidable loss of time. As I began preparing for my drive, head-deep into my equipment bag, I had not given Roger a lap-by-lap countdown for changeover. As I hurried back to the pit wall, I find Roger motioning that he was definitely pitting *now*, this a few laps before I has scheduled. I had not yet slipped on my bandana and helmet.

Roger said he begun getting warnings from some officials at the far corner about his helmet not being a full-face type. This seemed to be a reaction by the race officials to the serious injury that had just occurred. Roger decided to come in before that official black-flagged him, and perhaps draw some additional penalty. That was a smart move, and showed good team-work. Problem was, the next driver—me—was not quite ready.

I fumbled with sunglasses that were not fitting well with my helmet, and that I finally decided not to wear. I tried to wave Roger around for another lap, but it was obvious he was pitting that instant. I even pushed our KART over to allow the other teams out of pit lane. I ended up roaring off having lost at least a lap in the delay. But how classic is this? I have to hurry the helmet firmly down on my head and frantically pull my gloves on

and it's all part of the adrenaline rush of racing. My Bieffe KARTing helmet has a quick-lock fastener. It proves a great help in moments like these.

It had been a long time since I had sat in a KART—the last time had been in early spring, during one of my nephew Shaun's visits to Montreal, when we went for our usual indoor KARTing safaris. With the weather now quite pleasant, I had only a pullover and nylon jogging pants. There was a bank of clouds overhead, so I really did not need sunglasses under my visor anyway. There is a special payoff to owning one's own gear. The helmet, gloves and boots fit perfectly, and this provides for both confidence and a secure sensation. Being a musician means added hand protection when KARTing, and I use motocross/road-racing leather motorcycle gloves with padding for the outside of the joints. They fit perfectly, and being glove leather, feel really fine when holding onto racer-style steering wheels.

I can tell you that launching onto this historic track was a tremendous feeling. Even using this small portion of the GP layout, one gets a sense of the scale of things, and how everything looks at track level. It's so much like racing sims, but with the added dimension of full range vision, especially in the peripheral area. A KART's steering is very direct, pretty much like most sim-steering wheels. But the angle of the wheel in these rental KARTs is much flatter. Having now driven formula cars, I can say I much prefer cars for overall comfort. KARTs are spiky G-force generators, mostly. But that is exactly why they are fun yet exhausting to drive. Huge G-force tugs come from the steering wheel with massive shoves from the whole KART as it gets thrown into trail braking arcs sharply transferring its weight.

A lap around this layout begins with leaning hard into the hairpin, accelerating towards the first chicanes, getting shaken left-right-left through them, charging towards the far corner, snapping the KART into the

double apex, and leaning into that downward exit while holding the KART tight on the exit, before finally racing into another left-right-left shake for the final chicane. All this in around thirty-five seconds. What a blast! I am wondering how it will feel next time I attend a race here, knowing I drove on that very hairpin and surface. I have watched so much racing here over the years, and here I am, finally; on the track as a driver! And as a super bonus, we are all actually getting to race before a bigger crowd than at most local KARTing events. There are several hundred people around the track. Quite a few curious onlookers, who had been driving past the event site, have also lingered on as well. This is all more than I had hoped for. For me, this event is a total winner.

I inherit the same smaller number of KARTs on track Roger had for his stint. I am running around the layout in various sized formations from two to half a dozen racers. All it takes is to be heading into the chicanes with rivals on either side to make the racing very intense. My strategy is to only go for sure passes. Catch the rival out on mistakes and weak lines, mostly around the corner entries and exits. The chicanes to me are dictated by whoever's wheels are ahead, and getting a feeling for the consequence of letting someone by, or closing the door. Will we all wreck if I shut someone out? As in sim-racing, I let my pace in relation to others dictate my decisions. I don't block faster racers unless it's for a podium on the last laps. I just work on going as fast as I possibly can, and avoiding mistakes.

I remember a few years back trying a KART sim demo, and being impressed with the light, rattling Force-Feedback effect of KARTs compared to cars. This sim really had the twitchiness of KARTs well modeled. The lightness of a KART, along with the short wheelbase, amplifies all driver inputs. KARTs are all business, and that business is road racing. They are far more closely related to—and in fact are—pure bred racing machines. They are

thus less similar in experience to sedans or even sports cars. The steering is a very direct 140 degrees lock-to-lock, just like very fast and nimble formulas and prototypes.

I am smiling really hard inside my helmet. At just about every pass into the double apex, I confront nearly head-on one, or several, drivers that have spun out, having gone too wide on the exit, or too hot and tight going in. This brings out the yellow flags, and the field bunches up in a hurry just after the exit. There are tyre walls and plastic block barriers on the inside, so at KART-eye level, we could not see the exit straight. I had to put my KART sideways on one occasion as I was confronted with a traffic jam just as I rocketed out of the blind corner. The marshals did not always have time to wave their flags as these spinouts occurred. Like Roger, I am darting through short two or three lap battles under green and taking time under yellow to try different lines and feel out this KART. My inspiration? Watching Paul Newman race Jay Leno in KARTs around the NBC studios' hallways. Newman was so smooth in the KART! I had fun avoiding a few bozos and their pratfalls, and watching really good drivers weave through the masses and mayhem.

With only a few laps left in the event, my KART begins to falter. It is sputtering on the straights, and bogging down coming out of corners. I am running out of gas. It seems our great overall placing was partly due to our not having had to refuel during our stops. But it was costing us now. However, being that keeping the KARTs fuelled was the organizer's responsibility, our team is credited with an extra lap. I ran out of gas completely, and pulled over just after pit exit with only two laps left. I climbed out of the KART and still had that firm smile inside my helmet, which even event-boss Pierre Olivier could notice as I walked back to our team table. That was excellent. I have to do this again.

But now it was time to find out how our team actually did.



Pierre sits in kart with Hubert coaching. Early practice and it is cold.



Hubert after his stint. Pit lane in background and nice sky (above) ... Hubert Cheyroux, Pierre Major and Roger Legault.



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As results are announced, it is no surprise to see the real, young KARTing teams on the podium. We are mildly shocked as our DC Red Bull team is mentioned in the next few names. We finished seventh overall, out of the twenty-five teams that started. We were overjoyed and jubilant! We had just had a great time, were all safe and sound, and had done as well as could have been expected for a first team outing. Unfortunately, as in all racing, there were those at this event who did not perform well and, of those, some took this in stride while a few got quite vocal and complained loudly, blaming all manner of causes for their poor showing.

As I approach chief steward Pierre Olivier to confer on some point, it is clear that he has been inundated with complaints from several teams who felt the event lacked organization. If compared to FIK KARTing events, this was probably the case, but that was missing the overall point of this event. It was supposed to be a 'friendly' competition. A fun event, not some professional championship race. Pierre Olivier is mildly relieved as, on the other hand, I and several others, come to congratulate and thank him for this great event.

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Quebec GT racing star Sylvain St Hilaire and team.

The oddest thing was that our team did not pop open the champagne. I offered all a taste but, seeing as we were all about to get into our cars to return home, getting

tipsy on champagne did not seem wise. This had after all been a long event and Lori, Hubert, and Tim did have a ninety minute drive back up to Mt. Tremblant. Roger and Jonathan headed back to the suburbs, while I drove Pierre and myself back to our downtown apartments.

Pierre and I are already thinking of entering more such events. Circuit 500 holds indoor enduros, usually on the first Sunday of every month at their excellent indoor asphalt circuit, near Montreal's Olympic Stadium. These benefit from electronic timing, and are a full 500 laps in duration. We also look forward to participating again should this Villeneuve Circuit enduro repeat next summer. For me, this event reinforces my general opinion on sim-and-real-racing: It is preferable to do both. KARTing is easily the most accessible form of motor-sports, and it will get you up and out of the house for healthy outdoor activity. You meet the greatest folks on the planet: Motor-racing people. Most importantly, it helps one keep contact with something real with which to compare sim-racing.

As a way to end this, we'd all like to thank The Demolition Crew and Red Bull for lending their names to our team, and making us at least sound like contenders. Hubert and I thank Lori, Roger, Pierre, Jonathan, and Tim for helping out our online virtual team, DC Red Bull, for this fantastic real-life race.

A very special thanks also to Circuit 500 owner Fred Martel, event organizer Pierre Olivier Lapointe and staff, for this wonderful opportunity.



Actual Ineptness or Artificial Intelligence?

Duncan'Jim'Smith on the continued shortcomings of the AI ... are our not-too-intelligent offline foes about to drift into obscurity?

Duncan'Jim'Smith





Do you ever get the feeling that the more things change the more things stay the same? AUTOSIMSPORT has only been around for two years, which means it is not quite old enough to look deep enough into the past, but if we went back five years, what sort of issues were people having with their racing-sims back then? Finding ways to get a balance between eye candy and performance? Understanding setups? Getting the right credit for their third party work? Finding people to race with online? Finding a way to get a good offline race against the AI?

The interesting thing with that list is that all of those issues still exist in sim-racing today. We now have licensed MoTeC data acquisition, professional level organisation of online racing, almost photo-realistic tracks and cars, awesome sound, and nearly all the world's major racing series available to us ... but we are still getting rammed from behind by the AI, still see weird behaviour from pace cars, and are still waiting for blue flags to effectively be incorporated into our racing.

Indeed, AI doesn't seem to attract much development from developers these days. For the sake of this article, I will define AI as any part of the race controlled by the computer, such as non-human opponents, pace car deployment, flag rules and weather conditions. The feature most of us associate with AI would be computer-

controlled opponents though, and that is also the area where racing-sims struggle the most. GTL and GPL would be at the top of pile, the NASCAR series had its good points, rFactor has promise, but from there, it goes downhill. GTR was awful, Gran Turismo has always made do with almost drone like competition, LFS actually *uses* drones, and NetKarPro didn't even bother.

Unlike most things in sim-racing, AI has made very little progress in the last few years—in fact, in many cases, it has actually managed to take steps backwards which leaves me assuming that sim-developers view it as a feature that will not help them sell their product, especially as online action becomes more of the focus. Thing is, though, there is still a very significant place for AI, whether it is as a training tool for new racers, practise for the experienced, or a way to take part in a specific race when no one else is running it online; AI remains an important part of our sport.

So how can AI can be an aid? For starters, there are simply not enough of us for everyone to find that server running the car we want to run—remember, we are spread all the way across the world, which makes things even harder. We are all at different levels too, which means that, while it is great to get onto a server with twelve other guys running the V8s at Bathurst, the feeling is soon soured if they are all two seconds a lap faster (or slower): Door-to-door action—something we all love—can only happen when you're competing with able drivers who are on your pace: And to be able to compete effectively, at such close quarters, requires a lot of practice—practice than can only be honed from racing against well-tuned AI.

Which leads to the question—in an ideal world, what are we looking for in terms of AI?

To begin with, consistent performance from the AI across practise, qualifying, and races would go a long way to making offliners happy. GMotor-based stuff is terrible

for this; if you qualify at the front, you can expect a lonely race as the AI suffer a dramatic loss in performance come race time. Consistent performance across different race tracks would be helpful, too.

The ability to deal with irregular occurrences, also, would be a major step-forward. Whether it is a spin, a lapped car, or pace car periods, these are all a major part of real racing, and need to be dealt with in a realistic way. Having cars join in on a crash at an oval twenty or thirty seconds after it started is not something you would expect to see often in real racing.

Sensible pit strategies are yet another area that is in need of improvement. If the fuel window runs out two laps before the race ends, it would make sense for at least some cars to stop at, say, half distance. Seeing every AI car dive into the pits rather than take the white flag is a large mood killer.

AI operating on the same physics engine as the player would go some way toward healing the rift, too. Following an AI car through a corner, and seeing its brake lights flashing makes you wonder if you are fighting a fair fight, as does getting passed by a car with two wheels in the sand. Another big party pooper is seeing the cars in front of you float and bounce their way along; I know there are limits to processing power, and it comes down to priorities, but can developers really be running things that close to the edge? Most of us, I think, would tone down the eye candy in return for maintaining a better illusion.

And finally, an accurate reflection of real-life performance would not go amiss either. It is just not right that Marcus Marshall tops the times sheets at Bathurst in that PCR Falcon. It would never happen, just like finding Jim Richards out of the Top Ten in the Carrera Cup is highly unlikely. The mod makers can't be blamed for this one either—the talent files are there, they are just not being used.

The really frustrating point about all of this, however, is that, at one stage or another over the past ten years, all of those features have been implemented in various sims—just never in one sim at the same time. I had many great races in Micropose's Grand Prix, and its two follow ups, especially the third incarnation which, with the addition of the GP3edit software, was easily customisable to my own tastes. Sure they all ran around on rails and resembled a train more than twenty-odd cars, but they did not do anything to kill the immersion factor either.

A look at the boards at RSC discussing this topic shows a number of racers are frustrated with the AI shortcomings in rFactor. Yes it is marketed as an online sim, but there are still places in the world where broadband is not available, thus ruling out online competition as a serious activity, and as I mentioned earlier, there is no substitute for practising your skills offline—both understanding the fundamentals of the tracks, the cars, and how to *race* in traffic. Online racing requires special skills that do not come automatically: Racing door-to-door is not as intuitive as it appears, since the sim-racer cannot get visual cues by simply looking left or right: In a tight battle, one's ability to determine where the other car is—by sound and experience alone—is garnered mostly from offline practice against opposition that won't get annoyed when you punt them off in an ill-judged attempt at passing.

The good folks at ISI are certainly committed to their product, though, and rumours are floating about that the next patch will contain a big improvement that may bring offline racing to a level matching other areas of sim-racing. If this proves true, it has been a long time coming, and it must be expected that occasionally people are going to get fed up with paying \$50.00 for titles that spend the first six months

to a year of their existence in a sort of world-wide beta-test or, worse, still paying their money for 'features' in sims that are, simply put, inexcusable. Such as? How about the way faster GT cars would take *laps* to get past an NGT vehicle in GTR: We don't expect perfection, but developers should expect some backlash if unfinished products are released. After all, I don't see anyone offering refunds on this stuff, and relying on the community to develop 'work-arounds' is not good enough either.

I have spent some time with GTR2 since Christmas, and I must say I have seen some remarkable improvements from the first iteration. Following the AI cars sees them challenging each other, making small mistakes, and generally acting in a lot more believable fashion. I even did a mixed class forty-five minute race at Brno to test them further, and was pleased to see them not taking minutes to lap each other. The system was far from perfect—the GT cars had to fight their way past the slower cars rather than them giving way or yielding—but I suppose that would require a whole new level of programming. It did not ruin the race though, as gaps between the cars around me stayed constant as we fought our way through the traffic, even though Brno is a difficult track to pass on. True, there were some clashes, but hey—they happen in real-life too—René Arnoux and Matt Neal, please stand up! GTR2, then, has at least attempted to build on GTR and, despite numerous issues still plaguing the AI, it is, at the very least, a step in the right direction.

The right direction, though, will only be taken by developers if we, as consumers, begin to make some noise—which means, not flame-wars, but genuine constructive criticisms aimed at the developers. It worked with GTR (the dedicated server issue), so it can work here too, and what we are asking for is by no means impossible. Flight-and-combat-sims have

highly developed AI, and mostly because the players made it clear it was something they wanted. The focus of development for the past few years seems to have been on graphics and 'physics', and while there is nothing wrong with that, it has not left much room for improvement in other areas.

One can only hope that we will soon reach a stage where developers have to look elsewhere to attract people to their product, and that adding all those little things to improve the experience will become a real selling point like accurate physics are today. Some AI related suggestions I received in researching this article (have a look at the SimHQ forums to see the thread) included an interactive crew chief, as well more adaptable AI in a way that sports-simmers on consoles are already very familiar with.

I am not saying we have to write nasty letters or go about this in an aggressive way, but we do have to let developers know this is a feature that we want, and remind them that a sim that is as good offline as rFactor is online will have far more success in the market place. With new developments of existing software in the pipeline from Simbin and Blimey! Games, it will be interesting to see if significant progress is made, and perhaps more intriguing, one cannot help but wonder what Dave Kaemmer is planning over at iRacing; once again rumour has it that it will not even feature AI.

It will certainly be fascinating to see where we are on this issue in a year's time: With the ever-increasing affordability and availability of broadband, AI may well be something that is entirely left-out from future products, leaving the sim-racer very little alternative than to jump onto the nearest pick-up race and learn how to race door-to-door with live opponents ... either that, or someone's going to have to pay good money to teach the 'juniors' how to race side-by-side.

The Future

Eric Alexander takes out his crystal ball and predicts what is just beyond the blind-crest that is the year 2007 ... and why you should pay attention!

Eric Alexander



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2007—A New Year!

I'm going to take a cue off of American racing journalist Robin Miller and give a run down of what I hope 2007 has in store for us (and what I hope none of us ever see). The past few years have been banner years for sim-racing. The sport (yes I call it a sport now) has grown ever closer to becoming widely, and legitimately recognized due to

some special press in 2006. Notably—Denny Hamlin's comments about sim-racing following his rookie NASCAR win at Pocono. Let's hope 2007 brings more of the same cutting-edge expansion, and less of the inter-community flaming that we saw in 2006.

So, with 2006 something of a watershed year for sim-racing, here are my hopes for 2007:

»I hope 2007 sees sim-racers supporting all developers of quality racing simulations by purchasing their products. This means dropping the sim vs. sim argument and supporting *all* top-line sim-racing titles. It's the only way to send the collective message to the market about what general types of simulations that we want to see being made.

»I hope to see less flaming on forums in general. The Internet has been around a sufficiently long enough time for us to all understand how it works. *Yes, you can* say what ever you feel like saying. *No, you shouldn't* be doing it all the time you feel like it. Try to show a little less contempt, and a little more respect for your fellow sim-racers

»I hope Gjon and everyone at ISI continue to push the limits of developer support and update rFactor to even greater heights of sim-racing benchmarking. And if they 'were' to charge for a future update, I'd gladly pay as rFactor already is the best value ever in the history of sim-racing.

»I hope we continue to see innovative hardware that interfaces our racing simulations with real-world racing hardware like digital displays and tachometers.

»I hope sim-racers realize how important it is to support the innovative hardware developers to allow more expansion into this area of sim-racing.

»I hope Ian Bell continues on with Blimey Games! free of legal hassles, to produce cutting edge sim-racing titles well into the foreseeable future.

»I hope Blimey Games! makes a track pack for rFactor. I'd buy it.

»I hope sim-racers race more online and talk less online in 2007.

»I hope David Kaemmer hits the ball out of the park with iRacing.com and gives us the sim that the West brothers have been talking about for half a decade. I also hope the base software goes for over \$100.00 and is worth every penny!

»I hope The Pits NAGT mod for rFactor is as good as it looks.

»I hope more sim-racers learn the importance of the old saying, "to finish first you must first finish." Especially in Turn 1 on the opening lap.

»And on that note, I hope more sim-racers learn how important it is to show a little respect to other online racers when you crash out in Turn 1 of a ten-lap races. Here's how: *Do* stay connected, *don't* initiate a restart vote, *wait* ten-laps (try to enjoy watching the race. You know... drivers who *did* get through the first lap) and then *ask* if everyone wants to race again. It's easy—you should try it sometime.

»I really do believe the modders doing professional work should be able to ask for fair compensation. I hope the community in general learns to give more to these groups. I believe the way Hudson Kerr was criticized by the community was disgraceful. His Toban Raceway Park texture pack is still the greatest texture overhaul of any sim-racing track in 2006. I wish Hudson the best in his endeavors.

»On that note, I hope the community grows to relax about “stealing” textures, models and such. Let's face it, the community is all about a communal effort. If you put your work out there for, for *free*, you're *giving* it to the community. If someone else wants to add to it so be it. The cream will always rise to the top. Credit should always be given where due, but this act of vilifying modders who borrow from others work seems a little misguided to me. I mean, show me one sim-racing mod that does not use, or rely on, or is based on or around someone else's work. You know what, *there are none!*

»I hope it rains in 2007.

»I hope fully-functioning, trouble-free full-course cautions become a hallmark of rFactor. Then everyone can remove NASCAR Racing 2003 from their hard drives. And we'll have the first true Indycar simulation since Indycar Racing 2.

»I hope Rfactorcentral continues to be a pillar of the rFactor community. Pete's efforts are nothing short of amazing.

»I hope more sim-racers discover the beauty of NetKar PRO. It's hard, it's frustrating, it tries your patience like nothing else in sim-racing. Reminds me of racing cars. Funny how that is.

»I hope *every* car and track gets listed on RaceCast. This up to the track developers—*please do it!*

»Note to everyone: Step 1. Engage brain. Step 2. Engage gears.

»I hope Interactive Racing enjoys another year of rants, thanks to the fine folks at AUTOSIMSPORT magazine.

As always, my column allows for you the reader to interact in the AUTOSIMSPORT forums. If you have some other pet peeves about sim-racing in general, or God forbid, I struck a nerve, come get it off your chest. That's "Interactive Racing" under "Articles" on the AUTOSIMSPORT [message boards](#). Also feel free to interact (or inter-react as the case may be) on any of my past 2006 columns while there.

Be SEEN!

For rates and further information,
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AUTOSIMSPORT

Nascar HEAT

Appeal for news items to post!

I do my very best to hunt down any and all news items in the NASCAR HEAT community, but I'm no search engine. Some things are bound to be missed due to lack of time, or just plain human errors. So I ask anyone with the slightest bit of news to send it to me by [email](#). Anything newsworthy goes. Got a new site? Setting up a new league? Are you releasing a mod or a track? A new utility for the NASCAR HEAT platform? Anything at all? Just send it to [me](#). No news is too small. And ... any news sent in will not only be posted here in AUTOSIMSPORT, but will also be posted on the main page of [SCORE](#).

MagnusTellbom

Snakes on a Plain!

Magnus Tellbom gets all out-of-shape as HEAT returns to its oval-based genesis—but first, a brief history on how one snake killed-off an entire purpose-built racing facility!





Colorado Pace Park Review

I think I have said it a few times in the past, but I do need to say this again: There is a sim-racing God, and he loves me. Why else would stuff fall on me like divine kerb-markings from the sky? Why else would I be the one fortunate enough to write reviews of all those super-fine things that leave Smoke's computer? Yes my friends, it's once more *track review time*, because Smoke has released a wonderful thing called Colorado Pace Park.

When I read the release notes for this track, I learned that that this track was planned, built, tested ... and never used—all because environmentalists found a snake on its grounds. That's right: A snake. Okay, it should probably be added that this was no ordinary run-of-the-mill snake: It was a snake so rare it virtually didn't exist, and, to top it all off, the thing was using the grounds as one giant love nest. All of which meant—no racing allowed, since it was deemed too destructive to disturb the snake.

Is this a myth? An urban legend? I can't tell you, because I have not been able to dig up one single piece of information about this project. It's not mentioned in the famous (and sadly closed) Motor Racing Circuits Database, and it's not found on e-tracks online, and not

one single bit of info' turned up on Wikipedia. If I turn to regular search engines, I come up with nothing. *Zilch! Nada!*

So ... how shall we define this track? Is it a real track, or is it a fantasy track? Well, to tell you the truth, I don't really care. I mean, if the thing slithers and hisses and has scales, it's probably a snake, right? Right. Now where was I? Yes, right ... I couldn't care less, that's it—I care only about how bleeding beautiful it is. The track that is, not the snake. I really couldn't care less about the damn snake! I care only about how well the track is made, how much of a challenge it is to drive, and how fast I can go on it. Because *that*, my friends, is what it's all about.

The download is 11.2MB, and it's available on the very fast and reliable [texasspeedracing](http://texasspeedracing.com) site. It comes as an .EXE install, which makes it painless and fast to get going. It also comes with two custom garage setups, one advanced and one default, both made for road course racing. So far, then, it's 10 out of 10.

The AI line seems to be suited for cars with more than average downforce, like Group C beasts, or one of the formula car mods, but it works as a first-try for the more standard cars like STCC or WGTS. So even if you would want to create your own mod-specific AI lines in the future, this is more than possible. Thank you, Smoke!

Once you're on-track, it's hard to focus on the technical stuff, because you are faced with a track that, graphically, doesn't have any flaws. Perfect textures on just about everything from tarmac to tree, and fences that you can actually see through, crowds that look alive, concrete walls that have just the right patina, sponsor and commercial signs that look crisp and sharp, all of this and more make your first encounter with this track an experience you won't soon forget. And it's all framed-in by this scenic landscape box that almost takes your breath away. About the only thing I've seen better in any track for HEAT is the anti-corrosion mats beside the kerbs,

but who has time to study such details when you're going 150mph? Nope, this is as good as it gets.

But does all this good looks take its toll on frame rate? Well I can't really say since I got a new test-computer which runs HEAT at max frame rate (63 FPS) at all times. So ... I just set every graphics option to max, and I enjoy the ride around my new favourite track.



Nextel Heat '06 Review

Now, I know I had a Cup Car-style mod on review last month, and I know some said it was unfair to give it 'only' 7 out of 10. But what can one do when mods in that genre must go toe-to-toe against the Champion, the undefeated—the Nextel Heat '06 mod, the mod to which all others must be judged? I am almost out of breath in announcing that—ladies and gentlemen—it's finally done! Finished, released, and by now, downloaded many-many times. It's available from several locations, but the official release was made on The Mod Squad.

The package is about 90.5MB, and comes as a very easy install.EXE, which installed it on my hard drive in less than fifteen seconds. And that's good 'cause I hate waiting. So next step was to fire the mod up, and take a look at the goodies.



The User Interface is, of course, custom made. In bright orange and yellow colours with the Nextel Cup '06 badge in black and metal centered, I'm faced with pretty-much standard buttons, and a hard rock cover version of a (ahem) ... Phil Collins song? The UI is clean and it works, but I must admit I liked the '05 UI better, with its brushed aluminium look and 'Eye of the Tiger' coming out of the

speakers. Still, this year's version works and, furthermore, since it's not a major rebuild of the UI like Cholerix is doing for his upcoming Sportscar GTS mod, it's very straight forward to navigate.

There are forty-seven cars to choose from in the '06 version. All with life-like paints, and all modeled to a detail which is utterly stunning, and all beautifully

rendered for the car selection screen. I can tell that these models were made by artists who know their way around a 3D modeling program, and the result is very satisfactory. I went for the #16 National Guard Car since it's the first one in the list, and I headed to Atlanta where I tested the other Cup Car mod last month.

The default garage settings work well, and the AI prove to be satisfactory, although maybe a tad easier in the Hard setting than what I'm used to. I actually gave them a go on Pro level, and that turned out to be more up my alley in this mod. The AI are pretty aggressive, as you'd expect from a NASCAR mod; they trade paint, fight amongst each other as they constantly try to improve their own position on track, and generally make you life difficult if you mess too much with them. And while I'm on the subject of driving these cars ... you really, should just see the inside. This is a cockpit worth driving in. If I could ask for anything, I would ask for a more distinct difference between the three cars while in cockpit view, but still ... these cockpits are really something. Not one other NASCAR sim come close to this sort of beauty.

I do come up against the same question about physics as I had last month though ... Are the physics fudged? Is the track too short? Or are the cars not using restrictor plates? Every single bit of info I find about today's real-world times and speeds on Atlanta say they should have an average speed of 160mph, and not 180 plus like these cars exhibit. Ten or so years ago the speeds were higher, and I suspect this was before the restrictor plates were introduced to Cup Car racing. So ... even though the cars feel real enough, and even though it's very easy to make mistakes and spin out, and even though I honestly can say there isn't the slightest bit of arcade feeling about this mod, I still have to ask ... Are the physics *accurate*?

Bottom line then ... Well it's not easy this ... While I'm in the car, *driving* it, I feel it's a 10 out of 10. But I honestly liked the old UI better. Everything about this mod is

beautifully done though, and absolutely nothing is missing. But still ... There really should be more difference between the three cockpits ... And haven't I heard that engine sound before? All in all, I have to deduct one point from a perfect score and give it a 9 out of 10. Having said that, I must also tell you that regardless of what sim you're driving right now, you will struggle to find a better looking NASCAR-style mod. So go visit [The Mod Squad](#) right away, and secure your copy today!



Car of Tomorrow Review

Just when you think it can't get any better, it hits you like a divine strike from the racing god in the sky. Yet another stock car mod—this time a conversion—was handed out like new-rubber at a Vegas convention to the already ecstatic oval crowd. I'm talking about the Car of Tomorrow mod, which is a conversion from rFactor to NASCAR HEAT. But as you will soon learn, the HEAT version was released with a little something extra.

First things first though. The install is 103MB, and it's available from several locations. For slow connection users with dial-up and such, it is accessible as a seven part .RAR download, while a high res' texture pack is also

offered for those with high-end machines that can really handle this beast unleashed. Installation is painless as usual, and I'm up and running in no time at all. And this is a good thing, because I was almost instantly confronted with divinity!

You see, there is a two-part track set available to accompany this mod featuring all the tracks from the upcoming season 2007, if I'm not mistaken. This is a rare release, and it will most probably make most oval racers very happy. Some of the in-game ovals really needed a face lift.



On firing-up the mod, you are confronted with a short intro' movie—something that's almost becoming a Blaxman signature, and I do like it. Unfortunately, the UI has a somewhat low resolution feel to it—I can best describe it as a little dull. But the tune is catchy enough, and we're not exactly here to study a User Interface in detail now, are we!

Clicking through the screens, selecting Atlanta as I usually do, I set out to do a little test race with the AIs, only to find out that the mod ships with custom setups available in the garage, and custom-made AI paths to suit the updated tracks. This is indeed heaven.



After picking the setup available, I head out on the track, and instantly discover two things: The AI is superb, and very hard to handle for a rookie like me, and this mod has even got a custom made spotter voice. Magnificent! And when I sit down in the cars, the instrumentation is crisp, easy to read, and custom-made for each of the four cars. I must say that this takes the prize. It has been a long time since I saw this much attention to the little details and, as we all know, it's all those little bits and pieces one never considers that makes a mod sparkle.

My only gripe? Well it's the same as with the other oval-mods I've reviewed in the last two months—should the cars really lap Atlanta in about thirty seconds?

Bottom line is very simple. This mod is a 10 out of 10, plain and simple. Why? Because it ships with good graphics, both for low end systems, as well as for high end systems, and it ships with custom AI and pre-made setups for those who know nothing about setting up a car. It also comes with this wonderful custom spotter voice that is so much better than the original one, and it has the tracks to match the mod. It can not get better. Do yourself a favour and get this one right away. Available, once more, from the [Mod Squad](#).

NASCAR HEAT News

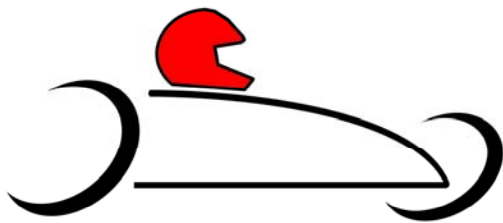
Craftsman Truck Series!

Finally it seems as if NASCAR HEAT is going to get an up-to-date Craftsman Truck Series mod. A little post at the Mod Squad, complete with preview pictures, shows what might be the next big oval release for our favourite sim. The information is available [here](#)—enjoy! See you on-track.

GPLEGACY ... What's yet to come?

Sergio and Co. have done it again ... sim-racing's most passionate crew are heavily involved with promoting our sport throughout the world, and this month sees AUTOSIMSPORT and GPLEGACY begin a formal arrangement which will bring our readers never-before seen goodies ... stay tuned!

GPLegacy.com



AUTOSIMSPORT Editorial

Their slogan is tricky at first, but once you get familiar with the concept, "Leave more than skidmarks ... Leave a legacy!", it's easy to see why these guys are making all this noise, and taking sim-racing's involvement with real-world motor-sports into a never-before imagined level. Through their personal investment (money, dedication, passion, and—yes, money) GPLEGACY has transformed itself from an unknown small project in sim-racing into a revolutionary force that is promoting this sport at many of the world's premiere events.

GPLEGACY's constant stream of articles for AUTOSIMSPORT keep astounding all of us here, and to this day, none of us know quite how they manage to get themselves prime seats at Champ Car events, A1GP events and, as you will see in this month's pages, International Motor-Shows. And we're not talking about a guy with a camera here: We're talking about full, and official access.

Leaving a legacy, for GPLEGACY, is being willing to take the longer and more rewarding road, and exploring all avenues that will see everyone come out a winner. Whether you are a newbie at sim-racing, or a veteran developer, these folks will give it their all to make sure that your work leaves a legacy as well.

By listening and recognizing the goals of sim-racing enthusiasts, be they developers, sim-racers, or those involved in the hundreds of projects that surround this synergetic community, GPLEGACY has remained committed to providing a platform for shared success amongst all of those entities with which Sergio Bustamante and co. enjoy a fruitful working relationship. Indeed, loyalty is one thing that Sergio has shown to treasure amongst all others, and AUTOSIMSPORT is but one entity to have been enriched by his personal affability and his dedication to making things happen.

Sergio has been, and remains, a very loyal friend to AUTOSIMSPORT, and, through his hard work at GPLEGACY, there are many surprises in store coming in the next few months: AUTOSIMSPORT is very excited by this, and we know our readers will benefit enormously through our mutual association.

In GPLEGACY, AUTOSIMSPORT has found a kindred soul, along with a passion, dedication and work-ethic that seeks, above-all, to *get things done*, despite the odds and, frequently, the sleepless nights.

Our first full project together will be released in February: A glossy special issue of the cars and sights that this year paraded at the SALON INTERNACIONAL DEL AUTOMOVIL MEXICO (SIAM) 2007 ... but this is just the start, as AUTOSIMSPORT and GPLEGACY begin to travel on the cyber-road bonded by one goal: To enjoy the adventure.

SALON INTERNACIONAL DEL AUTOMOVIL MEXICO



Marcelo Lagos, Carlos Suarez-Peredo, Cristyan Elizalde, and Clara McLean are on hand as sim-racing finishes off 2006 in style: GPLEGACY, rFactor, AUTOSIMSPORT, and Logitech wrap up a fantastic showcase year in Mexico in the most important auto industry tradeshow in Latin America, SIAM.

Photos: Courtesy of GPLEGACY, Luis Monroy, Carlos-Suarez Peredo, Antonio Reyes (Tech4PCs Director) Cristyan Elizalde, Alejandro Zaragoza

One year Ago, sim-racing was presented and showcased at SIAM 2005, which represented in itself a great achievement for the sport, and a dream come true for a young community like GPLEGACY that had been born only five months earlier, 'out of nowhere'.

This event represented a great opportunity to showcase ISI's rFactor, along Logitech, and AUTOSIMSPORT to car makers, major motor-sport players, racing series directors, team managers and drivers, media, and over 17,000 spectators.

Along with its main sponsor Tecate, GPLEGACY debuted its Antartida Omega I race-frame, which was featured here on AUTOSIMSPORT.

In December 2005, those intimately involved with GPLEGACY dreamt of being an official part of such a large event, which is the largest motor-sports tradeshow in Latin America. At the end of the event, Sergio Bustamante, GPLEGACY's founder, and Marcelo Lagos, exchanged looks for a while, knowing that, whatever happened in 2006, the end of the year would see them at SIAM as an official entry of some sort.

Brands that are able to afford a stand in an Auto Show—especially the biggest such show in Latin America—are household names such as HSBC, Telcel, Nextel, Telmex, American Express, Tecate, Motorcraft, AC Delco, and so forth. Even the 'small' spaces are reserved for such revered brands such as Car & Driver and the like.



Memo Rojas, first time training with the Proton Mod in Rfactor, now getting ready for Daytona's 24 hours in James Burroughs Daytona Track

Being at such a tradeshow would be a major accomplishment for GPLEGACY, especially in a country where sim-racing remains in its infancy.

But come SIAM 2006, and not only did GPLEGACY achieve its goal of being officially present at the event, but they managed—throughout the year—to stun the media with over twenty-seven events, actively promoting

sim-racing—and rFactor in particular—to what is becoming increasingly a less skeptical real-world. The remarkable thing is that this was achieved without a large budget (if there's been a word missing in this project it has been 'budget'), and it demonstrates what can be done using nothing more than savings, loans, and, sometimes, compensating the financial restrictions with overworking in different projects.

Investing for a full year in a project is not an easy task, especially when you have to believe there's a light at the end of the tunnel, but GPLEGACY's Sergio Bustamante believes that he's beyond that tunnel, and already in one of the brightest places in the sport that is sim racing.



The Mexican Auto Show (SIAM 2006)

AUTOSIMSPORT is proud to present the following highlights from SIAM, courtesy of GPLEGACY's involvement and alliance with FotoMix, who are kindly thanked for allowing us full access to their stunning photographic work and archive.



GPLegacy showcased 2 different GPLEgacy Antartida raceframes with Logitech gear, and(left) Scarlett, GPLEgacy's Mexico image at the press photoshoot for Autosimsport with the anniversary hats, boasting Rfactor, Logitech and GPLEgacy's logos as seen on Champ Car 2006.

Pro-drivers who exhibited the sim-racing concept, featuring rFactor software, and Logitech hardware were:
Salvador Durán – A1GP Team Mexico – Escuderia Telmex
Guillermo Rojas Jr. – Grand Am Chip Ganassi Racing – Escuderia Telmex



Benito Guerra's Mitsubishi Evo, Mexican Rally Champion 2006 – notice the sticker under the names Guerra Jr. and Brizio

Benito Guerra Jr – Mexico's Rally Champion – Racing in Finland's rally championship for 2007, training with GPLEGACY

Carlos Pardo – NASCAR Mexico's championship runner up – Telcel and Escuderia Telmex

Antonio Tame – Ford Motorcraft Racing Team Director and driver – NASCAR Mexico

Alan Williams – Pegaso Test Driver – Test driver for Ford – GPLEGACY's sponsored driver

Israel Jaitovich, NASCAR Team owner and driver, and comedy star, was a VIP of GPLEGACY throughout the event where he showcased his talents by winning a Team race in rFactor. It's worthy to mention that his teammate was Sergio Bustamante.



Spectators while Alan Williams proved that the BMW Sauber was a tough, yet controllable beast.



Oscar, from Centro Banamex Security with a heavy audience as he drove the fantastic CTD Formula 1 mod which was heavily recommended by GPLEgacy at the event.

Electronic Game Show Organizers: Oelli.

After the relationship forged with GPLegacy earlier this year at the Electronic Game Show, Oelli worked together with GPLEGACY in promoting sim-racing at both their stands at SIAM: They exhibited Need For Speed Carbon, in several XBOX 360 systems, while GPLEGACY also introduced the Nintendo Wii at their stand with NFS Carbon.

Special thanks go to Andrea, Luis Carcamo, Jorge Castillo, Montse, and all the brilliant Oelli staff.

Press Conference at SIAM highlighting sim-racing's relationship with real-world motor-sports

A1 Grand Prix held a press conference, as did NASCAR Mexico. Escuderia Telmex presented Memo Rojas Jr. as their new Grand Am driver for Team Chip Ganassi, while Luis Chapulin Diaz and Salvador Duran all received prizes along with Picho Toledano ...

A press conference featuring sim-racing's very own rFactor, along with the GPLEGACY concept, was certainly a highlight ...

GPLEGACY also conducted their first International Press conference for five TV channels, seven newspapers, sportcar.com, and assorted magazines. They had the privilege to have Mexican Legend Eduardo Leon introducing Sergio Bustamante along with the GPLEGACY concept.

The highlights of the conference were speaking on behalf of Image Space Inc.'s rFactor software as. As a leader in the simulated racing market, GPLEGACY stressed the key characteristics of the software that make it a leading real-world racing simulator, Logitech's developments as a leading hardware brand were also noted, and the announcement that the G25 wheel would reach the Mexican Market later in 2007 was welcomed by the press, and enthusiasts alike.

The alliances with Tech4Pcs and sportcar.com, Latin America's largest motor-sports website, was also featured in the conference, as well as Bridgestone's wide support to sim-racing through GPLEGACY Mexico.

Mexican Driver José Montaña endorsed the GPLEGACY project, and kept Sergio Bustamante, Carlos Suarez-Peredo, Cristyan Elizalde and Antonio Reyes company in the podium. He stressed the fact that he was not being sponsored by GPLEGACY, and that the reason he was on the podium was to verify the realism that rFactor to simulation, especially when mated with GPLEGACY Antartida Race-frame, along with Logitech's hardware.

Now you're probably asking ... where are the ladies that makes Auto Shows such fascinating events? We wanted to bring you first the thrill of the show which took place since December 10th to December 21st, 2006.

AUTOSIMSPORT will be issuing a special SIAM issue in mid-February with all the cars and sites of this great event— please check the site for this un-missable first in a series of special issues featuring Auto-Shows from around the world ... all exclusively available at AUTOSIMSPORT and courtesy of GPLEGACY ...



So yes it's a car ...

Further images are available:

www.gplegacy.com

www.racingmediacenter.com

TECH4PCS—A New Era PCs

Luis Monroy on the marriage between soft and hardware ... and Tech4pcs super-PC that ran rFactor at an astounding 270 frames per second!

Photos courtesy of Tech4Pcs Antonio Reyes, and GPLegacy Mexico, Luis Monroy, Tony Otero



One of the most important developments in GPLEGACY has been the alliance with computer guru Antonio Reyes, from Venezuela, who leads a very ambitious project which is now taking form in a most stunning way. Tech4Pcs is made by computer enthusiasts, gurus, and experts that are focused not only on performance levels, but also in the aesthetics of computer equipment. The highly specialized PC modding that Tech4Pcs brings to the computer world is a fresh look at the artistic enhancement of technology.

The project, which powered the GPLEGACY stand's rFactor sim in all its glorious detail, was also used to promote Intel, Nvidia, MSI, and Kingston. The loading screen for rFactor (while loading tracks), was emblazoned with www.tech4pcs.com logo, as well as these major developer brands in the computer industry.



"We are very grateful for this alliance, and we hope it is the start of a new ocean of possibilities. The computer that was provided is a true piece of art, and the performance it has is simply like nothing I've ever seen before. If there's a highly tuned, brutal horsepower engine for a simulator, I believe this is the top of the top, bar-none," said an enthused Sergio Bustamante at the press conference.

Tech4Pcs presented Intel's QuadCore engineering Sample (4 core system), the only processor of its kind in latin America, 4gb Kingston hyperX Display enabled RAM, Nvidia as a sponsor with the GeForce FX 8800 Sample (768 DDR3 compatible videocard), Dual water-intercooler, Kingston's LCD DDR3 sets, plus a full display of UV show inside the Tech4Pcs exclusive headcase.



The way rFactor performed on this system was simply stunning, pushing 275 frames per second with full graphics, DX9, highest anisotropic filters, thirty-two cars with day-night transition set at 60X.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Chequered Flag

Racing Times

The Battle of Nations, plus GPC FR2000 IC Season Review, and introducing The Sim Touring Car Cup.



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

THE BATTLE OF NATIONS

Kyle Scott reports

There's never anything more intense than the battle between nations, and nothing that provokes friends to become foes in the blink of an eye.

One of the world's biggest rivalries, of course, is that 'enjoyed' between Australia and New Zealand. Despite the friendship displayed by both countries during a couple of World Wars, natural disasters, and the like, put us on a field, racetrack, pool or stadium, and it becomes a battle. There's a saying here in New Zealand: "I support NZ, and any team playing against Australia."

So what could be more fun than having a racing battle—nation against nation, with glory and pride for the winner, absolute humiliation and taunts to the loser? Nothing much, really!

There's a very active sim-racing scene in both countries—Kiwisim Racing for the hardy New Zealanders, AusTeam Racing for the plucky Australians. What started a couple of years ago with NASCAR 2003 has spawned to the latest battle—rFactor V8 Super cars, racing around the home of Australian motor-sport: Bathurst.

Each October, in real-life, it's the one motor-race that stops both countries as the Bathurst 1000 roars around—over six hours of classic racing that is simply magical to watch. Hitting over 280kph downhill on the back straight before flicking it into a right hander—it'll make the hairs stand up on your neck.

Early Trans-Tasman races were raced with NASCAR 2003—something the Kiwis excelled in. Oval tracks, team tactics, communication, drafting, and foot to the floor racing meant the Australians were, well, simply left in the dust. So when the time came around for another Trans-Tasman race, the V8 Supercars mod simply leapt out to us as the one to use. The old Ford vs. Holden rivalry was cast aside because this was much more important than that—it was nation against nation.

Forty drivers, on a 24-Hour circuit of Bathurst compressed into two hours of racing, the race promised to be challenging, fun and scary. And when those lights came on, those brake markers just seemed to disappear!

After much organising between league officials, drivers were chosen, grid positions assigned, paint schemes ... painted. There's a two hour time difference between countries, so a 10PM NZT time was chosen.



RACE START: A disaster, with a huge smash on the front straight involving 6 cars, followed by an Oz car shunted into the sand trap at Hell Corner. Out pops the course wide yellow flag, that, on a 6km circuit, means 3 very slow laps.

This time, there was a new feature to the race—LRC, or Live Race Call joined the party. Drivers not competing could log into a media stream, and listen to live commentary of the race. It adds a stunning new dimension to sim-racing that, once experienced, you'll never want to miss again.

GREEN FLAG : the field spreads out very quickly as the top guns simply glue to the track, while the less confident drivers slip and slide around on cold tyres. Near the top of the mountain, Kiwi drivers are like ice skaters, smacking

into walls the seem to leap out at them, while the green and gold Oz cars drive off with the lead.

SimTV were along for the ride as well—planning a video highlights package and hoping to show all the good stuff of awesome Kiwi driving, and yet another Kiwi victory. Combining LRC commentary and race coverage from the track lifts the immersion factor considerably (by the way, the track cameras here match real-life TV coverage perfectly).



UPDATE : Slowly, cars are dropping off and the battle amongst the front leaders carries on into the night. Lead Kiwi driver Riven unexpectedly spun, dropping him for 3rd to 28th position. But rather than hand victory to the Aussies, he simply drives the pants off his Holden Commodore.

Bathurst is a very tough circuit, allowing no room for errors and one hundred percent concentration. So to add to the challenge, the race was to be run over a 24-Hour time period. Better make sure those lights are mapped to buttons, aye.

It's simply amazing how technology has allowed the sim-racer to become more immersed than ever before. Voice communications, including live race commentary with driver interviews during full course yellow flags has become the norm. Drivers can watch a replay of them with the fool hardy overtaking maneuver, or skilful pass, depending on how you see it.



As the race progresses, it's clear the Australians have the race under control. Kiwis are filling up the middle of the field, but it's just not enough. After 2 hours of racing Ben Cornett has aced the field, and so as he takes the chequered flag, with a touch of flair, he does a '180' and crosses it backwards. Victory to the Australians—first place and overall points winners.

So it's another year, another international racing event between two countries, and Australia takes the trophy as

winners this time by. And thanks to that technology, we (or I suppose they!) can watch it over and over again.

SimTV, who spend their spare time making race videos, enrolls the use of real-life TV show host Howard Dobson to add a different dimension to the viewing. Add some LRC race commentary, and you've got great moments to sit back and watch again.

If you ever want to have a heap of fun racing, try driving for your country—it's a beauty!

Be SEEN!

**For rates and further
information,
contact:**

lou.magyar@autosimsport.net

Those involved :

New Zealand www.kiwisimracing.net.nz

Australia : www.austeamracing.com

LRC Live Race Call : www.lrc.austeamracing.com

[SimTV](#) :

[Hi-res](#).



GPChampionship.com's netKar PRO FR2000 International Championship 2006.2 Review

Jaap Wagenvoort reports

In August 2006, GPChampionship.com organised the first official netKar PRO online championship. It was a huge success and assured GPC as the world's top nKPro league. The ever-swelling numbers meant that there was four times the available capacity trying to pre-qualify for the races. It was only logical, then, that GPChampionship would need to build on the success of their first season. Season 2006.2 was the result.

More drivers, more tracks, more competition and more races. All the favorites from 2006.1 were back again. Wagenvoort was defending his title. Almeida was trying to win it this time around, and teamed up with Woodward at the newly founded Ajira Racing team. Among the newcomers was well-known sim-racing driver Artur Mlodzinski, two-times GPChampionship champion (2000 & 2001 F1 champion with GP3) Christian Neumann, and Martin Dyrland.

The FR2000 International Championship was again contested with the well-known Formula Renault 2.0

racecar. An international field of sim-racers, representing over twenty-five different nationalities, did justice to the title of the series. netKar PRO, that offers a fantastic and very realistic car racing simulation including FullMode which brings realistic waiting time in case of a change to the setup or in case of repairing incurred car damage, proved a real challenge to the drivers. The result: drivers that carefully drive in qualifying and the race to avoid damage with no possibility to just reset the car. Realism. That is what GPChampionship's netKar PRO sim-racing is all about.

Season 2006.2

Five events were scheduled in 2006.2. Compared to 2006.1, two groups were now able to race. The top fifteen from pre-qualifying lined up in Group A, and positions sixteen to thirty from PQ battled it out in Group B. Position fifteen in Group B was rewarded with one point, with the winner of the Group A race collecting forty points from a race. One thing was certain: thanks to this structure, the competition would be tough, and the best of the best would fight it out against each other in Group A.

Race 1 & 2: November 4th 2006—Aviano (Full GP)

The season started at the end of the October. Over seventy drivers competed in the pre-qualifying to grab one of the wanted places in either of the groups. After the five-day pre-qualifying session was over, the expected front runners all managed to get into Group A.

On Saturday November 4th, 2006, the season kicked off with the Event 1 races. Group B started the season at Aviano (Full GP layout). Dutchman Tim Mosmans was the class of the Group B field as he won both the sprint (8 laps) and the feature race (24 laps). Justin White qualified in pole-position, but finished 2nd in the sprint race with British driver Sam Guest taking the final podium finish.



The feature race started with a crash as Sam Guest made a mistake going into the first corner. Purcell, Romero, Crompton, Guest and White all retired. After 24 laps, Mosmans took an unchallenged victory. Sam Skipper and Alberto Canzi stood besides Mosmans on the Group B podium.

After the Group B races, the paddock prepared for the main races of the day: Group A! Phil Woodward, already

fast at Aviano in 2006.1, was the fastest in qualifying. He outpaced 2006.1 champion Jaap Wagenvoort. In the sprint race, Woodward was again the fastest of the field. Wagenvoort had to defend against 3rd placed Almeida and so Woodward took his first win of the season ahead of Wagenvoort and Almeida.

The feature race, with the grid being based on the result of the sprint race, saw a different situation. This

time it was Wagenvoort with the best start and he took the lead ahead of Daniel Almeida. Wagenvoort got a 3-second lead until his connection broke and he retired instantly. What followed was a fight between teammates Almeida & Woodward. Almeida won it. Woodward finished 2nd. Bram Schoonderbeek took his first podium finish of his GPC career by claiming third after 24 laps.

Race 3 & 4: November 11th 2006—Dijon-Prenois

After the Aviano event, the GPC paddock immediately moved to Sunny France for the 2nd event which took place at the twisty Dijon-Prenois track. In pre-qualifying, it was new driver Artur Mlodzinski who showed the pace. The Group B sprint race was a one-man show as Finnish driver Juha Pyy won the race with a 7-second lead over Sam Skipper and Bram Schoonderbeek. Pyy also won the 24-lap feature race. Schoonderbeek finished a distant 2nd. White took his 2nd podium finish of the season as he claimed 3rd place.

In Group A it was Artur Mlodzinski who arrived in the paddock with a bang. He took pole-position, outpacing Wagenvoort and Dyrland. The sprint was also prey for the quick Polish driver as he kept Wagenvoort at a safe distance. Dyrland finished 3rd as all drivers did not want to take too much risk in order to avoid destroying their feature race chances.

Wagenvoort took more risk in the feature race. As the lights went green, he immediately put pressure on Mlodzinski and passed him for the lead going into turn 1. Dyrland misjudged his braking, touched Mlodzinski and spun. Wagenvoort soon got Mlodzinski right behind him and the two fought for several laps until Mlodzinski spun at the difficult right hander in the 2nd sector. More drama on lap 10 as Mlodzinski spun again in an attempt to pass Guest. The cars collided and retired. The upcoming Francois Nacabal couldn't avoid Mlodzinski, and also retired. Wagenvoort went on to take an unthreatened

victory. Daniel Almeida made the most of the event as he claimed 2nd place in front of Mauricio Tejedor who scored his career best result with 3rd place in the Group A feature race.

Race 5 & 6: November 25th 2006—Montreal

For the 3rd event of the 2006.2 the paddock moved to yet another brand-new track: Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in Canada.

In pre-qualifying, Artur Mlodzinski was again showing his impressive speed. He was the fastest even though Daniel Almeida was much more competitive than in France. On raceday, a new young driver showed his pace in Group B. Lucas Gerrijs—an independent driver—took pole-position and drove to a convincing victory in the sprint race on his first official outing in the GPChampionship. A performance that would not remain unnoticed by the top teams.

Sam Guest celebrated his 2nd podium of the season as he took 2nd place in front of Robinia Luigi. The 20-lap feature race looked to become another Gerrijs show as he developed a stunning lead in the opening laps, but his show was cut short by a clutch failure on lap 12. Second place Sam Guest kindly took advantage, and did not make any mistakes as he took his maiden victory in the GPChampionship. Mauricio Tejedor, this time pre-qualified in Group B, took 2nd place whilst compatriot Pedro Andres took 3rd to celebrate his career best result.

The highlights of the day were again in the Group A races, as always scheduled right after the Group B races on raceday.

Artur Mlodzinski continued his form as displayed in pre-qualifying as he took the most convincing pole of the season. His qualifying time was almost a second faster than anyone else. Almeida took 2nd, closely followed by FWN-driver Christoph Jungwirth.

At the start of the sprint race it was Daniel Almeida who took the lead from Mlodzinski. Just like Dijon, Mlodzinski wasn't able to get the best getaway. Dyrlund held on to 3rd place. All seemed set for Almeida's 2nd win of the season as he managed to keep the charging Mlodzinski behind him. However, on the last lap, Mlodzinski got into the slipstream of Almeida and muscled his way past the stunned Almeida. Victory for Mlodzinski.

Only one race left in Canada for the FR2000IC Group A drivers. Mlodzinski on pole, Almeida in 2nd. 20 laps to go. As the lights switched to green, it was again Almeida with the better start. Wagenvoort also passed Mlodzinski as he moved up from 4th to 2nd place. Behind Wagenvoort the mayhem started as the cars of Juha Pyy (4th) and Martin Dyrlund (5th) tangled between corners 1 and 2. The cars immediately blocked the already narrow track and the total of 9 drivers could not avoid the incident.

After a few laps, Mlodzinski closed the gap to Wagenvoort and was clearly quicker than the struggling, reigning champion. Mlodzinski passed Wagenvoort on the back straight and now faced a 5-second gap to Almeida. With 5 laps to go, Mlodzinski had closed the gap to the Swiss driver in the lead. Mlodzinski was trying to pass Almeida, but Almeida had learned his lesson from the last corner move of the sprint race. He held on to the lead and defended another last corner move by Mlodzinski to win the race by just over a tenth of a second. Wagenvoort finished a distant 3rd.

Race 7 & 8: December 9th 2006—Prato (Short)

Only two events to go in the season. Almeida was leading the championship, with Wagenvoort in 2nd place. Wagenvoort really needed to strike back in Prato in order to have any chance of defending his championship. Pre-qualifying immediately revealed that the Prato event was going to be a very close and exciting one. Woodward,

Almeida, Wagenvoort and Mlodzinski were all within tenths of a second of one another.

However, as always, the Group B drivers made the first appearance on raceday. It was FWN-driver Christoph Jungwirth who was the fastest in qualifying. He outpaced Luigi Paziienza and Max Vietmeier. Jungwirth was dominant in the 9-lap sprint race as he quickly developed a margin over Paziienza and Tejedor. A last lap incident between the two (Paziienza and Tejedor) saw them both losing certain podium finishes, and cause happy faces in the nDex Engineering (2nd place for Spencer) and Skunk Racing (3rd place for Manton) teams.

Jungwirth started on pole for the feature race. 27 laps to go for the participants. However, Jungwirth got into trouble in the 3rd corner and suffered damage. Stan Manton had by far the best start and moved up from 3rd to 1st at the end of lap 1. Todd Willing got up to 2nd while Andrew Spencer had to settle for 3rd early on. Willing got into trouble and dropped to 6th on lap 2, allowing Spencer to move up to 2nd and fight Manton. Manton was getting up to pace in the lead though, and looked solid and heading for his first GPC career victory. However, it was not to be for the young British driver as disaster struck on lap 12. Back marker Cervini was driving a damaged car and spun right in front of the upcoming Manton. Manton got distracted for a moment and could not avoid the spun car. Both drivers immediately retired from the race, and Manton was left disappointed. Spencer took advantage as he moved up to first place. Spencer had no time to relax upfront as South African Colin Crompton was not about to give up his chance to win his first race.

Crompton pushed harder and harder as he put pressure on Spencer. Spencer also increased his pace, and could manage the gap to Crompton. After 27 laps, it was Spencer who took his first career victory, edging out Crompton. Todd Willing was another happy man as he collected his first trophy by claiming third place.

After the Group B drama, the paddock prepared for the Group A race. The clash between the titans. Mlodzinski, Woodward, Almeida and Wagenvoort: All the championship candidates were there. With only 2 events to go, things were getting more intense.

As usual, Artur Mlodzinski was fast again in qualifying, attaining pole-position. Unlike Montreal, the gap to the 2nd placed driver (Jaap Wagenvoort) wasn't almost a second—a mere 0.018 was the difference between the two. Behind them, Ajira Racing filled the 2nd row with Phil Woodward beating Daniel Almeida by 0.006.

This time, Artur Mlodzinski did manage to get a decent start to the 9-lap sprint race. He took the lead and kept Wagenvoort and Almeida behind him. Wagenvoort immediately put pressure on Mlodzinski and, exiting the final corner, the reigning champion got a toe from Mlodzinski and passed him on the start/finish straight to take the lead. Mlodzinski was obviously having some handling problems as he almost lost it two laps later exiting the final turn. This time Almeida was taking advantage and moved up to 2nd place. Almeida then tried to close the gap to the leader, but Wagenvoort and Almeida were on similar pace at Prato so only mistakes could make the difference. Mistakes that were bound to happen ...

Mlodzinski though, was the first one to make a mistake. He was fighting with Veenstra for P5 when things went wrong and he spun off the track, dropping all the way back to P9. He recovered to P8, but obviously did not expect to see his sprint race to end this way after qualifying in pole-position. After 9 laps, Wagenvoort took his 2nd win of the season and an important one as he had to win in order to have any chance to win the Driver's Championship. Almeida took important points and Woodward did a solid race which saw him returning to the podium for the first time since the Aviano event.

One race to go. The 27-lap feature race. The battle between the championship contenders. Would Almeida be able to overtake Wagenvoort, or would the champion show that he still had what it takes? As the lights went green, both drivers enjoyed a great start. Wagenvoort held on to the lead. Almeida tried to challenge, but almost lost his car on lap 1 as he drifted off-track in Wagenvoort's dirty air. This gave Wagenvoort a small gap. Mlodzinski got off to a good start, avoided trouble in a start crash which involved Whitehead, Gerrijs and Neumann, and moved up to 5th place in lap 1.

Wagenvoort and Almeida meanwhile were involved in a battle which saw them fighting for tenths. Waiting for mistakes, but neither of them made any. Woodward was unable to follow the two leaders as he consolidated 3rd place. Behind him, Mlodzinski came storming up. On lap 16, the Polish driver overtook Woodward to take 3rd. Mlodzinski then pushed to reduce the gap to the front runners, but he couldn't manage to completely close down the gap. In front Wagenvoort withstood the pressure from Almeida to also win the feature race. Almeida finished 2.5 seconds behind Wagenvoort with Mlodzinski a further 3 seconds behind. The result saw Wagenvoort effectively passing Almeida in the fight for the 2006.2 Driver Championship, with only 1 event to go. Almeida and Woodward's team result meant that Ajira Racing Danu took a huge step towards the 2006.2 Constructors Championship.

Race 9 & 10: December 23rd 2006—Zandvoort

The showdown. The final event of the 2006.2 was held in The Netherlands. Would Wagenvoort use his home advantage to also win the 2006.2 season? In pre-qualifying it looked possible as Wagenvoort was the class of the field. No one was able to beat the times set by the #1 FWN.

Raceday appeared. December 23rd 2006. First Group B entered the track. Rookie driver Max Vietmeier had made his official debut in the Prato event and used his first bit of experience to the maximum as he clocked pole-position in just his 2nd event in the GPChampionship. Sam Guest qualified in 2nd place, only 0.042 behind Vietmeier as he underlined the competitive atmosphere in GPC.

The sprint race tested the drivers during 7 laps. Vietmeier was aiming to make the most of his qualifying performance. He had a great start and immediately developed a small lead over Guest. Vietmeier's race got a bit more relaxed when Guest made a mistake that saw him drop down to 5th. Now Italian driver Alberto Canzi moved up to 2nd place, but he had little opportunity to attack Vietmeier as his main concern was to keep American Andrew Spencer safely behind. Spencer did all he could to pass Canzi and he got very close. After 7 laps Vietmeier won the race to take his first GPChampionship podium and victory. Canzi stayed just over a tenth in front of Spencer as he secured his career best result.

The final Group B race of the season was now coming up. Vietmeier on pole-position. Canzi and Spencer looked set to attack the young German driver. After the start it was Vietmeier who just managed to hang on to the lead. Canzi and Spencer also kept their positions. After a couple of laps it was clear that these 3 drivers would decide the finishing order in the final Group B race as they ran away from the rest of the field. Vietmeier managed to negotiate the gap to the guys behind him. This continued for the full 21 laps and after almost 37 minutes it was a very happy Max Vietmeier who crossed the finish line to end his opening season in style: with a victory! Canzi and Spencer also finished their season on a high by claiming podium finishes again.



Drama in the Group A qualifying session. Wagenvoort—the fastest from pre-qualifying—got disconnected for the 2nd time this season and this immediately caused his retirement from the sprint race. Good news for Almeida, who now had a great chance to win the title. Mlodzinski collected his 4th consecutive pole-position in Zandvoort. Juha Pyy, winner in Zandvoort in 2006.1, again showed great pace in the Dutch dunes as he put his FR2.0 in 2nd place on the front row. Championship contender Almeida qualified in 6th place.

At the start of the race Mlodzinski had the best start. Neumann moved up from 3rd to 2nd place and was followed by Pyy, who was fighting to keep Jungwirth behind. On lap 2 Veenstra and Almeida got together which meant the end of the race for both drivers. The first retirement for Almeida on a highly unwanted moment as this gave a chance to Wagenvoort to fight back in the feature race. On lap 5 Neumann had to retire with technical issues. Pyy still managed to keep Jungwirth behind. After 7 laps it was Mlodzinski who forgot his Prato problems by claiming a solid victory in Zandvoort, his 3rd win of the season after previous sprint race victories in Dijon and Montreal. Pyy and Jungwirth celebrated their best results of the season so far as they finished 2nd and 3rd.

Only one race left in FR2000IC season 2006.2. Both championships still undecided. Almeida and Wagenvoort on the back of the grid, Mlodzinski and Pyy on the front row. Already before the start of the race there was more trouble for Wagenvoort who couldn't fire up the engine of his car and had to pull out, immediately handing over the championship to Almeida. A weird finish of the championship fight. Mlodzinski kept the lead after the start. On lap 2, Jungwirth passed Pyy going into the Tarzan corner to take 2nd place. The very same lap Almeida crashed into the back of De Jongs car to send both drivers into retirement. Nevertheless, Almeida walked away knowing he was the new GPC FR2000IC champion.

After 21 laps, Mlodzinski also took the chequered flag to win the feature race and thereby even moving up to 2nd place overall. Lucas Gerrijts, new 2nd driver for Ajira Racing Danu for Zandvoort, finished 5th and 4th in both races to secure enough points for the team to win the Constructors Championship for the team that also (under another name) won the title in 2006.1.

Final words

2006.2 saw GPChampionship.com FR2000IC online netKar PRO sim-racing becoming bigger and better. The racing was intense, the competition tough with the pre-qualifying structure putting the fastest of the fastest against each other on-track.

New, talented drivers joined the series and made a name for themselves. These new independent drivers were picked up quickly by teams looking for new talent. The racing was on a high level of respect, even in the competitive conditions.

Daniel Almeida proved to be the best and most consistent driver in 2006.2 as he took the well-deserved championship.



Future

Surely, a lot of drivers want to beat him in the next season. GPChampionship.com will continue with organising competitive and professional online sim-racing championships with netKar PRO. The next season (2007.1) will feature a longer season, more tracks and a better organisation involving institutions like a Court of Appeal that deals with drivers who do not agree with penalties given by the GPC officials.

If you want to compare yourself against the world's best drivers in the netKar PRO sim-racing world, GPChampionship.com is the place to go. An international field, a fantastic and arguably the most realistic car racing simulation, a good organisation, great competition and a fantastic atmosphere all contribute to what makes GPChampionship.com the world's premier netKar PRO online championship organiser.

GPChampionship.com will continue to inform the sim-racing community about the racing in the world's leading sim-racing magazine, AUTOSIMSPORT.



The Sim Touring Car Cup

Becky Rose reports

The Sim Touring Car Cup is a saloon & touring car class sim-race licensing authority with around 4,500 drivers. Every month the series broadcasts its flagship event via a delayed broadcast over the internet with English speaking commentary.

The year long broadcast league covers short track tarmac and rallyX racing with 2.0 litre turbo charged saloons, and uses the Live for Speed simulation at its core.

There are three cars with the tarmac king being the front wheel drive FXO. The quick starting RB4 is all-wheel drive and dominates the rallyX rounds, and the rear wheel drive XRT class car typically brings up the rear.

The series balances out the cars via a points bonus system and a series of qualifying heat races designed to order the grid favourably for the slowest car at any given track.

Round 4: Fern Bay Club

The STCC circus returns to picturesque Fern Bay in Jamaica for the fourth round of the 2006-2007 series. This is the shortest tarmac track of the season with an unrelenting and constantly turning layout. The front tyres take a pounding here, especially on the front wheel drive FXO cars.

The very short length of the heat races this round gave an unusual advantage to the XRTs as the FXO cars tried to make their way up the pack, giving Hungarian Victor Szabo the opportunity to start his first STCC feature race from pole position. Second round winner, Finnish driver Hannu Pinola, followed him to the grid by putting his RB4 into second place.

With championship leader Jack Green (Britain) languishing down in 9th position and second placed David Horváth (Hungary) being the last qualifier.

New on the grid this round was British driver Michael Kirk in his FXO, after a controversial accident with fellow Brit Sam Hopkinson in the heats, Kirk would later be disqualified and issued with a 1 race ban, discovering first hand just how strict STCC race stewarding is at this level.

Last round's winner Chris Redman (Britain) would start 3rd, but again suffered badly as the lights went green from the FXO's poor starting performance and completed the first turn down in 5th position.

The hero of the start was Dutchman Tommi Arends who monstered his RB4 through into third position behind Szabo and Pinola, who in turn immediately started to pull out a lead over the trailing pack.



A three car bump toward the back of the field left Finish driver Viermäki on the grass and staring at an afternoon spent recovering his position on this tight circuit where overtaking is difficult.

Britain's Jonny Pickard managed to despatch Luxembourg's Alain Lang at the end of the first lap, setting

himself up as the highest placed FXO driver in the field with a real chance of victory. Chris Redman would find his way past Lang soon afterwards.

As the midfield pack descended on the Maginot chicane in the third lap a chain reaction began which would leave title hopeful Jack Green, Behrens, Raemisch

and Galaske all losing places to the hungry field behind them.

As the dust settled, unseen by the cameras, Pickard despatched Arends for 3rd position and set about catching the two runaway leaders, meanwhile David Horváth's race took a turn for the worse as a sudden fps drop on his computer whilst braking into turn one left him waiting to see the final outcome, ultimately he would find himself sitting on the grass with the pack long gone into the distance. With an impossible mountain to climb, David decided his race was run and without a realistic chance of a good points haul, he retired.

By the 11th lap the race was well into its rhythm. Szabo had a short lead over Pinola, who in turn had Pickard glued to his rear bumper while a little further back Arends was having a similar duel with Redman.

It would be Redman who would make the first successful pass by switchbacking Arends into Shingles, whilst Pickard started to run into tyre problems and was unable to make a successful pass on Pinola, and eventually started slipping back from the Fin.

Whilst the cameras focused on the midfield battles Redman started to knock out lap times that would not have been out of place in qualifying as he clawed back the gap to the leaders. He would very soon catch Jonny Pickard who was by this time struggling with chronically overheated tyres. With Jonny barely able to keep his car on the tarmac, Chris Redman sailed straight past him into 3rd position.

During the middle stages of the race the midfielders provided us with some monumental battles. Harjula (Finland), competing in his second STCC race, again found his race characterized by a poor qualifying but exceptional pace and race craft., He worked his way up the field and then stumbled across the battle between Baker and Arends, ultimately working his way past the pair, but not before the trio provided some off track action!



The ferocity of the twisty circuit would soon claim another casualty, as German driver Bjoern Behrens fell victim to the high curb at the Cliff face corner. He rolled his RB4 over, finishing up dangerously close to the racing line with an upside down car.

This incident brought out the safety car with just 9 laps to go, and with a few laps spent under yellow flag, Pickard was able to cool his tyres.

With the field now bunched up Jonny Pickard was back in the hunt. Unfortunately for Jonny, between himself and the three leaders he found the back marker, Michael Kirk. As the green flag fell, Pickard set about nailing Kirk, and becoming the first victim of a "backmarker misunderstanding" of the season as Pickard pulled wide to pass Kirk around the outside of Shingles (turn one), which was unfortunately the same line that Kirk chose to take. Pickard was left in the gravel, and while able to recover, was now the last car on the lead lap.

Redman made the most of the restart and was able to slip past Pinola into Maginot, but as the next few cars filtered through the chicane a tyre was dislodged from

the tyre wall and Alain Lang, who had up until now been the 2nd XRT in the field, collected the tyre and was sent into a barrel roll. He was able to recover but suffered significant damage and had to pit stop for repairs.

As the field bustled for position over the next couple of laps, Redman began closing down the advantage Szabo had gained on the restart.

Then a few laps later Maginot would claim its final victim of the day, as Rob Sherborne turned in. Rob caught a tyre wall on entry which deflected his car in the wrong direction to complete the exit of the chicane, sending him head first into the tyre wall on the far side. This launched his car high in the air and brought it crashing down onto the track again, totally destroyed. He kept just enough momentum to wheel the car off the track though and racing was able to continue with only a local yellow flag being thrown, but the Brits own race was well and truly over. He probably has the award for the most spectacular accident of the season though!

As the last laps played out Szabo, in the inferior XRT, put in a scintillating performance to fend off Redman in his FXO. For a while it did not look like Redman would ever get close enough to challenge the Hungarian with the gap pegged at around a second, but with two laps to go things started looking desperate for the XRT driver as Redman nibbled away at the space between them.

When they came onto the start finish straight to begin the last lap, Victor had already sensed the challenge was coming and made an early decision to take a defensive line. Chris calmly followed him over in his slipstream pulled out at the end of the straight to take the normal line. The pressured Victor braked too late and left too much room at the apex, giving Chris a perfect opportunity to slip past as they exited Shingles.

After the leaders had lost time in the passing maneuver Hannu Pinola, who had been in Szabo's footsteps for the entire race, was finally in a position to

launch an attack on the Hungarian whose race was coming crashing down around him on the last lap. As the pair entered the final complex of corners, Pinola made his bid for 2nd place. Szabo slammed the door firmly shut forcing Pinola to take the green route through the apex and allowing Victor the better drive out of the exit to keep his position.



STCC Round 4 Staff

Becky Rose: Raceday official, steward, commentator

Bobby Islam: Clerk of the Course

Steward: Matt Gunn

Tristan Cliffe: Commentator

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GT Cockpit

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