AUTOSIMSPORT

Volume 3 Number 6

Slidin the Sport into the Sim

MERCEDES W196 UNLEASHED

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HeadOpEd

LxMartini

Not To Blow My Trumpet!

Those who are regular readers of this editorial will know that last month I predicted that the 'world's best-selling F1 magazine', *F1 Racing*, would change its name to *Lewis Monthly*.

I was, of course, joking. But as it turns out, I actually almost called it … this month it was reported that the editor of F1 Racing, one Matt 'Rule Britannia' Bishop had resigned from the magazine, effective January, to take a new role as … yes, you guessed it, head of Public Relations at discredited team Vodafone-Mercedes-McLaren.

Truly, there could have been no more perfect job for this clown than PR at McLaren; one only hopes that Peter 'Lewis' Windsor will be given the job that his talents so obviously deserve; that of Lewis's potty-trainer.

Giga Cheats And Jackie Stewart, 'Certified Halfwit'?

Those who read the Fifth Column last month will, no doubt, have arrived at the conclusion that Formula One racing is suffering a crisis of integrity. Not that the British papers and press would have noticed; no, for them, Vodafone-Mercedes-McLaren being caught—how shall we put this so as not to get sued—*cheating?* is just part-and-parcel of Formula One racing. That being so, we can only assume that the companies that sponsor Formula One racing must, themselves, be a little, shall we say, oblivious to ethical standards—after all, since the British papers claim Formula One is de facto corrupt ….

Having said that, Max Mosley was all in favour of booting McLaren out of Formula One for two seasons after the FIA's meeting mid-September found McLaren—once more—guilty of 'bringing the sport into disrepute', and fining the Woking team a piddling one hundred million dollars.

Mosley stated, along with Jarno Trulli, that if he'd gotten his way at the meeting, both Hamilton and Alonso would have been chased out of the championship this year which remains, as Ferrari rightly maintain, tainted.

Others, however—like Jackie Stewart—maintain that no damage has been done to the sport. Max Mosely, on having heard that Stewart believed the ruling would not have stood up in a civil court (email exchanges between McLaren drivers Alonso and De La Rosa assessing Ferrari's setups being, apparently, just a minor detail), replied (allegedly) with the following remarks, here quoted because they amuse me no-end: "There's one particular ex-driver who, because he never stops talking, never has the chance to listen—so he doesn't know what's going on. He said the FIA's decision would not have worked in a civil court. He has no qualification to say that. Then he starts saying this is personal between me and Ron Dennis, at great length, because everything he does is at extreme length. It's annoying that some of the sponsors listen to him because he's won a few championships. But nobody else in Formula One does—not the teams, not the drivers. He's a figure of fun among drivers. He goes round dressed up as a 1930s music hall man. He's a certified halfwit."

Oo-la-la—the soap opera that is Formula One continues unabated; which is a good thing, since the action on the track is even more laughable. Come on—you get paid tens of millions of dollars to drive a Formula One car, and suddenly a bit of rain means you need to start behind a pace car? Statistically, driving a Formula One car is thousands of times safer than driving to work in the morning; and yet we all do it, in rain, snow, and ice … without a pace car, either … and we do it for no other reason than paying the rent.

These clowns should just vanish …

Hard

Regular readers will probably have noticed this magazine has gone into a two-month cycle for the summer; we will be extending this until the new year, which means—for the mathematically challenged—our next issue will be out in December. But between now and then, please don't hesitate to donate, and enjoy our Autumn special issue, because there is only one good thing about the onset of winter, and that is—sim-racing season is upon us, and we have assembled pages-upon-pages of hardware reviews just for you! …

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News

Got Milk? … *Got Juice?*

Then send it to us!

Blimey!Games Swoop On Eero

AUTOSIMSPORT

Eero Piitulainen, for those who don't know, is a rare breed of programmer: A man capable of designing accurate physics for simulators with a proven record of success. Piitulainen was credited as the lead physics man on one of sim-racing's most authentic simulators, 2004's SCi Games Ltd.'s breathtaking *Richard Burns Rally*.

For regular readers of this magazine, you'll know that Piitulainen then went on to form his own venture, dubbed *Driver's Republic,* which was our cover story back last year {*see Vols 2 Num 4, and Num 8—Ed*}. Much anticipated, the Indy-simulator attracted a lot of attention until the beginning of this year, when things—and progress—went ominously quiet. Rumours began circulating as to what had happened to Piitulainen: AUTOSIMSPORT spotted him at Monaco, during the grand prix weekend, but he was reticent about going on the record …

And then we received this notice from one of our more eagle-eyed readers: "Check out the 'about' section at Blimey!," it read. And so we did … and there, recently added (the font is even the wrong size so recent had the cyber-ink dried), was the following: 'Physics Programmer: Eero Piitulainen'.

What this means for *Driver's Republic* remains open to speculation: We have not been able to track Piitulainen down for a comment. What this means for Blimey!Games, however, is not open to speculation: It means Ian Bell's studio—designers of *GTR2*, and the recent *BMW M3* sim (or is that mod?)—have just landed themselves the man most agree is the premiere dirt-physics programmer ever to have coded for any platform. An indication of things to come?

Let There be Wet—Weather For *rFactor*!

Bob Simmerman

One PM led to another, and the next thing you know, I am downloading the wet surface and effects LivetGlen track for *rFactor*! Yeah! You heard that right: A wet track for *rFactor*! A scratch-built stompin' cool track for *rFactor*, The Lonely and SLN once again reveal yet another ace up their sleeves. In beta now, it promises to add what rFactorites have been begging for for over two years. Go here to see the pics …

What's Wrong With This Picture?

AUTOSIMSPORT

At the Frankfurt Auto Show, another of our eagle-eyed readers (we have a few, though most are unerringly concerned with spotting typos every month!) sent in these two photos: The first is the *RACE07*-branded Chevy; the second, onboard the Chevy. The question was, 'what's wrong with the picture?' The only answer we could come up with was: That HUD display is from *GTR2*, not SimBin's *RACE07*. Which is rather odd, isn't it … why would Chevy be running a *GTR2* mod in their *RACE07*-branded car at the Auto Show? Anyone able to confirm this, or able to shed some light, please send us some mail!

Racing for Charity

Jr Dowdy

A new twist in the sim racing community has 'good times' and 'good cause' racing side-by-side on the front stretch. Spawned

by a friendship at another league, The Gentleman's Racing Group was formed with a common goal: Develop a hardcore, multi-faceted racing league that combined a personal desire to benefit charity for children in need. Jr. Dowdy, Chuck Curtis, and Jeff Mishler embarked on a quest to meld these two ideals.

From the outset, it was decided that there needed to be a delicate balance between the desires of well-informed veterans along with the needs of enthusiastic rookies looking for a place to call home, and that the league would not be a one-man operation. TGRG.info is made up of a Board of Directors, all of whom share special skills that are critical to the operations of this unique league. Joe Evans JNS (tracks *rFactor)*, Jeff Ricker (director of member relations), Mark Stewart Sr. (director *N2003)*, Dave Hiatt Sr. (director *rFactor)*, Dana Flagg (Pro Sim Series director), Rick Ellison (charities), Chuck Curtis (vice president), Jeff Mishler (D3 driving school), and Jr Dowdy (President), all combine and share their talents in order to create a league that is truly unique.

TGRG.info offers three divisions in *N2003* along with several others in the upstart *rFactor* series. On the technical side, Jeff Mishler heads up a comprehensive training program dubbed, 'D3'. The Driver Development Division caters to beginners and veterans, as well as those looking for answers to propel them to the next level. Group or individual classrooms along with trackside instruction provide this seldom-seen commodity.

Charity is what this league is all about. TGRG.info is a DBA of The Texas Performers Association Inc. a (501)(3a) non-profit organization. All donations go directly to a designated cause each month: 'Racing for a Cause'

If you're still undecided on which direction you'd like to see your sim-cacing career go, check out TGRG.info. There is a place

for you, and you'll feel good about the mission. Rarely do you get a chance to connect with a group that has your interests at heart, along with so many others less fortunate. Let's go racing boys and girls!

GTR2-XD

Bob Simmerman

This particular item will pretty much speak for itself, but just in case it doesn't, well, let me say that this is one handy item. As if the immersion factor of *GTR2* needed to be any higher, this add-on successfully accomplishes that lofty goal, which is, further immersing the user, even higher, in the necessary *minutiae* of accomplished thoroughness. I don't care how many old ladies are in your way, knock em' over and get this one!

Blimey!Games Release Their First Sim

Bob Simmerman

The *BMW M3 Challenge* was released (for free) during the summer amidst an amazing lack of pomp-and-ceremony. Odd, considering Ian Bell is sim-racing's maestro at

marketing … all the same, this goes down as Blimey!'s first-ever release, and holy Palomino hot pants on *fire*, this one hit with the brute force only a true surprise can deliver.

Released suspiciously around the time of a certain soon-to-be commercial product's demo, this (by the feel and looks of it) *GTL*-engine based BMW M3 treat from Blimey! is one hell of a great time. Designed for an online competition that is still in the planning phases {*AUTOSIMSPORT hopes to get some news on this for our next issue—Ed*}, this is a great little 'mod', and more than proof that good things are headed our way.

Sports Car Challenge (ALMS 1.2)

Bob Simmerman

Upon first appearance by the stellar talent at RSDG, this particular mod alone was a reason to purchase *F1 Challenge*, and the brilliant conversion by Turb for the *rFactor* platform was a dream come true. Naturally, I favour the Cadillac, but there is more than enough to satiate the pickiest of ALMS fans. Nearly a year in the making, this mod was done with full permission of RSDG, with some great input by way too many to list. I am out of old lady jokes, so I suggest you head on out, and pick this one up, it is fantastic.

Get This Now

Bob Simmerman

The first post by Aristotelis is all you need to know about this one. Pure gold, you can't say 'must have' enough on this one. And, more than likely, anything that follows as well. A beautiful work, and the working weather of *GTR2* makes it all the better. *Stunning*—amidst the numerous amazing mods that have been released this year, this one may just be the best of them all … and that is saying something because this has been the best year for mod's in the history of sim-racing …


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The SimRacingTonight Show

A couple of guys have started doing a video podcast-type deal centred around our wonderful world of sim-racing. It manages to strike a charming balance between a slick glossy American sports comment TV show, and amateur n00b Public Access TV {*think Robin Byrd on PBS meets ESPN—Ed*}. It's definitely worth a watch, with the first two episodes offering a fascinating glimpse into the history of sim-racing. The second episode also has a great piece where Team 'gets in where a draft wouldn't' Redline's Dom Duhan narrates a lap of Laguna Seca driven by fellow team-mate Greger Huttu. Recommended viewing!

There's even a sympathy piece on everyone's favourite left-out race-sim, *LFS*. It actually made me want to download the demo and try it again.

Sim Racing INRL

Am I the only person in the sim-racing world who is completely unimpressed by the general 'sim-racing is gr8! It's just like teh rael thing! Reel drivers plays sims and simmers drive fro real!' evangelism that loiters around the edge of just about every aspect of the race-sim media?

Whilst I do not deny that there may be racing drivers who use sims to hone skills (or just to relax when not racing, heaven forbid!), and some sim-racers who move on to race real cars (or become accountants, and even janitors), I have to say that the argument is reminiscent of avid comic readers who tell you that, 'comics aren't just for kids'.In that world, we can also include computer gamers along with Japanese animated series designers (well, actually, some of those *really* aren't for kids)—what they all have in common is their echoing of the same sentiment: In an attempt to somehow validate their hobbies, and after they have shown you their impressive collection of back issues, rare cards, and what not, you are left wondering just who they are trying to convince; you … or themselves.

I've been into sci-fi, fantasy, anime, comics, RPGs, computer games, race-sims, and all that, and in some cases, pretty heavily too. Yeah, I'm a geek. I like playing with UNIX too. I don't care if the masses don't understand what my hobbies are about. The thought that someone may judge me based on all that does not discourage me from doing it {*Bob claims the same about his goat infatuation—Ed*}—it just makes me think the person who does so is incredibly shallow, and I often just ask them what it is *they* do in their spare time that is so much better.

Next you'll be telling me that some actors may actually try out being a real person between roles. Or that some politicians may, between sessions, really care about some real issues. Or that Formula One drivers play *Everquest*. Crikey. What would the reason behind that be? 'It is a great place to hone your teamskills and gain experience'?

Sims For Sims' Sake!

PSRL

I recently caught a couple of the live race broadcasts done by the prosimracing.com people. That is some impressive stuff they are doing there. It's just like watching races on you TV at home, only you know and have raced against about half the people in each race. The commentary is really good—or at least no worse than regular motor-sports' commentary. Their camerawork, whilst not being particularly smooth all the time, is excellent, and, unlike modern Formula One where the camera is focused on Ron Dennis's wife, it shows you the action you actually *want* to see. In fact, that is the one area where sim-racing beats the real-life TV hands down: You have limited cameras in real life, and the director can only show you what he is aware of, which is why so many incidents are caught just after they happen. Well, you don't get that on PSRL! They just rewind and show you an incident from as many angles as they like, as each car is equipped with multiple movable cameras.

But above all, it is the personal attachment—being able to say you've raced those cars, or with those people, or at that track—that adds a whole bonus level of identification to your viewing, and it *rocks*!

Added Realism—Injury in Sims

A friend of mine (no, really; it wasn't me) recently sprained his wrist (I know what you're thinking! but no, read on …) driving a Corvette C6 ... in *rFactor*. Who said injuries aren't real in race-sims? I'm still working on the USB breeze-block-on-a-stick device for crashes.

Marriage

"WTF!???" I hear you cry. "What's that got to do with sim-racing?"

Well … I got married recently. A whole bunch of people from our beloved community clubbed together and sent me a G25. So I figured I would use this space to personally thank: Kevin, Ryan, Scott, Bob, Spencer, Gonzo, Eric, Theo, Stacey, and Alex. And anyone else whose name I couldn't torture from my sources. Thanks a lot you guys! You don't know how much this means to me. Oh, and the wheel is beautiful! Thanks!

.

T1

Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

Bob Simmerman gets behind the legendary 1955 Mercedes-Benz W196 … the painstaking recreation for rFactor by Team Players that is nothing short of a stunning achievement—AUTOSIMSPORT is both thrilled and honoured to unleash the majesty …

BobSimmerman

T1 Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

continued

Back in the day when men were men and race cars drove around on wooden bicycle tyres, there was a legendary marque that came into grand prix racing in the mid-1930s and dismantled the competition. Nine years—and eighty million deaths later—the Silver Arrows returned to action for two brief seasons … and yet again the men from Stuttgart would conquer all before them …

In the 1950s, at the dawn of Formula One, when you entered into a motor race, you knew the possibility of you arriving safely at the chequered flag was dependent on more than just skill: It was about guts, luck, and mechanical failures. And death … a quick glance at the final championship standing for the 1954 season, the year when Mercedes returned to Formula One, makes for grim reading: Hawthorn, dead at the age of thirty, Luigi Musso, dead at thirty six, Stirling Moss, career ended at thirty-one after a shunt that put him into a coma, Onofre Agustín Marimón, dead at twenty-two, Jean Behra, dead at thirty-seven, Alberto Ascari, dead at thirty-six … in those days, men didn't start races behind a pace car because of a little rain, and nor were they paid dozens of millions of dollars a year to drive cars that were statistically safer than a road vehicle.

Safety be damned, chaps, you better have a good dose of Ernest Hemingway and Jack Daniels on your plate before tackling the monstrously powered and monstrously difficult to drive *quickly* Mercedes Benz 1955 Formula One car … in real-life and, to a certain extent, in *rFactor*.

A small part of a much larger project by the awesome gang at Team Players, (who feature Alison Hine and Ricardo Nunnini as part of a team that achieved fame with their Fabcar mod this year), the Mercedes W169 has taken, roughly, two years of painstaking research and development to create. And it shows: From the real driver faces and brilliant physics, to the scary as hell (and painstakingly realistic) tyres, this is, without question, one of a very short list of classic must-have mods for any sim, and yet another stellar example of just how good *rFactor really* is when properly massaged.

While it is the case that *rFactor* is the lucky recipient of the attention, don't be deceived; if you expect to become proficient in the pilotage of these vintage historic cars, you had best prepare yourself for practice, practice, practice—and then practice some more. You will, at that time, either find yourself at Carnegie Hall, or, perhaps, turning half decent laps at the Green Hell. The learning curve of *Grand Prix Legends* comes to mind, easy to 'sort of' keep on the track 'sort of' in the desired direction, but it will take many hours to get the drift just right, and to come to grips, so to speak, with the ultra skinny 'racing' tyres of the day. Not to mention all of the sunburns you will get while racing in your silk, short sleeve shirt.

The W196

Mercedes-Benz had the distinct advantage, in 1954, of having returned to the sport at the exact time when the sport's formula had changed: Unlike other manufacturers, it could design a completely new car for competition (they had considered running a car in 1951 based on their 1939 design, but Carraciola had nixed the idea, calling it an antiquated soap-box), and this job was entrusted to the engineer, and test-driver, Rudolf Uhlenhaut.

Mercedes 'chose an in-line 8-cylinder engine with a capacity of 2,496cc (76 x 68.8 mm). This was claimed to develop 270 BHP at 8,200 RPM, which meant that it was rather more powerful than any of its rivals, and was mounted in the frame almost horizontally so as to give a very low bonnet {…} Most designers would have preferred a vee-engine layout because of the shorter overall length and the increased stiffness of the crankshaft. At this time, however, Grand Prix cars were still comparatively bulky and heavy and the overall length of the engine was relatively unimportant, especially as it was possible to achieve a smaller frontal area with an in-line engine. Two very advanced features of the engine design were the Bosch direct fuel injection instead of carburetors and desmodromic valves; the very high pressure was required, in the absence of valve springs, to ensure that the valves shut after being returned close to their seats by the return cam. The engine was built up of individual cylinders surrounded by a sheet metal cowling which formed a water jacket (a feature derived from the pre-war Mercedes practice), the cylinder head was non-detachable, and the crankshaft was divided in two for rigidity with the drive taken off by a pair of gear wheels in the middle of the engine.

'In choosing a rear suspension for the W196, the Mercedes designers rejected the de Dion layout which they had resurrected in 1937 for a swing axle system of a new type. With the conventional swing axle layout, the drive shafts are housed within the swinging axle halves, but the W196 had two transverse swinging links, locating the wheels laterally, and these were integral with the wheel hubs and met at a common pivot point at the centre-line beneath the rear-mounted gearbox housing. The wheels were mounted longitudinally by an upper leading and a lower trailing link per wheel so that a Watts linkage was formed on either side of the car. The suspension itself was formed by longitudinal torsion bars and finned telescopic hydraulic dampers. With this layout the transverse links were much longer than the swing axle halves, so that the variation of camber angle and, therefore tyre scrub, was reduced considerably. At the front, the wheels were located by two pairs of wishbones and torsion bars were again used. The frame of the Mercedes, constructed from small diameter tubing, was clothed in a very unusual aerodynamic streamlined body, but it was clear that the engineers had not complete faith in this body, for although all the area within the very deep frame was put to good use, nothing was carried in the space between the front and rear wheels.'—From: *Historic Motor Racing* by Anthony Pritchard (1969)

A footnote on the aerodynamic 'cloak': This cloaking was used in its first race, at Rheims, and then at Monza. It was called the 'Type Monza', but was not used on shorter layout tracks because its weight penalized the team.

continued

The Return Of The Silver Arrows

With the hope of enticing more manufacturers into Formula One—a series that was started in 1950, five short years after the butchery of World War Two had come to an end—the organizing body decided to change the formula for the 1954 season, after the first three years were dominated by Italian teams, notably Alfa Romeo, using cars that had been designed in the mid-1930s. Engines were restricted to 2.500 cc (750 cc in the case of supercharged engines, a provision that was added at the last minute in order to attract the British and their BRM team that were threatening to build a V16 unit—which they did, eventually, to great failure), and the change in formula did indeed succeed in its stated goals: It ended the Italian domination of the sport, and saw new manufacturers enter (to the detriment of the old guard: Alfa Romeo, Lancia, and Gordini soon having to close-up shop).

Mercedes were one of the new teams to come back to motor-racing, and they did so with many of the old guard who had, with Nazi money, dominated the pre-war grand prix racing; none more visible than their eponymous team manager, Alfred Neubauer, who invented the pit-to-driver board, alongside far too many inventions to mention here.

World Champion Fangio—through the usual machinations of Herr Neubauer—was also convinced to sign on for Mercedes (no easy job since Fangio had driven a Mercedes in 1951 in Argentina, and that episode had turned into a disaster for the Argentine in front of his home fans) mid-way through 1954 (he would go on to win the championship), and he was partnered alongside one-time Mercedes engineer Karl Kling.

The car—the W196—was entered at the 1954 French Grand Prix at Rheims (complete with its aerodynamically enhanced 'cloak' that would only be seen once again, at Monza the following year), and went on to dominate the race, with Fangio and Kling finishing a distant one-two. The car would race on until the end of the 1955 season, and it would win the championship for Fangio in both years, as well as nine races of the twelve in which it was entered, making it—on a strike-rate average—one of the most competitive cars ever designed and raced in the history of motor-racing. Complete domination culminated at Aintree in 1955, when the W196 secured the top four spots at the British Grand Prix, with a rather startled Moss beating a relaxed Fangio (to this day, no-one knows if Fangio had handed the win to Moss, although the Argentine, to his credit, always insisted Moss had won by merit; impartial observers that day, however, mostly told a different story), and Kling, and Taruffi taking up the next two spots.

The return of the Silver Arrows—and their domination—had been as predicted by many in the paddock at the time (most had been around in the mid-1930s when Hitler's financial generosity had seen the Nazis dominate grand prix racing with both Mercedes, and Auto Union {now Audi}), and so it would prove. But Germany's role in World War Two was not forgotten, neither by the French nor the Germans themselves, and the tragedy at Le Mans, on June eleventh, 1955, when Pierre Levegh, behind the wheel of the number twenty Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR (run by Daimler-Benz AG) lost control of his car and flipped into the grandstands killing eighty spectators (and himself), would signal the end of Mercedes' involvement in motor-racing (they would only return to Formula One as engine suppliers to the Swiss Sauber team in the mid 1990s).

The W196, though, had carved for itself a unique spot in the legends of motor-racing.

As a footnote, it should be mentioned that the W196 was, itself, both revolutionary and on the cusp of being made obsolete by the newly (Jano) designed Lancia of 1956 which was lower, shorter, and significantly lighter than the W196. Had Mercedes remained in competition, they would almost certainly have had to go back to the drawing board as the W196 was the last of the classic beasts first seen three decades earlier; heavy, simply designed, long, and immensely cumbersome (changing sparkplugs meant having to remove the front-right-wheel, before a body panel, too, had to be removed), the car was the last hurrah of the golden era of motor-racing, and along with it, the drivers of that era ...

T1 Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

continued

Driving The W196—Alongside Legendary Driver Piero Taruffi

Piero Taruffi won the last Mille Miglia race; before that, he drove for Ferrari, Mercedes, Alfa Romeo, Lancia, and against the legends of the sport: Nuvolari, Varzi, Fangio, Moss, Farina … he held dozens of land speed records on both cars and bikes, and wrote one of the defining books in the history of motor-racing: The Technique of Motor Racing.

In 1955, he was sweet-talked into racing twice for Mercedes in Formula One (Ferrari, for whom he was a works driver in sports cars, would not offer him a Formula One seat), and he drove in what remains the greatest-ever race for Mercedes: The one-two-three-four result at Aintree in 1955. In his autobiography (now sadly out of print) titled 'Worls Driver', and which remains one the most interesting ever written by a race driver, Taruffi explains—in a way in which only he could, being an engineer, a highly-sought-after test-driver, a racer of brilliant capability, and a designer of his own cars—how he became versed with the beast that was the W196 …

'The first race {for Mercedes} was to be at the British Grand Prix at Aintree. I was given a folder full of useful things: an itinerary of the trip with instructions what to do in case of trouble *en route*; a list of all members of the expedition, and everything drivers needed to know about arrangements for practice and the race itself. And so on the track at Aintree, in the grounds where the Grand National is run, I first met the Formula 1 Mercedes.

'The thing which first impressed me about the car was the driving position. The seat upholstery, made in various shapes and sizes, could be changed in a few seconds, according to the build of the driver. One sat with one's legs apart, the better to resist cornering forces {no seat belts in those days!}. The gearbox had five speeds {the other teams primarily ran four-speeds at the time}, but there was one thing I did not like about it: the 'gate' was the opposite way round to that of most Italian GP cars so that, anyway until one was used to it, the gear-change was rather slow and sticky. I tried to adapt myself, but on the first practice lap I found second in mistake of fourth. The revs went sky-high, and it was only the desmodromic valve-gear that stopped the valves touching the pistons, and thus averted a blow-up. I got out and told Neubauer what I had done. He told me not to worry; in fact, as I was climbing in again he said I could bash everything as hard as I liked—the harder I drove the better the test. He added that if the engine blew up there was a spare all ready to go in.

'They made me practice race starts, some laps with an almost empty tank, others with a full one; they explained that halfway through the race, when the fuel was partly used up, I was to move a little lever, to restore the negative camber of the rear wheels which they would have lost though the decrease in weight. Finally they showed me their whole system of pit signaling boards and flags, including one meaning "Hold your present position; don't go any faster". On the second and last day of practice I began to feel more at home in the car. The gear-changing difficulty had almost disappeared, partly because I had been going though the motions mentally and physically that morning before breakfast, sitting on the edge of the bed and 'changing gear' as though I were sitting in the car. My wife surprised me at this strange exercise and we both burst out laughing. At the end of practice Neubauer seemed satisfied and advised me to change ever faster. "Don't you worry," he said, "the gearbox won't break. You just concentrate on finishing."

'It was in this race that Fangio gave me an on-the-spot demonstration of how marvelously he could drive. I had already begun taking the clockwise corner known as Beecher's when the World Champion slashed past me at high speed on my right. I was practically into the corner, and seeing Fangio go past on the inside, with the handicap of having to take it on a much sharper radius, I quite expected him to go off the road; I dropped back, to keep out of harm's way. Instead of crashing, though, he resolutely threw the car into the most enormous drift angle—it looked to me to be about 30 degrees—which scrubbed off his excess speed on the way into the corner. In this phase, owing to imperceptible variations in road grip, I could see the car skidding, and with every tiny slide I could detect a change in the intensity of his exhaust note. At a given moment the engine revs began to mount gradually, and his car went on drawing away, yard by yard.

'So far as the British GP was concerned, Mercedes wanted the 'home town boy to make good'; so the winner was Moss, Fangio came second, Kling third, and I fourth. It was total victory, celebrated with a banquet and party, in the course of which Neubauer demonstrated his amazing capacity for alcohol and inexhaustible eloquence.'

'Shortly afterwards I was back with Mercedes for the Italian Grand Prix. During practice we experimented with various cars: different lengths of wheelbase, suspension with different travel and different spring rates, bodies with streamlining and without. The first trials were carried out by Uhlenhaut, the chief tester and development engineer, who is not only an able technician but also a first-class and very rapid driver, to whom Mercedes racing department owed a good deal of its efficiency. Having settled which types were most suitable they gave me a few laps in one of the streamliners. I enjoyed the car very much and would willingly have raced it—especially as it was faster than the others; but it was decided to run only two cars with aerodynamic bodywork, giving those to Fangio and Moss, while the other two with uncowled wheels went to Kling and myself.

'As the flag fell our four Mercedes took the lead—in the above order. After a bit I thought I would liven things up a bit, by passing Kling and getting closer to the leader. After the race I gathered that Kling had been very upset at being overtaken, even though there had been no "stay put" signal from the pits. He took no account of this, and treated me to long and excited remonstrances in German, which I managed to understand, more or less. I think he was still feeling worked up and furious over having had to retire from the race with mechanical trouble. Moss, too, suffered a like fate, and so this time only two Mercedes reached the finishing line, while I had the pleasure of coming second only a few yards behind the great Fangio. In third place, one minute away, came Castellotti, in a Ferrari.'—From: *Works Driver, The Autobiography of Piero Taruffi (1964)*

T1 Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

continued

Mark Stone's physics took two long years to develop: For those who are interested in seeing precisely how he did it, Mark has kindly made the following file available to AUTOSIMSPORT readers, which includes reams of documents used in the making of this one car …

Team Bio by Bob Russell

Team Players was formed by Bob Russell, Ben Dupaul, and Malcolm Edeson in the fall of 2000. *NASCAR Heat* had just been released, and that is what brought the three of us together. The name Team Players Virtual Garage was decided on because at the time editing *Heat* was in its early stages. There were very few guys that had been hacking at the sim trying to edit it when MGI decided to offer the editing tools. There was a small group of guys that were just discovering how to edit, but it was nearly impossible to break into the small circle of editors. The tools for editing were being given out only to selective people, and after finally proving ourselves, we were able to get them. This was back when the SpeedSims forum was going, and they had a few private forums for editing. It was a very closed and tight circle to get into, but we ended up being part of the editing group. We didn't seem to fit, though, and info' was still very difficult to obtain. We decided to start our own group, but didn't want it to be private and closed. There were lots of guys who wanted to know more about editing so we started an open forum where anyone could come in and see what we were doing. We wanted to promote *Heat* editing, so we started showing guys how to do it, and Team Players Virtual Garage was born. The name is actually a play on words; most people think it is named after the Canadian Cigarettes, but it really means we were unlike the other groups in that we were Team Players willing to help guys learn how to edit.

Bob Russell (Punko353) was the lead designer doing 3D modeling/textures and physics. Ben Dupaul was doing all of the textures and paint jobs as well as menus and music, and Malcolm Edeson (Maxx) was doing most of the physics with help from Bob.

Malcom "Maxx" Edeson was a real race car driver and a race instructor in England and an avid *GPL* racer. He got into editing with me when I started making the F2000 mod. We had a number of real F2000 drivers helping us with beta testing as well as the three time USF2000 champ Mike Anderson. We were able to get real telemetry data and had some of the best drivers in the country helping us beta test. Our F2000 mod is still being raced by real drivers over at ApexSpeed.com.

During our *Heat* days we created a number of mods, most of which were scratch built models.

1937 F1, 1955 F1, Ferrari 360 Challenge, F2000 Formula Ford, 1950 Pickup Trucks, Porsche Vintage cars, Le Mans 2, 1967 Lotus Trainer, UPS Trucks, Cart II, Gasoline Alley Indy Cars, SportBike (motorcycle mod), 67F1 (not released), Unlimited Hydroplanes (not released)

From *NASCAR Heat* we went to *GPL* to help on the 1955 mod that was being worked on; we created the Mercedes W196, Maserati 250F, Ferrari *Squalo*, and the Gordini. We worked on that mod with the *GPL* editing group until we hit a brick wall with very low frame rates and no known way to fix it. Maxx left the team to continue his career in racing and race instruction.

We left *GPL* to start editing *rFactor* and that is where we are today.

Mark Stone and a few other editors came with us to learn *rFactor*. The others left out of frustration with the complexity of *rFactor,* but Mark stayed on and is our main physics guru. Ricardo Nunnini joined our team and is helping Mark with physics. Keeper joined us, and is sort of a jack of all trades. Alison Hine came on board as our main beta tester, and is also helping with physics.

All three came from *GPL;* Ricardo is known for his web page GPL Foolishness, and as a GPL racer. Keeper is known for organizing all the GPLEA materials, and of course Alison Hine is known for being a beta tester for Papyrus in the beta days of *GPL,* and also one of the top ranked *GPL* drivers (aka Eagle Woman).

The Green Hell Shakedown

First things first—tyre selection. Early beta versions had only one tyre, the meticulously researched 'stock' tyre that was to be found on these beasts in reality. At the last minute, a major debate took place within the team, and it was decided to not only offer the 'proper' tyre, but one that may be a bit more conducive to controlled pilotage of the W169. While I am not the best driver on the planet, I immediately went for the tyres that belong on the car, forgoing the others for perhaps an online session where all are using the non-standard tyre, or for when I get really frustrated and need a bit of help getting around a venue, at least enough to calm down. I'm not entirely sure why they chose this route, but I'm not going to argue with folks who have created such a brilliant piece of work; suffice it to say, real-men will choose only the real tyres!

I assume the decision was made in an effort to make the mod a bit more accessible for the patience challenged among us ... like Martini, for example. Regardless, the option is there should the user (read girlyman) decide to use it. A decent compromise in my book, and in no way does this hamper the full glory and realism of the mod.

Since I had not driven anything in *rFactor* for a while, I decided to make things easy on myself for the testing of this new mod. Realistic tyres, default setup, back of grid start at the Nordschlief. Yup, sounds about right …

You get your first drippings of Formula One history as you select the car. There is, of course, only the W169 to choose from (in its open-wheel configuration—the 'cloaked', aerodynamically enhanced version than ran at Rheims, and Monza, is still to come, along with the other cars of 1955 … Maseratis, Ferraris, and so forth), but it is the list of driver names that will give moment to pause, and reflect on the accomplishments and legend of some of those names: Moss, Lang, Kling, and the greatest of them all—Juan Manuel Fangio. Talk about nostalgia!

I went with Moss's car for my little escapade, knowing full well that the real driver faces had all been incorporated into the mod as it neared completion. Nice touch. Another nice touch, and something I have yet to see on another *rFactor* mod—a fully functional (as in, you can see it move and stuff …) gear-shifter inside the cockpit! I don't know how they did it, but by golly, just like *GPL*, we got a moving gear-shifter, and it correctly indicates which of the five forward gears you happen to be in at the time.

T1 Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

continued

Don't even bother looking for the AUTOSHIFT button, roof rider, it ain't there.

The car is painted with the silver/grey shade that was such a predominant color for Mercedes, then, and now—the Silver Arrows, born in the mid-1930s when the engineers had stripped the paint from their cars to shed weight. Toss in the Scottish themed seat cover, and the giant wooden/steel steering wheel, and the only thing missing is the large metal tachometer in the middle of the dash. Except it isn't missing, it's there, I just was having some fun with you, dear reader.

The tachometer is there, and it'll redline at about 8,800 RPM or so. Go on, it's okay, take a few moments to admire the car in the spinner section. While you're at it, do note that, included in the release is a new showroom, for use with the utility that is used to change the spinner look of *rFactor*. Take a look at those fancy spoke wheels, with lovely chrome centerpieces. Also note how damn thin those tyres are, and remember, you'll be reaching close to 280km/h on them! Spin it around to catch the front view, and you will easily notice the brake rotors, and fine suspension modeling. Spin it to the back for the rear works, then back around to the front where you can't help but miss the trademark 1955 Mercedes front grille area. Or those groovy little wing deals on the side. And the spit-polish-chrome-a-shinin' side pipes.

Team Players hit this thing with the gorgeous stick about a million times. Damn fine looking machine, damn fine.

Now before we go too much farther, I have to say up front—I *do not* use ReelFeel at this time. For whatever reason, I am simply unable to get it to do much more than pull the steering wheel automatically with great force, usually in the wrong direction. And, the one time I think I 'got it' … well, it felt identical to the default *rFactor* model but with Force-Feedback turned to 'Low'. *Identical*.

Now, I know, I read the forums and ReelFeel is the next replacement for sliced bread and Tang, but on my rig it ain't happenin', and, bluntly—I really wonder what the fuss is all about. I have asked for help, but don't really get much other than, 'Ask some other guy for his *.ini file'. Uh yeah, okay, I will ask some other guy, different from the first guy, and then—ah, screw it.

I don't use it, period. And, given the genius of the W196 mod, and the fact that the Force-Feedback in *rFactor* really isn't as 'bad' as some would have you believe, I kept ReelFeel out of it. Not to say that it has no place in this mod, I know that it does, it just won't be done by me. Someone, not Martini, will have to, literally, give me their *.ini files otherwise I am simply not interested. I think to this day I am still using some Huttu stuff from the Team Redline page, and it has served me more than well enough for nearly a year. Okay, as **Mr. T** would say, 'Enough jibber jabber, fool!'.

And get on we shall.

To the Green Hell. Twenty-plus kilometers of sheer testicular-measuring devices, and about 'One hundred and seventy-seven dead man corners': I love and hate this track, all at the same time. But what better way to get revenge than to go pre-1967 on it? So I did, making sure to start at the back of the grid, as I wanted to observe how these cars moved around on the track, how the AI performed, and how well I could keep those skinny tyres glued to that skinny road with all the guard rails and sheer cliff drop-offs ahead of me. First things first—hit SPACEBAR so I don't have to do a four hour long formation lap. Check.

Formula One Mercedes 1955—The W196 Is Unleashed

continued

Piero Taruffi (above), Stirling Moss (below)

Second things first—brake on, clutch in, shift to first gear. And away we went. It won't take very long before the true beauty of this mod begins to shine through on the track. Brightly, at that. At the back of the grid, I observed the appearance of my opponents and their cars, and was nearly whisked away to 1955. From the trademark rear treatment found on the W196 to the shiny chrome side pipes and spoke wheels, it could be difficult to race with something this gorgeous as too much admiring will put you into the wall rather quickly at any track, even quicker at the Green Hell.

The green flag dropped, and off we went. I had the AI set fairly low as I wanted to do some 'formation driving' with the other cars, to get a good look at them, and how they behave on the track.Which is code for saying I'm too slow!

The details are stunning.. I have always enjoyed observing the suspension movements in *Grand Prix Legends*—a Kaemmer trademark if there ever was one—and a sure indicator that more than 'physics modeling' is going on; toss in the convincing visual cues, and you are swept that much further away from reality. The suspension movements in this mod are as brilliant as those in *Grand Prix Legends,* and it is rather surprising just how bumpy the Green Hell really is. As I pulled alongside the number six car, I became transfixed at the motions of the suspension, and the driver himself as he physically leaned into corners (the pedals were placed, in those days, as wide apart as possible so the drivers could brace themselves through the turns), and we're talking years from any HANS-type device … the effect was ultra convincing, and coupled with the movement of the steering wheel, you would damn near swear that was a real guy next to you. I slowly eased on the gas to pull away as I made my way further up the field to check out what the leaders were doing.

They appeared to be doing well, but they did stumble at about the quarter mark of the lap. Slowing to almost a crawl speed, the AI acted as if they had not been to that part of the track before, and considering I was using a very recent Green Hell, issues such as these are to be expected. Carefully, I made my way past them to the point, and then slowed down to determine what they were going to eventually do behind me.

Apparently, it was all some sort of secret plan—while trying to figure out what those guys were doing, I proceeded to slam into a guard rail, then I proceeded to knock off the right front wheel. I did note, however, that the AI drivers, all of them, were moving at a pretty good clip when they passed me. There was at least one fool on the track, and his name wasn't COMPUTER CODED DRIVER. Dammit. Stupid track.

They did, however, look fantastic as they drove by me, leaving me stranded on yet another GOF—Green Outing Failure. But I had seen all I needed to see, and it was clear to me that this mod is going straight to the top in a very quick elevator. You can't help but notice the obvious care and attention to detail that went into the creation of this *one car.* I assure you, you will not be disappointed with the quality of the mod, but I would ask that you stick with it as going quick is not something you will be doing right away. It will take more practice than most mods, probably on par with the brilliant 1979 mod, but once the effort is made, the reward is huge. And let's all give a big hats off to the Team Players group who made this spectacular glimpse into the past a very real part of our present.

Well done, guys and gals, well done indeed.

Release Notes

Team Players would like to announce that we are releasing our 55F1 mod for your enjoyment.

Since so many of you have been waiting patiently for the release of this mod, we decided to do something a bit different. We will be releasing each car as an add-on to the mod as we complete them. Since we have worked for over two years on the Mercedes W196, we thought it would be nice to let you enjoy what we have done so far. We will continue working on the other cars, and when they are complete, we will make the updates so you can build the mod as we progress with each car.

The Mercedes Benz W196 was a very successful German car created in 1954 and which ran in that year, and in 1955. The MB W196 won the World Title in 1954 and 1955, but after the fatal crash at Le Mans that killed driver Pierre Levegh and eighty spectators, Mercedes withdrew from auto-racing for the next thirty years.

We have tried to re-create the Mercedes to the best of our abilities by using as much real data as possible. Mark has done a spectular job of creating the physics with the help from a lot of different people. The one place we did comprimize on was the tyre physics; we have included tyres that we believe have a bit more grip than the real tyres in 1955. The increase in grip is small (less than ten percent) but was included in order to make the car more enjoyable to drive … at least initially. Grip levels will be made more realistic in an update to W196 as other cars are released. There are two tyre options; when first loading the Mercedes up, you will get the Continental 55 tyres, but you can select the Continental_B tires which will be a little more forgiving.

We have included a lot of accurate features to the Mercedes like the actual drivers faces, accurate paint jobs depicting specific paint jobs from different tracks, and correct car numbers, driver and car info, as well as accurate tyre graphics.

We have also created some new features in *rFactor*; we have created a new leaning driver, and an actual moving shifter to show you what gear you are in. (If you can refrain from using the HUD display, virtual mirrors or outside views, your driving experience will be very close to what you would get in 1955.)

We have optimized the model and LODs to get the best framerates possible, and have made the car look the same in all DX mods so the guys that can not run in DX9 will see the car the same as everyone else. We have done this so you can keep the detail level on full to get the best resolution you can with this mod.

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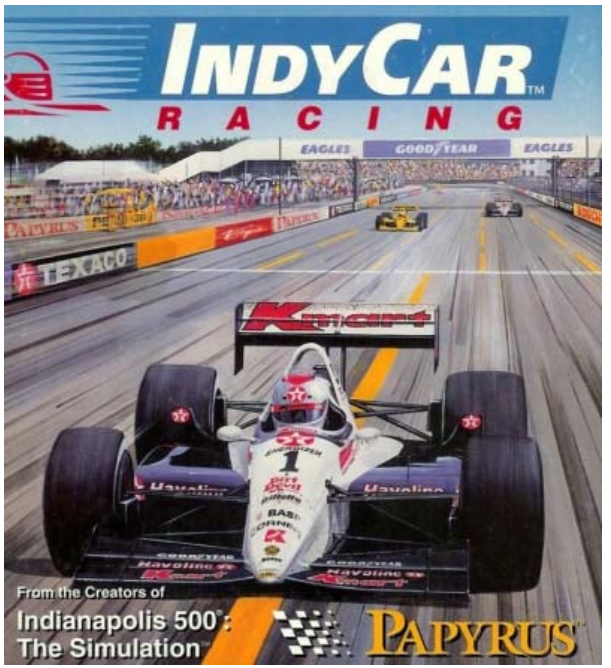
Side-by-Side

Adrián Fernández

Adrián Fernández sits down with Selena Horrell and confesses to being a sim-racer way back in the day of Papyrus' Indy Cars …

SelenaHorrell



Selena Horrell: Do you use simulators to prepare for events?

Adrián Fernández: Yes, for sure, but I don't do it as much as I used to. I did use a simulator to learn to Le Mans track this year, though, because I was competing in that event; it's such a long track, and I didn't want to spend too much time learning the track when I got there. I don't use them much anymore, though—I spend more time with my baby now!

Selena Horrell: Do you remember which simulators you used?

Adrián Fernández: Which brands? Sure, it was *EA Sports F1 2002* on a PC … with a MOMO steering wheel.

Selena Horrell: Did the sim help you with setups?

Adrián Fernández: Yah, for sure—I think that's the most realistic thing, you know? You can control the traction control, make is slippery, rain, and all that—the tracks, though—I haven't seen the latest ones, not as updated

as the other guys, but they weren't {that accurate then} … I think there is something …the problem, also, is that you don't see the tips of the nose, in-car, you know, and I think the views should be more fixed—more like you see it in a real race car: The tip of the nose is very important because it will help you judge your turning-in points better—but I think they're getting very close now …

Selena Horrell: How does speed translate—that is, from simulator to real?

Adrián Fernández: Nothing—it doesn't hurt in the sim! You don't feel the speed, and you don't really have the feel for what the car is doing. You just—you just perceive what the car is doing, you know? It's good exercise for concentration, of course, and for learning tracks, but jumping into a race car is completely different; the cars are moving—and here {in the simulator} you are just sitting, static, it doesn't move. Even those that move, it's not moving to the conditions, you understand, so it's not ideal … but for our level—I mean for someone who is learning lines—it's very good, you can learn the basics, and it's very good for that. But I bet—you can put one of the fastest guys in a simulator, put him in a car, and he won't be that fast because it's so different in real-life: Real-life is all about the loads, it's physical, you feel the throttle, you feel how the car moves—in a sim, you don't feel it, it's all about your eyes looking at it, while racing is all about feel—one hundred percent feel.

Selena Horrell: Tell me about setups—what is key?

Adrián Fernández: I try to set it up so it's not too easy, with no traction control, so I don't just get out of a corner and floor the throttle: I set it up so I have to drive it ...

Selena Horrell: Where do you start, in terms of setup?

Adrián Fernández: Normally, I play with the downforce levels, and the traction control, and then move on to the gears—shocks, and all that is hard, you can spend the whole day messing with that …

Selena Horrell: What cars do you use in the simulators?

Adrián Fernández: I always drive Formula One cars in the simulators. *F1 2002*, as I said … but in the old days, to learn the tracks for Cart, I had a little simulator … with Indy Cars and … was it Page Jones? Uhm … *Indy Car Racing*—remember? That wasn't as good as the new ones, but it was good for the time, and that's how I learnt the tracks at the time—Paul Page! He was the narrator, remember, and Robby Gordon was on the cover … I used that simulator a lot—plus in-car cameras from other drives—to learn the tracks. Learning the tracks is important: I came here in 1992 in Indy Lights, and everything was new for me—the good thing was that no-one had been here before either, and I won that race …

AUTOSIMSPORT

Contest

Winning the Blimey!Games Contest

John Sjöstrand's design saw him win an all-expenses paid trip to London where he got to visit with Ian Bell, his sport-car … and a lovesome view of 10TACLE STUDIOS' and Blimey!Games' full-licensed Ferrari-sim …

John**Sjöstrand**

John Sjöstrand is a Swedish sim-racer living close to Stockholm: He runs the Comet Racing Series (http://www.vtcc.se)


blimey!


RACE
8483

I designed a racing circuit from roads in the town where I live, Södertälje, in Sweden. I wrote a detailed document that covered every aspect of the 'track'—how it would be to drive, the history behind some of the turns, and so on. I shot a lot of pictures around the track, and also did an onboard lap (in my car) along with commentary. It may sound a bit like overkill, but considering the prize on offer, I was keen to create an excellent presentation.

Somehow I won, and I got a trip for two to London with one night at a luxury hotel. I asked to move the return flight one day, and booked an extra night at a more reasonably priced hotel so that we would have some extra-time in London to play tourist.

Little did I know what Blimey! had planned for us …

My wife Elisa and I got onboard the plane in Stockholm very early on a Monday morning with destination London City airport. As we touched down in London—with some very typical English weather welcoming us a couple of hours later—we hoped that our reception would not be as cool. A sign with the 'Blimey' logo, though, assured us we had not been forgotten. The man with the sign was John Harris, their Human Resource guy, and standing beside him was CEO, and Creative Director, Ian Bell. We quickly walked out to the parking lot where I found that I would much rather have landed at a more remote airport, rather than this one in the middle of the city for there, waiting for us all-a-gleaming under a spittle of rain, were a Ferrari F430, and a new Porsche Turbo. I did mention the sports-car part of the prize, right?

I got in the Ferrari with Ian, and soon found it interesting that he used the 'race' setting for the gearbox despite driving in urban London traffic. Of course, if he had let me drive—he seemed oblivious to my salivating stare—I would probably have done the same despite the rain and traffic! The Ferrari, in case you're wondering, was surprisingly comfortable … and unfortunately silent.

We took the cars home to Ian's garage, where a quick visit to his *tres-chic* apartment with a view over Tower Bridge was followed by a short walk to the Blimey!Games studio. Quite roomy, since many of Blimey!'s devs work remotely from hotspots around the globe. I introduced myself to those who were there, and they, in turn, gave me an overview of what they're working on: Most of it, sadly, beyond the remit of this article since it's all NDA and under development. I can say, though, that we were left rather impressed …

Ian has a reputation in sim-racing circles since his GTR-Simbin days of spouting lyrical over his upcoming products, and I was not to be disappointed; Ian was both gracious and quite open about what Blimey! were working on … but the truth is, there was really only one sim that I really wanted to know about …

10TACLE STUDIOS/Blimey!Games' fully-licensed Ferrari sim is one of the most anticipated sim in a very long time (alongside iRacing.com's sim), and I was rather excited when Ian accompanied me to a workstation where, waiting for me, was the latest build (for demo-purposes, anyway) of the Ferrari simulator.

Unfortunately they didn't have a wheel set up for me, so I had to make do with a gamepad controller. The controller is pretty good, but a poor relation to a steering wheel and pedals … all the more the pity when Ian fired up the first car for me to test: The most successful Ferrari Formula One car in history, the F1-2004, powered to life under my hands.

With the gamepad in hand, and Blimey! staff watching over my shoulder, I thought, "Oh my, this is going to make me look bad!". I had the car rolled-out on Ferrari's test track at Fiorano, which I had not driven before, but after a lap or so

I started feeling a little more comfortable with the controller. Despite being a very early version of the game, the graphics, and especially the lighting, looked absolutely fabulous. The real-time reflections from the surroundings—buildings and such—glistening off the blood-red Ferrari on the car was at a level I had never before seen on a monitor—really amazing.

But what took my breath away was the sensation of speed. This is one area that is quite often poor in sims: They are developed to simulate the physics correctly, but the other parts are always somehow disappointing, perhaps having to be downgraded during the development phase. Not so here. When I pushed the accelerator, the sensation of accelerating washed over me with a immersion I have yet to experience in any other sim ... for sure, the future of sims looks bright indeed if this is any indication of what our next generation simulators will both look like, and feel like …

My wife—who had come along to the office with me—is not exactly what I would describe as a dedicated sim-racer (a sad shake of the head in my direction is about all the enthusiasm she is able to muster), but she has tried all the major sims on the market (by default!), and she is—predictably for someone who can take it or leave it—hard to impress. She was, however, very impressed with the sensation of speed from the F1-2004, as well as the level of detail in-cockpit. The HDR lighting, on the other hand, and those reflections pleased me no end. Everything is reflected as it should be in the real world, and, unfortunately, I can also knowingly state that the grass, along with the other materials surrounding the track, look good, and feel quite solid, as well ...

But yes, this is a sim-racing magazine, and I know what you're thinking: 'Come on, John, how *did it drive*!'

The first feeling was fun; the sim was fun to drive, and it felt … a lot more 'sim' ... It is always difficult when driving with a different controller than one is used to, but I managed to both get into trouble and counter-steer myself out of it while feeling I was in control: That is, intuitive control of the simulated vehicle was immediately reflected in what I felt was an authentic response from the F1-2004. When I had settled down in the environment, I managed to set some good lap times as well.

Ian, perhaps sensing I was getting a little too comfortable, then flipped into the menu and gave me the chance to briefly try a couple of other cars, including an historic Formula One car (without wings, I assume it was from the mid-1960s), and then the FXX. Those made me feel the difference in challenge between driving the older cars, versus the new cars. There will be more than enough challenge for any level of driver; consider that, in an afternoon, I was driving two beautifully rendered Formula One Ferraris, separated by sixty years ... this sim is going to be amazing if, for no other reason, the sheer amount of classic, fully-licensed cars we'll have a chance to explore …

I didn't get as much driving time as I hoped—though, I suppose, quenching my thirst would have meant spending the entire day and more at the studio—but I was promised I would get the chance to drive the cars again, and I can't wait for that!

We then sat down and had a much-needed cup of coffee, and talked about the game, sim-racing, and the future of the sport. I must say, it looks bright!

After that, Ian and co. had a surprise for us. A car picked us up, and drove us to the London Eye where a private capsule, along with a bottle of champagne, was waiting for Elisa and me. The London Eye gives a great view of the city, and the trip takes some forty minutes—all too short for two people in such a romantic setting with a bottle of good champagne!

Our driver then took us to the Four Seasons in Canary Wharf where we checked in, and treated ourselves to a late lunch in the hotel restaurant. It really was a luxury hotel, and we did our best to blend in. After that, we took some time to relax—it had been an early start—and when we woke, we took a walk through Canary Wharf. Some quite impressive skyscrapers there, as a lot of financial companies are working in the area.

The next day we had a good breakfast before checking out and going to the new, cheaper hotel. The new room was about the same size as the previous hotel's bath-room … not that it mattered since we were now on tourist-mode, visiting the British Museum, and doing some shopping.

That the evening we met up with AUTOSIMSPORT's Jon Denton, who had dragged along the well-known Team Redline sim-racer and GTP-mod co-creator Dom Duhan, in a pub somewhere near Covent Garden. Trying not to bore Elisa to death, we didn't speak about racing *all* the time. I am not sure she agrees, though …

It's always nice meeting with fellow sim-racers, but ultimately, with the drinks flowing and Dom paying for dinner, we had to get back to the hotel. On the final day, we visited the Tower of London before heading to the airport. At security, they seemed to think I was somehow suspect since I had to even take off my shoes and have them x-rayed! That was probably the only downside of what had been a fantastic couple of days!

Looking back, now, as I do, I think sim-racing is in my blood because I really ache for one thing above all else: testing those Ferraris in the sim again! …

AUTOSIMSPORT

VR

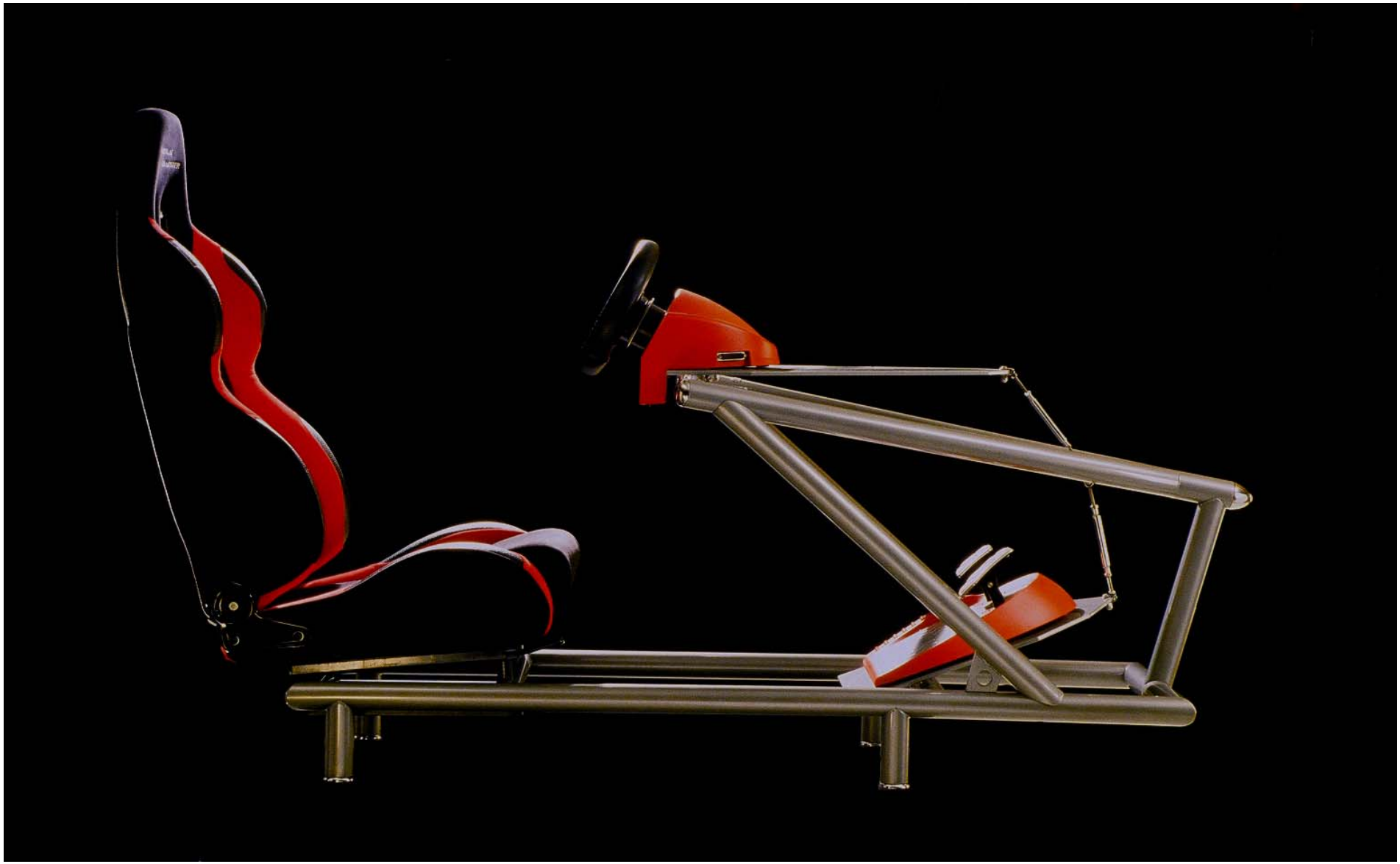
AUTOSIMSPORT

Virtual Roadster Production Model

AUTOSIMSPORT previews the Virtual Roadster Simulator Cockpit, four years in the design phase, and now finally available for purchase courtesy of Ted Heys ...

VR Virtual Roadster Production Model

continued



Considered by many to be the stylistic leader in racing-simulator cockpits, the Virtual Roadster was, up 'til now, only available as an expensive, custom-built prototype. But after years in development, the new, factory-made production model of the Virtual Roadster is about to be released at one-third the price of the prototype, thereby making this classic cockpit widely available as never before.

History

The Virtual Roadster first hit the simulator market back in 2001. Its unique, minimalist style, coupled with its robust construction, immediately made it a sought-after cockpit, attracting many admirers. But due to the nature of its custom construction, high cost of its materials, as well as shipping costs, the Roadster was available for a price that dug deep into the four digits, and thereby limited the customer base to only the well-heeled.

For the majority of sim-racers on a budget, however, the Virtual Roadster remained a 'wish-list' item, and many emails to the Virtual Roadster site were inquiries asking whether an affordable, kit version would ever be available. Responding to these requests, the Virtual Roadster's creator, Ted Heys, set about redesigning the cockpit with cost-saving forefront in his mind. The goal was to create a design that would remain true to the Virtual Roadster's classic design and firm construction while allowing it to be mass-produced, and shipped in a flat, cardboard box.

With this project firmly in mind, Ted, in 2003, enrolled in a four-year engineering program to learn structural principals alongside modern manufacturing techniques. The results can now be seen in the new, affordable Virtual Roadster.

Some examples of the cost-saving measures are the elimination of the expensive Speedrail connectors; the tubes on the new production model are welded. High-strength alloy steel has now replaced the aluminum, and, working with a leading aerospace engineering company in Texas, the key structural connections were redesigned and stress-tested in their lab.

After three years of design and construction, the final model was completed in the Spring of 2006, and the blueprints were sent off to manufacturers worldwide in order to find both a capable, and enthusiastic partner. The arduous process whittled down potential manufacturers until only the best remained: A steel furniture fabricator in Eastern Europe who was selected after demonstrating great precision and quality in the construction of the first prototypes.

The care with which the Virtual Roadster has been designed can be seen in the way the seat has been selected: Many different seat samples were evaluated to find the most comfortable model and, after much research and testing, an ISO9000 {ISO900 is an internationally recognized standard of quality, and includes guidelines to becoming an ISO9000 standard'} automotive accessory manufacturer was selected for its notable quality, as well as customer service.

Strength and Adjustability

The new Virtual Roadster, built to commercial grade, is designed to withstand even the most aggressive of drivers, and the strength and stability of the Wheel Deck is the dominant design feature. Built solidly from forty-five millimeter diameter steel tubing, and six millimeter thick aluminum plates, the Virtual Roadster is designed for abuse. In fact, the Wheel Deck has successfully been tested with a 220 pound load!

To achieve this strength, the height of the Wheel Deck is fixed at nineteen inches above the chassis. This positions the hands on the wheel at shoulder height, where the leverage is greatest. Earlier prototype versions of the Virtual Roadster had the ability to alter the height of the Wheel Deck, but it was hardly ever needed, and therefore scrapped from the final version. Hundreds of test-drivers and customers have driven in perfect comfort by only adjusting the slide and the tilt of the seat. That being said, the *relative* height of the steering wheel can be precisely adjusted with additional hardware. The Owner's Manual has the complete instructions.

Distribution

The first batch of cockpits will be arriving in the U.S. in November. North American sales will be through the website, http://www.virtualroadster.com. Several potential European distributors will soon be receiving evaluation cockpits for Continental, and UK sales. Other distributors are being sought in Australia, South America, and Asia.

Price

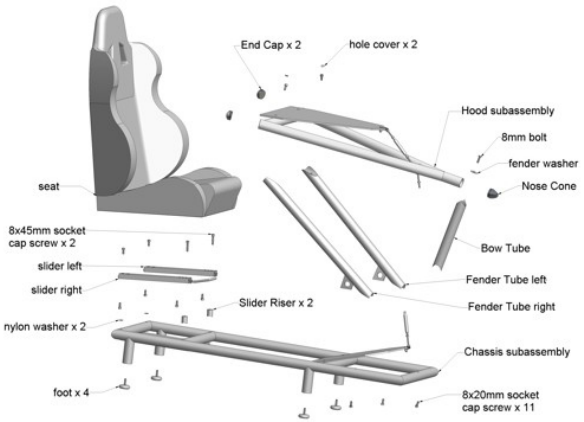
Comparable in quality to other high-end cockpits costing hundreds of dollars more, the target retail price for the new Virtual Roadster is $695. Custom frame and seat colors will also be available. Contact ted@virtualroadster.com for more information.

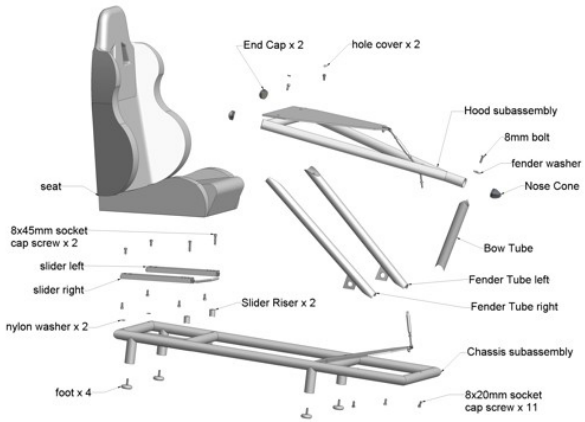
What's in a sim? Whatever the answer to that question, each component has the possibility of being tapped in order to deliver a more realistic feel to the sim-racer. But despite the many ways in which what is 'inside' a sim are processed by third-party add-ons (Force-Feedback, and the like), there remain many aspects to simulator-racing immersion that have gone, up to this point, largely untapped. Primarily among these is finding ways in which to use the audio track of the sim itself in order to add an extra dimension of immersion.

There are, of course, high-end rigs—The VirtualGT being but one example—that do use audio to simulate movement in a racing seat environment. Most, however, are quite loud (not that loud is a bad thing—unless your wife is trying to watch *Law & Order* in the other room), but also expensive (as in thousands), and thus out of the price range of most sim-racers.

VR Virtual Roadster Production Model

continued





Videos:
Two videos of the Virtual Roadster are posted on YouTube. The first shows the cockpit in action.
The second is a computer animation showing the parts of the kit coming together, one by one, to form the assembled cockpit.

Standard Features:
Open and elevated cockpit makes for smooth entry and exit
Comfortable, sporty ergonomics accommodates drivers from 4'-8" to 6'-6" and at least 350 lbs.
Wheel Deck large and strong enough to support 100 lb plus video monitor
Open Hood tubes allow for concealed wiring and/or optional internal ventilation system
Packs flat in box (57" x 24" x 7") for economical shipping and storage
Compatible with all systems, PC, XBOX, PlayStation, Nintendo
Accepts nearly all makes of steering wheels and pedals
Elevated chassis allows easy access for vacuuming
One year limited warranty

Specifications:
Design
American design and engineered
Awarded U.S. Patent # D446,263
Created on Autodesk Inventor 3-D CAD software
Redesigned and stress tested at a leading aerospace engineering firm

Construction:
CNC laser-cut tubes and plates
TIG welded by hand
European craftsmanship and quality

Material:
Almost 30 feet (9 m) of high strength, roll cage diameter steel tubing, 45 x 1.5mm, yield strength of 65,000 psi
1/4" (6 mm) thick aluminum alloy plates
Custom machined, stainless steel aerodynamic Nose Cone and End Caps
Highly adjustable, steel framed, race-grade seat with plush felt fabric
Seat and sliders manufactured by an ISO 9000 company
Automotive-quality, metallic-flake powder coat paint
Top coat of high-gloss, baked-on lacquer
All visible hardware is stainless steel

Adjustability:
Seat slides 8" fore and aft on regulation sliders, tilt lever sets recline angle
Wheel Deck tilts plus 5 or –10 degrees
Pedal Decks tilts from 10 to 30 degrees
Pedal Deck is over 18" long, allowing 4" of fore and aft adjustment of standard pedals and room enough for the G25 set
Height and angle of steering wheel and pedals can be further modified with additional hardware
Seat bottom angle (set at 5 degrees) can be adjusted with additional hardware
Chrome plated leveling feet with non-slip black rubber pads
Compatible with all types of steering wheels and software
Compatible with most models of pedals, including ECCI
Force transducer mounting hardware on Speaker Deck included
Stows vertically in a 23 x 43" floorspace

Cockpit Dimensions:
Length: 74.5" (189 cm) with seat at furthest rearward position
Width: 24.5" (62 cm)
Height: 43.0" (109 cm)
Weight:70 lbs. (31 kg)

Shipping Dimensions:
Chassis: 58" (1473 mm) Length X 25" (635 mm) Width X 7" (178 mm) Height
Weight: 50 lbs. (23 kg)
Seat :54" (1380 mm) Length X 22.4" (570 mm) Width X 11.4" (290 mm) Height
Weight: 37 lbs. (17 kg)

AUTOSIMSPORT

GreenFlag

AUTOSIMSPORT

Virtual Grand Prix Gets FIA-Backing

The Virtual Grand Prix competition, sponsored by the FIA-accredited Swedish Motor Sport Federation, and offering a 10,000 EURO prize along with live TV coverage to tempt world sim-racing stars such as Roland Ehnström, and real-world racers such as Jocke Mangs, is a significant step toward sim-racing's full integration with real-world racing: Svenska Bilsportförbundet's Magnus Öhrström was kind enough to answer our questions ...

Sweden's Svenska Bilsportförbundet (Swedish Motor Sport Federation {'Bil' being 'car', in case you're wondering!}) is the first FIA-affiliated motor-sports federation to officially recognise sim-racing as a bone-fide form of international motor sports (as reported in these pages over a year ago).

But with their backing (not to mention creation) of the Virtual Grand Prix competition, the federation is showing some real commitment in promoting and marketing sim-racing to the general public. VGP will offer a 100,000 Swedish Krona prize (roughly 10,000 EURO or … well, not sure what it would be in U.S dollars considering the dollars' freefall {about $14,000 as of this writing}), and is, as Svenska Bilsportförbundet's Magnus Öhrström tells us in this exclusive AUTOSIMSPORT interview, just the first step in their ambitious plans for sim-racing's professionalisation.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Could you give me the background to the VGP concept? Who came up with the idea, and what is the general plan for its evolution?

Magnus Öhrström: VGP is one part of the engagement in {our} Virtual Competition concept. VGP is the commercial part, and then there will be a part for our clubs, organised under the Swedish Motor Sport Federation's flag, to organise separate competitions, not engaged with VGP, but under the same regulations.

The idea came when we, {that is Magnus and the president of the Swedish Motor Sport Federation, Kage Schildt—Ed}, learned that our racing and rally drivers used virtual racing and rally to train, and get to know racing circuits, and rally terrains. We could also see the power behind it when we attended exhibitions and events. {With that in mind}, the board of the Swedish Federation decided to {create the} VGP, and virtual racing {by extension}. One of the Swedish Champion classes next year {was thus created}to explore the power of virtual competition, and the VGP.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Could you explain in what ways the Swedish Motor Sport Federation, which is a member of the FIA, is involved with the VGP, and also, again, why?

Magnus Öhrström: The Swedish Motor Sport Federation, (Svenska Bilsportförbundet—SBF), owns the concept, and has engaged a company to organise the VGP with events, online gaming, and televised finals. The quality of sim-racing is very like 'real' racing today. We hope to see the future will probably bring virtual racers and rally drivers to our circuits and sites to investigate the 'real thing', and challenge the established drivers on site, for the real thing, and virtually. We hope {also} that this will recruit more motor sport enthusiasts.

AUTOSIMPORT: Could you give me a brief explanation on the VGP itself—that is, the format, the sim used, and so forth?

Magnus Öhrström: VGP is organised at the website http://www.vgp.se/home.do, where all the qualifications are made under five separate q-periods. The best will qualify to a 'part/semi-final', and from there some will win their place in the semi-final, and some will be able to take a 'Wildcard'. There will be two drivers from each part/semi, and semi-final to continue to the final. VGP will be broadcast {televised} in ten programmes: Six semi/part, three semi-finals, and one Grand Final.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What channels will VGP be featured on?

Magnus Öhrström: VGP will be on our TV channel TV4+, one of the best channels to be in, regarding viewers and genre! *{It is, in fact, the largest commercial channel in Sweden—Ed}*

AUTOSPIMSPORT: Could you explain who is eligible for the VGP?

Magnus Öhrström: Everyone who is interested! Next year there will be an open championship, but only a Swede can be Swedish Champion.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What is the prize money at stake?

Magnus Öhrström: This year the prize will be 10,000 EURO, or 100,000 Swedish Krona.

AUTOSIMSPORT: When do the actual events take place, and how many rounds are scheduled?

Magnus Öhrström: {We will have six different events this year} and they are just to put the light on VGP. We are still in the production phase this year, but will soon have the project ready for next year.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Could you tell me a little more about how the Swedish Motor Sport Federation is involved in sim-racing; I believe it is one of the only organising bodies to have recognised sim-racing as a sport itself; would you be able to explain and elaborate a little further on this?

Magnus Öhrström: Correct, the Swedish Motor Sport Federation is the first of the FIA-Federations to take virtual racing to our sports. We have organized virtual competition from the ground {up} with our clubs. We sincerely hope that VGP will put virtual competition on the map, and that we can develop a worldwide VGP with FIA involvement.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Are there other sponsors for this event?

Magnus Öhrström: There are a number of sponsor with us this year, and {we} hope to attract more sponsors for next year.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Could you give us the dates for the events?

Magnus Öhrström: We are in the final of the event part of the VGP season, this year, but there will be an event at the Swedish Touring Car Championship (STCC) finale at Mantorp Park on the twenty ninth, and thirtieth of September, and at the 'Svenska Bilsport' exhibition in Stockholm running from the twenty-fourth through the twenty-sixth of November..

AUTOSIMSPORT

The Weather Forecast Is For A Slight Chance Of Rain

T2

PerDavidsson

OlaLennström

Per Davidsson, and Ola Lennström explain how and why weather forecasts have now become a reality (for GTR2, RACE, and RACE07) courtesy of the Swedish Sim Racers …

SSR GTR League, Season 6, Division 1, Zhuhai, 2007-08-28
Roland Ehnström vs. Johannes Norberg, final lap...

Sim Racing

WEATHER FORECAST

SWEDISH SIM RACERS

Introduction

Swedish Sim Racers (SSR) have developed a web-based tool that enables the creation of objective weather forecasts, generated from the weather-files (weather.txt) used by *GTR2*, *RACE* and *RACE07*. The tool can be found at the Swedish Sim Racers homepage, and is free for anyone to use.

History Behind The Weather Forecasts

It all began when Swedish Sim Racers decided to use changeable weather for their world-renowned *GTR2*-league. A Division 2 race at Hockenheim, with particularly difficult weather conditions, was felt by many to have been too much a matter of luck, and many felt the only option was to quit using the changeable weather in the sim. Others, however, insisted that the changeable weather in GTR2 added to the realism, and that a solution needed to be found in order to make the weather more 'predictable' and less of a lottery.

At the time, no information about the weather was available pre-race. Discussions about creating a weather-file, and a forecast—created manually—was discussed, but this idea was abandoned since it would mean far more work for the admins of the series, and, more importantly, it would also be unfair since the admins (some of whom were also racing in the series) would know the exact weather conditions for all phases of all sessions in advance.

To be able to keep changeable weather—which really does bring a new dimension to the races—SSR started thinking of a way to generate weather forecasts automatically. A tool was eventually developed that took the weather-file as input, and from the weather-files was generated a weather forecast.

At first the tool required a lot of manual work, so it was only used by a few people in the admin-group at SSR. But slowly, a web-based version has evolved from this original concept—much easier to use, and far more automated—and this programme is now ready to be released to the public.

The forecast has been tested for two full seasons in the *GTR2*-leagues at SSR, as well as on various LAN-events, and it has evolved into a tool that we are very satisfied with (even though we are constantly trying to improve it).

The Weather Forecast Design

The forecast is generated from the weather-file and is, in that sense, an exact description of the weather that will occur during the session (practice, qualification, and race). It was decided not to introduce any probability in the forecasts (for example, by altering the values in weather-files): Instead, in order to make the forecasts as life-like as possible (that is, not exact descriptions of every detail in the weather), we have divided the weather into several groups such as, 'light rain', 'heavy rain', 'clouds', and so forth.

The most important factor to know about the weather—for the sim-racer—is whether the session will be dry or wet, so to get a little bit of uncertainty when the weather is on the brink of turning to rain, or very close to drying up, a group called 'risk for light rain/chance for dry weather' was also added.

The Weather Forecast: Different Parts

The forecast is divided into six parts, where each part describes one aspect of the weather that will occur. These parts are: 'Wetness on track before race', 'Most common weather', 'Best weather', 'Worst weather', 'Average temperature', and 'Temperature changes'.

Here is an example: *'Before the race, light rain. During the race, mostly light rain, some heavy rain, and some sun. The average temperature will be around 18 degrees but with big temperature changes.'*

This forecast will tell the sim-racer the following: That the track will be a little wet when the race starts; that, during the race, it will rain most of the time, and the most common rain-type will be light rain; that the worst weather that will occur during the race is heavy rain; and that during some part of the race, it will also be sunny.

For a more detailed and exact description of the forecasts—that is, how the forecast should be interpreted—see this page at our website.

Session End Times

Since most leagues use a vastly differing number of laps for their races, as well as for their qualifying sessions, and so forth, we have made it possible to choose how much of the information—through the different sessions—can be used within the forecast.

For example, if your qualification goes on for fifteen minutes, you might want to set the end time for qualification to fifteen minutes, otherwise you will get a forecast for a far greater part of the weather than will occur in that fifteen minute session.

If the weather is set to time-scaled in the race-session, the whole weather-file will be used in the race, but at a faster rate than is specified in the weather-file. So for race-sessions with time-scaled weather, use the default end time for best results.

For a more detailed account and discussion about end times, see this page …

The Simulators Supported

The weather forecast generator currently supports weather-files from *GTR2*, *RACE,* and *RACE07*. There is, however, a small difference in the weather files between those used in the *GTR* series, and those used in the *RACE* series, so before creating the forecast, make sure to select the proper simulator-type.

Future SimBin sims, we hope, feature compatible weather-files, making this a long-lived tool.

Create Your Own Weather Forecasts

To try our tool and create your own forecasts, visit our website here. Choose the language of the forecast (currently available only in Swedish and English), choose the simulator, change the end times to your custom end times, browse for the weather-file you want to use, and press 'Upload'. The forecasts for the sessions in the weather-file will then be created and printed on-screen.

SSR hopes that you will have much fun with this tool in your *GTR2, RACE* and *RACE07* leagues, and will, we hope, help you set-up a whole new dimension of changeable, and predictable (as far as weather can ever be predictable) weather into your league.

Questions

For questions about the tool and the weather-forecasts in Swedish, visit our forum here. For questions in English, visit the weather forecast-thread here.

Donations And Terms Of Use

The tool was created without any financial benefits in mind, and was, at first, only created to be used internally in our league; it turned out so well, though, that we now want to bring the joy of weather forecasts to other leagues as well.

The tool is free for anyone to use. The only thing we ask is that you place the forecast facility prominently on your website/programme, and also refer to our weather-page to help us spread the word about our tool.

With that said, we do have a cost for our web-server, as well as our race-server which are kept running thanks to donations from the members of SSR. If you feel this tool is of any economic value (or for any other reason), we are happy to accept donations to help us keep our servers running.

Thanks To …

Rohland Ehnström—who assisted us with his deep knowledge of the weather in *GTR2*. Rohland has been highly involved in every aspect of designing the weather forecasts

Erik Hutters—who created all the graphical interfaces, as well as the weather icons for the web-based tool

Niclas Norenheim—who hosts both the web, and the race-server for SSR

Swedish Sim Racers community—who have taken part in the design of the weather-forecasts through the discussions about the forecasts, and about changeable weather in *GTR2*, especially Roger Wennström, and Per Gassne, both of whom have been very involved in these discussions. Many thanks, also, to the many from the community who have also contributed in so many ways.

Links

http://www.swedishsimracers.com
http://weather.swedishsimracers.com
http://forum.swedishsimracers.com
http://forum.racesimcentral.com/showthread.php?t=299182

AUTOSIMSPORT

OvalOffice

Dakota Sim Racing

Bob Simmerman takes a trip down memory lane and discovers the legends along with mod-designer Denis Rioux …

BobSimmerman


STP
PONTIAC
GOAL
SKOAL


Rayboestos
BRAKES
12


2
66
CARWASH
W&E Plymouth

1990 was one hell of a remarkable year in NASCAR Cup racing history. A mere two years after the mandatory installation of restrictor plates at the Super Speedways, the 1990 season nevertheless provided for all the elements to a storybook year. From Derek Copes unexpected win at the Daytona 500 after Dale Earnhardt, who had led 155 laps to that point, ran over a piece of debris and saw a twenty-five second lead—and the victory—vanish on the last lap of the race, to the fierce battle between Earnhardt and Mark Martin for the championship, the first year of the decade was a classic.

Much like the early days of Formula One, though, the season was visited by more than one tragedy: Rob Moroso would lose his life mere hours after the September Tyson Holly Farms 400 race in a traffic car accident, and Mike Ritch would be killed in a pit lane accident during the running of the Atlanta Journal 500.

The deaths prompted NASCAR into rule changes and pit lane procedure changes, and the loss of Ritch has no doubt saved many lives as the years have gone by.

At the end of the season, it was Earnhardt who ultimately prevailed, leading Martin at the end by a mere twenty-six points, overcoming a deficit of forty-nine points with only four races to go in one of the closest and most exciting championship battles in NASCAR history.

And it just got to a PC near you as the great talents that make up the Dakota Sim Racing/Designs by Rioux team have recently released their fantastic mod for *NASCAR Racing 2003*, the 1990 Season. My excitement and joy at seeing the availability of such a thing prompted me to get off my butt and do some digging to get a behind-the-scenes lowdown on the creators of this fantastic new addition to the already amazing *NASCAR Racing 2003*, a sim that remains as fresh today as it did nearly five years ago when we got our first look at it.

Denis Rioux was more than happy to give me some time and answer a few questions I had about this gorgeous new mod for one of the best sims of all time. I was hoping to get a glimpse of what is on the horizon for this classic sim, and I wasn't disappointed.

AUTOSIMSPORT: How many members are involved with Dakota Sim Racing?
Denis Rioux: There are about twenty of us involved with the creation of mods for *N2003*. Programming, 3D Modeling, templates, car-set painting, car-set AI ratings, and beta testing are just a few of the tasks on our plate. We have also created a few *N2003* tracks. Currently, we are in the process of moving to a new site and forum by the name of Designs by Rioux, created by Bill Anderson.
AUTOSIMSPORT: How long have you all been modding?
DR: I began modding about three years ago, and we have only recently formed the Dakota Sim Racing team—sixteen months ago, roughly. The Dakota Sim Racing team was created by Bill Anderson.
AUTOSIMSPORT: What are some of your past projects?
DR: Early on, I was interested in creating tracks for *N2003*, with my first track representing South Boston. After that track, many more followed. My first modding work was in collaboration with Gary Champagne (aka 'Midnight Wrangler') on a set of stands for the Daytona 1970 track that was to be used in the new GN70 v1.1 mod created by the US Pits. It was at that time I became interested in creating mods for *N2003*.

I contacted Jim Kerekes (aka 'DT99') in order to obtain permission to create an updated version of the GN70 mod, an update dealing mainly with damage modelling. In regards to programming, I have learned a lot from Scott Stockton ('Tigger#76') from The Pits, from using tutorials, and working with Bill Anderson (Dakota Sim Racing). We made another GN70 mod update (V2.5), a 1970 Saturday Night Stock Cars mod (SNSC70), and finally a 1990 Winston Cup Series mod (Cup90).
AUTOSIMSPORT: What are some of your future modding plans?
DR: There are quite a few projects in the works at present, to name a few; IROC 87, Late Model 1990, T/A 70 Historic Trans Am mod, 1955 Historic Stock Car mod, Winston Cup mods covering the years of 1995-1997. There are also plans to work on stock cars from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980's with an emphasis on local short tracks you might find on Friday and Saturday night local race events.
AUTOSIMSPORT: Are you planning anything for any sim beside *NASCAR 2003*?
DR: Only for *N2003* at the moment. Maybe later for *rFactor*, possibly by converting our *N2003* mods.
AUTOSIMSPORT: How long did the 1990 mod take to create?
DR: Working with the team, I created this mod in about four months.
AUTOSIMSPORT: What was involved with the decision to model the 1990 season?
DR: The first person who asked me to work on this mod is Chris Crockford (aka 'CC48'). After a discussion with Bill Anderson, we decided to proceed with the Cup90 mod. Around January 2006, Mr. Oblivious ('MR « O »') had published some pictures of a 1990s mod, but unfortunately, he never released it to the public.

I worked from a basic model by 'Mr. « O »' to create our four models: Lumina, Olds/Buick, Thunderbird, and Grand Prix. The most difficult one was the Grand Prix as it is not easy to create a realistic 'low polys' model.

I have created all LODs, exterior and interior damages for each LOD, interior and rear views for all models, and a new pace car (Trans Am 1990). All car sets for the years 1989/1990/1994 were created by the team who, presently, is working on the 1992 and 1993 car sets.

AUTOSIMSPORT: It is a fantastic mod; were you able to have all the features you wished to have at the beginning of the mod's creation?

DR: Thank you. Before we begin work on the models, we try to obtain the following information: Specifications for all models in terms of length, width, height, and wheelbase. We also try to gather as many pictures as possible of each model, model kits commercially available that may help with modding the cars for the sim, blueprints if available, and we have also obtained many pictures and information from the Historical Stock Car Racing forum for which we are very thankful.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What are some of your favorite projects?

DR: All of them! I have really enjoyed working on Daytona 1970 (historic track), the GN70 mod, the SNSC70 mod and, mostly, the CUP 1990 mod. I think everyone has loved the Winston Cup series of the years 1989-1994 with Dale Earnhardt.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What types of software do you use during the creation of your works?

DR: I work with thedrawing software Paint Shop Pro 9.0, an old version of 3DS Max, and Zmodeler.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What are some of your favorite racing simulators to play?

DR: While I am creating mods for *N2003*, I have very little free time to play, but my two favorite simulations are *Grand Prix Legends* and *NASCAR Racing 2003 Season*.

AUTOSIMSPORT: What simulators release are you looking forward to?

DR: For announced racing simulations, *iRacing.com* as well as a new version of *rFactor* (v.2.0), better adapted to short tracks (NASCAR, including their rules). I would also like to thank all of the people who have helped me in the past, and who are currently helping me make improvements to my work; MasGrafx Racing, The US Pits, Jim Kerekes, Scott Stockton, Gary Champagne of Midnight Blue and Sim Race Tracks, Todd aka Sbvelle70, Bill Anderson, and all of the folks at Dakota Sim Racing/Designs by Rioux, and, finally a big thanks to everyone at Dakota Sim Racing.

LOU MAGYAR'S HARDWARE REVIEW

MATROX

Matrox's Digital TripleHead2Go

Lou Magyar comes face-to-face(s) with the three-headed beast from Matrox and learns why three heads are better than one …

LouMagyar

Matrox Graphics' parent company, Matrox, has been in the high-end graphics business for over thirty years. The graphics division, meanwhile, has been developing their highly-regarded Graphics eXpansion Module (GXM) multi-display line of products for gamers, developers, and professionals alike, and their latest creation is the all-new Digital TripleHead*2Go*.

This compact unit retails for about $330, and for the price, you get a Digital TripleHead*2Go* that will instantaneously turn your single video card analog, or digital output, into a triple-screen wide-resolution monitor. Why '*2*Go', you ask? The answer lies in the TH*2*G's ingenious design that requires no case intervention. It simply slips between your video card and your monitors, and its tiny size, along with its USB-power-supply, means you can bring it anywhere—making it perfect for gamers on-the-go.

The Matrox website notes that, 'Matrox GXM are a new line of patent-pending technology that allows users to add multi-display support to a system via external connectivity. GXM are easy-to-use, external, palm-sized boxes that connect to a notebook or desktop PC. Benefit from multi-display computing without having to open the PC chassis'.

Matrox provides a tool on their website that will test your system for compatibility. If you are thinking about getting a TH*2*G, you can go here to ascertain whether your system is up to the task before purchasing. It will check the graphics card you're using, the driver version installed on your system, and confirm if your particular configuration will work with TripleHead*2Go*.

Hookup is straightforward—so simple, in fact, that the included connection overview leaflet that explains it all is precisely one diagram long. The TH*2*G connects to either a VGA or DVI output from your video card using one of the two supplied dongles. Connection to the monitors is just as it would be if you were connecting a single monitor to your video card's digital output. The TH*2*G is sensibly labeled so you don't need to guess which monitor will appear where on your new wide-resolution display. The last thing to connect is the six-foot USB cable. This supplies the power to the TH*2*G. And that's all there is to the hardware connection.

Having said that, I must admit to having experienced a small glitch when I did my install ... see, I am a nay-sayer, and so, as always, just jumped straight in. The TH*2*G has an LED next to the USB power port. This LED is used as a troubleshooting diagnostic tool. A black LED (no power) is pretty straight forward; either you have power, or you don't. Black, however—according to the troubleshooting section of the User Guide—says that it could also mean that, 'your Matrox product may not support the selected display mode', and guides you to 'see "Supported display modes", page 21' (of the User Guide).

A Red power LED indicator is also indicative of a problem. Red's telltale is, in addition to the aforementioned 'display mode', an issue that indicates, 'unsupported graphics hardware in your computer'; in other words, you need a new video card. In my case, I connected the hardware and booted-up the computer ... *before* installing the software, or reading the User Guide.

I was greeted by black monitor screens and a red power LED ... great, but not quite what I was after! So now what? I shut down, reverted back to the single monitor connected directly to the sound card, and opened the User Guide. There, I found the above information concerning the red LED, and thumbed to 'page 21' hoping to solve my problem.

Well, 'page 21' doesn't have any further troubleshooting information, only a list of supported display modes, and, to make matters worse, my monitor's resolution settings were already *in* one of the listed display modes.

Ghaaaaa!

Now what? I went back to the triple-head configuration, with the self-same results. I tried several different things before it finally dawned on me that my problem was none other than procedural. After about thirty minutes of scratching my head, I realized that, if I set my desktop to 640x480 VGA, the problems should resolve themselves. And, yep, I should'a been thinking about 'best practices', and done that in the first place; it would have saved me a ton of grief, and gotten me going a lot sooner.

With ecransbezel (above), without (below)

I spoke with Lisa at Matrox regarding the vagaries in the guide. Being a bit more technically oriented, I was able to resolve the issue, despite the lack of guidance in the User Guide. I suggested that something more detailed regarding the red LED should perhaps be discussed in the guide. Something as simple as 'set your resolution to 640x480 before you begin' in the instructions would go a long way to avoiding problems that are, shall we say, simply avoided. Adding that same line to the troubleshooting guide would also be a big help for end-users.

Okay, so I got the TH2G to work with the three Samsung monitors just fine after realizing the error of my ways. But, once bitten twice poisoned and all that, I decided to take a none-too-cursory spin through the instruction manual included on the install CD to see what I needed to do next.

Of course, I should probably have done that *before* I disconnected my existing monitor and replaced it with the TH2G and three nineteen inch LCDs! The three monitors I used for this review were identical nineteen-inch Samsung SyncMaster 940B TFT-LCD Digital displays, with a resolution of 1280x1024. The TH2G triples the desktop width to 3840x1024, which is, conveniently, the maximum resolution capability of the TH2G ... nothing like a super-wide desktop!

The obvious choice for procedural nay-sayers would be to explore the driver CD. In addition to the .PDF manual, I found a couple of software applications that make the TH2G do what it does so well. Insert the CD, and the autorun feature brings up an install control panel, from which you can get up and running.

The first on the list to be installed is the PowerDesk SE application. This software is the 'driver' file, and includes tools to help with image quality adjustment, center pop-up control, window management, and the Matrox Bezel Management tool—among others. The PowerDesk SE detects all your connected monitors, along with their available resolutions, and allows you to configure the resolution of your entire desktop, thereby allowing you to make configuration changes to your display mode. It's all quite easy to follow and very intuitive once you get things going.

I jumped into the PowerDesk SE application and set about configuring my new über-wide desktop. The Bezel Management tool is a great little application: Simple in its effectiveness, this tool allows you to virtually remove the gap created by the bezels on your monitors for a seamlessly smooth look to your gaming desktop. The tool lets you shift the left and right monitor displays either left/right or up/down so that the gap created by the display bezels disappears. I put the left and right monitor bezels just behind the middle monitor bezels, effectively creating a single (rather than double) bezel between them. This made for less 'dead space' between the monitors since 'dead space' has the potential to make icons on your desktop disappear.

The other application on the install CD is the Matrox TripleHead2Go Surround Gaming Utility (SGU). The SGU is a tool to tweak your game desktops to match the resolution capabilities of the TH2G, and automatically detects the resolution capability of your video card. I started out with an ATI Radeon 9800 Pro that I *thought* was a pretty decent card ... unfortunately, it's only capable of a 1920x480 resolution with the TH2G. As it turns out, the X800 I purchase has the same limiting capability. Apparently older ATI cards suffer from dysfunctional attitudes—they neither work nor play well with others!

Despite the apparently low-res capabilities of both these cards, however, I can say with confidence that the triple monitor setup is a thing to behold. After a chat with Matrox, I found out that I would need something better than an X1000 to get higher resolution from my ATI cards.

My PC at work has a dual-head GeForce 6600GT. The TH2G says it can run at the full 3840x1024 with this card. Having something similar to the dual-head 6600GT intrigues me ... you can have your triple-headed beast on one port, and a regular desktop on the other, allowing you to monitor things like TeamSpeak while still having a full-screen gaming monitor! *Cool*!

I set about exploring the capabilities of the SGU. It will search for, and identify, all the games installed on your computer, but it didn't find a couple that I had ... one—*GPL*—was too old, and the other—*Medal of Honor, Pacific Assault*—was too new! Matrox says that they update the information for different games as they become available, and will perhaps release a version of the SGU that not only checks for games, but also auto-updates as well so you never need to go hunting for config. files. The reason why it searches for your games is because the SGU will, at your command, optimize each game it *does* find. What this does is create a unique .EXE, customized for the wide desktop, after which you use *that* icon to start your game or simulator.

Since *GPL* remains one of my favorites, I decided to spend some time into sorting out the problem. I had read that there were some .DLL edits to allow widescreen resolutions for *GPL,* and did what any red-blooded *GPL*er does—I started scouring the net to find some info'. I came across the Today's Legends site, which is chock-full of useful how-to things *GPL*-related. Today's Legends then pointed me to the definitive SimHQ, which had a very detailed and simple to follow guide on getting *GPL* set up for widescreen. After a couple of minutes (most of which was downloading), I was off and racing *GPL* on a 1920x480 (limited by my video card *and GPL*'s DX7 architecture) monitor.

Bliss!

Getting *rFactor* up and running, on the other hand, couldn't have been easier. In fact, it was just a single click of the 'Optimize' button, then a click of the new desktop icon, and I was experiencing widescreen nirvana, *rFactor*-style. All the big simulators are there ... *Dirt Track Racing 2, F1 2002, GP4, GTL, GTR, GTR2, LFS2, MotoGP, Nascar Racing 2002, and 2003 Season, Racer, rFactor* ... you name it, it's probably there, along with dozens of other FPS and RPG games too.

If you are looking for greater immersion along with a more realistic peripheral view, then I strongly recommend the Matrox TripleHead*2*Go. I saw absolutely no impact on frame rates—I thought that the expanded desktop might cause some FPS hits: The TH*2*G quite simply triples your video card's output to create a very widescreen desktop, without any performance loss. Matrox has done their homework with their GXM devices.

Gamers and people that actually work for a living alike can benefit from the extra-wide desktop created by the TripleHead*2Go;* highly recommended!

AUTOSIMSPORT

PLAYSEATS

An Evolution In Sim-Racing Playseats

Lou Magyar slides into the Playseats Evolution Gaming Seat and finds a lot to like … and that's before he sees the price …

LouMagyar

Practicality In Design

Let's start with a conclusion: The Playseats Evolution simulator-racing seat offers a superb, realistic ride along with an authentic feel for sim-racers on a budget. While many make the claim of affordability along with practicality, the Evolution acheives both with a style and panache that belies its price, ease-of-assembly, and functionality.

If you have ever thought about ripping the passenger seat out of a Miata and mounting it on a frame so you can race your favorite simulator in an actual racing position, don't bother—go out and get yourself a Playseats Evolution instead: You'll save yourself a lot of trouble, expense, and you'll keep your girlfriend happy in the bargain (assuming the Miata doesn't belong to you).

What the Playseats Evolution does is simple: It gives you an enhanced seating position, superior immersion, and, in all likelihood, cuts down on your chiropractor bill, all in one very nifty, and brilliantly designed piece of hardware—at a price that is genuinely affordable.

I may be wrong, but experience tells me that the vast majority of sim-racers sit—out of necessity—either in an office chair, or a folding chair; our simulator rigs are, as often as not, also our home-office or homework computers, in addition to being our racing machines. I am in the self-same

position: I enjoy racing, but out of necessity, I have not turned my racing PC—which also serves as the keeper of the books, the study hall, the email gizmo, and the recipe finder—into a fully-fledged sim-racing rig; rather, to keep the peace, I have left it in the furniture cabinet so that when we have guests, my 'mess' can be hidden from view.

So what's a sim-racer to do? While the Miata might be willing to give up her seat for your enjoyment, it's not likely the most practical thing to have in your family room, especially if you actually have a family that uses it *as* a family room.

Enter the Playseats Evolution that allows sim-racers to have the best of both worlds: A sim-racing rig by night, and a home office by day, all courtesy of the Evolution's outstanding design coupled with Playseats' intimate knowledge of what sim-racers actually *need*—a low-cost, no-fuss-no-mess storable solution that will enhance the sim-racing feel while not cluttering up the living environments.

The Evolution comes neatly packaged in a single large box, weighing about forty-four pounds (twenty kilos). On opening the box, it's evident that the Evolution's packaging is well thought out—so well thought out, in fact, that I doubt I'll ever be able to find a way to get it all back in there!

After pulling everything out of the box and un-wrapping the paper-protected small parts, I set out to assemble the seat using the multi-lingual instruction book as guide. To be honest, I doubt most of us would even need the guide, since assembling the thing really is as simple as one-two-three (and four, actually, since assembly requires four quick steps—no matter which of the nineteen languages you choose to follow!). And before you ask, I can only identify six or so of the available languages without help or research ... but if you can't find one that suits your needs, then you're either from another planet, or you're no doubt finding it really difficult to navigate the digital age …

After about twenty minutes of assembly time, the Evolution was primed, and sat there like a skeleton awaiting nothing more than my wheel and pedals to give it the soul it so evidently craved.

For the purposes of this review, I tried several different wheels on the seat's mounting post: All three were Logitech-based wheels, and all three attached instantly, and solidly, both on the wheel post, and the pedal rest. Among my wheel stable is a Logitech Driving Force for console gaming, and a Logitech Momo Formula Force wheel that, until I acquired the G25, was my sim-racing wheel of choice.

The Evolution's practicality is really outstanding, and I would imagine—it was certainly the case with the three wheels I mounted—that the majority of wheels will clamp on as simply as mine did; merely a matter of clamping the wheel to the base in precisely the same way as you would clamp it to your desk.

The pedal seat, on the other hand, has a bracket that will hold the bottom of the pedals in a virtual clamp. With rubber feet on the bottom of the pedals, they really don't go anywhere under most racing conditions, anyway, so that proved ideal. However, the G25 wheel proved to be a different proposition entirely.

Have I mentioned the practicality of the Evolution's design? Well, to my surprise, the Evolution's wheel post has actually been designed with the G25 firmly in mind. Not only are there holes in the correct spots to utilize the G25's threaded mounting holes, but the maker of the Evolution—Playseats—has thoughtfully included the metric hardware necessary to *mount* the wheel, too. What that means is that it has pre-drilled holes to securely mount the G25 via Allen screws, *and* includes the hardware needed to do so. A nice touch considering it is very doubtful the sim-racing market will have an affordable alternative to the G25 for quite some time to come.

There is also a veritable treasure trove of hardware and accessories that accompany the Evolution. Along with the extra hardware to mount the G25 to the wheel post, there are several different sizes of Velcro strips, along with a handful of zip ties to secure your chords way out of the way of any errant limbs (or kids!).

And while we're on the subject of kids; my boys enjoy a good console racing game, and enjoyed the Evolution immensely. Again, I must harp back to the practicality of this piece of kit. Both my young racers found themselves fitting effortlessly into the Evolution. My eldest, Chris, is fourteen, and a rather robust six-foot-three, while twelve year old Marc is a slight five-foot-four. Neither found any difficulty in quickly adjusting the fit of the Evolution to suit their particular size. As for me—those have met me know that I am a big guy, and my six foot, 300 pound frame isn't easily show-horned into tight spaces, but the Evolution—once I pried the boys out of it—had ample room for my frame as well.

Modifying the seating position is a matter of merely loosening the desired hand-tight bolts, and moving that particular piece. To bring the pedals *and* wheel closer, one bolt needs to be loosened, and the entire front end of the Playseats Evolution can be slid closer. In fact, you

don't even need to get out of the seat. With such remarkable design-qualities, it is no surprise that the Evolution, in my opinion, will easily handle pretty much any human frame. Similarly, the wheel tower can be moved to change the wheel-to-seat distance, and the wheel platform can be raised and lowered as well.

Another feature that highlights the Evolution's well-thought-out design is in the simple way in which you can store the unit after use. It will fold up into a cube-shape, and the whole thing can be stored in a closet with just a couple of simple and quick steps.

Did I say practicality in design?

The Shifter Attachment

Playseats are also offering a shifter attachment to run side-by-side with their Evolution. This little accessory is designed to hold your remote shifter of choice, be it Act Labs, Logitech G25, SST, or whatever you may be using.

Again, as with the wheel post, the shifter mounting plate comes pre-drilled with the correct mounting holes for the Logitech G25 shifter, and the hardware kit that accompanies the shifter also has the extra metric hardware to mount the shifter to the attachment.

However, while the Evolution itself comes with an impressive assembly manual, the shifter attachment doesn't enjoy the same luxury. A small box with the neatly wrapped components, along a bag of hardware, is all you will find in the package. I took a lingering look at the mounting bracket, and loose-fit everything in order to decide how it would mount to the seat base. The shifter bracket uses one of the mounting holes for the seat base as the mounting point, and is quite easy to install; life is made even easier by an idiot-proof installation—it will only install in one way—and in no time at all you'll have it installed—even without a detailed instruction sheet in Farsi.

At first I thought the shifter might be too low, and immediately set about thinking of ways to make it better. Over the long haul though, driving the American Muscle mod with the G25's shifter mounted on the shifter attachment proved to be an absolute pleasure. Perhaps some means of changing the height of the shifter relative to the wheel would be nice, but after racing with it, I don't think that it's necessary.

After several weeks of racing in the Playseats Evolution, I am going to have a difficult time parting with it. But there are, as always, a few minor grumbles.

The Evolution is comfortable, although a guy my size wouldn't mind a bit more thigh room ... after a couple of hours sitting in the chair, I could feel the pressure points from the seat sides start to hurt a bit. The positioning is very good, too, but I would like to see a few minor modifications such as the steering wheel mounting platform—which is adjustable for height and closeness—being adjustable for tilt. The platform is locked into a horizontal position, and some degree of freedom to change the angle of the wheel would be a great addition to the design. Also, the pedal base is not adjustable angularly. It does have a couple sets of mounting holes so that the user can offset the base in the case of different pedal arrangements, but the angle of incidence is fixed. Some adjustment of the pedal angle would not go amiss either.

Overall, though, the fit and feel is both adequate and comfortable. The Evolution creates a racing position that emulates sitting in a car quite well, while storage, should your wife or life require it, is made simple by the economic design used in the Evolution. The entire rig comes apart into two or three smaller pieces with just a couple of hand-tight adjustment bolts. The seat can also be detached from the wheel and pedal mounts. The back can then be folded onto the seat with the help of the ingenious split-back uprights, while the wheel and pedals come apart simply, and the entire broken-down unit can be stored in a closet or other hidden location.

The Playseats Evolution offers an affordable alternative to the office chair, and one that all sim-racing hobbyists, as well as purists, will enjoy. Whether you have a PC sim, or a game console, you would do well to race in the Playseats Evolution. Aside from the lack of adjustment in the angle of the wheel and pedal mounts, and the slight discomfort for bigger guys after long rides, I can see no reason not to recommend the Playseats Evolution to anyone. But the deal clincher, of course, is the price: For what you'd shell out for a good, sturdy office chair, you can buy yourself a race-frame that will deepen your sim-racing experience immeasurably.

The company Playseats originates in The Netherlands. The company was founded by Dr Fernando Smit in 2000. He is a passionate motor-sports aficionado, as well as a professional KART racer. The idea for Playseats originated from his desire to experience the 'ultimate racing feeling, at home ...'

The company is always busy developing new products, as well as improving existing ones. If you are a fan of flight sims, look for them to release a flight sim seat onto the market in the near future. They enjoy partnerships with the likes of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, as well as the A1GP racing series. Companies such as Sony, Microsoft, and Logitech utilize Playseats whenever they have promotional events with their gaming consoles or products. They are available in the USA through playseats.biz, and widely sold at cyber-shops such as GoGamer.com, Amazon.com, VideoGameCentral.com, Wal-Mart.com, Target.com, and Kmart.com.

The Playseat, as tested for this review, is available here, GoGamer.com, for $299.99

The Shifter attachment, as tested for this review, is available here, at GoGamer.com, for $34.90

Revzalot

Revzalot Motorsports Beats Feet

And their pedals are pretty darn good too, as Lou Magyar discovers …

LouMagyar

I was asked by Anton Chu from Revzalot Motorsports if I might want to take his little friend Frankie for a spin. 'Who is Frankie?' I inquired. Frankie, it turns out, is Anton's pet-name for his prototype Revzalot P35R Pedal set, which were previewed in AUTOSIMSPORT earlier this year {*see Vol3 Issue 2*}. And don't go thinking that because these pedals were a prototype, that they were somehow … lacking … because I can confirm right-off-the-pedal that these innovatively designed pedals look about as good as they feel—and they feel about as well as they drive: Superbly.

I raced with them for about a week, and found them enjoyably realistic, and a very fine addition to the already excellent after-sales pedal market. But in order to fully appreciate just how good they are, we need to look inside—because behind the sexy-looks is an interesting and ingenious new take on how to create sim-racing pedals that lead to an authentic and 'real-feel'.

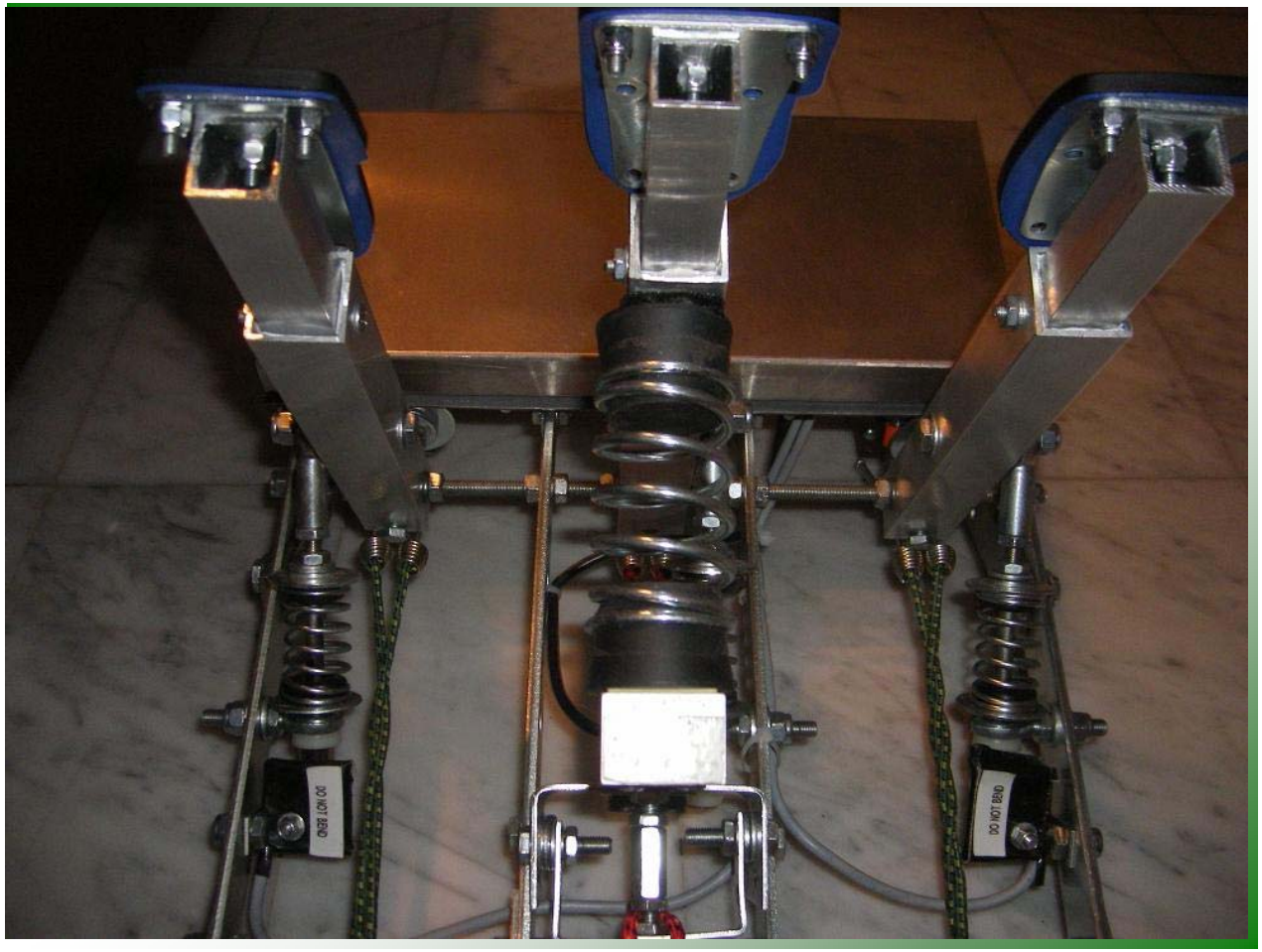
The Revzpeds, as they are known by everyone except Anton, are—as has become the norm in the last couple of years—a robust, three-pedal design featuring moving parts that, by design, have been kept to a bare, functional minimum; for reliability, longevity, and performance, this is always a good thing.

Frankie arrived with a USB cable in tow, and an instruction sheet on how to set him up—and what pitfalls to avoid. One pitfall you'll never need to avoid, however, are pots; from here on in, sticky, jittery, dirty pots will only trouble you in your kitchen.

To avoid the use of pots, the Revzpeds P35R's clutch and throttle pedals use Hall effect sensors, and neodymium magnets. However, the magnetic field generated by these magnets is extremely powerful and caution *must be used* when working around your hard drives, credit cards, and other magnetic media.

I spoke to Anton and Daniel and suggested they find some shielding method in order to avoid a catastrophic accident: Being careful about where you place the pedals, and how close they are to your hard drive, is definitely something that will—in all likelihood—eventually unfold into a regrettable accident for which you will be very sorry!

Additionally, Daniel instructed me to be mindful of electrical wires, as well as power supplies, as they, too, may have adverse effects on the sensors, and perhaps cause erratic output. Pressing either the throttle or clutch pedal proficiently moves the magnet—attached to the pedal mechanism—past the Hall effect sensor (which is rigidly mounted to the rig's frame). Both pedals have a set of concentric coil springs, along with bump rubber dampers to provide a positive feel when the pedal is depressed.



Frankie's brake pedal, it should also be noted, is different from the throttle and clutch since, as in a real-world car, the brake exerts a completely different feel than those of the clutch and gas. Rather than a Hall effect sensor, the brake pedal uses a beam load cell. The beam load cell provides a real-feel brake pedal, unlike potentiometer-based pedals; when you press on Frankie's brake pedal, he uses the pressure *you* exert, not the distance the pedal travels, thereby affecting both the feel—and the performance, which is optimal. The brake pedal, similar to the clutch and throttle, uses springs and rubber dampers, with the difference, in this case, being that the springs and dampers that are what actually exert the pressure on the beam load cell.

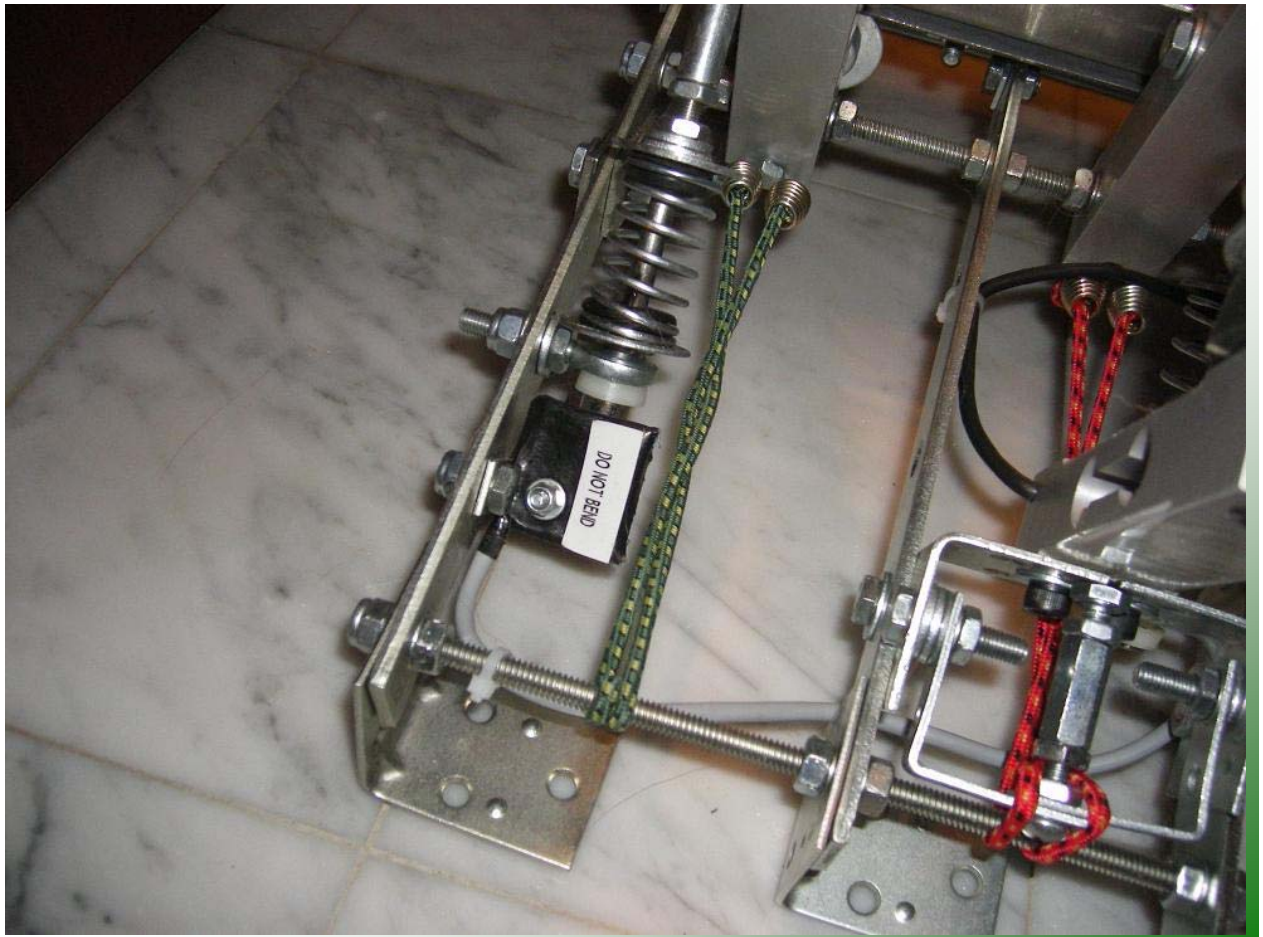
All three pedals use a bungee chord that acts as an additional return spring. The concentric coil springs do return the pedal to its at-rest position, but the bungees add a bit of security to the return.

I put Frankie under my desk, away from my PC and electrical chords, connected the USB cable to an available port, and got busy calibrating. Daniel sent me a detailed guide on how to get the pedals properly calibrated: At first read, it sounded very complicated, but once I got started, it was all pretty much intuitive and smooth waters.

The first order of business was to download the 'DXTweak2' from the Wingman Team site. The 'DXTweak2' utility allows you to independently, and with full configuration control, calibrate the pedal signal output for each pedal axis. I'll save you the details here, but suffice it to say that, while there are several steps to calibrating the pedals with 'DXTweak2', the entire process is straightforward, and easy to follow. With that done, Frankie was ready to rumble.

Because of the realistic pressure exerted on the brake pedal, the Revzpeds work best when clamped or secured to a sub-surface. The feet have several holes with which to mount the pedals to whatever you're using: I simply put the pedals against a board under my desk, and used my feet to keep them in place. This worked out okay, but it wasn't an optimal solution. In the very least, I recommend clamping them to something solid, thereby erasing any residual movement in the set itself. The need to affix them is especially pronounced when using them in a recumbent sitting position—like that in the Playseats Evolution—where the force is more parallel to the floor.

To use the P35R pedals, I removed the pedal mounting bracket from the Playseats Evolution I was also reviewing, and slid the seat into the proper position. Despite the fact that Frankie wasn't bolted down, he served me reliably, and provided a superbly realistic pedal feel.



Throttle and clutch are about what you'd expect: The travel and pressure of each is similar to other full-motion real-world-like pedals I have tested. They give a solid response and, because of the travel of the throttle, and the linear output curve generated by the Hall effect sensor, the throttle in particular *feels* accurate, and performs extremely well. It is quite easy to feather the throttle, or do just about anything that you could do with a set of pedals mounted in a real car: In other words, precision is the order of the day here.

The brake pedal, being actuated by the beam load cell, has a relatively limited range of motion. This creates a pedal feel, both in motion and required force, which very closely emulates what a real brake pedal feels like. The position and feel of the brake pedal, combined with the position and feel of the throttle pedal, makes for incredibly realistic heel-and-toe movement. Frankie, being assembled with threaded rod, would allow a mechanically inclined person to relocate the brake pedal closer to, or further from, the throttle. Additionally, the pedal height is adjustable to some degree to customize the feel further. No matter if you are a size eight or a size fourteen, I think Frankie will fit you well.

The Revzpeds P35R look a bit tinker-toy-ish, but it sure doesn't drive that way. Even this prototype Revzpeds is well made, and easy to set up. The pedals are also configured—in a three-pedal set up—with the throttle and brake pedals close enough (closer than the G-25) to allow for brilliant heel-and-toe action—and, if that's not to your liking, it's also somewhat adjustable.

Aside from the bungee chord 'pedal return' spring, the Revzpeds P35R is made from high-quality components that will last—I mean this literally—pretty-much forever. The pedal shafts use ball-bearings on their axis of rotation, there are no pots to wear out, and the Hall effect sensors are as durable as anything you'd ever need, meaning that, aside from the bungees, you shouldn't ever need to replace anything on these pedals. Couple that with its performance, and the P35R is a solid investment for your sim-racing career.

The only disappointment I felt was … saying goodbye to ol' Frankie; we'd formed a terrific friendship! Frankie's completed cousins—the Revzpeds P35R—are available for sale at $489.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Axial FX

Logitech DriveFX
Axial Feedback Wheel

Bob Simmerman test-drives Logitech's XBOX 360 wheel … so what exactly is axial feedback? …

BobSimmerman

My recent dive into the shark-infested waters of console-land has not been without a few road bumps, so to speak. From system reliability to sloppy wheels to needing a second mortgage to buy the damn thing, you really have to watch your step else face the shattering reality of a lot of flash, little substance, and a much lighter wallet. To make things even worse, when a console system, or add-on component, or peripheral is sub-par—or a flat out pile of junk (see Sidebar)—the din of denial, from the vocal majority reaches deafening dimensions. But so be it. *Caveat emptor*.

Recent events—and disasters—fresh in my mind, I remained skeptical as the Logitech DriveFX Axial Feedback Wheel for the XBOX 360 made its way to me. With a list price of $99.99, it offered an immediate advantage over the Microsoft offering—price point. The DriveFX is not 'wireless', but the Microsoft wheel, technically, isn't either. In order to gain full advantage of the Force-Feedback, you need to at least plug the MS wheel into the wall, which sort of defeats the purpose of the full wireless advantage. As such, I don't really miss the wireless functionality, and it is easy enough to plug the connection to the console, and then unplug it when you are done. Simple, really, isn't it?

Microsoft Wireless Wheel Retrofit

As if a shaky shaft wasn't enough to be concerned about, Microsoft has recently revealed that in 'a small number' of Microsoft XBOX 360 Wheels, certain amounts of smoke may be seen to emanating from what can only be called the 'Slop From Redmond'. Nothing to be concerned over, of course, as Microsoft is claiming that no fires or injury have resulted. Serious issue or not, yet another problem Microsoft really doesn't need at the moment. See the handy link above for the instructions on the free retrofit kit to owners of the smokin' wheel.

After the DriveFX review was finished, I gave the MS wheel another try, and was further convinced that early impressions were still in effect. While the DriveFX lacks the licensed, 'real' Force-Feedback of the Microsoft wheel, it was almost as if the Microsoft wheel doesn't quite get the entire feel of the surface of the road to the driver's hands. Ovals are too smooth in FM2, and in NASCAR 08, as you bounce around the cockpit, the wheel was oddly weak in the hand, presenting a counterintuitive immersion killer.

Quality issues aside, Microsoft needs to realize that even a perfectly constructed item that lacks the ability to properly do the job is about as useful as a broken or poorly constructed item that also can't get the job done. I would hate to find that the wheel gets titanium bearings and asbestos shielding yet still maintains the illusion that decades old race track surfaces can also double as billiard tables.

The first thing you notice about the Logitech offering is the size and feel the wheel. Taking up a much smaller amount of real estate than the MS wheel, it eases the burden of finding a decent location, and the clamping system is nearly identical to that found on the Logitech DFP wheel—more than plenty to properly mount the wheel to prevent unwanted movement. The shifting paddles are similar in feel to

those of the DFP, and give good feedback to the user while shifting. The button layout is what you would expect for an XBOX 360 controller interface; having everything you need to get the job done with the exception of the gamepad's analog sticks. The wheel itself is smaller than the G25, for example, with a diameter of about twenty-five centimetres. The wheel is contoured for comfort, making any sort of adjustment process a new user may need quick and painless.

The other first thing I did was check the wheel for the dreaded steering column slop that plagued the MS wheel. Holding the wheel by the center hub and lifting gently, a few millimeters of movement in the vertical direction can be detected, but it is practically non-existent in the horizontal direction. I would rather not see any slop at all, but the amount on the DriveFX is so inconsequential as to be a non-issue. In other words, you won't be flying off the track because the wheel moved in twelve directions at the same time in addition to the direction you were actually trying to go. In the power off condition, turning the wheel from side to side reveals perhaps a bit too much of a 'gear' feel, but it is not ratchety or clunky.

Surprisingly, the degree limit on this wheel is quite a bit less than almost every wheel I have ever used, console or PC. Well below the unspoken 270 degree standard, this will take a bit of getting used to. Roughly 200 degrees throw-to-throw, it is more reminiscent of something out of a Formula One car than the family Ford. Far from being a showstopper, the user should quickly adjust to this limited movement range, but it will be a bit disorienting as you come to grips in-game with a few degrees less on-track.

The pedals are standard fare gas and brake, with a relatively small footprint. Connected to the wheel base with a seven pin VGA D-Sub connector, and bottomed out with some anti-slip tech' to keep it under the desk—and under your feet. This is the weakest part of the setup, with the pedals somewhat jittery, and a bit of a disappointment overall. Far from unusable, of course, but the 'Slop From Redmond' {*see Vol3 Issue 5 for a review of the Microsoft's wireless wheel for the XBOX 360—Ed*} is a better bet in this department.

The DFP's pedals were, equally, a disappointment for me, so, if you liked those—you'll get on with these … or not, as the case may be ... Only time will tell how the reliability is, but I wish Logitech would get us some better feeling pedal sets. I don't expect those of the stellar G25, not at this price point, but the pedals are obviously extremely important, and it wouldn't hurt Logitech to devote some more attention to this area in the future.

The wheel also sports two sensitivity modes, but if you are like me—that is, not in possession of a God-like control ability—you will want the less sensitive mode for most use. More than precise enough, less in this context is quite a bit more, at least in terms of keeping the car in a straight line. In the higher sensitivity mode, I found it extremely difficult to drive anything with precision, as the slightest movement was amplified too much for my tastes. Keep it on low to get the best out of this wheel in terms of sensitivity.

Axial … feedback … I searched, I Googled, I asked around, I discovered that I really have no idea what this is. Something along the steering axis, I think, but something about it is different than the traditional Force-Feedback … whatever *that* really is … Well, whatever axial is, it was time to find out what it meant—where it mattered most: Feel.

Forza Motorsports 2, and *NASCAR 08* were chosen as the test-games. I tested the wheel with other games—*DiRT*, *Test Drive Unlimited*, and *Project Gotham Racing 3*, but did the bulk of the work with *FM2*, and *N08* as those two 'games' are more along the lines of sims, at least in terms of the lack of overtly arcade handling and tyre models, should the user decide to go for the sim-like experience. Equally, considering my recent time with the Microsoft wheel and these games, the comparison with traditional Force-Feedback would be optimized. Axial?

Powered up, the wheel has a 'return spring' feel to it, but this will change depending on the game it is used with. There is no overpowering resistance to user inputs while playing and, to my surprise, I found a lot to like with this new fangled 'axial' feedback technology which is, apparently, taking vibrations programmed into the game and converting them to a realistic feeling of actually driving a car.

Road noise/bumps, rumble strips, and dirt/grass events all give the feeling one might expect, and it was nice to be able to feel the wheel slowly increase in static vibration frequency as the motor climbed the RPM range. I also noticed while playing *FM2* that when a shift is made, you can feel it in the wheel as a bit of a jolt. I can't speak from any race car experience, but my beloved 1985 Honda Interceptor motorcycle definitely has 'feedback' as I make a shift at around 12,500 RPM, easily felt in the handlebars, not to mention the vibration felt at such a rotational speed. I suppose I have never really noticed this before, but found it much to my liking—the more physical interaction with the drive train the better.

Also impressive was the feel of the tyres going from grip-to-slip-and-back. This was especially noticeable while playing *NASCAR 08* using a setup that was a bit too loose for the conditions. Entering a slip condition while driving will definitely be felt through the wheel, and I also found it much easier to control the car in *NASCAR 08* with the Logitech wheel. A surprisingly good game that is definitely closer to a sim than practically everything ever released on a console, it is notoriously difficult, if not downright maddening to control the game with the gamepad, and even with the Microsoft wheel it was very easy to overcorrect and get into an unrecoverable spin situation, especially coming out of corners and on the gas.

Great news that this sort of thing is happening in a console sim, but bad news if the controller will not allow the user a fair glimpse at what is going on, not to mention a fair chance at recovering the car. But the DriveFX excels here; not only providing a very convincing over-the-road feel—the cockpit bouncing is the visual cue, the wheel activity is the tactile cue—but also providing a very precise control that, while not making spins impossible, makes it very easy to avoid them with proper throttle inputs. Long story short—you steer, the car goes there, and any bumps in the road you will feel just fine.

If I have any complaint with the wheel system besides the pedals, it would be the 'rough' feel when inputs to the device are sharp and fast. For sure, this can be felt in other wheels as well, but it was one thing that the Microsoft wheel managed to do rather well: that is, a nice and smooth turning feel. On the other hand, the Microsoft wheel was a bit too smooth for my tastes; the ovals in *NASCAR 08* felt like they did not look … that is, rough-looking, smooth running. For example, Darlington is a bump fest in real-life, and the DriveFX more closely approximated this, in my opinion, than the Microsoft wheel did.

In other words, you simply feel the road more. Granted, it does feel a bit different than true Force-Feedback does, but it is convincing nonetheless, and leagues above a gamepad. In fact, leagues above any wheel currently available for the XBOX 360 console system. Some may initially be turned off by the much smaller size of the wheel than the DFP or Microsoft wheels, but don't be fooled—the performance and feel is substantial, and game play is only made better with this wheel. Like anything else, it isn't perfect, but if you're in need of a wheel to control the sim-like offerings slowly becoming available on the XBOX 360, the Logitech Drive FX is, for now, your wheel of choice by quite some margin.

Pros:

Axial feedback technology does a convincing job of relaying grip levels along with road activity to the user; precise controllability translates to a great on-track experience

Steering axis solid, with an absolute minimum of slop

Adjustable steering sensitivity (two levels) to suit user's driving style and preference

Mounting method reminiscent of the DFP, solid and stable

Low price

Best wheel currently available for XBOX 360

Cons:

Pedal construction on the fragile side, standard pre-G25 Logitech fare

Available range of motion less in degree than most other wheels requiring user 're-education' in terms of both driving inputs, and steering ratio settings

Turning smoothness at times a bit on the rough feeling side

83%

Light Up Your Life!

SLI

Lou Magyar has seen the light courtesy of CXC Simulations' G25 SLI ...

LouMagyar

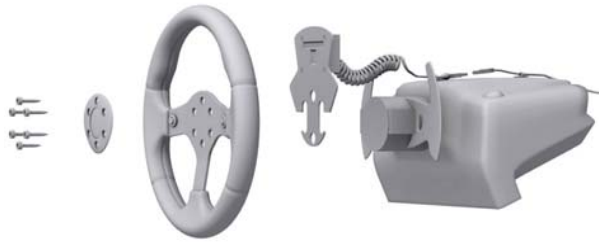
SLI Light Up Your Life!

continued

So What Is An SLI?

Ever wanted your steering wheel to come complete with those rather cool and useful LEDs employed by our real-world cousins? You know, the lights that inform them that they're about to reach the end of their engine's capabilities to maintain physical integrity? Ever wished, in the heat of battle, you knew just what that last gear you shifted into was as you're shuffling through your 'box? Well, the CXC Simulations G25 SLI (Shift Light Indicator) is your tailor-made, low-cost solution.

Chris Considine, from CXC Simulations—makers of full-motion simulators for professional racing teams—contacted me earlier this month about a new in-wheel display product they have created: The G25 SLI. This compact, lightweight device delivers a graphical F1-like LED RPM indicator accompanied by an eight-segment LED gear position indicator, and is designed to sandwich between the G25's wheel and hub, thereby integrating itself completely with the wheel's function.



The G25 Shift Light Indicator retails for about $120, is made of 3K high-gloss carbon-fiber twill, and weighs—crucially—just 100 grams in order not to dampen any Force-Feedback performance. It will be compatible with all top PC racing-simulation software: Currently, the driver disk has DLLs for *rFactor,* and *Live For Speed*, while, Chris assures me, *GTR, GTR2, GTL, NetKar Pro, NR2003*, and *RACE* will all have plugins that will be released shortly.

Every one of CXC's products is hand made in the U.S. They pride themselves on innovative thinking alongside exhaustive testing. Chris founded CXC Simulations after years of being a racing brat ... he came from a racing background. His father was a driver in the 1950s and 1960s racing sports cars against, and with, a lot of the greats of that era. He passed the bug onto Chris, who did the standard KARTs to formula car thing when he was a kid, and worked at the Bondurant School of Performance Driving for a while. Eventually Chris realized that he didn't have enough money to take racing where he wanted it to lead him, so decided to switch to the tech'-industry instead. One thing led to another, and he decided to combine his talents in order to begin building racing-simulators. They started as simple one-off frames with simple consumer level controls. Along the way, the company grew, and they eventually evolved into full-on racing sims with motion systems, proprietary hardware, and custom frames. They have been used as race driver training tools, marketing centerpieces, and really cool toys for big boys. CXC Simulations have a new production oriented system that will—once launched in the very near future—be the culmination of all the things they have learnt about sim-racing. CXC is a name we're going to hear a lot of in the sim-racing peripheral market in the months and years ahead …

The G25 SLI has a carbon-fiber face plate, and an enclosure mounted to the back with countersunk flat-head screws. It is sleek and seamless, and looks as if it's made from ABS plastic. The curly-chord connecting the SLI to the USB cable looks almost precisely as those you'd find on many a race car. All things considered, if there was a USB plug on a real race car, the CXC SLI wouldn't be out of place in the least. It is a well crafted, stylish accessory. The simplicity of its form, fit, and function, when combined with its aesthetically pleasing elegant design, is immediately appealing.

Turning On The Light—And A Warning Bell!

I eagerly opened the plain brown box. Being an engineer who once considered packaging design as a career path, I was, to say the least, impressed with the economy of packaging provided with the SLI; it is nearly 100 percent recyclable. A simple mylar and cardboard center piece holds the G25 SLI in place during shipping, while the rest of the contents languish below. Aside from the SLI unit, there is a small, sealed baggie that holds the provided Allen wrench, zip ties, and zip anchors, a driver CD, and a six-foot USB extension cable. There is also an included warrantee slip, and a quick setup guide complete with pictures to guide the textually impaired.

Mounting the SLI to the G25 wheel is a matter of removing the six screws that hold the wheel to the hub/shaft. They are Allen screws, and the provided wrench does the job nicely. I started with 'Step 1' of the directions, which are provided in English, Spanish, German, and French ... not as many as the Playseats manual, but it should get the job done. Step one is removing the wheel from the hub/shaft. Undo the screws and remove the wheel, and—*oh crap*!

Before I realized what was happening, my eagerness to mount the SLI cost me one of the wheel button connectors. I broke a wire loose from the PC Board plug when I pulled the wheel away. The directions tell you to be careful, *but not until the end of 'Step 2'*! Yikes! I would suggest a BIG and **bold** warning at the top of the sheet alerting G25 owners that they must use a *great deal of caution* when loosening the wheel, or the potential for disaster is colossal. Luckily, I have an electronic soldering iron, and I'm familiar with crimp-type PCB plugs and sockets, so I was able to correct my tactical error, but others not as blessed with tools and knowledge might find their wheel handicapped … so heed the warning!

Crisis over, I set about putting the SLI on the G25. The center hub of the Logitech G25 wheel is 'keyed' with a plastic insert. The carbon-fiber base of the SLI is perfectly molded to fit over this key system, and mounts with a comforting ease. The only caution is that of the same small switch wires ... just be sure they aren't pinched anywhere before you start clamping things down again.

The SLI comes with a handy test-mode feature. With it you can set how you would like neutral displayed—several options are available—and test in order to ascertain all the LEDs function correctly. You can even invert your digital gearshift indicator—just in case you are in the habit of driving ass-over-teakettle. The software includes an .INI file which is editable, and will instruct the SLI at what point in the RPM range to start displaying the RPM indicators (a rough-and-ready MoTeC). If you plan on racing different classes of cars—let's say from the 6,500 RPM American Muscle Car mod, to the 19,000 RPM Formula One mod—you might want to consider different .INI files to get the job done. Perhaps a small batch program to do the renaming based on which mod you plan on running would make life easier, but, if you don't want to take that route, you can always tell the SLI to start displaying the RPM bars at a specific percentage of the RPM range. It's all pretty straightforward, really, and is easily configurable through editing the accompanying .INI file.

After installation and .INI tweaking (the default is fairly good for a Formula One car, or other high-revving mods), there's little else to do other than enjoying your new toy! The SLI provides real-time RPM graphical indication, as well as digital gear position. If you have been running *rFactor* with the HUD on so you can see RPM and gear position, the SLI clears up that screen clutter with style.

Chris also let me in on some future plans they have in the works. CXC is working on a line of G25-specific enhancements that will continue with the G25 PWS (Professional Steering Wheel) Kits, and G25 Pedal Tuning Kit. The PWS Kits will be custom-drilled racing steering wheels like Sparco, and MOMO, with adapters, along with new buttons. The pedal tuning kit will allow you to convert your pedals to an overhang design, and be fully adjustable in rake, distance, and height. It will also come with a spring tuning kit. Following in the tradition of the G25 SLI, both products will be made of high-end materials, include comprehensive, graphical instructions, and all tools needed for the job.

If you don't own a G25, and don't plan to ... fear not. Chris tells me that CXC will also be releasing a new, non-wheel specific version for cockpit mounting called simply the 'SLI'. This will essentially be the same system with a smaller plate, and a straight USB cable.

On the whole, with the exception of a few manual tweaks alerting the new, eager owner of the pitfalls and dangers regarding the G25's wheel button connectors, I can see no reason to ding the G25-SLI at all. On a scale of ten for fun factor, creativity, and practicality, I give it a solid nine out of a possible ten.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Buttkick

You Need A Good ButtKicking!

Lou Magyar gets a good kicking from the ButtKicker Gamer, and comes away smiling ...

LouMagyar

Buttkick You Need A Good ButtKicking!

continued

What's in a sim? Whatever the answer to that question, each component has the possibility of being tapped in order to deliver a more realistic feel to the sim-racer. But despite the many ways in which what is 'inside' a sim are processed by third-party add-ons (Force-Feedback, and the like), there remain many aspects to simulator-racing immersion that have gone, up to this point, largely untapped. Primarily among these is finding ways in which to use the audio track of the sim itself in order to add an extra dimension of immersion.

There are, of course, high-end rigs—The VirtualGT being but one example—that do use audio to simulate movement in a racing seat environment. Most, however, are quite loud (not that loud is a bad thing—unless your wife is trying to watch *Law & Order* in the other room), but also expensive (as in thousands), and thus out of the price range of most sim-racers.

The Guitammer (a conjunction of 'guitar' and 'hammer', and pronounced 'git-ammer') ButtKicker® Gamer™, on the other hand, sells for $150 retail (less on the street), and for that, you'll get a piece of hardware that will pretty-much match your expectations on what can be accomplished by tapping into the sound track of your simulator-of-choice: that is, a piece of hardware that uses the sim's audio track to—quite literally—rock your world.

Before you even open the box, the ButtKicker Gamer looks terrific. The attractive packaging speaks high-tech and says, 'Take me home. You'll have a blast'. The Buttkicker looks the part (erm …), and easily lives up to its looks.

So, how does it work? Quite simple, really; the device clamps to your chair or sim-racing seat, and then, using the sim's audio, shakes the seat (mostly) silently using low-frequency effects as its input. The principle behind it is to be found in its linear motor which works essentially the same way as a speaker does: Audio input to the amplifier is converted to electrical current, which is then converted to linear motion—and it is this 'motion of the motor' that creates the vibration.

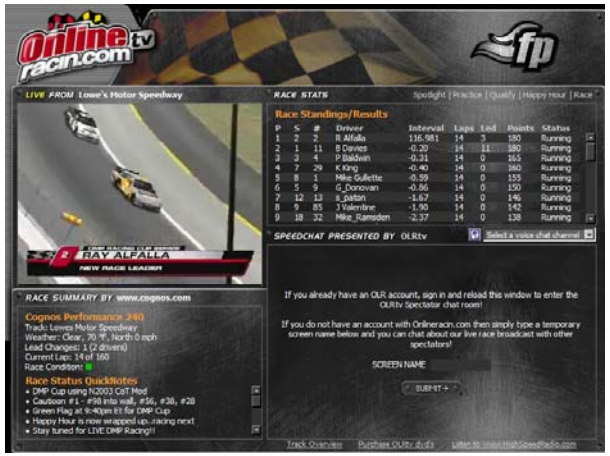
So what does the ButtKicker Gamer do for you? Well, it quite simply and effectively kicks your butt! The sensation is that precisely the one you'd expect from an IMAX theatre, or one of those attractions at Disney where the seats are primed to rumble.

The Buttkicker Gamer enables you to sense many auditory stimuli that usually go unnoticed by delivering low-end response to audio through your seat: Engine vibration, especially at low RPM, is very pronounced, for instance, and off-track excursions—including trips to the rumble strips, and beyond—are greeted with vigorous rumblings, and much jarring. What you feel, in essence, are the low-end vibrations caused by the ButtKicker Gamer's linear motor which is, at its heart, a form of subwoofer.

The race starts are particularly amazing; as you and all the cars around you come up to speed, you can really feel the energy, and the earth literally shaking beneath you.

The ButtKicker is designed to clamp to the centre post of a typical, rolling office chair. I grabbed one from my workshop, and clamped the unit on the chair. The rest of the setup was fairly simple. In addition to the chair-mounted linear motor, the unit comes with a 100 Watt amplifier, which can be placed flat on a shelf, or standing, and which then connects to your soundcard output jack with a cornucopia of connecting cables. The ButtKicker Gamer comes with enough cabling options to easily run with any console or PC sound card. Mount the motor, connect the amplifier, and you're in business. The included quick setup guide makes connection a breeze. Even the least technically inclined should be able to connect the amplifier to their computer or game console in very short-order.

Since a rolling office chair isn't my regular choice for sim-racing accommodation—I hate finding myself on the other side of the room after a particularly vicious braking maneuver—I did a little engineering to come up with a way in which to use the motor on my preferred seat; a folding chair. The clamp's minimum clamping diameter proved too large to grab a folding chair leg, so I had to come up with an *ad hoc* solution. What I decided would work best was a length of old heater hose I had in my garage. I clipped off a two inch length of hose, slit it so I could put it on the chair leg, and used it as a spacer to clamp the motor onto the chair leg. If Guitammer came up with a hard insert that could act as a spacer for this type of use, it wouldn't hurt my feelings much at all, because the rubber between the clamp and the chair, I think, took away some of the effect.



The adjustments, however, for the unit itself, are simple to tinker with. There are controls for level (volume), crossover, and both low, and high filters. The quick setup guide provides starting points for several different game types, and troubleshooting information to help you get going fast.

I started out with the recommended settings for a racing game, and did some tweaking. I eventually wound the crossover most of the way up, to allow for a larger range of feeling from the RPM, and turned the level down so that, at its worst, the clipping indicator (a red LED) just flickered to life. The controls are simple and easy to access ... easy enough to adjust on-the-fly while racing.

The amplifier has an auto shut-off feature to save it in case of overheating. If you happen to have the level tuned too high, the unit will shut down for a minute or two until it cools down, thereby preventing any damaged. If it does shut down, you are either crashing too much, or just getting your ButtKicked! Turning down the level just a bit will, however, prevent any issues with mid-race shutdowns.

I tried out the ButtKicker Gamer on a variety of games, on both my PC, and on game consoles. My son really enjoys using the ButtKicker with the PS2, and *Guitar Hero*. He says it really helps him keep the rhythm, and it's 'really cool'. My advice? If you decide to get a ButtKicker Gamer, don't let your kid use it because you'll likely need to buy another one for yourself.

If you're looking for a simple effective way to add a level of realism to you gaming, the ButtKicker Gamer is the way to go. Guitammer, the company behind the ButtKicker line of products, is proud to be a part of the simulator-racing community, and are huge fans of the sport.

They sponsor a DMP Cup team, owned by Eric Porterfield: His two drivers, Ray Alfalla, and Jesse Atchison, have put ButtKicker Motorsports in the owner points' lead. Ray is currently leading in the driver points too, so ButtKicker Motorsports is literally kicking butt. Eric competes in the DMP Sportsman Series, as well as JRL, and RBOL. He says his association with Guitammer 'has been a great partnership. With ButtKickers on board we have sponsored three broadcasted races, and given away three ButtKicker Gamers with one of the biggest races this past weekend, raising $1,200 for the fallen firemen of South Carolina'.

The XBOX 360 *Forza Motorsport 2* community, including the game developers at Turn 10, have equally embraced the ButtKicker Gamer, as well as the company's larger, ButtKicker LFE Kit which is designed to shake an entire three or four person couch!

Mark Luden, from Guitammer, told me that, 'the whole deal about ButtKicker Motorsports is to reach out to sim-racers, and this will save them money, and bring a whole new element to their sim-racing experience'.

I couldn't agree more. For the money, you will be hard-pressed to find a better peripheral component to enhance your sim racing or console gaming experience. A must-have …

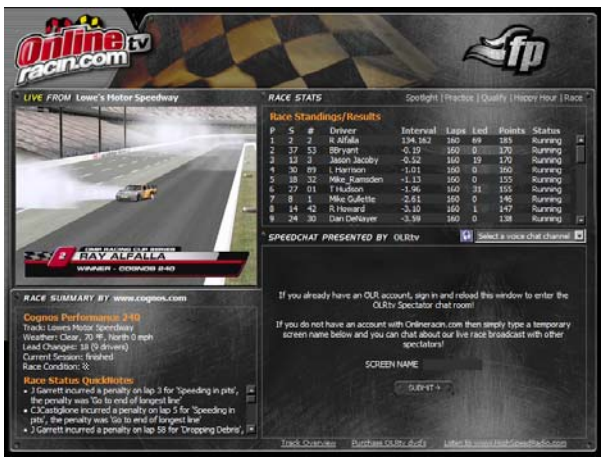
Mark Luden, being a sim-racing fan, was only to accommodating to find ways in which AUTOSIMSPORT readers could ButtKickers too. If you are interested in any of the ButtKicker line of products, visit their online direct store. There you'll find the ButtKicker Gamer, LFE, and Link—a wireless option for the ButtKicker line of products. Mark provided the following codes to help AUTOSIMSPORT readers save big money on their product.

ButtKicker Gamer: *$49.99* after using coupon code of *DMP* (save $99.96 off retail)

ButtKicker LFE kit: *$300.00* after using coupon code of *DMP1* (save $159.95 off retail)

ButtKicker Link (wireless option for the ButtKicker Kit): *$50.00* after using coupon code of *DMP2* (save $29.95 off retail)

The coupon code is added at checkout. All Guitammer ButtKicker products have a 30 day money back guarantee.



AUTOSIMSPORT

AudioPro

It's All In Your Head ... Or Is It?

Lou Magyar takes a ride with the new eDimensional AudioFX Pro 5+1 headset ... and hear's more than just voices ...

LouMagyar

Look.

One might wonder how much can be crammed into a headset. The AudioFX Pro 5+1, designed by console-modder extraordinaire Ben Heckendorn, packs about as much as one would imagine to be possible into such a small package. Gaming headsets take a huge step forward with the integrated 5.1 surround sound decoder, ambidextrous microphone, and in-line volume control delivered by the AudioFX Pro 5+1. I have owned several different PC headsets, and this set is by far the best I have worn for gaming, or my favorite MP3 tracks. Forget Logitech, forget Bose, this AudioFX headset delivers quality at a fraction the cost of more expensive headsets—and leaves them wanting in the process.

To start out, the AudioFX Pro 5+1 fits like a kid-skin glove. It's lightweight, comfortable, well-padded, and fully adjustable. I have worn headsets that feel great when you first put them on, but after a half-hour-or-so of racing, they start to feel like you are wearing bricks and razor blades. I wore the AudioFX Pro 5+1 for several hours of racing with no noticeable discomfort at all. The next thing that you notice is how robust the headset is when compared to its comfort and weight. The mic' boom and ear-cups are securely attached, and well constructed. The ear-cups fully enclose your ears, shutting out the ambient environment. Additionally, they pivot both front-to-back, and top-to-bottom, allowing the cups to fit any shaped head with equal comfort. The mic' boom may also be rotated so that it can be on your left or right, and, using the included configuration software, the speaker channels can be swapped to permit retention of left/right channel correctness: There's nothing worse than hearing an opponent behind you and thinking he is on the opposite side.

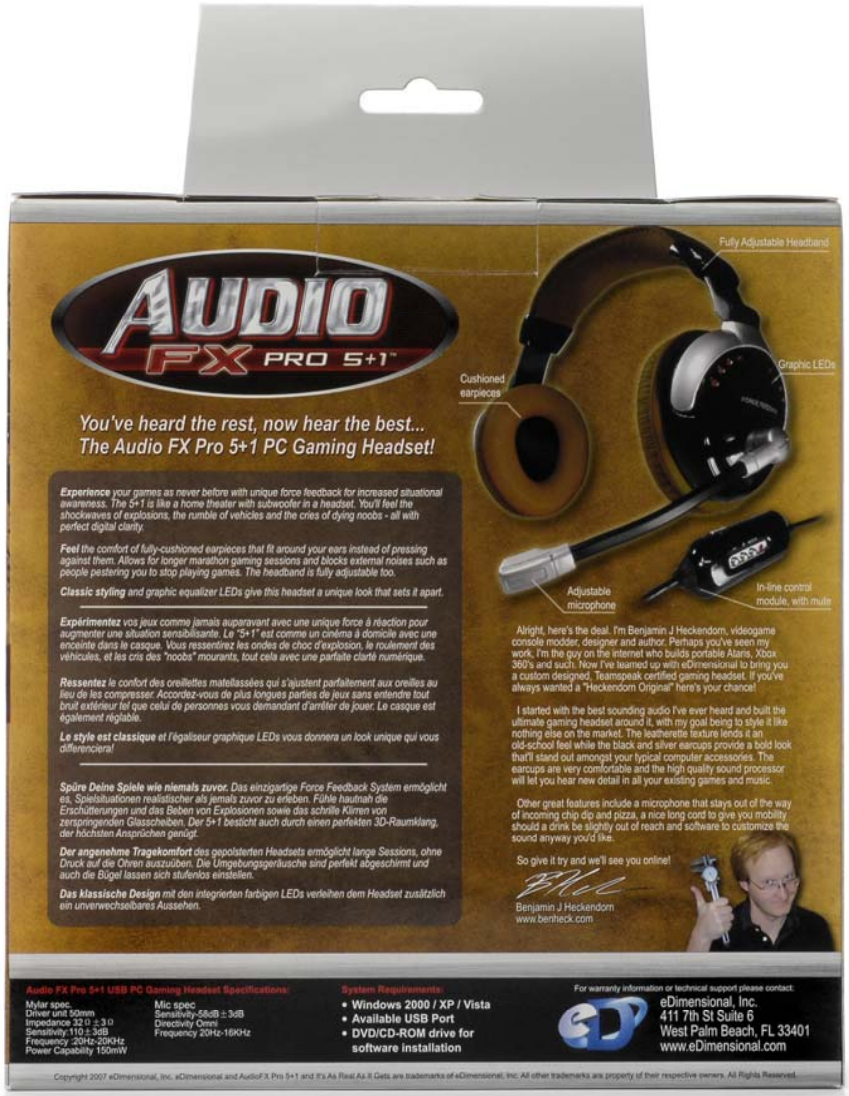
And hear your opponent you will. The 5.1 surround sound encoder emulates a true 5.1 surround sound speaker system. In addition to the four regular speaker channels (LF, RF, LB, RB), you have a center channel, a subwoofer channel, and two additional side channels for increased audio separation. How all these speaker channels pack into such a small headset is simply amazing. The audio quality produced by the eight channel configuration rivals high-end home theatre configurations—and yet you'll be wearing the entire system 'round your head! Regardless of your opponent's location, there will be no doubt where he is located; the only thing left to determine is if you can carry better speed onto the straight than he can ... and to aid in this, you'll know which side to 'drift' to help him find his way into the grass, thanks to the full surround sound output.

Getting Into Your Headphone

Okay, so what's all the fuss about? Take a look at the goods behind the scenes. The software shipped with the AudioFX Pro 5+1 is, to put it bluntly, superb. The simplicity of the controls, and the configurability, complete with many presets, makes getting up and running quick and efficient. Spend some time playing with the audio shifter function—which allows you to configure exactly where you want each channel to be heard—as well as the mixer controls, or the effects setup section—and appreciation for this headset and its accompanying software just grows by the minute. In addition to the capability of moving speakers around in the room-inside-your-head, you can select from dozens of preset audio effects, from things like concert halls, singing in the shower, bar acoustics, or even (do I need to make a joke here?) a padded cell ... depending on the music you're listening to, or what sim you are racing, you can make it sound just about however you wish. There is also the option of turning off all these special audio effects, which for most driving sims should be the way you want to go.

Let's not forget that this is a Force-Feedback headset too. If you get too wrapped up in the amazing audio quality, you might forget that you are actually getting Force-Feedback vibrations in addition to the rumble you feel from the speakers. In fact, the speaker rumble you feel, just as if you were at a concert, *is* the Force-Feedback effect. It is so well integrated into the function of the headphones that it almost goes unnoticed until you stop to 'feel the music'. Like the original AudioFX headset, the AudioFX Pro 5+1 has LED visual feedback to let your friends know you are rockin' da house.

Along with the Force-Feedback, digital 5.1 surround sound, and comfortable ear cups, eDimensional has also been thoughtful enough to throw in a high-quality microphone with which to communicate with your fellow racers. The microphone transmits clear, noiseless audio to anyone listening. If you prefer the microphone on the right, simply wear the headphones with the mic' on the right and, using the configuration software, swap the headphone L/R orientation. Add to that an in-line volume control with a Force-Feedback setting switch and mic' mute button, and the entire neat and tidy package will add high-quality surround sound audio to your desktop, but keeps it all on your head. The AudioFX Pro 5+1 headset also features USB 2.0 connectivity, and a newly designed oval ear-cup for immersive audio, external noise blockage and improved 'around the ear' comfort.



Despite the plethora of superb features and extremely high-quality sound from both the headphones and microphone, there are a couple things that I would like to see to make these headphones even better. Firstly, as with the original AudioFX headset, the Pro 5+1 needs to have the volume increased to a fairly high level to get the Force-Feedback effects to kick in. If the Force-Feedback had an amplifier to allow lower overall volume from the speakers while maintaining Force-Feedback effects, older gamers like me can still enjoy the experience without generating an over-stimulation headache. The other thing that I would like to see—and this is new with the Pro 5+1 set—is an indicator as to the microphone status. The other night I was chatting away happily but not getting any response back from my race-mates. It wasn't until this went on for a few minutes that I realized the microphone mute button—which I had used to speak with my wife—is in fact a toggle-on/toggle-off button (press once to mute, press again to un-mute). With all the LEDs flashing away on the headset, and in-line control pod, adding one more that flickers with the microphone pickup shouldn't be too complicated—at least not if you ask the marketing department!

When compared to the other headsets I have owned and used, the AudioFX Pro 5+1 wins—hands down, heads up, and all the rest included. This headset simply rocks, regardless of whether you are sim-racing, flight-simming, or rocking to Led Zeppelin, and delivers high-quality audio sweetness to your ever deserving sense of hearing. On a scale of ten, I give the AudioFX Pro 5+1 headset from eDimensional a rockin' 9.5. For bang for the buck, this headset won't let you down. If you are in the market for a new headset, or just tired of ho-hum audio output, get this headset ... you won't be disappointed.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Sim-Gear

FreeAdd-On Is Good

Lx Martini on how the best—the Lightning SST shifter—just got better … and considering this is a free add-on for existing clients, he cannot fail to be impressed by Sim-Gear's commitment to excellence and the community …

LxMartini

First things first: They sent it to me because they were told I am astutely qualified to test-assemble any mechanical device: That is, if I can do it, anyone can do it.

To assist me (and others), Sim-Gear have posted a simple-to-follow video on their website … And I can now report that, yes, it's simple … but not quite *that* simple!

AUTOSIMSPORT reviewed the Lightning SST Shifter *{see Vol 2 Num 8—Ed}* last year, and we gave it a glowing review. I've had this shifter for a year now, as well as the generic G25 job, and the Lightning has won that challenge … hands down, so to speak.

But the good folks at Sim-Gear are not resting on their laurels, and in June, I was sent a nice little surprise: A free (free, that is, to all owners of the Lightning SST v2) add-on that adds a spring to the mechanism of this beautifully crafted gear-box.

Why a spring, I hear you ask? Well, here's the thing: The shifter, without this add-on, has no 'centering' spring, meaning that you physically have to move the gear into its centre position while shifting.

True, this occasionally means a missed gear, but … the sensitivity and feel of the box is such that I have learnt to live with the occasional shift-stumble while relishing in the authentic 'throw' and quick gear-changes. I have no proof but … I'm faster with this shifter in the GP79 mod … by about three-tenths of a second over the sequential shifter on the G25, and about the same amount on the paddles. Of course, this is just me, so take that as anecdotal evidence …

What is certain, however, is that the days of missed shifts are, I am glad to report, a thing of the past.

But before I tell you how much better this shifter has become, I should give you a quick blow-by-blow account of what happened when I tried to assemble the spring … Simple, they said?

I began the procedure oozing confidence: I had watched the video (twice), and taken careful notes … flat-

side goes up, keep screws in the holes (hey-ho!), yup-yup … amazingly enough, I even had an extra Allen key lying around (used for some IKEA job some years ago) that was the perfect fit for the Allen screws (see, I even know the name of the screws!).

Of course, I *did* note (with a certain alarm, I will confess) that the dude in the video used an electric drill (cool), and Lou had told me earlier in the day that there was something 'wrong' with me when I confessed to not having any tools (oh grow up!): 'What kind of man has no tools?' he asked.

Yeah well … I also noticed the dude in the video looked the business … but, he sounded like he knew what he was talking about when he said, "It's real easy to install".

Well, yes, for him it was a doddle; see how he uses that drill with the confidence of a brain surgeon opening up a pig's skull? Yeah, well I had an Allen key … and I twisted and turned and opened up the guts to my beloved gear-shifter.

I did as he said, the dude in the video: I inserted the screw (it looks a little like a … okay, never mind, this is a family magazine!), I replaced the two tops (did someone say beveled? What the hell is beveled?), and, smiling triumphantly, began replacing the screws.

Which is, alas, where it all went terribly, tragically wrong … the damn screws refused—for a reason I could not fathom—to screw in. No matter how many times *I turned that Allen screw*, it would not go in.

Stupid thing!

Three screws had undone me. And now … now I could feel the sweat bead on my (deeply, yes) furrowed brow. This, I thought, was all so terribly familiar; that awful feeling in the gut, as one is confronted by one's own incompetence, had taken hold of me ….

Looking up, I caught a glimpse of my wife who was watching the TV—with rapt attention … far too much raptness, if you ask me … and was that a smile, playing on her lips? Is she remembering the time—the last time—I tried to assemble a wall-plug and shorted out the entire building's power supply for seven hours? Is she recalling my numerous failures at construction? Well, damn her, I would not allow three—*bloody*—screws to be my undoing. I mean, come on—three screws—three (albeit long!) screws … *why are they not going in!*

Perhaps, I think, it is because the gear is actually engaged into one of its slots … that must be it! Brilliant … ten minutes, and only now did I realize what the problem was!

I turn the thing around, to shift into neutral. And then whole stupid thing comes apart in my hands … like so many tear-drops, pieces fall to the floor as my wife contains her giggle and pretends it's a sneeze …

Three screws. One 'spring-thing'. And … *what the hell is this now lying on the floor?*

I am confronted with a crescent-moon shaped, black plastic thing staring back at me like a mechanical smile … and while I *know* it came from the gear-box (it wasn't here when I began this job!), it slowly dawns on me (with a deep-felt sigh) that I have absolutely no clue where it fits … or how to replace it … *and all because I had no drill,* I shout.

For almost an hour I tried to fit this piece into the shifter; I tried every configuration I could but … I gave up. It just didn't seem to fit anywhere …

Now—in case you're thinking I am a complete moron, let me say, in my defense, that I have built—quite successfully—numerous IKEA tables and even chairs, and yes, all of them had pieces remaining at the end. It is, I like to believe, a sign of genius to build what someone else has disassembled with pieces in hand—as all my IKEA furniture through the years will attest too … and so too, I know, will this stupid thing. Even without this piece of plastic!

One hour later, tongue firmly between lips, I finally managed to get the screws down so that the casing was secured (well, two of three screws, anyway, but that's enough for me). The black plastic thing, however, remains out of the shifter (if anyone has any idea where it belongs, please send me en email!) …

The result?

Well worth it … the shifter is now even more intuitive than before, and the shifting is faster and more secure. If you own v2, get this add-on: If you haven't yet bought this shifter, buy it—it is a quality piece of gear, and puts the G25's shifter in the shade when it comes to 'normal' shifting (that is, non-sequential).

Now, I wonder how well it would work with that funny piece of plastic inserted.

rFactor rEview

rFrE

Magnus Tellbom highlights some of the mods that have seen him through a long, cold Swedish summer …

MagnusTellbom

This summer was about as bad as any summer I've lived to experience, and the sun and warmth, I think, came and left on Thursday last week … From the beginning to the end of July we have seen—according to the weatherman on the TV, and she should know!—about three times as much rain as we usually do, and my pale Swedish body has been soaked to the bone every time I set foot outside the front door of my house.

But there's always a silver-lining, isn't there, and for me, this was a fully legal reason to stay inside and plough my way trough mods like never before, only interrupted by the wife demanding a new wall in the garage, a fence around the garden, or a clean kitchen. Well ... these things can only take so much time, and that's why I have a bunch of mods that I've been able to test—not only for my usual *NASCAR Heat* column, but for *rFactor* as well. So let's move right along!

DTM 2007

The DTM (Deutsche Tourenwagen Meisterschaft) saga—in its dozen year run, it reached a dizzying height as one of motor-sports' premiere series before suffering a spectacular collapse in 1996—began way back in 1984 with a staggering thirteen manufacturers on the grid: BMW, Opel, Rover, Alfa, Ford, Audi, Volkswagen, Fiat, Chevrolet, Volvo, Mitsubishi, MG, and Mercedes. *Thirteen* manufacturers … astounding, isn't it?

This year, the Swedish Touring Car Championship (STCC) has no less than ten manufacturers on the grid, but I don't think we'll see thirteen any time soon, for the very reasons that, in the end, saw the DTM fail as it did.

The story of DTM is a story of initial success, eventual failure, astounding high-tech developments … and costs gone wild. Indeed, the astonishing budgets required to compete in the series is what ultimately killed off the championship, forcing both Opel, and Alfa to call it quits after the 1996 season. Both cited cost as a hurdle that they could not overcome. At that time, of course, the DTM wasn't even called DTM any more, but ITC (International Touring Car Championship)—the name change didn't help, though, and neither did the scheduled events outside Germany (the DTM, in fact, was pretty much a global show by the mid-1990s), and—with budgets far too high, and technological leaps creating a scene reminiscent of Formula One—manufacturers began to leave, the whole thing collapsing under its own weight (measured in dollars) at the end of the 1996 season.

Four years later—come the new century, come the new DTM—the series returned. But don't be fooled by the initials; DTM now stands for Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters, and only three (German) manufacturers were to be found on the first grid in early 2000: Mercedes, Opel, and Audi.

Long story short, Opel didn't win enough, and quit after the 2005 season (despite having designed the concept car that was used as a blueprint for the new series), leaving just two manufacturers: Mercedes, and Audi.

But a loss of manufacturers is not a loss of competition: These two rivals are bitter enemies on the track, and it is no longer obvious who has the faster car, either on the straight, or the best traction in a corner. They are as equal as can be, making the series is a blast to watch.

As you can probably tell, I am a big fan of the series, and was delighted when the DTM 2007 mod was released. I would finally be able to sit down in a DTM racer, and test my skills in these cars—just like Jean Alesi, Heinz-Harald Frentzen, and two-time world champion Mika Häkkinen.

For those unfamiliar with the DTM, here's what you need to know; this is not your uncle's Touring Car championship. It takes the best from two worlds: You have enough horsepower to easily compete with any GT-machine, along with a format that replicates what you'd expect from a Touring Car championship. Add two compulsory pitstops, and you got yourself one of the toughest Touring Car series in the world. In my book, DTM's status as the world's best championship is only challenged by the Australian V8 Supercars.

The version I downloaded (from, where else, rFactor Central), and tested is version is 1.1. Several download links are available, so just pick the one you're most comfortable with. Now, the install is suspiciously small, only sixty-nine or so megs. When I saw this, I actually thought the download was corrupted. But no, the real answer lies inside the .RAR archive: The mod consists of two cars, and twenty paint-schemes … and that's it. Extract the archive in your *rFactor* folder and you're ready to go.

Now, I should tell you that it doesn't matter which of the cars you choose 'cause this time the modders seem to have made cars that look different—but are exactly equal where they matter—on the track. I drive both in exactly the same way, and a setup for the Audi seems to work just as well for the Mercedes. None of them offer any surprise whatsoever; that is, they are just plain drivable, and from install to first laps took me less than two minutes.

The default setups for this mod aren't that great. The cars bottom out all the time, and if you stiffen the suspension to stop them from doing so, you get an unstable ride. The journey to a good setup is longer than you might expect with this otherwise straightforward mod, and it requires a lot of testing and tuning before it comes out right.

But by then you will probably have a two or three or even five tenths of a second advantage on most drivers out there. I prefer to race these beasts on tracks like the Nürburgring, and compare my sim-times with those of

the real-world. Having just mentioned that, I must say that something is a little odd here: The DTM record from 2005 (Gary Paffett, Mercedes) is 1:24,442, while I struggled to get under two minutes. Now I understand if the real world racing talent is about, say, twenty seconds faster—really, I do, even if it does depress me no end!

But I think I should make up some of that by not fearing death or economical ruin if I crash. And the thirty-five second difference between my time and the real time is just too much. So, my ever present question is ... am I really that slow? Is the track not the right length? Are the physics wrong? Well ... to tell you the truth, I can't tell, so let's just blame it on me, and my lack of talent for now—although I suspect the track is probably a different layout than that used by the DTM.

Graphically, this mod has all the looks it needs. The paint-schemes are good. Not great, but they get the job done. The models look accurate, and the cockpits are more than just okay. I hear some complaints about sitting too low, but I find that if I push the seat position as high as possible, I end up in exactly the right position. No complaints there. The dash is easy to read, and the shiftlights are a big help. This mod has just enough good looks to make it enjoyable, but it stops there. Nothing more, nothing less. Like a real DTM-car, we're talking functional.

With a full field of cars (twenty including my own) on the Nürburgring, I get an average sixty-eight FPS count. That's really good on a test machine almost a year old, and I can turn every single graphic option to max' and still enjoy at least fifty-four FPS at any give location, and in any kind of traffic. That is superb, and I suspect that this—coupled with the mod's drivability, the competitive cars and functional looks—will see this mod become very popular among those with two or even three year old machines.

Bottom line then? DTM 2007 is a solid mod. It has what it takes, and it's easy on both the machine, and the eye. It might lack some of the polish seen on other mods, but that's not really important when you're supposed to go at 250km/h. If I deduct one point for polish, one point for the lack of good base setups, and one point for question mark I got about the physics, I will still give this one a very strong seven out of ten.

I'd recommend this mod to anyone who has even a passing interest in Touring Cars … not to mention fans of the series itself.

Sportscar Challenge For rFactor

I never got this mod when it was released for *F1-2001* (or was it *F1C*, I can't remember) because back then I was on a dial-up modem, well into *NASCAR Heat*, and knew for a fact that the netcode of all the ISI sims sucked. And since online play has always been my cup of tea, rather than trading paint with a bunch of stupid AI, the reasons for not getting the mod were many indeed.

Times, however, and things, have changed: I'm no longer on a modem, and out of nowhere ISI now sports arguably the best netcode on the market, all of which means … it's time to try out Sportscar Challenge and find out, once and for all, what all the buzz is about. I mean, if a mod makes an appearance on two platforms, separated by years, and enjoys a loyal following, it must have something going for it ... right?

There are two things you should know about me, though, right off the bat: First of all, I've never liked formula cars. Formula One and the likes make me wanna go to sleep on my couch. I know, it's not something a major motor-racing enthusiast should admit, but there it is; I find Formula One boring. Second of all, given the choice between endurance and sprint racing, I'll take the endurance event any day. Any race shorter than one hour is a sprint race, and any race than runs longer than three hours is nothing but pure therapy for this otherwise stressed-out soul. So, a sports car mod, featuring cars from all four classes in the very competitive American LeMans Series—well, you know it's right up my street, and I was rather excited when I began the download. From the comments (I love the comments on rFactor Central, gives you something to do while downloading), I noticed there were some gripes with the grip level (too low), and some other minor problems with a .MAS file.

Not that I let this stop me from getting the mod, and it soon found a home on my harddrive. The download is 161 megs, and the 1.1 update is 100 megs. That is a quite big download, but I will tell you right away—it's well worth it, and more.

This conversion is a beauty, and if I understand the comments on rFactor Central correctly, it's even better for *rFactor* than it ever was for the original sim for which it was modded.

You will find fourteen manufacturers in four classes, and, all-in-all, you can put just under forty vehicles on track (if the track and your computer can handle it). I took thirty cars, including my own, to—where else!—the Nürburgring, for some proper testing. I soon found out that the test session would be more about my skills, rather than the mod itself. It's just that fun, and the immersion factor is tremendous.

I chose a GT class BMW for my first run, 'cause you should always learn to crawl before you start to run (never mind walk!). I thought that the slowest class would be a good stepping stone to the faster cars, but boy, was I in for a surprise. There is nothing easy about even the slower cars. You struggle to keep the rear from stepping out, you struggle to keep out of the way for the faster cars, and you struggle to keep up with the others in your class. In just about every corner and every breaking point you must remain focused, or you will either fall away from your opponents, or fall off entirely. Lovely!

I could go on-and-on for several pages about how good it feels to drive these cars, but I suspect almost every reader out there would get bored pretty soon—so let's just say it is a brilliant experience, and one *rFactor* owners should not miss.

So instead, let's look at the test results. With thirty cars on track (Nürburgring), and every graphic option turned to max', I get an average FPS of fifty-three, with a lowest of forty-six, and a high of seventy-one. Thirty cars, ladies and gentlemen, is no easy task—for *any* computer. Especially when the cars are as good looking as these are, with stunningly recreated models, and glistening, superb paint jobs. I suspect that a two or even three year old computer could reach the magic twenty-five FPS if they turn down some of the candy.

As for the AI: As we all know, this is not a feature that remains on the high-priority list for the majority of modders working on the rFactor platform, but here, the AI is one of the better I've come across, and that's a really important thing for multi-class racing like the American Le Mans series. After an hour on-track with the AI, I was only taken out once, and that could very well have been my own fault. Had I done the same move online, I'm not sure the outcome would have been much different.

Bottom line then ... This is not original work, it's a conversion. What this means is that the models are a few years old, and I have seen better damage modelling. The physics, however, are great, as are the sounds, and the AI, and the performance. My final verdict is a strong nine out of tne, and I recommend this mod to anyone, not just the GT freaks out there.

Sprint Cup Mod For rFactor

Once upon a time, way back in the Amiga days, a friend named Patrik and I made a list of the top ten things about computers that we considered the most boring. Anyone who was into computers, and especially the Amiga scene, are probably familiar with the all-time number one on that list: Formatting floppy discs. 3.5" floppy discs, that weren't all that floppy, was the main medium for spreading files between friends in those pre-net days, and formatting them was so bleeding boring that I still don't know why I didn't leave the world of computers behind me there and then. (Then again, the fact that we'd do such a list is probably an answer in itself!)

Then came the Bulletin Board System era, and instead of using floppy disks, programmes and files were traded on one BBS at a time, earning credits as a trader. It went like this ... You got hold of some great new software, and you uploaded it right away to as many BBSs you knew and for whom you had a phone number, hoping you'd be first and in that way gain a fistload of good credits. The usual credit ratio was three bytes for every byte you uploaded, called the '3:1 credit system'. Wonderful! This meant you had to call one computer at a time, so you could end up making ten calls with your modem in a matter of an hour in order to get those credits, along with a good reputation.

The downside—as those who used the system will no doubt recall with a heart-stutter—were the phone bills that looked much like the foreign debt of a small banana republic. Uploading stuff soon ended up on that top ten most boring list—right above downloading—although waiting for the phone bill was anything *but* boring!

So why am I telling you about this old stuff right now? Well, I wanted to make a point. You see, I got this email from Alex asking if I wanted to spend some time on a mod, writing a bit about it, and I said yes. But in order to write about the mod, I have to download and install it, right? Right. And that's why I'm telling you how I despise waiting on a download … and why … The only thing that makes a download slightly more fun than an upload is that you might get something good at the end of it.

Something fun ... This particular download was a three step rocket, and the first step was no less than 648 megs. Step two was a mere twenty-five megs or so … leaving the third step coming in at 183 megs. That—for the mathematically challenged—is 856 megs right there.

All of which probably makes you think—heck, this must be some mod, 'cause that is *huge*. It must look better than anything I've seen so far, and it surely must have some really weird out-of-this-world damage modeling, or textures that will take your breath away … either that or very good performance.

The alternative—well, after eight hundred megs, it was not worth considering …Of course, there were tracks that came with the pack so … maybe that's the reason, right?

Only one way to find out; let's open her up and see what's inside!

Installation is a simple matter of using the 'extract to here' function in WinRAR. I like that since it's cleaner than the normal install.exe thingies that really doesn't do anything butt clog up your registry. As you can imagine, it took a few seconds extra to initialize a mod this size, and so I went and put on a cup of coffee while I waited. I came back just in time to hear a somewhat hysterical voice shouting out those classic words, 'Gentlemen, start your engines!'.

Okay so that was fun but … I think as I sit down …why on earth is that NROS.org logo so grainy? After an 856 meg download, I really want to be stunned. Blown away ... and a blurry logo, as a first impression, is not a good sign.

Moving on to the menus—since this is the second thing you see—well they are ... Different. Not bad, don't get me wrong, but very 1980s or something ... I can't put my finger on it, and I like the 1980s, but you have to forgive me—I come from a modding scene that gave us Gasoline Alley, NASCAR 05 and 06, Sports Car GT ... A user interface is important, especially when you consider the size of this thing. But ... the tune playing in the menu *is* catchy to say the least. I only wish it was a little longer.

On the really bright side, the cars are indeed beautifully modelled. They really spark on that spinner. Chevrolet, Dodge, Ford, and, of course, Toyota. They look good, they gleam, the paint fit the models, and leaves little to be desired. Superb work right there, and I can't wait to take one to track with me.

I picked a Ford for no obvious reason at all, and headed to the first track in the list. Atlanta! Now, it doesn't say in the readme that the AI sucks—mostly because, well, there is no readme in the archive. But the AI *does* suck, and big time at that. You see, I find these cars to be extremely hard to handle. So hard in fact that it took me three attempts to get out of my pit box and perform a clean test lap. Yet, with the default setup on Atlanta, I manage to reach a 31.4—which is more than three seconds faster than any of the AI are capable of. So let's forget about the AI, and take a closer look at how the car feels.

Being European, I am not that familiar with ovals, although I have tested some oval mods for NASCAR Heat in the past, and I liked them a lot. I also, at one point, got the thumbs up on my oval technique from a bunch of diehard oval drivers online, and so I must say that I think I can handle myself in this type of racing.

All of which is to say—I found these cars difficult to handle. Maybe it's supposed to be like that, and I'm the one who's at fault, but heck ... I *should* be able to go in a straight line on the back straight, right? And I should be able to feel it in my MOMO when I'm on the very edge of losing my rear, right? I mean, these cars are supposed to be low tech, high torque monsters with no driving aids whatsoever, and I should feel every painful moment of it, right?

Well not so ... I find myself relying more on what my eyes can tell me rather than what I feel in my hands as I usually do, and the result is a ride that is intensely difficult to the point that I have yet to complete ten laps without smacking something. The mod's problem? Mine? I have never set my scrawny behind in a real stock car, and probably never will, so I let this pass as a failure due to my own lack of skills. But I still want more of that Force-Feedback feeling.

So the menus are 1980s style, the music is good, the cars are well modeled, the paints are awesome, the AI sucks, and the Force Feedback—on my system at least—is lacking. How then is the performance?

With thirty cars on track, the benchmark says forty-two frames per second, with a low of thirty-eight, and a high of forty-six. That is the lowest performance I've seen this summer, but it's still well above the lowest acceptable FPS count of twenty-five. Still, I do wonder how a mod—with four types of cars that look almost identical—can have a worse performance than a mod that features fourteen car-makes in it. Okay, so the models are really good, but ... I can't help it, I think the performance should be better.

On the other hand, the cockpits are simply gorgeous, and may have something to do with the frame rate issue.

Last, the tracks ... I have not had the chance to check every single track that ships with the mod, time being an issue, but—let's just say the tracks are variable when it comes to quality.

Atlanta, for instance, is very poor, and it looks as if it came directly from *N2003* without any improvements other than minor logo updates. Just look at the crowd. Now I know Americans are *supposed* to be a lot fatter (or should I say weightier!) than most other people due to far too many visits to McDonalds, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, but are they all dwarves too? The textures have clearly been stretched and badly handled, and I must confess to being very disappointed … I've seen better tracks converted from *Sportscar GT*.

To be fair, though, a fair number of the conversions are okay, and look much better than Atlanta. But that doesn't help when they are packed away deep inside an 856 meg download. If someone asked for my opinion, I'd say that the converter would be better off releasing these tracks as standalone conversions, and make them available at rFactor Central.

Bottom line? Much to like in this mod, much to love about this mod—and a lot to dislike about this mod … Picking out the things I like about the mod, the cars, the cockpits, some of the tracks, and the tune. But I can't overlook the fact that a lot of the tracks don't match up to the quality of the cars, and cockpits, and leave a bad stain on it all.

I understand that this is quite a project, and it is clear that a lot of work has gone into it, but a seven out of ten is the most I can give it. As the mod stands now, it doesn't quite match-up to the best NASCAR-type mods on the rFactor platform …

The Kink

Reality Show

In a series of articles for AUTOSIMSPORT, racer Josh Rayman will conduct a never-before attempted experiment; evaluating whether a simulator can be of benefit to a real-world racer throughout the course of a season … this month, Josh's season starts at Caldwell … will his endless hours of rFactor-testing give him an edge? …

JoshRayman

Josh Rayman

After seven seasons in KART racing, I have decided to make the jump into car racing. Although this is an expensive move, car series tend to draw more attention and, in turn, investment, so I am hoping to attract the attention of some backers for this year and next. I am Josh Rayman.

In KARTing, I have won three local titles (in Cadet, Junior, and Senior classes) in hire KARTs (2000, at Lodge Road), Junior Rotax Max (2004, at Lodge Road), and Pro-KARTs (2006, PF International). I have also competed nationally in the top-rank Junior ICass (JICA, Junior InterContinental A) for two seasons. This yielded a thirteenth place in my first year, which is a nationally seeded (recognized) position.

This season, I am racing in the 750MC club racing series across Britain. It is a series that is heavily engineering-based, and has had members that have risen to both great game and prominence in motor-sports; names such as Colin Chapman, Adrian Reynard, and Gordon Murray have all come through this series. I am racing with Andy Waters Tracksport, an established team with a lot of experience in the club racing scene. The particular championship I am competing in is the Toyo Tyres 16V Golf GTi series, which runs alongside the 8V GTi series over five rounds, visiting many of the UK's most famous circuits, such as Silverstone, and Brands Hatch.

For my first season, I hope to hit the ground running, but I see it also as a year in which I will gain experience: Learning how to race cars properly, learning the circuits, and—it should be added—learning how not to end up with a large repair bill! The car I'm racing is ready to go, and I'm looking forward to the race season, along with the promotional events that run alongside it.

In terms of this series of articles for AUTOSIMSPORT, which will be specifically linked to sim-racing as it applies to real-life racing, I have already some experience to share with you: When I was told I'd be racing VW Golfs, I immediately turned to the fully-fledged Golf mod by Lazytech. I started to drive it in order to see how it compared with the real thing and, from what I've been able to gauge, the setup I'm using in the sim (a hybrid of street and sport) is indeed very similar to my race car.

I used a sim to prepare for my first test session, which was at Mallory Park. I had to use *F1C* (as *rFactor*, as of this writing, has no conversion/version of Mallory). I had never been to Mallory before, so I used the *F1C* version to familarise myself with the layout, and I must confess that I was surprised at how effective this proved to be. The only minor issues were with perception of how wide the circuit was (real-life feeling much wider), and some of the elevation changes, too, were more exaggerated in real-life. Being able to know roughly where the circuit went, however, helped me a lot, and as I go to more familiar (through sim and real-life visits) tracks, I imagine that having an in-sim version, along with the correct car, will certainly help me with my lines, and how I prepare for the race. It may even help me gauge a basic setup, and help me experiment with different ideas before I hit the circuit, where, obviously, I will have limited testing time this year.

Over the course of the five rounds, I will be preparing for the races using *rFactor* and Lazytech's mod, along with the circuit mods for each respective circuit. I will detail these preparations, comparisons, and how they helped me throughout the course of the season.

Going to Silverstone, despite having spent a week training there late last year, was a nerve-filled experience. I had never set foot onto the National circuit, where I was racing that weekend. So I prepared using ISI's Northamptonshire representation, and the sim helped me get to grips with the layout.

I had a fifteen minute qualifying session, which doubled as the track familiarization session, and thanks to playing the sim, I was very comfortable with the circuit layout as soon as went out on-track. In real-life, there was a sense that everything was larger, but apart from that, the sim-circuit was very realistic.

In terms of how the car handled, the sim suffered from understeer, whereas on track I suffered from some oversteer. This meant I had to back off in some corners that I was not accustomed to doing in-sim. Going into Copse wasn't flat in real-life; however, towards the end of my dry session, the car was starting to push as the tyres heated up. Into Becketts, I was expecting heavy understeer as it was a large radius corner, but the run-off was wide, and the exit flat. The entry was much slippier, and this caught me out a few times, especially in the race. The material change, moving off the main straight into Brooklands, was well represented virtually although my rear-end was sliding around due to the road tyres. Luffield acted in-sim nearly identically to the way it did with my Golf, and like ISI's version, I can tell you, it was a really fun corner to get right.

During the race, this experience counted for very little, unfortunately, due to a heavy downpour which was hitting the circuit during our race. A few laps in, one of the competitors left oil leading into Brooklands, and there was oil on the start-finish straight, which was being spread around by the heavy rain. This made the conditions very interesting, and due to an early spin at Becketts, I lost a lot of time, and much track position.

After an impressive qualifying session, posting the eighth fastest time out of the twenty-six runners, we unfortunately dropped to eighteenth in the race, but the dry pace was very encouraging.

Bring on Snetterton! Which is at the end of September—30th September …

STA photos are Josh's father (Roy Rayman)
The other photos are by a ClubGTi.com forum member called vrbanana.

Backstraight

Onboard With Panasonic Toyota Racing F1

Aerodynamics and simulation for the world's biggest car manufacturer play a defining role in their quest for Formula One success …

Luisa**Ghibaudo**

Q&A With Dieter Gass, Chief Engineer Race and Test

With Fuji Speedway returning to the calendar for the first time in thirty years, how does the team begin preparing for a new circuit?

First of all you get a CAD (Computer Aided Design) file with the circuit data, so we can start to run some simulations in our software and get a first impression of what the circuit is like. We are able to simulate all setup aspects of our car and see the results of setup changes on the new track. Effectively our simulation software calculates virtual laps of the circuit showing the effects on lap time of running different levels of downforce or different setup options. Using these simulations, we are able to find the best starting setup for the new circuit, so we arrive at the track well prepared.

What areas are we able to simulate?

You start to determine what downforce level gives the best lap time on the new circuit. Once you know that, you look into which gear ratios suit the track with the given level of downforce, before you get into more detailed simulations of different setup solutions. Getting a bit closer to the weekend, you start running race simulations in order to predict the optimum race strategy. This prediction takes into account estimates of relevant characteristics of the new track, like the degradation of the two Bridgestone tyre compounds, and the effect the fuel has on lap time. If you have more fuel in the car, this affects your lap time, but we can accurately predict how much time is lost with every extra kilogramme of fuel carried.

Are there any unusual setup implications at Fuji Speedway, particularly considering the long straight?

The main straight at Fuji is exceptionally long, 1.475km, but the rest of the circuit is relatively twisty so there is a compromise you have to find on the aerodynamic and mechanical setup. You have some very slow corners which require good mechanical grip and, as always, you want good grip in general, but you have to balance that with the long straight, where you need low enough downforce to get a level of drag which allows you to have a good top speed.

Is it more difficult to predict the best strategy when the team has not raced at the track before?

It is a bit more difficult, yes, because there are more uncertainties at a new track compared to one which we know very well and have all the data on.

Obviously, it is a bit harder to predict tyre behaviour if we don't have any actual data from testing or racing at that particular circuit. Mainly, what you want to know about the tyres is the level of degradation over long runs and the effect that has on lap time. Also, without having driven at a track, you can only estimate the time loss during a pit stop and that makes a difference to the strategy you choose. Having said that, I am confident our predictions will be very close to what we find when we get to Fuji Speedway.

Historically, how accurate are these predictions?

I think we are quite accurate but the ultimate response to that is very difficult to say for sure because it very much depends on what happens in the race. Many incidents can happen, which then have a positive or an adverse affect on strategy. If you get a good start or a car you would be fighting with gets stuck in traffic you can gain a lot in the final race result, but the opposite case obviously costs time and ultimately will compromise your strategy. On the other hand, if you have a clean race you are able to see more clearly how accurate the prediction was.

With a new circuit, do we learn more about setup requirements just by observing the track before the cars have even run?

To a small extent, yes. We have most of the information but when we first go to a new track we would walk the circuit and study elements like the kerbs and the cambers of the track in the corners. We have a good idea what to expect but it is helpful to actually see the track with your own eyes to really have a complete understanding. Well before the race all the teams get a complete circuit map, which shows all the corners in detail so you have the altitude and the topography of the track. We have quite a bit of information there.

Would you keep a wider setup window available in preparing for a new circuit compared to one we know very well?

Not really because at any race we come prepared with all the set-up options, so we have everything available to us. However, it is true to say you might make bigger steps when evaluating setup in free practice as you tune the car to the requirements of the track

Inside a Formula 1 car—Aerodynamics

Aerodynamics in Formula One is often described as a black art, the real secret to success on the track. Head of Aerodynamics Mark Gillan explains that the answer is blowing in the wind.

First and foremost, aerodynamics is the science of manipulating and making use of air flow. In Formula One, high speeds mean the air is a formidable force and it can be used to the car's advantage, as well as presenting an obstacle to speed.

Put simply, the bigger the frontal area of an object, the more wind resistance it will encounter, so a bigger object will travel slower than a smaller object with the same amount of power to propel it.

As always in Formula One, things are not that simple. Downforce complicates matters, because wind resistance can be used to improve a car's performance, if the forces are transferred in the right way to provide extra grip around corners.

Mark explains: "Downforce is simply the force acting down on the ground. If you think of an aircraft, it has lift - a force acting upwards. On our car we have wings which work in the opposite direction to those on an aeroplane. On our car we have a force which acts down on the ground to keep the car fixed to the track as it is going around corners."

Maximising the positive effects of the air and minimising the negative effects is the aerodynamicist's challenge. The first attempts to harness aerodynamics in Formula One were relatively crude and dangerous, but the technology and knowledge has evolved into a fine art, which literally dictates who succeeds and who doesn't in Formula One.

"Aerodynamics in Formula One has been around a long time," Mark says. "Way back in the late 1960s the first aerodynamic wings were sprouted and then, in the 1970s, understanding of aerodynamics on racing cars became more apparent. But it's really in the last ten years that Formula 1 aerodynamics has progressed beyond all recognition. It is really very impressive.

"Aerodynamics is now the most important item on the car which a team can actually change, because if you look at the tyres, everyone has the same tyres and the engine is homologated. So aerodynamics is the single biggest item we can change —the biggest performance item on the car."

Although every part on the outside of Panasonic Toyota Racing's TF107 car is designed with aerodynamics in mind, the most obvious aerodynamic elements are at the very front and rear of the car.

As the first part of the car to encounter air resistance, the front wing is a key to the aerodynamic puzzle. It channels the air around and over the car, ensuring it reaches the right areas to generate downforce but avoids places where it has a negative effect.

Mark explains: "The front wing is one of the more efficient areas on the car. It basically provides the downforce at the front of the car, to provide stability and increase grip. But it is also a mechanism for directing the air away from the tyres. The tyres are one of the main items which generate drag. From a legality point of view, we cannot cover the tyres so we have to find a way to move the air around and over them.

"To get the perfect setup, we typically start at the front and work our way back because each item at the front, for example the front suspension, will have a knock on effect on the rest of the car."

But that does not diminish the importance of aerodynamics at the other end of the TF107, as Mark adds: "The rear wing, like the front, generates downforce. It is the balance between downforce at the front and the downforce at the rear which provides stability."

Because Formula One cars are incredibly sensitive to small changes in set-up, the TF107s are built to allow fine-tuning to maximise the useful effect of the wings. "If you look at the rear wing, you can see various hole positions," Mark says. "What we can do is change the angle of the wing elements which generates less or more downforce as required."

Of course, with aerodynamics being such a pivotal factor in determining performance on the track, Panasonic Toyota Racing leaves no stone unturned as it searches for the small improvements which combine to deliver success.

At its headquarters in Cologne, Germany, the team uses the latest technology to put designs to the test before they even make it on to a race track with a two-pronged approach. Powerful computers are able to simulate the effect of air flow over the car without it even needing to be built, while in the wind tunnel, an exact scale model of the TF107 is subjected to a wind flow which replicates driving at speed.

"Basically we spend roughly 8,000-9,000 hours a year just to develop the car in the wind tunnel," says Mark. "That is in addition to a similar amount of time in CFD, computational fluid dynamics, which is a computer programme which models the air flow over the car."

The comprehensive data from these tests shows the team how the car behaves at racing speed, giving Mark and his colleagues the information they need to constantly improve the aerodynamics.

Constant improvement—*kaizen*—is a fundamental philosophy of Panasonic Toyota Racing and aerodynamics play a pivotal part in its challenge to reach the front in Formula One.

A rights-free video feature of Inside a Formula 1 Car—Aerodynamics is available to order free of charge for the media on www.thenewsmarket.com/toyotaf1

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AUTOSIMSPORT

Split Second

Mika Hakkinen In Mexico

Sergio Bustamante is driven to the limit by Formula One legend Mika Hakkinen before finding out all about the Alonso/Hamilton battle, life after McLaren, the DTM, the famed McLaren simulator, and … oh yes, does Mika really drink Johnnie Walker?

SergioBustamante

Photos courtesy of GPLegacy, Puesta A Punto,

Erika Rodriguez, RacingMediaCenter

Split Second Mika Hakkinen In Mexico

continued

AUTOSIMSPORT was one of only eight official media companies that were invited to the exclusive Mercedes Benz Test track located near Lerma, a town nestled between Mexico City and Toluca, and sponsored by Johnnie Walker's educational campaign focused on the dangers of drinking-and-driving. This worldwide campaign features—alongside Mercedes' car-*du-jour*—two-time Formula One world champion Mika Hakkinen, with whom we had the opportunity to share some special moments … both on, and off the track.

On track, the weather was threatening, with dark pregnant clouds, a lot of wind, and … an amazing beam of sunshine that gashed across the test track on which Mika was scheduled to perform. The promise of rain was simply that; a promise that never materialized, and Mika arrived into the lush setting, surrounded by the greenest of woods, with a sunny sky on his back, and the most impressive lightning and thunderstorm as backdrop.

Before the on-track session though, Mika was brought into the Johnnie Walker media lounge. There he was met by a lively media scrum, TV cameras, radio station microphones, newspaper and magazine photographers, famous anchors from news broadcast companies in Mexico, and, of course, the presence of the beautiful Johnnie Walker girls, all of whom had been stirred into a sense of elevated expectation by Mika's tardiness.

The Interview

Mika Hakkinen: We had a delay on our flight …

Question One: I'd like to know your opinion about the struggle that's going on—the internal struggle inside McLaren between Hamilton and Alonso … What do you think … how… how much do you think it can affect the team in general, and do you consider that Alonso should leave the team … How … What's your opinion as a world champion—as an ex-driver for that team about what is happening inside the team?

Mika humors the question (you know this because he suggests it is an 'interesting question' followed by a funny 'hmmm') before, being Mika—that is, a polite and kind professional—smiling and attempting an answer.

MH: Honestly … Well, obviously it's a very, very special situation … Very difficult, of course, and the fact is that Fernando is a world champion, and Lewis is still very much of a rookie in Formula One, and they have a very tough competition at the moment, and it makes the feelings very, very hard … A situation like that is difficult to control …

Mika then takes a second as his craggy features set into an 'I'm thinking' face before simply waiting for the next question;

after all, Mika's not hear as a McLaren insider, and this is certainly not a Formula One conference, let alone one about a championship in which he is playing no part. All of which it to say; in that first question, he managed to be polite with the answer, make us all feel at ease, and show his great attitude, while simultaneously not walking into the potential landmine.

Question Two: Hi Mika, Sergio Bustamante for *AUTOSIMSPORT*. I was wondering, when we're watching so many drivers training in their simulators—Lewis is a good example—did you have this tool available when you were racing? And what do you think about the difference of training in simulators, and then going to the track?

MH: Yes, obviously, by the moment I stopped in Formula One in 2001, the simulator was just a work in progress at that time. The simulator is a machine, which is, step-by-step, developing better-and-better all the time. I never really—I didn't use any kind of simulator at that time … *Mika shrugs and smiles confidently*, because I'm so talented, I didn't need it!

Well, *he continues after the laughter subsides*, really it was because it was still developing. The simulator … It is, for a newcomer who comes to Formula One, a great tool to learn the different circuits, and to understand how to take the lines and how to cut the corners.

Question Three: Erika Rodriguez from *Puesta A Punto* … We learnt that in the past winter testing you drove the Formula One, and you were two seconds faster than Hamilton's best time; we know you're considered among the ten fastest drivers in the history of Formula One … Would you go back to Formula One if there's a seat available?

A long silence set in the room as the question was translated to Mika (it was once again asked in Spanish) and he exchanged a few comments 'off the mike' with the Johnnie Walker people, before smiling and explaining … 'sorry guys, it's a little bit complicated to, you know, please wait a second'. Laughter filled the room again while Mika continued to talk with the Johnnie Walker people for a little longer, before, still with the smile on his face, offering his answer.

MH: Okay, now I understand why it took so long to answer the question … I don't think that, at the end of the day, you know, that Formula One is simply a racing category—which is always at extremely high speed, it is at a very high speed car, we're talking about situations in which we find ourselves going at 350km/h for example, and then breaking in a corner, just sixty meters before, and then you drop the speed to 50km/h—so what I'm saying is that you have to react in every situation very fast. So I did the test in Barcelona, not such a long time ago, just for the experience, and to see how much it has changed, and at the end of the day I can say it hasn't changed. If you were driving in Formula One about … what, five years ago, and you jump in a car today, it's not so easy. So I can say that Formula One, at the end of the day, is the same as it was. Of course, technology has developed a lot, but still it's the same machine …

Question Four: (*A question in English, and Mika's face seemed to echo some form of delight as he could understand in real time what he was being asked*) Mika, Emilia, from *Televisa Deportes*; we know you retired along with Jo Ramirez, in the same year … What do you think about him? And do you know 'Chava Duran', our Mexican pilot?

Yes, she meant driver—pilot is 'piloto' in Spanish, which means driver, a false cognate and a common mistake but still amusing enough for Mika to smile. What is important is to stress that the best prepared media people from large firms like Televisa *were still professional enough to conduct an interview in English. The reason I keep stressing this is because we're actually having an interview with a driver who speaks Finnish, and part of his education has led him to be conversant in English, so we're talking about one language barrier (and therefore one language removed from Mika's real thoughts) that is then tested even further by the need for translation.*

MH: The Mexican driver I don't know—I don't know Salvador, but Jo Ramirez obviously I know, and have known for many years, and when I joined McLaren at the end of 1992-1993, he was definitely a person for me that was very close, or more or less the closest person to me in the team when I started there. And he was definitely helping me get inside the team, and it was fantastic, he's got a great personality … And yeah, we had some great times together, some great times together … Funny guy. But about the Mexican driver: When I think about it, it's come very late to see the potential to have a Mexican driver in Formula One, at a high level, it takes a lot of practice for the drivers, and it needs a lot of … how do I say … a lot of effort, from the motor-racing … how can I say this … motor-racing … you can see it was a very long flight! … okay, federations or funds, so they can optimize different parts of practices for the young drivers, and I think it's definitely possible to go there.

By this time, the other interviewers realized that whether their English was up to standard or not, it was the polite way to conduct the interview, so from now on it was all in

English, which meant some hilarious words in Spanglish—I'll preserve the questions in the way they were asked.

Question Five*:* Mika, what is for you being a 'bicampeon' (two-time champion) Formula One driver involved in a campaign as Johnnie Walker's doing with consumer and designated driver and … ?

MH: (*Understanding the gist immediately*): I feel that way, when I went together with Johnnie Walker a few years ago, and I was asked if I'd be interested to do this, and I thought about it, and I thought it was a fantastic idea to do this, and being twice world champion, I told them I would think about it, and okay, I do have a lot of fans, and that's why I think that when I do tell this message to the people that they would listen, and that the message will go through because they would listen to me. So I thought this is a fantastic team, and being the 'designated driver', as an example, is a great team to also inform people that when they go to a night club or they go to restaurants, and that they decide to have something to drink—alcohol—that they should have the decision before they go with their friend or with their wife or girlfriend, or whatever, to make the commitment of who would not drink and would drive, and I think that is a fantastic idea, and I think all the girls should follow this as soon as tonight, you know!

Question Six: Hey Mika, Paul Rodriguez from *Editorial Eto*, can you tell us what was your favorite grand prix win and why?

MH: Well my favorite grand prix victory obviously was the Monaco Grand Prix, and simply because it was very tough. It is the hardest race of the year, simply because it's already started as a race as long as you stay, you have a lot of promotions, a lot of team meetings, practice on Thursday, Friday is off, qualifying on Saturday, race on Sunday, so it's a really long week. And the Monaco Grand Prix—in there you have all the most important partners of the team in the race weekend so it makes the pressure higher, not only for the driver, but also for the mechanics and for the whole team, and, of course, physically is a very demanding race to race, it's a street circuit, with all the drivers, it makes the driving very, very tough.

Question Seven: When you do drink alcohol, what do you drink, and do you really get to pick the designated driver, or are you the designated driver for your friends?

MH: Well I'll be definitely driving tonight, some people in the club, but of course you can enjoy and have fun in the evening.

And here goes a high point of the conference. As they say, there's always a dumb question and someone who is desperate to ask it.

Question Eight: And what do you drink?

Mika looks back in search of an answer to the question—what does he drink … I wonder, erm …

Mika looks stunned for a second, and can't help his face as it sets into a 'Is he really asking that question?' stare. In the most obvious way possible, he just looks at the wall behind him which is covered with a checkered layout which has Johnnie Walker emblazoned all over it, before noting: 'I'm not too fuzzy about that'.

Question Nine: Hi Mika, welcome to Mexico. Can you tell me how much difference is there now that you're racing DTM with a Formula One Car?

MH: The difference is big, obviously. In Formula One, your life is much more hectic, you travel much more, you do continuous testing, more promotions, much more races on the calendar, pressure is much higher, and in one team there are just two drivers. In DTM, I have four teammates, so you share the pressure together. Obviously Formula One is much faster, which makes driving much more complicated, and there are quite a few big differences. The similarities is that the game is still the same, you race against other drivers, you're aiming for victory, you have to be a good team player, so those are pretty much the similarities, but it is very different from Formula One.

One of the last questions—unfortunately we don't have it on tape, which is a pity because it was cringe worthy—Mika was asked how he could do a campaign about safe driving with an alcohol company when his Finnish mate Raikkonen was busy 'making a fool of himself' and being 'silly-drunk' in a very public manner.

This question was both uncomfortable and disrespectful, but it was asked, and Mika just held his ground in a fantastic way, even if, for the first time in the conference, his face took on a stern look. All the same, he answered politely but with the character that defines his style. He defended Kimi by saying that Kimi was young, and that he doesn't drink and drive, and especially not during his performance in testing and weekends. Young people have the right to enjoy themselves in their spare time, he added, and that it was an unfair judgment on Kimi's attitude. 'Kimi is a professional, and I can promise you, he's always at the top of his game when he is driving, any other statement from anyone that brings him down in scandal is absolutely false and even embarrassing'.

Most of the room was filled with a sensation of touché when Mika simply set this reporter straight, not allowing the conference to take a tabloid feel and thus elegantly preserving the nature of the Q&A session.

Test Drive With Mika

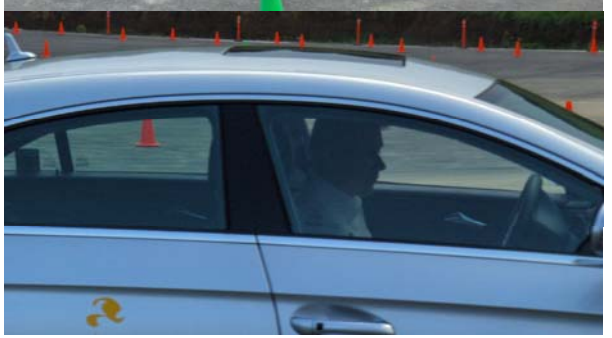
After the session was over, there was a raffle for the invited guests as well as pre-selected media who had conducted the questions; at stake was a lap with Mika, driving the Mercedes at its limit on the tricky slalom-like track.

It was a good feeling having my name in there and being able to share the seat with Mexican motor-sports legend and authority, Chacho Medina.

Mika was simply amazing in the way he drove the Mercedes. The delicate input through the steering belied the speed at which he threw the Mercedes around the twists and turns, totally relaxed as he allowed the car its head.

Mika was as fast as I had imagined he would be, and even found time to joke—when we arrived at the first corner at an impressive clip after a rather meaty getaway down the small straight, reaching over 195 km/h into the one hundred degree left turn where Mika simply set the weight transfer to the right, applied the brakes, shifted down with the car behaving like a tame puppy, a swift, impressive turn-in with a squeal of tyres the only real giveaway that we were going through that turn at a quick pace—with the nervous group serving as his passengers that, 'I don't really like this corner'. It was hilarious to see everyone, including me, force out some nervous giggles since the 'wall', after the turn through which we were coming out of in opposite lock, was nothing more than a flimsy plastic containment barrier centimeters away from a precipitous fall.

We needn't have worried of course; what seemed like an impossible speed to us was, in all likelihood, a pedestrian run for Mika, who never touched a cone throughout the run; he simply went to the car's limit with a precision that remains a once in a lifetime experience.



AUTOSIMSPORT

The Kink

NASCAR 08 XBOX 360-Style

Bob Simmerman on EA Sports' current foray into the sim-racing market … this time exclusively on the console …

BobSimmerman

NASCAR 08 is the first licensed NASCAR game to hit the next generation consoles, and is not available for the PC: Whether this has something to do with the mauling EA Sports took after their *NASCAR Sim Racing* venture is difficult to say, but there's the fact … the PC has been ignored like a mistress spotted in a public venue.

Like *War and Peace, NASCAR 08* has much that is good and bad in varying, and at times strange, places. Just when you think you have a sim on your hands, an arcade moment makes a very rude intrusion. Sometimes you're toddling about in an arcade situation only to find you have a sim on your hands and a car in the wall. As satisfying as it is frustrating, there are many glimpses here of a simulated future for the consoles … but there are, equally, many elements—perhaps too many for some tastes—that slam the user firmly into the auto-controlled world of arcade-fun-land.

Firing Up

Like many console games before, you simply insert the disk and play. It either works, or it doesn't. There may be a patch—or not—when the game starts up: If there is, all will be automatically taken care of for you. In other words, the installation process is no-brainer simple. The standard fare EA intro' screens are followed by the cover athlete *du jour*, Tony Stewart and his Home Depot #20 Chevrolet doing some smoky burnouts to put you in the mood. So far so good—if the cars in the game look this super-shiny-fine, at least *NASCAR 08* will be a visual treat. Sporting his Car of Tomorrow for this scene, Tony looks his three-day-stubbled worst … though his burnouts aren't that bad … No need for a discussion about McDonalds, though …

Press the start button, and the guts of the game are exposed. With a backdrop of a NASCAR Nextel Cup garage in the background along with all of the trimmings, those who have played EA Sports games in the past will feel right at home here. Those who haven't should have little problem acclimatizing since the menu system is basic, and to the point. There is plenty to do initially, and a thorough familiarization with all of the menu selections, and sub selections, is highly recommended as this thing is chock-full of goodies and content. The true sports fan will love the ESPN feed in the background, should it be turned on, and there's apparently a solid soundtrack on there somewhere, though I have no idea what or where since I could care less about sounds … other than a purring V8 that is …

Game Modes

In typical console-land fashion, there are game-modes-a-plenty. Race Now, The Chase, Season, Multiplayer, and the Toyota Racing module (designed to help the user improve their skills on the track, or go it alone to turn a few practice laps).

Of course, detailed statistics are kept of your progress, including a couple of odd ones; total number of pit stops, and total number of tyres used. Stranger still, although many of your race finish stats are tracked, there is no tracking of how many points you have earned in your career! But you know what? At least there are abundant stats, and PC sim-

developers should take note—computers are similar to consoles in that they can add, divide, and stuff ... is it really that much to ask for sims to keep track of our virtual careers?

Car offerings and licensing here will make any NASCAR fan drool. Cup cars, Car of Tomorrow cars, Busch cars, and a healthy dose of Craftsman Trucks all make an appearance, and from a graphical standpoint, they are top of the line. Beautiful models and a ton of real-world drivers are really all we can ask from a developer on the console, and the developers of *NASCAR 08* deliver big. Of course we want good physics and game play as well, but face it—EA know the console-market, and they know that, above all, the market demands something that looks as photo-realistic as possible. The tracks, too, are sheer works of art, and majestic to look at … all twenty-two of them.

The Chase Mode is the meat and bones of the game, requiring the driver to progress through challenges in order to acquire track licenses, cars, and finally ownership of a NASCAR team before they can actually tackle the real series. This mode may not be for everyone, but not to worry—there is a wonderful and customizable Season Mode as well for those who wish to bypass all of non-essentials and just drive.

Graphical and Sound

Graphically, *NASCAR 08* excels. In fact, without a doubt, this game sports the best real-time damage model to date, on a console, PC, or fancy watch. It reminded me of those renders of wrecks you often see before a game's release—except here, the renders are *in the game*, and are about the best damn damage available anywhere. One of my favorite things to do early on was to switch to an external view, burn the tyres to the point of blow-out, and then watch with manic glee as the tyre ripped and shred itself to bits before ripping away the sheet metal around it. No six second cool down here; those tyres will destroy themselves if your right foot turns to lead.

The lighting changes smoothly and beautifully, and the shadows slowly make their way over the track, altering the look of not only the corners, but the straights as well; as the wall becomes more difficult to see from the cockpit, the driving becomes more difficult. Yes, I said cockpit because there is a real cockpit to look through, complete with bouncing and shaking, replicating what the car is doing over the track in a convincingly visual manner. And for those with real-sharp eyes, you will be happy to see bits of 'klag' make their way up in the air as cars drive around, something you can witness from the cockpit. Windscreens get dirty after time, and they really get dirty if you take a ride through the dirt.

Should the user choose to, they can enable the Vehicle Telemetry Visor, a nifty gizmo that displays all sorts of useful information in a surprisingly non-intrusive way (achieved with clever positioning around viewing area). Numerous values are tracked, including the current grip levels of the tyres. It is very reminiscent of the MoTeC display that can be enabled playing *GTR2*. I found myself keeping it on all of the time.

The replays are very nicely done, with great camera angles for the most part. It would appear you can review a large chunk of the race, but you cannot record a large chunk, unfortunately. I imagine too many full-length race replays would attack the limited size of the console hard-drives, so this is an understandable compromise. Controls are basic, but with some practice, some really nice clips can be obtained.

Of course, many driving views are available, but I pretty much stayed with the in-car view unless I was blowing up tyres, or watching myself launch into the air after a brutal hit into the wall.

Sounds are, in general, well done, but I felt that some of the external effects sounded a bit too processed, with not enough 'gut-shaking' rumbling. The crash sounds are solid, and go a long way to indicating just how serious that wall hit really was, in case the smoke billowing from under the hood isn't enough of an indication …

Driving Around

To say I was skeptical before so much as turning a lap would be an understatement: We've all been to console-land, and I have played other console NASCAR games before, and was left deeply unimpressed. The ability, for instance, of jumping into another car during a race—so touted by the developers—made me yawn with disinterest, and I was glad to see none of it in *NASCAR 08*.

What I did see, however, was one hell of a decent driving model. Damned if the thing didn't give me a *Grand Prix Legends* moment, and it is definitely *not* best driven with the gamepad. It took, literally, hours before I was able to turn a decent lap, and I've been messing with PC-sims for a decade. If you are using a gamepad, or wheel, plan on spending a fair amount of time fiddling with the Linearity and Responsiveness settings in the control setup. Further, make sure to tune the Steering Trim and Steering Lock values found in the car setup.

Did I just say car setup? For those who wish to get down into it, the car setup is extensive, detailed, and provides weight values and estimated tyre changes with each setup change you make. Pretty nifty, very useful, and extremely helpful for making those perfect camber setups; a lot of time went into the setup pages, and it shows. Of course, you can go with basic settings that are loose, tight, or neutral, and for the beginner this is probably the best way to get comfortable with the complex driving model.

Complex driving model? No doubt about that. Small setup changes make a big difference, and with VTV enabled, you get a visual cue as to what the tyres are doing in terms of grip levels, and three distinct regions of

tyre temperature levels. If both right side tyres are in the red zone (whether in grip-phase, or temperature), then you may, in fact, be experiencing an out-of-control situation. Which, of course, you may have already realized as you just got done watching first-hand your epic departure from the race course.

To test the physics model, I dialed-in a huge amount of wedge, and sure enough, the thing wanted to go straight when I wanted to turn. Dialing-in settings that will make the car loose instantly creates a car that is both skittish and supremely difficult to drive. The feel of what the tyres are doing is also well communicated through both the Logitech DriveFX, and Microsoft Wireless Wheel; as the tyres begin to lose their grip, you get that feeling in the wheel, very similar to what a PC-sim player feels when they lose the back-end in a quality PC sim. While there is a lack of a 'heaviness' that one would expect, I am unable to confirm whether this is due to the game itself—or the quality of the driving devices employed for this review.

Of the two wheels I used, the Logitech Drive FX offered by far the best feel all around, not only giving a convincing road feel—bumps, grass, off-road, and so forth—but it also delivered a convincing feel to the driver, allowing for correct inputs to work, well ... correctly.

I would have preferred more weight through the wheel, but the driving model was such that it was very easy to enjoy. Tyre management is critical, and not too forgiving. If you push too hard early on, that right front may let you down well before your scheduled pit stop, and this was yet another highlight, and one that is sadly still missing from the majority of PC sims—tyres modeled such that they require management, from warm-up conditions all the way through to worn-out condition.

And the fact that they can blow-out, and actually damage the car while doing so, is a realism I hadn't expected.

As with anything NASCAR-related, we need to go back to 2003 to compare; *NASCAR 08* offers a solid ride, but it isn't a *NASCAR 2003 Season* beater … what it is, though, is an indication that consoles are beginning to take risks, and offering their market driving models that are not designed for 'playing', but for driving, and the future of sims on the consoles is looking positive if this new EA Sports' offering is any indication of things to come.

The AI

Sucks.

My apologies, but I have had just about enough of this. Crammond and Kaemmer got this right last century ago and really, is it too much to ask for someone to actually do some work on this? The AI does all the usual things—ramming you as you leave the pits, ramming you at the track at any given time, at any given speed, at any given location. The only fix as far as I am concerned is to qualify first, get the hell out of there, and try not to lap anyone until you absolutely have to. Depending on your tolerance for such behavior, the AI can be a real buzz killer. Another solution is to simply lower the number of opponents that can show up at a race, but that sort of defeats the purpose of a game trying to simulate a forty-three Nextel Cup lineup.

Multiplayer

With a maximum of twelve players, some may find the multiplayer to be a bit on the underdeveloped side (and equally, may set them wondering why the hell the AI is so bad considering the MP is so limited). Of course, a non-free 'XBOX live' subscription is required to use the multiplayer, which is more than a bit of a turn off since it's like paying again for something you already own. Regardless, there are many nice features such as lobbies, online stats, the ability to practice while you wait for the session to start, and the EA Locker, a great feature allowing you to upload and share setups with your friends.

Bad Things

Let's recap before we delve into the ugly; the driving model is solid (arguably the best physics for the console), the graphics superb, the tyre management simulated to a fine degree, the MP requires you to pay, and the AI is a disaster.

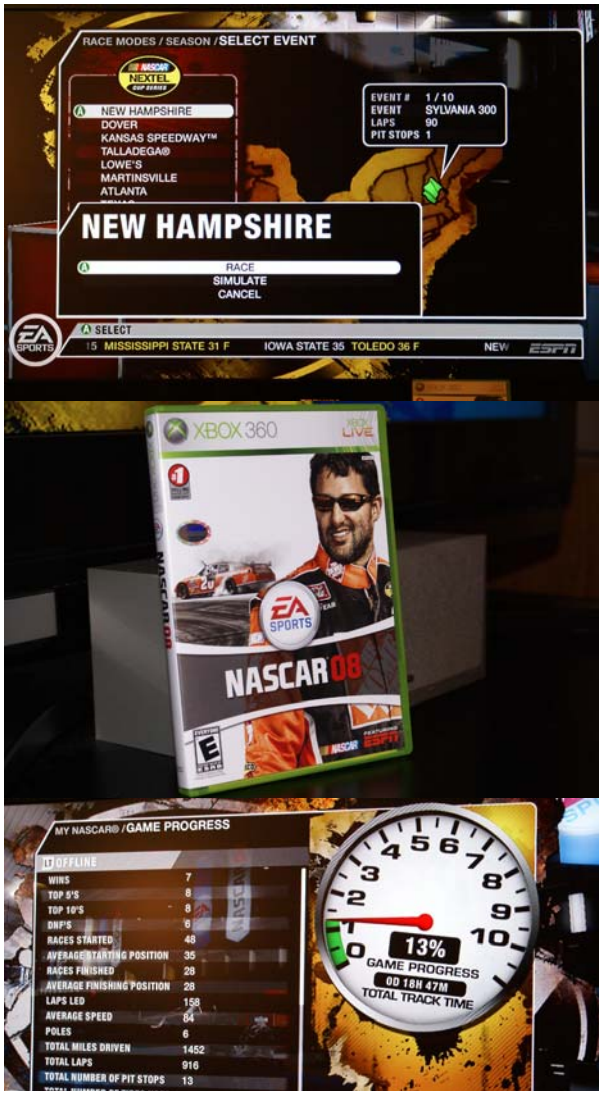
And then … then there's the racing. Early into my first race, I realized something was terribly, terribly wrong. First off, if the race is under yellow, go ahead and let go of the wheel as the entire process is now out of your control—hullo arcade-world *circa* 1976!

Fine, I thought, I will just watch the action from the side of the track as my car drives by, and press the button to 'not make a pit stop'. And then it wasn't fine as control of the car will not be returned to you until *the moment the green flag flies*. And I mean the very moment it flies, leaving you desperately trying to gather up the car as the game drops you from auto-mode into the race in an abrupt and ridiculous fashion: Think high revs, wrong gear, cold tyres, stupid AI, hard wall.

The driving model is too complex for such arcade antics, and this was a big disappointment for me. I can sort of understand the 'taking over' during pace laps, and even the pit stops, as these appear extremely difficult to program well if the flying 300MPH pace car in *NASCAR 2003* is any indication. For the life of me, though, I cannot figure out why you simply aren't given control with half a pace lap to go; you know, on a straight part of the track so when you *do* get control back, you have half a chance to gather the situation up. For a game trying hard to be a sim, that sort of thing just doesn't wash. Coupled with the idiotic AI, pace laps, for all intents and purposes, can have the same sort of gruesome ending as a 150 MPH head-on crash into the wall.

The End

When all is said and done, NASCAR 08 is EA Sports' best NASCAR game, with a fair-few stabs at realism, and a surprisingly good driving model. It is the best I have seen on the consoles since the brilliant *Dirt to Daytona* for the PS2 many years ago. Heroic car models, great track models, stupid-cool damage modeling, decent physics, full flag rules including the Lucky Dog rule, and dynamic lighting put a lot of meat on the table for those in need of a NASCAR fix. Unfortunately, the terrible AI, and ridiculous 'auto yellow flag fiasco' really put a damper on the game as a whole, at least from the perspective of the serious sim fanatic.



Pros:

The kind of damage you see in renders—in real-time
Superb driving model is a nice surprise, and sheet metal-ripping, exploding tyres are a nice bonus
Dynamic lighting forces driver to concentrate on brake points and corner exit strategy
Track and damage debris flying around at the proper times gives a dynamic nature to the track environment
Cockpit view

Cons:

AI a true chore to navigate through and around
Ridiculous auto-control during pace laps
Extremely difficult to control without a lot of controller setting adjustment
Cars feel just a bit too 'light' while driving them

74%

PitBoard

Grand Prix 4—Falling In Love All Over Again

Bob Simmerman takes a lingering look at Grand Prix 4—still, in the opinion of many, the most authentic Formula One sim ever made … and just getting better half-a-decade after Crammond released what remains his final work …

BobSimmerman

While working on the *F1 Championship Edition* review (on the PS3), I could not help but weep nostalgically for my favorite PC Formula One sim of all time—*Grand Prix 4*. From the flawless weather to the extremely competent AI, *Grand Prix 4* is one of the most overlooked PC racing-sims in existence. But don't be fooled; not only is work being done to make *GP4* better, it is being done at the highest levels of skill and craftsmanship. I made an effort to signal Tony (aka 'b-tone'), my source, and one of *GP4*'s most important modder (possibly its *most* important), to find out what has been going on in the world of *Grand Prix 4*. I quickly discovered that not only is the *GP4* modding scene very much alive (it should be recalled that arguably *rFactor*'s best mod to date, GP79, has its roots in *GP4*), but about to unleash a medley of excellent add-ons and mods ...

Some of the most impressive work is coming to the community in the form of a fully filled-out DTM 2005 mod. I had the rare opportunity to get an early look at this new work in progress, and was extremely impressed. But I should discuss briefly the newly revamped Car Set Manager installation utility for tracks and mods … and a whole lot more after and besides!

Car Set Manager

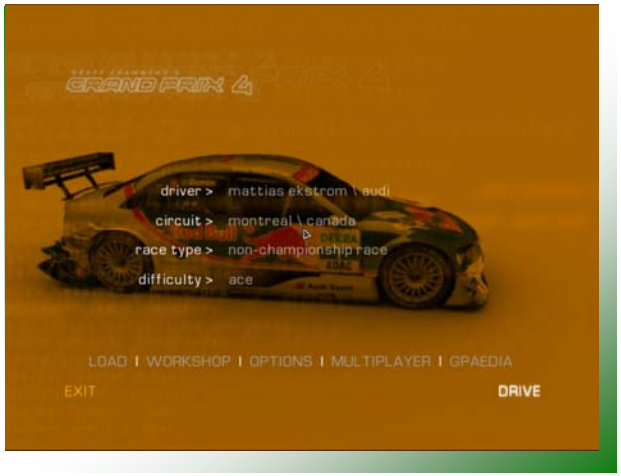
Not much brainwork was required; install *GP4*, install official patch version 9.6, install GPxPatch 3.91, then, finally, install the Zaz Tools Car Set Manager (beta 5) that also includes the Track Set Manager (TSM), and off you go. No more tricky and risky WAD unpackers, *GP4* bliss is truly a few mouse clicks away. The Zaz Tools include an updater for not only the CSM, but a utility to download the official Microprose/Infogrames v9.6 patch as well, should you need it. Truly one-stop-shopping. The utility has several tabs, and when a mod is being loaded for play, you can adjust the configurable of the mod such as driver, track, skill level, LOD values, and so forth, as well as any GPxPatch settings the mod may require. All very neat, and the UI makes it pretty intuitive to use out-of-the-box; the Zaz tools are a slick bit of work, and a definite must have for those seeking easy use of mods for *GP4*.

While this all works great on XP, I have no idea how it will go for those Vista folks, so keep that in mind. And also keep an eye on the processor setting of GPxPatch—*GP4* does not like running on more than one processor very well, so make sure to force it to use one CPU or the other. I have it forced to use CPU 0, as trying to play with both cores enabled left me with numerous lockups and CTD's, even with the non-modded out-of-the-box sim. I also had no trouble at all getting the G25 to work, and programmed the buttons and controls within the sim.

DTM Mod

Tony gave me a bit of background on the DTM mod, and here you can have a look at some work in progress shots and information on the massive DTM offering coming soon to a link near you. The stats are impressive—every single track of the 2005 season, complete with race-specific livery and drivers. TV-style overlays round out the presentation on-track, and the stunning track models, car models, and physics round the rest of it out for the user. I would not have thought the physics system of *Grand Prix 4* could support a touring car type mod, but I am happy to be proven wrong. Not only did the interior of the cars look fantastic, they also drove damn well, feeling not at all like open wheelers, but true saloon cars, a huge achievement if you have any knowledge of how insanely difficult it is to work with *Grand Prix 4*.

I used the CSM to load up Hockenheim and had an absolute blast tooling around in the 2005 DTM cars. There are a few visual warts at this time, however, but not to be concerned as my version is an extremely early beta. Of course, the brilliant weather and AI of *GP4* make any mod an attractive prospect, and fans of the DTM series won't be disappointed. I was most impressed by the cockpit graphics; there is no doubt you are in a fully enclosed chassis as opposed to the normal open wheelers found in *GP4*, and it is a treat to see such well-done modeling. Sounds are pretty good, and the handling felt great, even at this early stage of the beta. Again, Tony and the gang have done quite a bit of work in the physics department to make a believable touring car experience and it shows. The tracks are extremely beautiful—as many third party *GP4* tracks have been over the years—and it's fair to compare *GP4* with *GPL* when it comes to the quest for authenticity of the modders that work for these two landmark sims (both, it should be recalled, being flops at release).



"I've mostly been doing the DTM mod and tracks for the last few months," Tony told me when we spoke earlier this month. "I started working with Mark (aka 'MarioB'), a long time *GP4* editing legend, and that sort of delayed the DTM mod a year or so, but it did give us a handful of great tracks, so I can't complain!"

But wait, there's more, as Tony explains: "We'll continue with the 2006 and 2007 DTM mods … We're also thinking of F3 which normally races alongside the DTM events, so the tracks will be done already. The two big projects for the future are the completion of the 1979 mod, and a 1980s sports car mod which should push the limits of *GP4*—we are still stuck with ninety-nine lap races and seven kilometre track limits, but hopefully we can crack those, and a few others."

Obviously, *Grand Prix 4* has a fan or two left at the table, author included, and the future of this simulator—released in 2002—seems fairly assured; with refined tools available for the end user, those mods will be a lot less of a hassle to install and use without the very real risk of completely obliterating your install should you make the slightest mistake.

Formula One

As impressive as the DTM mod is, the mods don't stop there. Available in the last few months have been the 1991 and 1995 F1 mods, both CSM-compatible and well worth the download. Personally, I have been overdosing on the 2006 season mod in between DTM play time. Featuring the complete drivers and cars of the 2006 Formula One season, this is, by far, one of the most satisfying Formula One experiences I have ever had on the PC. Even my easy words of praise would fail to convey the flat-out cool factor of this mod, but suffice it to say it is worth every bit and byte of disk space.

Truly a marvel to behold, this masterwork from Tony and GP4 Italia is an absolute must have no matter how many old ladies you have to push to the ground to get it. Simply brilliant, and a very impressive display of what *Grand Prix 4* is ultimately capable of delivering with the proper care and attention to detail. From livery to physics, this mod delivers on a level not often seen in commercial products—not to mention a mod. The screenshots, as usual, don't do the thing justice, but when played, it becomes quickly apparent this is a serious enhancement, the proverbial Phoenix from the Ashes. If you don't have *GP4* yet and can still find it, I highly recommend you grab it if for no other reason than to try the 2006 Formula One mod. And since you are trying that one, you might as well try all of the others as well!

I thanked Tony for all of his help and top secret information, keeping in mind that there are quite a few other ways to enjoy *GP4* in the form of various mods, enhancements, season sets, and all sorts of other cool things available from a huge pool of talented modders and modding groups, and it wont take much of a Google search to begin the discovery process. The GP4 Database is a great place to start, as is Grand Prix Games and Grand Prix X.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Tele-metry

Belle Isle Grand Prix

Oliver Day follows the ALMS south across the border along with Selena Horrell … …

OliverDay

See More Of Oliver's

Detroit Pics Here

So, what do you do when you've decided to bring racing back to the Motor City at a track that the drivers, the teams, and even the fans regarded as sub-par at best? Well, if yer Roger Penske, you throw a dumptruck's worth of cash at it, set about improving the old complaints, and devise an extensive plan that considers everyone's enjoyment of the weekend. Oh, and you rope in thousands of pleasant and helpful volunteers, and hand them all a really pretty yellow shirt. Wait, did I mention there's a *free* day for all on Friday, and a huge family-fun area? What a concept!

I've never been to the race at Belle Isle, but from what I'd seen of the races back in the glory days of CART, I didn't hold out much hope for terrific on-track action. All the same, I was excited to get up close and personal with the street-fighting men (and women), something that was denied to me at what has become known, in my mind, as the 'Toronto Imbroglio' …

After the ease of working at Mosport, Selena and I walked into the accreditation trailer with a new sense of confidence, both in ourselves, and Mr. Martini. The flashbacks, alas, started the moment as the first kind lady gave me a slightly confused look, and quickly passed me onto someone else. This lady reassured me that she'd find our package, and that she did. One parking pass for lot G for you, sir!

Erm … and the other passes? 'Only a parking pass in your AUTOSIMSPORT envelope, sir.' But this time I was prepared. I had phone numbers, emails, revenge plots … and a sweet smile. Apparently printed emails work the best, and after a bit of discussion amongst the accreditation folks, we had proper passes made up and I had ten minutes to spare to get to the photographers' meeting.

Where is our parking lot? 'Oh, you drive ten minutes along Jefferson, and then make a left and drive up another five minutes, and then a bus will be along to pick you up and take you back to the track.' Oh. And how long will it take to run across the bridge and get to the media centre? 'Maybe ten minutes.'

Okay, the decision seemed simple enough, so I grabbed a heavy backpack full of gear, wish Selena well with the parking, and did my best *Run Lola Run* impression.

At least twenty minutes later I hit the media centre. Luckily, proceedings are lagging, and I have enough time to find a seat, and then hook myself up with a rather nice breakfast and coffee(s).This was looking good. Very nice breakfast, too, and some guy from Windsor (that's in Canada) was handing out little bottles of Canadian Club! I also took up the offer of a spot of KARTing on the streets of Windsor in front of the Casino later that night. In addition, the media centre was setup in a lovely old building, and very well sorted for the modern journalist.

Selena arrived forty-five minutes later … the parking lot turn around time was about as accurate as the run time. Then again, maybe Americans are just faster. I leave Selena with some notes on Adrián Fernández (with whom we had an interview), before I head out to explore what Belle Isle has to offer for the photographer.

Belle Isle is a rather beautiful island park, not unlike a (less glamorous) Île Notre-Dame in Montreal. The far side of the track offers a nice view of my Canadian homeland, and the other side a view of the, erm … evil empire.

Selena Horrell: *You've been having a bit of bad luck in traffic lately …*

Adrián Fernández: Last two races I've been like a magnet; they've been hitting me, and I haven't been hitting anything! But in a series with so many different classes, and on a track like this, {it's expected} … I was beside a Corvette, and he didn't see me, and we had that contact—and then a Porsche crashed in front of us, and his tyre came up and hit us sideways … we were a bit unlucky on that one …

Selena Horrell: *How is the car?*

Adrián Fernández: The car is quick—we were P1 for a long time in practice; obviously knowing the track helped early on, and the other guys were learning it, and traffic was playing a big part, but the car is pretty good. It's difficult because traffic is so bad, and we didn't have a clean lap the whole time, not one, so it's difficult to judge, but I think we're quick compared to the other guys …

Selena Horrell: *What is the track like this weekend?*

Adrián Fernández: It's nice, they've done some good changes, but bumpier than I remember …still hard to pass, and difficult for the Le Mans cars because of the four different classes, but it's part of the game. The speed differential, though, is very significant …

Selena Horrell: *They've changed the track—better or worse?*

Adrián Fernández: In this configuration, I think it's better for the Le Mans cars. The paddock is fantastic, I must take my hat off to Roger {Penske} for that one—he's done a good job for sure …

Selena Horrell: *You've raced all over North America in so many different classes and race cars—can you tell us what's the challenge to driving prototypes compared to open wheels?*

Adrián Fernández: The prototypes are very much like open wheel cars, but with more body work. So very similar. The biggest challenge, though, is the traffic. Last season I drove in the Grand Am series, and those cars are far stronger, more rigid—so you can hit and {still get away with it}—but here the cars are lot more fragile, and the speed differential is that much greater, so that's the hardest part—having to deal with the traffic.

Selena Horrell: *Considering all the series you've driven in—Indy Lights, Cart, IRL, NASCAR Busch, Grand Am, and so forth, what is your favourite?*

Adrián Fernández: The best cars were, for sure, the 1997-1998 Carts. We had close to 1000BHP, and the cars were brutally quick—that was nice! Now they don't have the power or technology they used to have in terms of the competition—in those days, we had Toyota, Honda, Mercedes, and the rules were more open, now it's a little more stuck, but this year it's pretty much like the old days, the rules are more open, and pretty more advanced technologically—and also with what you can do to the car.

Oliver Day: The LMP2 class is shaping up like the old days too …

Adrián Fernández: It's a nice class, yes, and it's just getting better …

Selena Horrell: *You've been here in different series—nice to see old friends from IRL?*

Adrián Fernández: I raced in 2005 in IRL, so yes, for sure—we had a team until last year, we had some friends there … also the Le Mans Series, of course …

Selena Horrell: *Is this—the Le Mans Series—the future for Fernández Racing?*

Adrián Fernández: I think so—it's a business, right, and we're used to these types of cars now …

Selena Horrell: *Any further plans?*

Adrián Fernández: No, this is it. I don't want to get too busy, you know—I've done enough of work through the years, so I want to spend more time with my family. I don't want to race more than I'm doing this year …

The Fernández /Diaz Lowe Lola B06/43-Acura would finish the race in sixth place: Fernández/Diaz are currently fifth in the LMP2 Championship …

Access to the track was nice and easy, courtesy of some yellow-shirted volunteers for whom a memo must have circulated describing the importance of polite greeting—something they did with much gusto!

Sadly, fan viewing was less than stellar, but about as one would expect on a track that is as flat as a pancake and comes with two layers of fencing that separate spectator from action. Luckily, there are a few well-placed grandstands for those inclined to looking down on their racing from on-high.

The light was harsh (a bright and sunny weekend compared to Mosport the previous week), and I found myself battling intense shadows from some large old trees throughout the day: I imagine the drivers must be equally challenged by this phenomenon.

My morning exploration brought me back to the media centre, where Selena was indulging in some 'preparatory investigation'; seeing me produced an astonished look from Selena. Getting so close to the action introduces a number of fashion accessories, it turns out, and my face and arms sported a number of little black marks, while my hands were pebbled with carbon-fibre slivers (the price of being helpful as the support crews cleaned up after a Porsche that had lost a wheel before the Fernández Lola tried to pick up it with their car at speed).

After a good bit of cleaning up, we headed off to find Mr. Fernández himself (yes, we actually had an interview booked, for once …). We find Adrián wandering into his trailer and, seeing us looking as if we might want something, he comes on over with a smile and invites us in.

Adrián, I must say, is a class act: We watched him offer himself up to race fans all weekend long, and was amazingly gracious, and a pleasure to chat with … to the point of offering to organise anything that Selena may need throughout the weekend. Sadly, when the opportunity arose to take advantage of this offer, Selena was too shy to ask. See, David Brabham was celebrating his birthday with a rather large and tasty looking cake in the paddock on the Saturday. After seeing that no cake would be offered to anyone outside their taped off area, I suggested that Adrian could probably set us up. But no-no-no, the lady known for her lust of tasty cakes couldn't muster the courage for an odd request, and we went cake-less.

With the Adrián interview in the can (or is it the bag?), Selena decided—after the Toronto Imbroglio—to adapt a far more aggressive approach to getting at the drivers. This, she quickly learned, was good for a single question before various handlers would snatch back their drivers and pass useless sheets of info at her. She *was*, however, using this tabloid-style bark, able to talk to Helio Castroneves long enough to find out he sucks at racing simulations (his words!), and that Dario Francitti didn't really want to be bothered with questions, and that Allan McNish really didn't fancy his chances at the track and was predicting carnage, while Timo Bernhardt was very happy to be on pole and, apparently, in Detroit. Nothing quite like a one-to-one with the drivers, eh!

On the track, it was a double-header of ALMS and IRL racing without any support series. I was pleasantly surprised that the IRL cars weren't as horrible looking as they appear on TV, and they provide decent viewing as they make their way around the track. I was not so pleasantly surprised that the Panoz is far too loud, even with earplugs, at close quarters. The track itself had changed very little from the last race in 2001, and it

S still fairly tight, bumpy, and sports a variety of surfaces. Qualifying would definitely be the key to success this weekend.

Compared to the pits in Toronto the pits at Belle Isle were relatively quiet for both the IRL and ALMS. Besides the small huddle of photographers and hangers on around Danica Patrick's pit the yellow shirted volunteers easily had the population of non-team members in the pits covered.

Listening to the drivers through their qualifying interviews it would seem like both the IRL and ALMS drivers were not expecting much racing and giving good odds on disaster striking. In the ALMS race the recent trend of LMP2 Porsche cars to the front continued and as expected the LMP1 Audis had a rather poor showing on the streets of Belle Isle. Mind you, Pirro in the #2 Audi felt like shaking things up a bit and made a brilliant start from fourth to plant himself into the lead from the opening lap. Not only did he start well but kept his Audi on the point throughout the race until the late going (we're talking last 5 or so minutes!) when the #7 Penske Porsche driven by Ronald Dumas took the top spot but Pirro couldn't let it go so easily when he was so close and used the Audi power to steal the place back along the front straight… but he overcooked T1 and the Penske car was back through and pulled out enough through the rest of the lap to prevent another front straight repass. Great stuff for a track nobody expected there to be any passing on. And the disasters? Besides the GT2 Porsche of van Overbeek's going up in flames (oldschool bonfire style!) after punting the #71 Tafel GT2 Porsche, there wasn't much to speak of.

Family matters took us away from the track before the IRL race but besides a bit of late race bumper cars with the championship hopefuls it sounded like a decent race to watch as well.

All in all Roger and the Belle Ilse crew put on a terrific even outside and around the track with racing on track that was actually better than almost all expected. From talking to folks involved with the event this is just a starting point and we should look things being even better next year. Sign me up!

AUTOSIMSPORT

Mosport

American Le Mans Series At Mosport

Oliver Day returns to duty after his humiliation at the Champ Car event at Toronto … and finds some love at the spiritual home of Canadian motor-sports …

OliverDay

See More Of Oliver's

Mosport Pics Here


Castrol


DRINK FULL THROTTLE


TDI
Power


THETFORD

Mosport started out as a flight of fancy among a few local motor-sports (heh, Mo(tor)sport!) enthusiasts in 1958 who hoped to find a home for a track they could call 'local'. It did not take too long to find a 450-acre patch of land north of Bowanville in the rolling hills of eastern Ontario. A quick visit by a racing legend (Sir Stirling Moss) to review the layout and suggest improvements to a rather boring hairpin—altered to Moss's suggestion (double ninety degree instead of tight, single apex)—and Mosport was all set for racing.

In 1961, the track held its inaugural race, with Sir Moss (or is that Sir Stirling?) only too keen to come back and test out the layout he had had a hand in designing. Not satisfied with a corner (well it's two corners, actually) named in his honour, he also wanted a trophy, and he proceeded to get one after winning the Players 200 in his Lotus 19 to the delight of the 40,000 spectators on hand.

Flash forward to 2007, and very little has changed on or around this 2.459 mile track, and what *has* changed has been mostly superficial in nature (or not—the nature remains pretty much unspoilt, come to think of it, as we found out!), and in the interest of safety. As such, when you arrive at Mosport today and stand at the top of that fabulous Turn Two, any *GPL* driver will be flooded with memories of taking their Brabham in just a little too hot into there and suffering the inevitable consequences.

It also means that, should you have the pleasure of driving the track, you will be following in the tyre-stains of a veritable who's-who in motor-sport from the past forty-five years: Clark, Stewart, Fittipaldi, Gilles, Andretti, Foyt, Unser, Allison, Tracy—you name them, and they have tested their skills against the fast sweeping turns and twists of Mosport. The grounds are soaked (in history and, this year, rain!), and leave you with both a sense of awe and comfort; it's a warm, cosy, and intimate place, even on your first visit.

Mind you, if you're looking for the modern day, purpose-built racing experience, you'd best either go home—or go somewhere else. This is grassroots racing at its purest—camping, hill, forests, and if you have to take a piss, you might as well hit the forest. There are few creature comforts, but the experience is much like that of the drivers: You can feel pretty safe knowing you're experiencing racing in the same way as those original 40,000 fans.

This weekend we're here for the 'Mobil 1 Grand Prix of Mosport' featuring the ALMS, Star Mazda, and Formula BMW racing. This year the racing happens a week early as Roger Penske stole the traditional long weekend date for bringing back the sorely missed races at Belle Isle in Detroit.

Getting to the track, while not difficult, isn't exactly easy, either. Mosport is in the middle of nowhere, forests to left of me, fields of crops to the right, and here I am, stuck in the middle with 40,000 fans.

That said, you either have to enjoy camping or driving if you're staying for the weekend. We enjoy both, but sided with driving considering the sky; dark, threatening, and leaking. We headed West and treated ourselves to a lovely motel forty minutes away that had all you could ever want—ice cream parlour attached, bed, stink, and the sound of fucking and fighting all night long from the room next door. But we didn't come for a honeymoon; we were at Mosport *for racing*.

I must say that the ALMS and Mosport people are a joy to work with from a media standpoint. Everything was quick, easy, and dolloped with as much friendly help as you could take. It really gives you the impression that they *want* people to see the races. Add to that a track built for the spectators (as opposed to the drivers), and you have a wonderful communion of cheerful lovers of motor-sport alongside jovial journalists.

Despite extra catch fencing at a few key corners (Moss, T3), the natural terrain and excellent access give even general admission viewers a wide variety of angles to take in the on-track action; and that view reveals the track to be even quicker than you think. If you're brave (and fit!) enough, you can even hike the forests of the infield and setup along Andretti to watch the cars scream by below you.

Now to the racing. The 'Mosport Mobil 1 Grand Prix' is packed with entrants… ALMS, Speed GT, Speed Touring, Formula BMW, Star Mazda, IMSA lights, and Porsche IMSA GT3 Cup—meaning there's almost non-stop track action from track open to close each day … unless there's fog. And while Friday brought out a few brief but intense showers, Saturday woke up foggy.

It was one of those ethereal mornings as we wandered about on the outside of the track, with the infield barely visible, and everything gloomily quiet. Early, damp, foggy, and cool but still, as I walked along the fence, the other side was littered with fans in their chairs and raingear with coffee-in-hand and ready for racing. Canadian race fans are hardcore!

The Mosport weekend was like a holiday compared to the Toronto Champ Car race. The pace off the track is relaxed but, while there is easy access to the paddock and all are rather friendly, the drivers themselves are rather elusive. This may have been partly the result of most drivers not fancying soaked race-suits (and an editor who didn't book any interviews!).

The ALMS folks were even dragging around the latest in console sim-racing, *Forza 2* (reviewed by AUTOSIMSPORT last month). This sim racer and his trusty companion could do no more than watch as kid after kid put in piss-poor laps at some track that looked vaguely similar to Sebring. *Forza* looked beautiful on the triple screen setup they had, but the physics seemed a wee bit suspect—but less so than the gangs of twelve year-olds in the playseats.

And just when I thought I could put down my heavy pack and show these punks what's what on four wheels, the weather finally did as it had been promising all weekend; the rain came and down and the parade packed up as the XBOX folks ran for warmer climes. Before that happened, though, it was nice to see Bob Dickinson (VP of Public Relations for the ALMS) stop by to see how things were going with the simulators and fans. I'm telling you, ALMS is a class act.

Having spent Friday and early Saturday taking in the action from all over the outside of the track, this photographer thought he'd go hunting for the ultimate photos … shooting up from the inside of Moss.

The only thing standing between him and his imagined Pulitzer-winning photos? About a kilometre of woods and bog … after a couple of days of rain … and no real guide or path to the promised turn. But why would that—or news of his fellow AUTOSIMSPORT slave breaking his ankle at Road America—stop him?

So committed was he in his adventure that even his partner was convinced to trundle along for the ride … though she did suggest maybe staying in the media centre and waiting for drivers might be a warmer and drier way to spend her afternoon.

But off we went over the hills and into the woods. As the world grew dark in the midst of the old trees and the sounds—fans and engines—faded, we found the occasional overgrown path, and followed them in the direction that I assumed was the track … and the legendary inside view at Moss.

One path led to a decent spot along the Andretti straight … getting closer … and another to T4 (at which point my companion pointed out that there were easier ways of getting to this spot—like the road!).

So back into the woods we went, trying to find our way … hoping small bodies of water and running into small camps set up deep into the wilderness would not have sinister consequences. One can only guess at what kind of ancient racing rituals are thrown down to appease the gods of Mosport this far out. But after the third unsuccessful attempt at breaking cover below Moss, we gave up and headed back to T4 to cross the track and shoot from the easy side, again. Perhaps we'll try again another, drier year … with a sherpa.

The actual ALMS race was a mix of confusion and excitement. The Audis jumped to an early lead and looked to finally turn the tables on the LMP2 Penskes that had dominated the top step of the podium for the last few races. Around the one hour mark, though, and the race would start to look like another, historic Mosport race; the Formula One GP from 1973. Old hand Stefan Johansson got into it with a GT2 Porsche, bringing out the safety car … all fairly routine … but the safety car came out just as the leaders were going through, and eventually picked up an Audi instead of the actual leader, the number seven Penske Porsche.

From there it appears the battle left the track and moved over to the airwaves leading to much passing under the yellow, letting by of cars to avoid penalties, miscommunications about pit open status, and three different packs of cars on the track as the pace car circulated!

This all led to a slew of penalties and a rash of inflamed tempers, not to mention enough confusion to rival that 1973 Revson Mosport victory. The Panoz team actually parked their car in frustration over the mess. It took almost thirty minutes to sort this to the point where some racing could resume.

Allan McNish came through the confusion shining like a new pin and was all but set for the victory until in the final moments of the race when he started slowing, his Audi taking a distinct liking for fourth gear like a poodle for a fence, and, despite the urging of the Scot, would not budge. Needing no invitation or further encouragement, Timo Bernhard drove up and around the ailing Audi and took the overall honours, but not before punting the BK Mazda off for good measure. Despite that, the BK Mazda team still came through in a terrific fourth for the LMP2 cars and seemed nonplussed about being punted; perhaps they thought it was a congratulatory punt from winning Porsche.

Surprisingly a Corvette won the GT1 class, with Johnny O'Connell and Jan Magnuson at the wheel, while Mika Salo and Jamie Melo came through to win in GT2, helped by an early yellow that left their Ferrari F430 close to a lap ahead of second in class.

Mosport and the ALMS were a treat; the track remains a legendary venue, and one that has not seen the parasitic emasculation that has been the scourge of race-tracks worldwide, while the ALMS people not only put on a good show, but are keen to keep their fan-base, and media, content. Racing doesn't get better than this …

AUTOSIMSPORT

Fifth Column

Two Views, One Legend

Greg Haglund and James Burroughs go on the Road America …

Greg**Haglund**
James**Burroughs**

Should Never Have Killed Those Damned Frogs

James Burroughs

Okay, now did that really happen? Was I really even there? Lou had asked me if I was interested in going to Road America to cover the ALMS and Champ Car race for AUTOSIMSPORT: Since I live way up in Northern Minnesota, and most high-end race tracks are a far-piece for me, this was a 'deal of a lifetime' considering I would be attending as a fully accredited journalist.

The week before the event was spent prepping for the big-event: I had several notebooks full of track pictures, driver photos and bios, and such. Everything was in place and time to leave was getting close.

On Wednesday around eight in the evening I hit the road for what I estimated would be a twelve hour drive: Traffic, I figured, would be better at night, and I also wanted to arrive early morning so I would have a full Thursday to scoop the place out since I had never been there before.

I set my laptop on the passenger seat along with the downloaded map, and set off for the first stop—my brother Charles's house where I had arranged to pick-up his electric scooter. He is semi-disabled, and has one of those little three wheel scooter-jobs that—since I have a somewhat bad left leg (I was in a bad motorcycle wreck when I was a teenager, and the military doctors did less than an award winning job {my Dad was career Air Force}) which has been exacerbated by a few more wrecks over the years—would help me, I reckoned, navigate the enormous track. One last stop at Wal-Mart to pick-up a voice recorder, and I was finally all-set for the drive.

The forecast had predicted rain, and this time the weather-guys got it too right: It was coming down pretty good by the time I noticed something eerily strange ahead on the road … rocks washing up on over the surface. Then I noticed the rocks were … *jumping*?

Holy crap, these weren't rocks—they were *frogs*! Not just a couple either, the road was covered with these jumpin' critters! It was about nine-thirty now, and there was still a bit of traffic out, and the frogs were committing some sort of mass suicide … At first I tried dodging them, but I quickly realized this was a futile effort. These guys were going to get squashed no matter what, so I went ahead and set to cruise control, and let the carnage begin. This went on for about a hundred miles or so. I can't imagine how many frogs met their maker that night. But those frogs … they gave me a bad feeling, and I should have listened to my gut …

I pulled into Elkhart Lake at about eight-thirty in the morning, and the trip-meter was showing 730 miles. I headed directly to the main gate and got my paperwork. The Road America staff was super friendly and ultra-helpful.

That sorted, it was time to set-up my camp-site: after a few directions, I found my spot for the weekend and realized there were no trees up on the slope between the Snap-On Bridge and the Go KART Track. Ah well …

Unpacked, I headed back to the press-parking and caught a shuttle ride up to the paddock area. Now there was some eye candy. The Star Mazdas were out on the track by then, and most of the teams had their haulers unloaded and were prepping for the weekend.

First thing that amazed me is how small the cars seem as opposed to TV. I was looking into the cockpit of a Formula BMW, and my first thought was—how the hell do they get into these things? They would have needed a fair amount of grease to slide my butt in there! The crews were all rushing around at that point, and didn't seem to keen to answer any questions so I made my way back to camp, and grabbed the scooter. Time to see the track …

As I was making my way around, I noticed the ALMS teams were hitting the track. A few Porsches came by, then the sleek LMP boys. I tried to snap-off a few pictures (I was there for the reporting, Greg would be taking the photos, so these were strictly for my scrapbook only), but they were either faster than my camera or my eye 'cause I kept shooting blank stretches of track!

Then I felt—before I heard—this thunderous sound coming at me; my head whipped around, and there they were. Both 'Vettes were on the track, and they had everyone's attention … I can't describe how deep and wicked they sound, it was like no other car out there ...

I made my way back around to the paddock, and watched the cars exit the track for final practice. The Champ Car inspections were still going on, so I watched that for a while. It was getting to be about seven in the evening when I made my way back to the camp, got me some grub, and prepared to get some sleep.

All done, I was walking back from the Porta-T when, in a fraction of a second, it all went wrong. I stepped into a hole, and in the time it took for me to realize it, my ankle was in agonizing pain. Sadly, I've known this pain before since it's about the twentieth time I've injured it (since the bike-wreck), so I knew both the routine—and the consequences. I hobbled on back to the tent, threw some ice on it, and decided to see how it was come morning.

Though, like the frogs, I kind of knew what was coming next …

After a restless night, morning came, and in the damp-light, my tent looked a little strange. I touched the inside roof, and found it beading-up water. I opened the tent to find the entire track covered in a thick, sluicy fog, the likes of which I had never encountered before. I could hardly see my car ten feet away. Everything outside was covered in dew. I crawled out of the tent, and gave my leg a test run (it was more of a limp punctuated by a jarring shout).

Pain was about all I could feel, and I knew then my weekend was about to come to a terrible close. It was obvious that I was not going to be able to get around on my feet. I sat and pondered what to do for a while, before deciding it was time to pack-up and head for town. My first big race was slipping through my fingers, and my depression was not eased by my cursing as I packed up and slowly drove away.

I pulled out the map and followed it to Fond du Lac where I stopped at the ER. They wrapped me up and told me I needed to see my regular doctor when I get home. I had been driving about twenty minutes when Lou called on the cell phone: I gave him the low down, and we both mourned together. I could tell he felt my pain; and the truth of it is, I was more upset about missing the race than hurting my ankle.

As far as the ankle goes, I wound up breaking off a screw that was already in there attaching my fibula and tibia together. I got some new hardware, and can now walk on it gingerly.

But I learnt a lesson here, for sure: First, don't run over the frogs and second, next time I'm just gonna take a leak outside my tent. So if you're ever at a race, and this guy with a weird looking leg is outside his tent taking a leak, don't get upset with him, it may be me.

Generac 500 American Le Mans Series

Greg Haglund

If you have never been to Road America in Elkart Lake, Wisconsin, you are absolutely missing out on one of the finest and most challenging tracks in North America. I have had the opportunity to attend six major events at this track over the past ten years—including two CART Races, June Sprints, Porsche Club weekend, Grand Am, and two ALMS races—and out of all these events, the ALMS has been my favorite. I have had a love for sports cars since the age of seven, and have been an avid follower of the ALMS series since it began in the late 1990s. This is one of the only racing series in the world that features ten different engine-types running at the same time.

The Generac 500 American Le Mans Series race turned out to be thriller. This year the race was held on a Saturday since the Champ Car World Series was booked for the Sunday for what was a great double-header at one of the world's premiere race tracks.

The ALMS race was set to begin at four in the afternoon, and was scheduled to run for four hours. I didn't see much of the race, though, since I was there as a photographer, and as such, my time was spent trying to find the best spots to take photos. Add to that my new-found responsibility as journalist (Lou had called earlier informing me of James's accident), and I ended up viewing the race not as a spectator or fan, but in a strictly business-sense … and it really does make a difference …

I had arrived on the Saturday morning (for the seven-thirty mandatory photographer meeting—basically, they just tell you where you can and can't go, and also let you know about photos you are not permitted to take) and enjoyed a wholesome breakfast with some folks from the *Prancing Horse* magazine (they're affiliated with the Ferarri Club of America, and were there following the White Lightening Ferrari team for the weekend).

Breakfast done, I headed over to the camp-site—scene of James's tragedy—and passed someone who seemed vaguely familiar: Hearing someone shout out to him for an autograph gave me pause, and I realized, after a second-look, that it was David Brabham, the Highcroft Racing Courage-Acura P2 team driver.

I just so happened that I was wearing an old 2002 ALMS T-Shirt from my first ALMS race at Road America: It was a Panoz LMP shirt with Jan Magnussen, Bryan Herta, David Donohue, Gunnar Geanette, Bill Auberlen, and … yes, you guessed it, David Brabham!

I stepped on over and asked him whether he'd be kind enough to sign the shirt: He was only to willing, despite the fact that I had neither a pen nor my AUTOSIMSPORT business cards on hand … After he signed the shirt, I explained that I worked for an online magazine that covers simulated auto-racing, and he seemed mildly aware of the existence of such a thing. I told him I could give him a business card later, and perhaps we could chat about sim-racing a bit, and he said that would be okay. I went back to my car, grabbed some cards, but by this time, he was already busy with his race-prep', and I didn't feel comfortable ruining his concentration.

The day before I left for Road America, Lou had advised me that Sergio Bustamante—from GPLegacy—was acquainted with Luis Diaz on the (Adrián) Fernández Racing Team, so I walked the paddock area for a while waiting for a chance to introduce myself to Luis.

Over the intercom, I heard that the drivers were signing autographs; seemingly the right moment, I quickly made my way over to the Fernández Racing tent. After a short explanation on who I was, and a little about the magazine, Luis introduced me to Adrián Fernández and soon we'd arranged for an interview at Detroit (since James was already on his way home by this time).

That done, it was time for me to accomplish my mission: Get some race-shots. One of the many highlights at the Generac 500 was the return of the beautiful Maserati MC12. The owner, Fredy Leinhard, had decided (on a whim, allegedly) to test the car, and was so impressed with its speed he decided to take it racing. World-class sports car driver Didier Theys was drafted in to join him at Road America, and this classic race-car was back-in-action after a two-year hiatus.

In 1954, a trained civil engineer by the name of Clif Tufte started planning for one of the most beautiful racing tracks in North America. By April of 1955, his dream became a reality. The layout he conceived has not been altered since it was created, although the fabulous track has seen vast improvements in its infrastructure, such as the grandstands. The track winds through fourteen turns, spanning 4.048 miles in distance. The first national race weekend was held by the SCCA on September tenth, 1955. This track is known for many of its famous spots on the track. Not just the turns, but the straights as well. If you are familiar with the track, you know all the named spots on the track starting with Road America Straight, Moraine Sweep, the Hurry Downs, the famous Carousel, the Kink, Kettle Bottoms, Canada Corner, and then through the epic Thunder Valley just before the final turn and back onto the main straight.

Road America has been host to many of the world's most famous racing series. Currently, Road America plays host to the AMA Suberbike Series, SCCA June Sprints, Kohler/Brian Redman International Challenge, American Le Mans Series, and Champ Car World Series. In the past, Road America has also featured a NASCAR race (in 1956), as well as CART in its glory days, CanAm, Trans-Am, USAC, and IMSA. Ask any racer about their experience on this track, and they will always tell you it is one of the most spectacular and amazing tracks they have ever driven on.—Greg Haglund

The Maserati turned out to be pretty competitive all weekend as it came up against the 'Vettes in GT1. Less than a second off the C6R's times during qualifying, and only a half-second off of the best laptime of the GT1s, must have been as good as Theys and co. could have expected from the weekend, and we can look forward to seeing the Maserati compete with the Corvettes and Bentleys in the future.

For sure GT1 does need more competition in their category: Bringing back the 911 GT1 to compete with these guys would be a start, and, to make matters worse, the Bentleys were not there to compete at Road America. And what about the Ferrari 575? As I walked around this beautiful machine, I took as many picture as I could, including a beauty of Didier and Fredy standing together looking at this beautiful piece of artwork, discussing strategy. If you check out our new area at our online store, you can purchase prints of not only this beautiful machine, but many others that were there too.

Porsche, however, are most certainly spicing things up in the LMP2 class: The Audis have had too much publicity in Le Mans-style racing over the past seven years, and the sport certainly needs someone to shake things up. Porsche has provided the answer this year. With popular teams like Penske and Dyson, Porsche has had a chance to shine as the 'Giant Killer', especially being in a class below the fastest cars and still kickin' tail. You gotta love it … The Penske Porsche went on to take the overall win away from the Audis at Road America and, as Oliver Day discovered as he followed the ALMS series East, they weren't done yet; this was certainly going to turn out to be Audi's summer of discontent.

AUTOSIMSPORT

LatinHeat

A1GP Season Preview

Sergio M. Bustamante, and GPLegacy International give AUTOSIMSPORT readers an exclusive preview of the world series of motor-sport as it prepares for its third season …

GPLegacy.com

Photos courtesy of A1GP Team Mexico, and

RacingMediaCenter . . .

As the 'World Cup of Motorsports' prepares for its September thirtieth season-start, the open-wheel series that was conceived by Sheikh Maktoum Hasher Maktoum Al Maktoum of Dubai—and was considered one of the most ambitious projects ever planned in international motor-sports—is attracting a lot of interest (not to mention high expectations) as its third season gets underway at Zandvoort.

The series—which represents over eighty percent of the world's population, and features identical cars for every nation—pits nation and against nation in eleven rounds held on every continent (aside from North America) during the Northern Hemisphere's winter (and motor-racing free) months.

The series was created in such a way as to encourage both experienced drivers, as well as rookies, to be able to race for the pride of their nation. Motor-sport expert Lola was specially commissioned to create a chassis that the Sheikh himself had designed in his mind for many years, while the tyres had to be named differently from any known brand: Avon became the maker of the 'exclusive' Cooper Tyres. The engine, too, was specifically designed for the series, with the legendary British engineering company Zytek getting the nod to create a purpose-built engine (based on their F3000 model) that features a power-boost option that gives the cars an extra (and time-limited) fifty horsepower.

The series was baptized with the first denomination of the alphabet, and the first number. Thus the series 'A1' Grand Prix came to be. A1GP was handed to South African businessman Tony Texeira (who was named CEO), and held its first race on September twenty-fifth, at that most alluring of race tracks, Brands Hatch.

Rumours are pretty rampant that the third season will come with some rather interesting surprises (we can confirm that this is the case, although we're not going to give the farm away just yet!), and fans will be in for a treat … and speaking of treats, here are some photos from the latest test-session at Silverstone, courtesy of Team Mexico.

For further updates, you should keep a close eye on www.a1gp.com; we are very thankful for all the extensive media coverage. And just a note on the test-sessions: If the lap times are any indication, we're in for the closest season on record with the last two test sessions reflecting a gap of less than 2.8 seconds between the fastest and the slowest (in a field of twenty-two cars).

TEAM ITALY

Italy is confident that the new livery of the 'Forza Azzura' car, boasting the Italian flag on the rear wing, will help them become a really strong competitor this season, and the driver's line-up is impressive. Enrico Toccacello, who has already proven his skills, will be joined by eighteen year-old sensation Paolo Bossini, who has been working directly with the team's seat holder, ex-F1 driver Piercarlo Ghinzani.

TEAM FRANCE

Nicolas Prost confirmed for team France.

Team France is coming-on strong; they want their first title back, and to ensure that, they have set a more passionate design in the car's livery, as well as a very talented driver's entry list from the start. Four-time Formula One World Champion Alain Prost will be very close to the A1's team as his son, twenty-six year-old Nicolas Prost, has been confirmed as the team's rookie driver. He will join up with highly-regarded Nicolas Lapierre, and rumors about Justin Premat running a few races for the team refuse to go away.

TEAM INDIA

Narain Karthikeyan making full use of his Formula One knowledge.

He gave the world a fleeting glimpse of his talent in Formula One and Narain is poised to make some waves this season in A1GP; taking advantage of his experience in the world's premiere racing series, Narain broke the Silverstone A1GP record in the last test session, and Team India is confident that they will be a contender for this year's championship.

TEAM NEW ZEALAND

'Black Beauty' is committed to bringing home the championship

Team New Zealand has confirmed in testing that they are going flat-out to achieve the title which has so narrowly escaped them over the past two seasons. The penultimate test session was dominated by their lead driver, Reed, and they actually broke the 2005 record. However, this record got smashed once again by Team India the very next day.

TEAM GREAT BRITAIN

Team Great Britain has one of the most interesting flag-related designs, and the confidence keeps growing within the team that will field a very strong line-up

TEAM SOUTH AFRICA

The August twenty-eighth test was dominated by Team South Africa, with their driver Adrian Zaugg choosing the final five minutes to break the A1GP record for the circuit's lay-out (the record had belonged to Malaysia's Fairuz Fauzy). South Africa has been a disappointment in the last two seasons (considering they host a round of the championship), and a new engineer has been drafted in to help on-track performance. Wesleigh Orr, meantime, has won the race to be appointed as the team's Rookie driver, with a lot of pressure from fellow rookie Marc Murray. Also, Team France and Team South Africa will join forces again this year.

TEAM NETHERLANDS

Zandvoort … Netherlands … First race of the season … and the first time that the Clockwork Orange car will boast the full flag's colours in one of the most interesting car liveries the series has seen, the result of a recent public design competition. The design was disclosed at the Assen circuit, in front of more than 50,000 fans. Dutch driver Jeroen Bleekemolen is already bullish about the Zandvoort race, and has promised his home fans an exciting and auspicious race. The goal for Team Netherlands in the championship, and they're hoping to get a good start at their home grand prix, and season-opener at the legendary Zandvoort track.

TEAM LEBANON

Biggest surprise and breakthrough coming?

The team that enjoys more support from non-Lebanese than its own people, Team Lebanon—representing this troubled, but proud nation—is everyone's favourite underdog. In a special vote at A1GP's official website, A1GP fans reckon this is the team set for the biggest improvement despite the fact that they have yet to score a point. There is a lot of hope for driver Khalil Beschir, as well as the full technical team now powered by Argo Racing.

TEAM IRELAND

Ireland really wants to become a contender for the title, and this time it's ex Formula One Ralph Firman's job to see that the team, with renewed strength, can bring home some much-needed success for one of A1GP's strongest teams.

TEAM U.S.

The U.S had a strong show of talent and speed in last season's Mexico's round where Summerton chased Great Britain hard for the Feature Race win. This year, the U.S team is confident that they will finally begin to chase for the wins. Their driver's line-up is not air-tight just yet, but the team will field Jonathan Summerton, and he will be joined by Indy 500 2004 winner Buddy Rice. The car named 'We The People', is expected to field even more surpises with their line-up as the season unfolds.

TEAM GERMANY

The A1GP World Champion Nation of the 2006-2007 Season expects to take the same car livery to the same result this year. Vietoris is convinced the team will be able to retain the crown. The team is widely acknowledged as enjoying the strongest Engineering Dept., with Willy Webber's expertise behind it, and rumors are flying about that Michael Schumacher may yet have some role to play in the series … only time will tell if Webber's protégé will bite …

CZECH REPUBLIC

The team has taken a bold approach by appointing a new driver, but expectations are high for the Czech's and in particular for their rising star Erik Janis, a former European KARTing champion, and the nineteen-year-old younger brother of Jarek Janis (who has capped four times for the Czech Republic in 'Season 2'). Jan Charouz will also drive in the majority of rookie sessions this season, and drivers on stand-by include ex-Formula One driver and Czech Republic sensation Tomas Enge, as well as Filip Salaquarda. A very strong driver line-up, and one of the dark horses for this season's championship.

TEAM AUSTRALIA

Rookie Initiative!

Australia is once again at the top of the headlines, with enjoy what many consider to be the best initiative to hoist young drivers into international racing careers. John Martin and Daniel Ricciardo tested the car, before handing it over to Ian Dyk, lead driver of the team. Martin, who is twenty-three years old, has been racing in the British F3 Championship, while Ricciardo has been driving in the successful Formula BMW series in Asia. Team Australia's Boss, Alan Jones, explains that, the partnership between A1 Team Australia and the AMSF (Australian Motor Sport Federation) will ensure that Australia's young drivers are assisted in every way possible to make them—and make Australia—a dominant force in international motorsports. The Australian car pictures are dedicated to The Ausmex Virtual Sim-Racing community, the Australian sim-racing community, and in particular, to Tim Watt, Uly, Brett McCrohan, Shaun Field, Bernie Knezevic, and Alison Lanning.

New Qualifying, And New Points System

A1GP has seen many interesting rules prove successful for a tight championship and on-track duels, and this year the lessons learnt from the first two years have made the series graduate in terms of giving the whole world more exciting wheel-to-wheel action by setting a few incentives for the teams so that strategy is a big part of the game, but risk taking and bold driving are the key to a successful championship.

There will be the same four fifteen minute, flat-out qualifying sessions with one flying lap allowed in each, so, what's new? Well, now a driver's best lap time in the first two segments will determine their Sprint Race grid position, with the best times from the final two segments determining the Feature Race Grid, which does away with any aggregate times, thus making the series more competitive and less confusing

As it was announced in the media, this also makes the Sprint race more exciting … "Because drivers will not be afraid to risk maneuvers for fear of losing a good grid slot for the feature race", so they will be able to give their best in the Sprint race, because the point system now has the same, equal points granted in both races. This time, fifteen points will be given to the winner, with a bonus point available for the fastest lap in each race.

The Points Allocation:

1st—15
2nd—12
3rd—10
4th—8
5th—6
6th—5
7th—4
8th—3
9th—2
10th—1
Fastest lap—1

New Feature Race Format: Second Stop!

As announced in www.a1gp.com on Wednesday August twenty-ninth: Previously, the feature race had just one mandatory pitstop, in an also mandatory window; however, this year teams will now be required to take a second pit stop later in the race. The "sting in the tail is for the teams to be notified about the time when they must have their pit stop when the pit lane opens for the feature race."

The feature race will still have a sixty-nine minutes time limit, with the first stop having to take place between laps eight and sixteen, while the second stop will take place in this surprise window, which will vary from track to track.

Sprint Race: Longer

The sprint race will now have twenty-nine minutes in length, plus one lap.

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HEAT

Sports Car GT For NASCAR Heat

Magnus Tellbom on the mod that all Heat fans have been awaiting for years … ISI's venerable Sports Car GT gets heated and served as NASCAR Heat feels the chill of its autumn years …

MagnusTellbom

Every now and then there comes a mod that really stands out. A mod that has a huge impact on the sim-scene, and one that really takes modding to a level previously unimagined. A mod that forever raises the bar, and goes on to become a benchmark upon which all future mods must be judged.

In my opinion, the V8 Supercar for *rFactor* is just such a mod. ETCC and WGTS were such mods for *F1C*. And SimBin, of course—the original SimBin—created precisely this kind of revolution with their GTR-inspired mod almost a decade ago.

And now—seven years after its September 2000 release—*NASCAR Heat* has a mod that will sit comfortably in the company of these luminaries.

Yes, it's finally here. The most anticipated mod for *NASCAR Heat* in a very long time, Sports Car GT.

Cholerix, the creator of GroupC for *NASCAR Heat*, made a simple little post saying, 'It's done, download here', and pointed the way to Speedsims.net. I rushed to get it, and was puzzled about the download being so small.

Only forty-three megs?

That's not much at all. For those familiar with the usual interface of *NASCAR Heat*, this mod is quite shocking. Not one single item is where you expect it to be. The entire user interface has been given an overhaul, and it looks, feels, and handles just like ISI's good ol' (as in 1999, last century old!) *Sports Car GT*.

I don't think even diehard *Sports Car GT* fans (are there any left?) would spot the difference unless they where really looking for it. Amazing stuff. I should also tell you that Cholerix has done wonders with the garage interface. There's not one single trace of the boring old NASCAR-style options. This is a fully operational road course garage with options for camber, ride height, toe, and all the stuff you normally find in a garage for a road course sim. That is not something I have ever seen in any *NASCAR Heat* mod before this one.

The mod contains four different cars: A Porsche 911, BMW M3, Saleen Mustang, and Vector M12. The Porsche and BMW are also available in two classes, just as in the original *Sports Car GT*. The models are all new, scratch-made by Cholerix, and the detail level on those cars are worthy of any modern sim out there. Load up these cars, and you could never imagine that this sim is seven years old. Absolutely stunning. Still, Cholerix has worked hard on getting the detail levels worked out, so this mod will run on almost any machine capable of handling the original Cup Cars.

All cars have individual physics and sound, and they all require some work in the garage if you want to master them all. I find that they are all very well matched, and after two days of hard testing, I can get them all within two tenths of a second of each other around Spa Francorchamps.

Even more enticing, the usual matter of finding a car that matches your style of driving is there. I would really like to be able to handle the Saleen as well as I can handle the BMW, but I can't. Still, practice makes perfect, and it might just be that I found a sweet spot in the setup for the BMW that I have yet to find for the Saleen.

The AI is a matter of opinion. I think Cholerix has done a superb job. The only way to do it better would be to hack track physics and ship the mod with custom tracks, and frankly that's not worth while. A run on Spa against the AI was quite a challenge, and I don't think more can be said about that. I am thankful for the collection of custom AI lines shipped with the mod that allows you to use the AI for practice (as well as racing for some real competition). The best about racing the AI is that you get to see so many beautiful cars on track at the same time.

Bottom line for this beauty? Well, I cannot really put figures on such a masterpiece. Let me say this though ... If you are one of those who still race the original *Sports Car GT*, you can stop that now and get this instead. In fact, I think you should install the *NASCAR Heat* Essentials right away, get this mod installed as soon as possible, and go have a blast. It's like getting a new, standalone sim for free, and you get that feeling of nostalgia at the same time.

In short, this is the new benchmark for *NASCAR Heat* mods, and every other mod in the future will have to measure up to this one. This is the new ultimate ten out of ten. Get it right away. You *will* regret it if you don't. Available at http://www.speedsims.net right now, and don't forget to say 'Thank you, Cholerix', 'cause he is well worth the praise for this one. Job well done!

Craftsman Truck Series 2006

It's been a while since there's been a proper Craftsman Truck series mod for *NASCAR Heat*. But this summer, the void was finally filled. The advert promised forty-seven paints, custom screens, bad-ass physics, and a custom spotter voice. Templates and ZModeler files were also to be included in the package, all of which would make it real easy to make your own custom paint.

Well, we'll see about that, won't we? In other words, it was time to get busy.

The team behind this consists of some of the best editors the *Heat* community has to offer and names like 'rpm750', and 'sofa747' promise a lot. So it was with great anticipation that I headed over to The Mod Squad to try and get myself a copy of the latest oval thrill.

The download weights in at 110 megs, and it comes as a single install.exe. Not that big when you consider what was promised in the package, but still rather big for a *NASCAR Heat* mod.

Not that it matters much, 'cause the download is fairly fast, and after just a few minutes, the install.exe is on my hard drive. A double click later and it finds its way to the right place and the install is complete within a few seconds.

Wonderful!

So I start mod launcher and get this mod running, and I'm met with what I can only call some rather cheesy screens in red and black. Not my cup of tea for sure but …I must admit that it does work rather well. That is, it's not bad—it's just not what I was expecting. The tune, however ... Well I might be getting old, but that isn't music! Thankfully, I can turn the—I think it's a song—*off*. So, not really a good start for me and this mod, was it? It gets worse when I get to the car selection screen. No previews? Oh well ... They *are* supposed to be the same, right?

Well then, onto the important stuff—let's select a track and try the truck.

Atlanta it is, as always, and—what is this? Either the apocalypse is near, or there's a texture conflict somewhere 'cause the Atlanta skybox has turned blood red. Well, there's nothing else to do but to move on to another track, and, as it turns out, all the other tracks look okay.

The red skybox, though, is a strange problem that I have never seen before. Well, as all the other tracks seem to be fine, I had no choice but to got to Daytona for a test session. And it was now that the fun began. You see, these trucks are a blast. Not only do they look so crisp clear that it almost hurts my eyes, they also drive like a dream.

Lighter than a normal Cup Car (I reckon), and so also more agile. Less horsepower, yes, but does it really matter? No, not really. The racing may be a little slower, but it's tighter. So tight I cannot find any of the usual overtaking points. There's always someone blocking, there's always movement, and the advancement through the field is painfully slow, and I love every minute of it. This is what racing is all about. I soon promise myself to never ever go on an oval again in anything other than a Craftsman Truck.

The AI is more than okay. In fact, it's more of a challenge in the trucks then they are in any of the Cup Car mods released for *Heat*. But still, the racing is cleaner, less bumping, and more of the fair and square game of finding a good spot to make a pass. Add this together with really nifty cockpits along with some stunningly good looking cars and paints, and you got yourself an afternoon of fun and pleasure right there.

I should mention a flaw I found in the models. If you have a look inside the wheelhouse of the cars, you will find a see-through effect, which means the insides are missing a texture. But in all honesty, this is a minor thing, and not at all important when you go 180mph around Daytona. I only spotted it in a replay photo I took.

Physics leave nothing to be desired, and I feel I'm in control of the car as long as I don't do anything stupid. Along with the default track setups, I can keep up with the AI at most tracks, but on some I find I need to adjust the final gear setting to be competitive. Still, this is acceptable, and not really a problem for most.

Bottom line, then ... I like this mod, and I bet every other oval racer out there will do likewise. I will take away a point for the texture conflict on Atlanta, and I will take away a point for the combination of cheesy menus and that unbearable tune. All-in-all, it results in a strong eight out of ten possible, and I can do nothing but recommend this one. On a final note, I like to tell you that if you get the NX Trackpack that was released along with the COT mod for *Heat*, you will find that that version of Atlanta looks as it should.

AUTOSIMSPORT

Chequered Flag

RacingTimes

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

STES— Race 1 season III, Road America

After the successful testrace at Monza, Italy, the complete STES field was looking forward to the real season opener at Road America; the beautiful long and curvy American circuit. This track has proven it's ability to host a challenging endurance race in the past, and

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

many drivers were eager to open the season in style here. A small change in the pointsystem opened possibilities for the participants to choose different cars that could get extra bonus points. The new system was chosen to avoid starting grids with similar cars only, and it worked. In total 8 different cartypes came to start the event. With 32 drivers registered for Road America a pre-qualifying session had to be held to fill the 28 spot grid. This pre qualifying session was won by anders Nilsson, in an excellent 2;00,8 in the mandatory Corvette C5-R pre-qualifying car.

After the server restart 28 drivers could join for the main event; three hours on the challenging track, wich was set at around 88 laps. The main qualifying session was dominated by season 2 champion Rickard Hellsten in a Ferrari 575 GTC breaking the 2:00 barrier easily with a very fast 1:58.2 time. Second came Steve Walsh and third Bernt Jensen. In NGT class pole position (20th overall) was obtained by John Dixon with a very fast 2:07.1 in a Porsche GT3 RSR. Second in NGT class came Darren Blythe, followed by Scuderia Twente driver Chris Smit in third. The Scuderia Twente was present with two cars, where Dennis Glaasker put his Maserati MC12 in 8th spot overall in GT class.

The racestart, as usual with pacelap, was smooth as ever, and after T1 the field went away for 3 hours of hard racing. After four laps the first retirement came from Dutchman Maurice Claessen with his Saleen S7, while Hellsten was already taking a small lead over Steve Walsh. The early phase of the race saw a mostly very tight GT field though with very close racing, with a strong role for the two Corvette drivers Anders nilsson and Baril Ignatius. After six laps Erik Nordqvist retired his Lister Storm after a crash, soon followed by Piotr Niedziela, the first victim in NGT class. Meanwhile there was a big pile-up in the GT field too, where Ignatius and Glaasker both had severe damage to their cars, and had to repair.

In the NGT class it was John Dixon putting the pace on, leaving Chris smit, George Pol and Thomas Granbacka behind. Dutch driver Rob Bakker drove a Porsche 996 GT3 RS to gain an extra point in the credit system but he couldn't find the pace to keep up with Dixon and Smit either.

During the race more and more retirements followed. STES administrator Ronnie Akesson was one of the last to retire when his Ferrari 575 GTC hit the right wall on the long straight, unluckily coming into contact with Bernt Jensen from Norway. The last exit came from STES newcomer Michael Harmsen from The Netherlands, who wrecked his C5-R after a big jump in the last session of the track in lap 57. With about 30 laps more to go, luckily there were no more retirements, and 17 out of 28 cars were still in the race.

After three hours it was Rickard Hellsten to take another STES win, followed by Steve Walsh and PeterL on the podium. In NGT class it was John Dixon who took victory (10th overall) in superior class with Scuderia Twente driver Chris Smit finishing second and George Pol third. That meant a complete Ferrari 575 GT podium and a complete Porsche 996 GT3 RSR NGT podium. After a race with two big incidents second Scuderia Twente driver Dennis Glaasker finished 9th in GT class.

The second race will be at the circuit of Brno, and will feature changeable weather. Results of this race can be found on the website in the STES results session.

Formula Racing Challenge

LigaF1

With winter approaching Formula Racing Challenge first full season is reaching the end. Allot as changed since last time, and after the summer stop, most racing titles are already decided. Only the Formula BMW driver's championship is up for grabs.

At the Formula 1 championship, Bruno Marques returned, and what has been an emotive championship until then, soon returned to a calm and predictable league, as it has been in the first part of the season. After the summer break, Bruno won all races and build up again a good margin in the driver's championship. Although mathematically he's still no champion, he only needs a couple of races to conquer the title, and thus succeed to Luis Azinheira, the 2006 champion. At the team's championship, everything is calm, and the last three races only served to confirm GhostSpeed Racing Team favouritism in the team's championship table, and is for the second year in a row the Champion team. Next year tough, a bigger challenge is waiting, as teams such as Vitamina OSR and Morábia Sports Team will want to challenge the top.

With three races to go, most drivers and teams are only racing to finish the calendar, and some driver's will want to do their best, to get that good result that they have been missing all the season.

If at the F1 league, things have been quiet, at the Formula BMW things are still very much alive, and both titles can still change hands. On the driver's standings, things seemed to be a two way deal between Alexandre Caetano and Álvaro Parente, but after the last round at Varano de'Melegari, two more drivers placed themselves on the frame to challenge for the cup. JPC won the race

and Vitor Enes was 2nd. With these results both are less than 25 points from the leader, Álvaro Parente, who now drives for Vitamina OSR.

On the team's championship, GhostSpeed is on good shape to take the teams cup, but with his sister team GS Racing. A 10 point's advantage to 2nd placed team it's well underway to get another title. Jaguar Racing in 3rd is doing his best season ever.

Other league almost finishing is the historic one. Riding the 1979 cars, there's not much do decide. Team Racing Knowledge has been dominating, and through Tiago Moreira, one of the most talented Portuguese SimRacers, they already conquered the driver's championship with two rounds to go. But they didn't stopped there, and the team's overall championship will be decided between their two teams, as all the other formations are already mathematically out of contention now. After dominating the Portuguese Grand Prix Legends league (GPLPT) for years now, they keep having success in historic open wheel championships.

FRC-GPC Jarama Race Report by Gil Abobeleira:
After facing the long straights of Monza, the GP79 drivers had a new challenge: the ups and downs of the Spanish track of Jarama. At the last round, Tiago Moreira, driving the Ligier JS11 Cosworth, scored another brilliant victory, increasing his lead on the Drivers' table. On the other hand, TRK also edged closer to win the Teams' Championship (or did it?), but after the Madrilenian Historic GP, another team stepped up for this challenge.

Designed in the 1960's by the famous Dutch track builder, John Hugenholtz (who also gave us the tracks of Zandvoort, Suzuka and...errrr Nivelles), the Madrilenian track features many slow and tight corners in its 3,404 km lenght, meaning that cornering speed was of up most importance, unlike Monza where top-speed was the most important aspect of setting up the cars.

Even thought there were some problems with the local organizers before the race started (surely, they wanted to have a siesta, while the drivers wanted to burn some rubber at the track), when times mattered, everything sailed smoothly. But no so for the Ferrari drivers. After none of its cars were able to battle for the win at Monza, some rumors popped up at Jarama claiming that the Commendatore had called his drivers for an emergency meeting and did not authorize any car to leave the Maranello HQ.

For the Williams TRK boys, qualifying was business as usual, but unlike Silverstone and Monza, this time the pole position went to Gil Abobeleira, who clocked a 1m16.262s on his first flying lap. Miguel Rodrigues was a mere 0.120s adrift, while Tiago Moreira was 0.994s slower than the pole sitter.

Further back, Spanish newcomer Roberto Nogueras, drove his SRT Racing Team prepared Williams FW07 to a fine fourth place, just in front of the Williams of Ricardo Pires and Francisco Figueiredo. Tiago Guerreiro driving the McSpye.... I mean, McLaren M29 was seventh, in front of the Bercar Lotus duo of António Sousa and Berto Carvalho.

At the start, Miguel Rodrigues was got away faster, but had to give the inside line to Gil Abobeleira. This driver, as expected, binned it right away in the barriers of Turn 1 – Fangio corner. Coño! At the Le Mans corner, Tiago Guerreiro and Ricardo Pires tangled with each other and the resulting crash took out Francisco Figueiredo from the race. Puta madre!

While Miguel Rodrigues started to build up a lead, local boy Roberto Nogueras spun off the course on lap 4. Joder! This left Tiago Moreira with a secure second place. At the back, Gil Abobeleira was climbing up the order and by lap 6 had his sight on fourth placed man, Tiago Guerreiro. His first attack at Le Mans was unsuccessful, as Tiago Guerreiro shut the door firmly, but on lap 9, he successfully overtook the McLaren on the outside of Farina. Olé! Two laps later, he has back up to third place after passing Ricardo Pires after the Pegio hairpin.

The start of the thirteenth lap would prove unlucky for someone, when Tiago Moreira overshot the braking point for the Nuvolari corner in his quest to catch Miguel Rodrigues. As well as loosing valuable time to Miguel Rodrigues and Gil Abobeleira, he also damaged the rear of his car. Thus, when Gil Abobeleira caught him some laps later, he just let him go through into second place and into hot pursuit of leader Miguel Rodrigues.

On the same lap – thirteenth –, Ricardo Pires also made a mistake at the Le Mans corner, letting Tiago Guerreiro into fourth spot. But these positions would not be the final ones.

Behind the front quintet came Alex Fighter – on a day off – and Daniel Gaspar's Williams, Berto Carvalho on the Lotus, Rogério Matos on the turbocharged Renault and the Brabham of newcomer Pedro Ferreira.

There were no major happenings after the twentieth lap, with everyone settling down. Eventually, we would lose the Williams of Spanish racer Alex Fighter and Daniel Gaspar, as well as the Brabham of Pedro Ferreira, as they all exited the race after mechanical problems or simply by going off the race track. There would also be a change of fourth place, after Tiago Guerreiro lost the front of his car at Ascari right-hander, letting Ricardo Pires through into the fourth spot.

At the end, Miguel Rodrigues secured his second win of the season, in front of Gil Abobeleira and Tiago Moreira. Then came Ricardo Pires, Tiago Guerreiro, Berto Carvalho and Rogério Matos, the last man to see the chequered flag.

On the last lap, as in Monza, Gil Abobeleira put on his gorilla suit and clocked the fastest lap of the race. Some rumors in the paddock said that, after the race, he was

seen with a couple of Spanish beers on his hand, but he quickly denied, saying that:

"Cerveja espanhola? Dasssss! Eu cá não bebo desse mij..!»

On the Championship tables, Tiago Moreira is now very near to clinch the Drivers' title, which he can do at the next race in Long Beach, California. On the other hand, after his win in Jarama, Miguel Rodrigues climbed up into third place in the standings, just behind Duarte Pires, who had been hijacked at the Ferrari's HQ by the Commendatore.

While is almost certain that Tiago Moreira will clinch the Drivers' title, the same cannot be said of the Teams' Championship though. After the 1-2 result at Jarama, Williams TRK has made it clear that they're also in the hunt for it. The other TRK team, while in front with a 25 points advantage, could yet lose the title in the final race in Mexico.

The GP79 Championship now goes into the American trek: Long Beach, Watkins Glen and then the final showdown at the Hermanos Rodrigues circuit in Mexico City. But first, let's enjoy the sunshine of Southern California...

FRC-GPC Monza Race Report by Gil Abobeleira:
After a six-week break for the summer holidays, the GP79 cars returned to the track, at the Autodromo Nazionale de Monza, for the Italian Historic Grand Prix.

After the first five races, Tiago Moreira, in the Ligier prepared by Team Racing Knowledge, led the championship with 51 points, 17 points adrift of the Ferrari driven by Duarte Pires and prepared by the Evolution Racing mechanics.

During qualifying, Miguel Rodrigues set a blistering pace, being the only driver dipping below the 1m38s mark and being more than half a second quicker than his team-mate, Gil Abobeleira. Behind the pace-setting Williams, Tiago Moreira just lost out for the second place spot at the grip, the difference between him and Gil Abobeleira being a whisker of 0.030s.

In his arrears, Hugo Grilo, driving another Williams, prepared by the Celeritas team, was the other driver able to dip into the 1m38s bracket and secured comfortably the forth spot on the grid.

At the start, Miguel Rodrigues spun too much the rear wheels and Gil Abobeleira was able to overtake him going into the first chicane, but he soon made a mistake entering the Chicane della Rogia and was back into the third spot. Behind the front quartet of Miguel Rodrigues, Tiago Moreira,Gil Abobeleira and Hugo Grilo, a small incident ocurred between Rui Cunha's GhostSpeed Engineering entered Wolf and the Williams of Samuel Duarte and Ricardo Pires. Meanwhile, at Curva Grande, Mário Esteves lost the rear of his Ferrari, which, according to his words after the race, was the result of spotting a too-beautiful Italian girl on the side of the track.

At the start of the second lap, Tiago Moreira was able to pass Miguel Rodrigues, while at the back, Nuno Lourenço's Ferrari hit the Lotus 80 of Berto Carvalho going into the Prima Variante. On the aftermath of this incident, Rogério Matos, driving for the Offroad Team was unable to miss both drivers and entangled his Renault RS11 with Nuno Lourenço's Ferrari.

The leaders passed and repassed each other at the Parabolica, but Miguel Rodrigues misjudged his braking point at the Chicane della Rogia and returned to the track behind his teammate, leaving Tiago Moreira comfortably in the lead. Unfortunately, on the same lap, he had to leave the race with an unknown problem.

At the back of the field, the positions soon stabilized, with Filipe Santos's Ferrari in third spot, Hugo Grilo in forth and his teammate, Francisco Figueiredo in fifth...

...But no so at the front. While leading comfortably, Tiago Moreira made a mistake on the lap 12 and Gil Abobeleira returned to the lead. Seven laps later though, the leader made his second mistake of the day at Prima Variante and the Ligier was back at the front of the field.

For a few laps, Tiago Moreira and Gil Abobeleira were never separated by a big margin, but Gil Abobeleira made another mistake four laps from home leaving the Ligier driver with no opposition for the remainder of the race.

At the end, Tiago Moreira won his forth GP at the FRC GP79 Championship, further strengthening his lead over the second placed driver, Duarte Pires who, after a strike on the Italian headquarter's of Evolution Racing, wasn't able to race at Monza.

Gil Abobeleira, who made a "Kimi" and secured the point for the fastest racelap on the very last one, and Filipe Santos accompanied the pacesetter at the podium. There was not much joy in the grandstands tough: a Ferrari hadn't won the race!

Behind them, Hugo Grilo finished on a lonely forth place, Samuel Duarte was fifth after a somewhat erratic race, Francisco Figueiredo was sixth and António Sousa's Lotus 80 was seventh. On the last point scoring positions finished Mário Esteves, Berto Carvalho and Rui Cunha, who scored the final point.

A fortnight later, the ground-effect cars went west into the Iberian sun of Jarama, on the outskirts of Madrid.