



## THE STORY BEHIND...

■ With the summer fast approaching and the sun shining, I felt I should ask the Olivers about their very 'summer holidays' game, Jet Bike Simulator. I only hope our readers are able to enjoy this year's summer given the lock down we are all faced with.



**Chris Wilkins:** So I guess we should start with the obvious question, what inspired you to write Jet Bike Simulator?

**Philip Oliver:** We'd written Grand Prix Simulator which had done amazingly well, we followed this up with Pro Pro Ski Simulator a few months later and we were keen to write another Simulator game.

**Andrew Oliver:** The answer became really obvious when a friend's dad bought a Jet Bike and a Jet Ski and allowed his son to take them to a local(ish) Jet Skiing lake. So during the summer of 1987 we went about once a week to the Cotswold Water Park — near Cirencester.

**CW:** Wow — that's a good friend to have? That must have been amazing fun! Can you explain the difference

between a Jet Bike and Jet Ski ?

**PO:** Our understanding, and we weren't sure if this was right, was that Jet Skis were the ones without seats, where you have a platform to stand on and Jet Bikes had seats that you ride on. We've learnt more recently, with the benefit of the internet, that 'Jet Ski' is the trademarked name for a 'Personal Watercraft' (PWCs) made by the market leader Kawasaki, whilst Wave Runner's are made by Yamaha. Other general terms used include water scooter and boatercycle. Bizarrely the generic name is officially Personal Watercraft.

**AO:** Personally, I think Jet Bike Simulator sounds better than Personal Watercraft Simulator! So maybe, accidentally, we termed a better generic name for them and doing a quick google we can see some people still call them Jet Bikes.

**CW:** We'll I'll keep calling them Jet Bike's since that's the name of this article and your game. So I've seen people on Jet Bikes on TV, on holidays and at Universal Studios Waterworld show — it looks really cool. Was it hard to learn to ride them?

**PO:** It was, and pretty expensive too. First off, we needed wetsuits and then we had to have lessons with the hired Jet Skis, so the one's without seats by our definition, were £35 for 30 minutes each and it was really hard. We'd take them to the shallow water, climb aboard the back, and whilst lying down hold the handle bars and start accelerating whilst being dragged behind. As the speed picked up we'd drag ourselves to our knees and get to a comfortable kneeling position. This is how you see amateurs riding these. Then as we got more confident and

skilled we were able to attempt to stand, but this often ended in us falling off!

**CW:** So what then, the Jet Bike screams off into the distance?

**PO:** No, as you fall it cuts the power to an idle and some even start gently circling around back to you. So you swim after them and have to drag yourself back on and try again. You find your arms ache a lot afterwards.

**AO:** After many hours and using Patricks Jet Ski we got really proficient to the point we could walk the Jet Bike to a swallow spot, step on and zoom off! So cool!

**CW:** So having learnt how to do the real thing, I can see it was obvious for you to make the game. How did you go about this?

**PO:** We started at the end of the Summer holidays, after completing 3D StarFighter. It occurred to us that a top down approach like Grand Prix Simulator was the best way forwards.

**AO:** It was actually a good game to pick on as we could see the similarities in the design and approach to the code, yet the image of the game would be completely different. So it would require a complete new set of graphics. We could easily envisage how instead of tracks, we could have lakes with buoys marking out the 'gates'.



Above: Jet Bike Simulator on the ZX Spectrum.

**CW:** Why was the game, which came out in January 1988, released in a double cassette case as a Codemasters Plus game priced at £4.99?

**PO:** Games had two price points back in the mid to late 80s — budget £1.99 or £2.99 or full price £9.99 or £11.99. Codemasters, was known for fantastic value budget games, but there was a lot of concern how games coming from Codemasters at full price would be received. I believe it was actually Bruce Everiss, the Head of Marketing at Codemasters, who proposed the concept for the Plus range as a mid-price point. The double sized Jewel case was a great format for that price and was popular in the music industry for large compilations like the hugely popular 'Now That's what I call Music' series.

**AO:** Part of the concept was to show extra value by putting two cassettes in the box and therefore more content. So

we decided to have different difficulty levels.

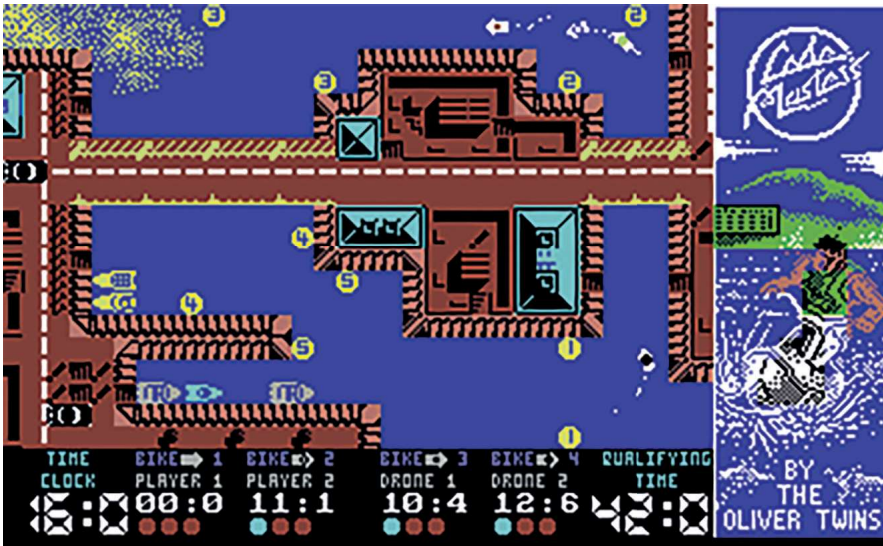
Tape one, Side one contained the game and six easy Lakes courses, whilst if you flipped the tape, you got the game with six more challenging (expert) Lake courses.

The second tape had six additional coast courses on one side, and six docks courses X on the other.

**AO:** Here's an interesting bit of trivia : Why are so many things priced with 99p on the end? And where did it start?

**CW:** Well I thought it was because people thought it was more of a bargain, 'less than a fiver'. And some people see the first digit and mentally round to that, so £4.

**AO:** Well that's true, but there's another important factor that made it popular. A large chain store in the US, back in the middle of the



Left: Jet Bike Simulator on the Commodore 64.

last century, found theft was quite high and they wondered how much was from staff — particularly cashiers. So the management decided to reduce many items by one cent. Now when customers paid, they waited at the till for their receipt and change, meaning cashiers couldn't simply take the money and not put it through the till. It solved a great deal of the theft!

**CW:** Um, interesting, but back to the game. So the game was pretty tricky with very small Jet Bikes to control, can you explain the thinking behind this design.

Below: Jet Bike Simulator on the Amstrad CPC.



**PO:** We designed as usual on the Amstrad as the lead version. We chose Mode 1 (320x200 pixels with 4 colours) which is the mode similar to the Spectrum resolution. Since we weren't able to scroll the screen, this meant the whole screen had to contain the whole course, and this dictated the size of the Jet Bikes, viewed from above. Conveniently they were arrow shaped which really helped players see the direction of travel.

**AO:** We created a level editor, and a few demo courses with one playable Jet Bike. We sent this to James Wilson who used this to generate all the other courses. He sent these back in the post and we imported them into the game,

made a few tweaks and added data for the starting positions and gates.

**PO:** James created the majority of the courses and graphics and very sadly he died shortly after delivering his work and before it was released in a very tragic accident.

**AO:** Yes, it was devastating, he was so talented and such a great guy and only 20.

**CW:** That's very sad. So did he see the final game?

**PO:** Probably not.

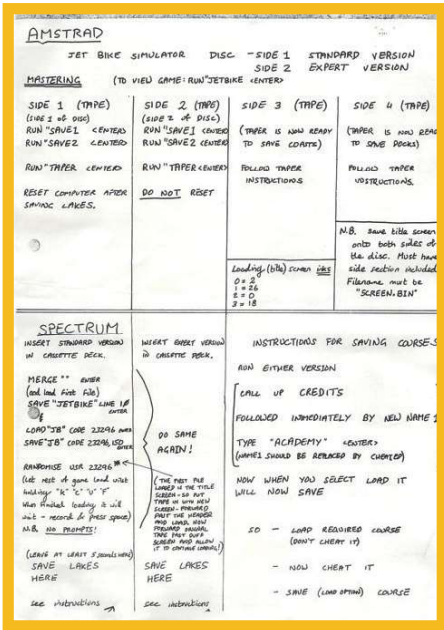
**CW:** So who did the Commodore 64 version and why wasn't it ported to the Atari ST & Amiga?

**AO:** It was Codemasters job to find people and pay them to do conversions.

Mark Clements took all the source code and graphics and did a brilliant version for the C64. Sadly they weren't able to find people to do the ST and Amiga versions.

**CW:** How did the game do?

**PO:** It was expected to do really well, and critically it did pretty well, but sadly sales were lower than anticipated. The problem was that budget games were weekly pocket money purchases, but £4.99 fell outside of that. It was often put on the shelves with full price games which were bought less often, and looked cheaper than those other games. If a parent said, 'you can have a game off this shelf' most kids weren't likely to pick the smaller cheaper one'.



Above: A design document for the game, written by The Twins.

CW: The insert to the game says the research was done by David Darling & Julie Coombes at Lakeside & Watersports Club, St Osyth, Essex.

PO: Yes, strange that isn't it. We created the game from our experiences at Cotswold Waterpark. During that summer David, and his girlfriend Julie did come and join us on a few occasions, as did others from Codemasters including James Wilson, but they had no input in the design. I think it's possible that this Lakeside & Watersports

Club was known personally to someone at Codemasters or maybe they even paid for this as an advert. I don't think David and Julie ever visited it either – it's just a long way from Leamington, and they used to like to visit the South Coast near Lyme Regis.

CW: A year later you released Championship Jet Ski Simulator. Wasn't this just the same game?

PO: Mostly, yes it was, but remastered to fit onto 2 sides of a tape and reduced to £2.99. We put the best eight lake courses on side one and made these a little easier, whilst side two contained eight dock courses. We changed the logo, and called them Jet Skis instead of Jet Bikes. Fitting the additional courses in memory meant a little more optimisation too – as everything always had to fit into 34k (Amstrad and Spectrum). We also changed the voice recordings to use a female voice, this game was voiced by Melody White.

CW: Many years later Nintendo came out with Wave

Race on N64 – what did you think of that?

AO: It was brilliant, and very successful. I'd like to think we helped inspire it, but I doubt it. I think we were probably the first Jet Bike game or should I say Personal Watercraft game!

CW: Excellent – or should I say Absolutely Brilliant?!

PO: Well that's very generous of you. We were pretty pleased with both games and hope that everyone that bought them had lots of fun.

CW: Well thank you again for another interview. Anything else to add?

AO: We did create a Let's Play video on YouTube where we talk and talk about how and why we made Jet Bike simulator which some of our reader may be interested. You can find it here:

<http://bit.ly/JetBikeSim>

PO: Thank you Chris, I hope you readers enjoy this.

Below: The full insert for the game for the Amstrad CPC.

