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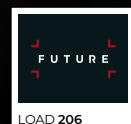
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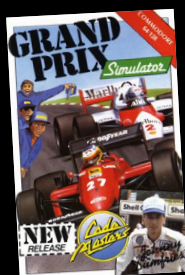
THE MAKING OF

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR



Activision thought the Oliver twins' *Grand Prix Simulator* ripped off Atari's *Super Sprint*, but the brothers were actually inspired by Codemasters' *BMX Simulator*. Philip Oliver explains how the twins started their racer after visiting a safari park

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- » **DEVELOPER:** PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** RACING

There are no hard and fast rules for coming up with ideas for games, and this was especially true during the Eighties. That said, the background to the Oliver twins' racing game concept *Safari Madness* was more unusual than most, as Philip Oliver explains. "We thought it would be hilarious if you took our brother's orange Citroën 2CV through Longleat Safari Park, because the monkeys could probably pick most of the pieces off it!" Philip grins. "That's where we got *Safari Madness* from. The problem was that since you couldn't scroll on an Amstrad, the whole road system had to fit on one screen, which meant that we ended up with matchbox-sized cars and tiny monkeys."

The Oliver twins tried everything they could to make monkeys dismantling 2CVs work on a humble Amstrad CPC, before temporarily putting *Safari Madness* on hold. "Around that time, we pitched *Super Robin Hood* to Codemasters," Philip says. "It was only when we finished *Ghost Hunters*, and we had seen *BMX Simulator*, that we thought we could revisit *Safari Madness*, but instead of a safari you could be going around racetracks."

Having given their racer a more grounded theme, the



» [Amstrad CPC] Hitting oil slicks in *Grand Prix Simulator* can cause cars to spin-out and lose control.

twins next looked to a childhood pastime to inspire courses for their retitled project: *Grand Prix Simulator*. "Our track design skills were honed on *Scalextric*!" Philip beams. "We were always trying to make bridges, so we had to have them in *Grand Prix Simulator*. You had to keep a straight line going underneath them, otherwise you were buggered!"

Besides building bridges, the Oliver twins tweaked the road handling of *Grand Prix Simulator*'s player vehicle, taking their lead from a BBC Micro classic and watching TV. "A really big inspiration was Geoff Crammond's *Revs*," Philip enthuses. "It didn't have sliding around corners, but I think we had watched rally driving, and that was all about controlling the slides,



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PRO BMX SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS

YEAR: 1988

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR 2 (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS

YEAR: 1989

JET BIKE SIMULATOR

SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS

YEAR: 1989



» *Grand Prix Simulator* was the first of many 'Simulator' titles that the Oliver twins developed for Codemasters.

"I think we had watched rally driving, and that was all about controlling the slides, and those did make Grand Prix Simulator a lot more interesting"
Philip Oliver

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Of course, as interesting as sliding around *Grand Prix Simulator* was, the game needed an opponent, and so Philip and Andrew added a computer car, which was essentially a playback of their test runs. "The problem was when another car got in the way," Philip notes, "so we made the computer car start slowly to give the player a head start. It then raced better to stay on your heels, but if you fucked up it would overtake, and if you collided with it there wouldn't be any effect – it just wasn't that clever!"

Nevertheless, the twins incorporated their ad hoc computer driver into their game's two-player mode, just to up the ante. "We figured that if we had to have a one-player mode with a computer car then we could just leave it there for the two-player mode," Philip reasons. "It made it look more interesting, and it gave you more of a challenge."

Further challenges were added in the form of on-track collectibles worth bonus points, which gave *Grand Prix Simulator* additional replay value for very little coding time. "It was just adding a bit more depth," Philip reasons. "And all games back in those days had scores, so



» [Amstrad CPC] The fastest lap times are achieved by deftly drifting around corners.



» [Amstrad CPC] Make sure to nail your approach or you'll end up snagged on a barrier.



» [Amstrad CPC] You have to drive straight under the bridges to avoid getting stuck underneath.



» [Amstrad CPC] Sections of this *Grand Prix Simulator* course feel like tackling a slalom run.

there were spanners that you could collect for points, and it was easy to add them."

The extra effort put into *Grand Prix Simulator* by the Olivers was appreciated on its release by almost everyone except publisher Activision, due to the game's similarity to its upcoming coin-op licence *Super Sprint*. "When the action came through the post, Codemasters called us about it, and we just reminded it that we had done *BMX Simulator* with cars," Philip recalls. "Codemasters went to the press. It did brilliantly out of it; the sales of *Grand Prix Simulator* were spectacular."

A home computer sequel followed two years later, and shortly after a third iteration was

planned for the NES, but its name was changed to take advantage of a marketing opportunity.

"Codemasters looked at its best-selling titles: *Dizzy* and *Grand Prix Simulator*," Philip recalls. "We couldn't do both, so we left *Grand Prix Simulator* to Andrew Graham. Then Codemasters did a deal with Galoob, who owned *Micro Machines*, and it was renamed."

Reviewing *Grand Prix Simulator* now, Philip is happy with the Amstrad racer, and points out what a bargain it was. "We're dead proud of it!" Philip says with a smile. "It looks absolutely lovely. The maths could have been a little bit better, and there were a couple of bugs, but bear in mind that it was only £1.99!" ✱

CONVERSION CAPERS

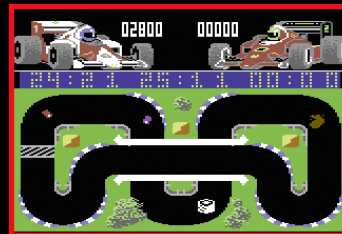


AMSTRAD CPC

The gameplay at the heart of the Amstrad original is almost as impressive as its beautiful 16-colour courses. Its boxy player cars do get snagged on barriers and under bridges, but otherwise their handling is perfect. In terms of engine and skidding noises, the original's sound effects are spot on.

ZX SPECTRUM

Understandably, the Spectrum version is less colourful than the original, but it's disappointing that its graphics aren't as well designed. Additionally, its cars are the same colour, which is a bit confusing, and its in-game sound is poor. These minor faults aside, it's a pretty decent conversion.



COMMODORE 64

The player cars in the C64 iteration slide wildly every time you turn, which makes it feel like you're racing on ice, although there are fences around bad bends to help keep you on course. The C64 conversion has some great pregame music, but its vehicles sound more like desk fans than racing cars.

ATARI 8-BIT

Like the C64 port, the Atari 8-bit version has 12 courses to the original's 14, and they're less brightly coloured than those in the Amstrad game. On the plus side, its cars don't slide around as much as their C64 counterparts, and their engine noises don't cut out when they screech around corners.

