

## DIE SENSATION

# Nürburgring/3

The two machines were shown in Berlin at the March 1976 International Exhibition for Coin Op Games. Despite the name, other exhibitors were mostly of German origin. Dr Foerst was told that because of his manufacturing speed and cost, he would soon find others copying his design.

Manufacturing at a rate of one machine per week, sales commenced. As did the story of the copies. Early August 1976, Dr Foerst had a memorable meeting with a young man, Ted Michon from the Californian company Micronetics. They had, by chance, happened across each other at a Bowling Alley in Dusseldorf...Dr Foerst had taken his sons to see their fathers game. Ted, according to Dr Foerst, was there to look at Nurburgring. A somewhat plausible reason. Meeting Dr Foerst himself then, must have been good fortune for Micronetics (soon to be re-named Digital Games). Ted suggested the machine had two many components and suggested using fourfold op-amps instead of onefold. They even bowled together. After a brief telephone call with his boss, Dr Foerst says Ted was "very nervous, very frustrated and told us, that he was sorry, but he had no choice than to end their conversation. Then he left the building". By mid-August the two had exchanged correspondence and Dr Foerst has clear evidence that Ted's boss had forced him to re-create the game without licensing it. So Ted did, and just a few months later Digital Games had even sold the rights to the game to both Atari and Midway. Midway later sent one Marc Wolverton to see Dr Foerst. He too was (of course) very friendly. Explaining some of the details and principles of the game, Dr Foerst thought that a new contract was on the horizon. Clearly Dr Foerst is a trusting kind of fella, but as was the way, no license fee was paid. By November 1976 Atari and Midway were manufacturing their own independent, CPU driven copies of Dr Foerst's design. In that same month, Trakus' client, Spobag wrote a letter (from the show floor) which cancelled an order for ten machines, on the basis that Atari, Kee and a third company had made cheap and good copies of the Trakus machine.

Of course the fact that Midway and Atari could mass-manufacture and sell globally meant that the game could go international. For what was such an innovative game at the time, that, alone is not a bad thing. But poor old Dr Foerst and his young kids had been fully and completely ripped off in a way that only videogames manufacturers and designers seem to be able to do. The dream was over. And history can record a new perspective on Nolan Bushnell's famous talk about the 'Jackals'.



**Der erste kommerzielle echte\*  
Fahrtsimulator der Welt**

**Mehr als ein Spiel:  
Motorsportlicher  
nie erlahmender  
Nervenkitzel**

Seeing Atari's flyer for Night Driver state 'Another Atari First' must have been infuriating, but today, Dr Foerst says "copying was unavoidable...I had no choice but to take the risk [of showing the simulator], that someone sees and copies my invention without paying a license fee. I did not have the money for production of hundreds of units. Rather I was forced to sell them in small numbers to cinemas, stores and arcades."

So far as international success goes, that was mostly that for Dr Foerst and Trakus. But it's not the end of the story. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. This was just the beginning of the Dr Foerst Simulators. Somehow, despite being crushed by the big boys, Dr Foerst pressed on. Presumably hoping that his next Patents would be of more use.

Nurburgring/2 arrived as late as 1979 and was almost the same game- a motorbike version. Dr Foerst says it differed to the original by having "handlebar, another engine noise and a more narrow shape for the collision detection".

It would be easy to deride these games as black and white and lacking (manual) gears. But you would be wrong to castigate so quickly. The games were, after all, conceived at a time when the worlds only CPU was the preserve of calculators and games were mostly derivatives of pong.