

ARCADE MOTORBIKE RACERS

ARCADE MOTORBIKE GAMES: DISCRETE ELECTRONICS TO STUPENDOUS SPRITES



LEFT: Traverse USA came in 1983 from Irem into the arcades. It was the first third person perspective cycle game. Just shows what can be done on a single Z80 processor!

RIGHT: Kick Rider from Universal 1984

FAR RIGHT: Mach Rider from Nintendo in 1985



The earliest videogame to involve a bike was Heavy Traffic from Digital Games—1975. The following year was also blessed with a motorbike game, a Sega game called Motocross. Both these games were essentially vertically scrolling racers much like Speed Race. You can read about them earlier in the book.

Atari's Stunt Cycle was released in 1976 and can agreeably be the first time you could pull a wheelie, reach ridiculous speeds and fall off your bike. That's the reason we like bike games and for that reason we should think of Stunt Cycle as the first videogame based upon a motorbike—the others were no different to car-themed games except they had handle bars not wheels/pedals.

Stunt Cycle aside, bike games were not the most appealing games of the era, with the space games, platform and maze games being the best sellers.

Heavy traffic, Stunt Cycle and Motocross/Fonz were all based on discrete electronics, ie no CPU utilised. In 1983 came one of the earliest bike games to utilise a CPU (other games had used a CPU seven years earlier) Traverse USA was a neat game but the view of the road is just wrong and it spoils the action. Pole Position got it right the year before so why didn't they learn? Who knows. Later in 1984 came a top-down vertical scrolling game called Kick Rider—dodge or kick your opponents to the ground making as much progress as possible inside the time limit. Not very original then.

Still in 1984, Taito showed the best bike game to date with Kickstart and Nintendo's efforts in 1984 were commendable too (Excite Bike). But Nintendo's second foray into the bike world was of substantially less quality. If you couldn't find Hang On in 1985, you could have tried Mach Rider, but don't expect too much. If you'd already played Hang On, you weren't going to waste your money on this baby.



If, in 1983, your passion was gaming and motorbikes, you would have felt most deprived of a decent bike game. Then, saviour of all saviours, the motorbike genre is saved by Nintendo with their Excitebike in 1984. Later released to NES, SNES, N64 (as an easter egg within another game) and also released recently to GBA this game was very playable. Although a little short lived and the tracks are less than imaginative, no-one would disagree that the animation, graphics, colour, perspective, flow and rhythm of the game are united in greatness. It plays great if you're after a 20 minute blast. Your little man even does a 'Schumacher Leap' when he gets onto the podium. And if you were competing with a friend? Well you'd kiss goodbye to any free time you had planned.



In 1984, Taito showed what could be done with two Z80 processors—a 3 and a 4 Mhz. The sound was awful but playing the game and the graphics were a lot better than 1983 Traverse USA.

Kickstart was a decent third person view game, but frustratingly, no wheelies could be performed. (tut tut!) It even had two parallax scrolling layers in the background—but the machine struggled to keep going when on the third level, so many obstacles are thrown at the player.

Perhaps this should be seen as the spiritual predecessor to Hang On.

