

Driver's Eyes, 1987, Namco. The first ever racing game to use polygons instead of sprites. It wasn't just a new generation of hardware, it was a whole new paradigm. Like shifting from propellers to jet engines, it was a colossal leap in engineering.

Hardware Engineers had to provide a number crunching machine. Sadly for Driver's eyes the hardware available at the time wasn't upto the job so all they could do was cram in as many chips as possible.

Software Engineers had to implement real-time 3D graphics where previously all they had to do was scale and shift sprites. Keeping in mind the rather steep learning curve for software engineers, you would have to say that any attempt in 1987 to use new bespoke hardware with millions of chips (known as the Polygoniser) to make what was then called a CG game (or 3D game, or filled vector, or filled 3D) was very brave.

It's not surprising their first game of this type wasn't a success (commercially or otherwise). The cost of the product with that many chips (and three screens) doubtless had something to do with it's failure. Certainly it seems not to have left Japanese shores, if indeed this mysterious game was ever released.



Above: 1989 Collaboration with Mazda.
Right and above right: 1987 Driver's Eyes—Nice effort.

GEEKY CHIPS BIT
Namco used 5 Texas Instruments TMS320C20 DSP chips in Drivers eyes. Each said to be about 12.5Mips performance, running at 25Mhz. They were second generation DSP chips (the first generation from TI was 1983 and these new chips were hot off the fab in 1987).



Thankfully Final Lap was raking in the profits, so not perturbed at all, Namco went onward in 1989 to re-use the hardware to better effect in a new racing game (this time a single screen ride-in) called **Winning Run**. No doubt the chips were cheaper and software engineers must have really honed their skills. First shown at the January ATEI trade show, it didn't get into the UK arcades until Autumn. With its sequels (Winning Run Suzuka and Winning Run 91) it sold globally and successfully.

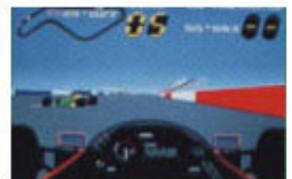
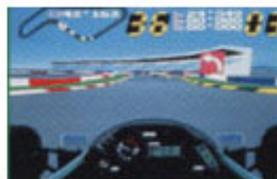
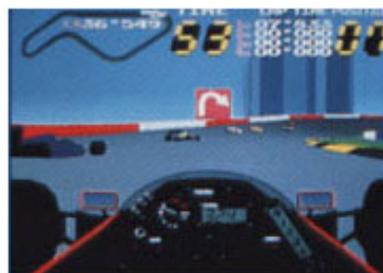
One of the amazing new phenomena of 3D games was that you could overtake a car but conversely it could overtake you...this never happened before 1989...if you overtook a car, it disappeared for good. This may sound trivial but it did make quite a different game.

Further revising the hardware, Namco created a game looking suspiciously like a Driver's Eyes cabinet in conjunction with Mazda - the 1989 Eunos Roadster Simulator. And with SimDrive came Namco's first full-scale ride-in simulator - a predecessor to Ridge Racer full scale...presumably both these Mazda games use a modified version of Winning Run.

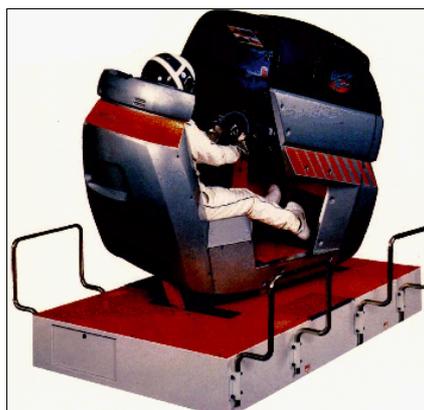
Winning Run made a serious impression in magazine editors of the day. C&VG spent nearly two full pages and claimed:

"The graphics are simply stunning, with a Polymiser system used to give the most impressive 3D graphics yet seen. There are tunnels, hills, alcoves—and just about everything you'd expect to find on a real race track. The game feels incredible too, with superb handling and feedback as you skid, countersteer and bump on the kerbs. Winning Run is easily the best racing game yet seen—it's thoroughly realistic and totally exhilarating."

But let's not over-estimate this game. It transpires that this bunch of chips would run a system about 1/4 the speed of the subsequent Ridge Racer. And this explains a lot. Firstly there's no shading or textures and secondly there's actually very little going on, other than a race track, some low-poly cars and the tunnels/grandstands. Of course, that wouldn't have mattered in the day and C&VG summed up the impressions of the day perfectly. I don't recall seeing this game in the UK at the time (Hard Drivin, by contrast was in almost every arcade). Perhaps they still couldn't manufacture at an affordable price.



Above: Winning Run Screens from an alternative flyer.
Left: Winning Run Cabinet. Very nice!
Below: Part of the Winning Run Suzuka Flyer.



Below: Somewhat curiously, Namco seem to have released a sound-track in Sept 1990 which included quite a few tracks from racing games and indeed a track from this game.



ZUKA GPで起こる!!

画面説明

- コースマップ(現在位置を表示)
- 残り時間
- 順位
- 参加人数
- ラップタイム
- バンクモーター
- シフト表示

- タコメーター
- スピードメーター
- シフト方式

遊び方

プレイしたい方にステアリングを回してアクセルを踏んで選択します。

TRANSDRIVER SECT
SELECT HANDLE TO SELECT

初級者向け
5速オートマチック

上級者向け
6速マニュアル

PRACTICE (予選) ここでは各プレイヤーのスタートインジック・グリッドを決めます。

GRANDPRIX (決勝) 各プレイヤーの熱戦が繰り広げられます。