

RIDGE RACER

To beat Sega's 1992 VR was a tall order.

If anyone was going to fight the fight, it was Namco. After six years practicing with Polygons (Driver's Eyes and Winning Run) In 1993, four years after the first polygonal car was crafted, Namco released the first of their new series, **Ridge Racer**. To say that it was well received would be a huge understatement. The world loved it. Running on their new System 22, a hardware specification capable of 240,000 polygons per second was an improvement to be expected, but instead of just flat shading, the new system could implement **texture mapping for the first time in arcades**. This was an addictive, highly playable and challenging game. Cars handled in a manor specific to this game and perfecting a corner was very satisfying.

Ridge racer was released as a huge brightly coloured cabinet with a large screen and the whole racing chair, six speed affair. In deluxe form it even had a working clutch for those who wanted to try and master the gear box...of course auto was an option along with a choice of music and difficulty level. Ridge Racer went on to receive numerous updates, including a 1994 two player version, a much bigger three screen affair and the even bigger (huge then) full size Mazda MX5 ride-in game with video projector. These huge monsters required an assistant to collect the money and be-seat the player.

Ridge Racer was a big event in the arcades during them years but it was a much bigger event soon after when it hit the home market. It was one of two Namco games which helped enormously in sales of the first (and very expensive) Playstation in 1994. It was well received at the time, being the first decent polygonal arcade conversion the world had seen. It appeared to run fast play smooth and sound great. It's easy to criticise now, looking back and comparing, the conversion lacked a little in depth of colour, polygon count and crucially, it had some horrible clipping issues (you could see joins in some buildings, trees, cars models etc. But this is the sort of game that commands competitive play and whilst the graphics looked great, it was the unique handling and gameplay that set this apart from all previous racing games.

The home game was so popular it was always going to receive a sequel. Ridge Racer Revolution added a few tracks, more music and removed the clipping issues but it was just an update. Rage Racer was third at home and followed a few years later by RR4 which was the first Playstation racer with Gourard shading. Ridge Racer 5 was a launch game for the second Playstation machine in 2001.



Right 1993 arcade RR. Above Playstation RR in 1994. It had just one track, but it was a gorgeous track and was used in a variety of ways.

The sixth in the series - R:Evolution tried to evolve the game into a more realistic experience (real cars, less sideways action) but failed to captivate. So it was back to the sideways sliding for the true Ridge Racer 6 released 2006 for the Xbox360. R7 came to PS3 in 2006 (USA/Japan) and 2007 as a UK launch game and in fact despite the age of the series, both were critically well received (and being launch games would inevitably give a good attach rate but ultimately they would never break any record for sales).



DRIFT

In 1993 Namco invented what was later to become known as drift racing. This means putting the car on it's side for as long as possible.

Ridge Racer allowed a side-ways slide without loss of forward momentum. This is contrary to real life but created a challenging and fun game to play.

Ridge Racer evolution, the sixth in the series tried and failed to reinvent the handling of the game. The real RR6 and 7 both returned to normal handling and added a nitro boost.



Above: Red cabinets—of course.

