

BreakNeck – Windows

Developed by: Synetic (<http://www.synetic.de>)

Published by: SouthPeak Interactive (<http://www.southpeak.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.southpeak.com/titles/breakneck/>

Genre: Racing

System Requirements:

233MHz Pentium® or compatible processor

Windows® 95/98

32 MB RAM

120 MB of free space

Direct X compatible video card with 4 MB VRAM

Direct 3D compatible hardware acceleration recommended (Supports most major 3D acceleration cards).

6X CD-ROM

16 Bit Windows compatible sound card

DirectX 5.0 (included) or higher

Microsoft® mouse or compatible pointing device

Supports: Force Feedback Joystick/Steering Wheel

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 7.5

Graphics: 9/10

Sound: 5/10

Documentation: 7/10

Getting Started: 6/10

Gameplay: 7/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: Eye-popping graphics; dozens of tracks and vehicles to choose from; lots of cool weapons; enormous replay value.

The Bad Press: Bewildering interface in expert mode; obnoxious audio; collision detection could use some work; no real cars.

Overview: If you can look past the cumbersome interface, *BreakNeck* has plenty to offer racing fans.

Tips:

If you get out to a decent lead in weapons mode, drop a bunch of mines all over the road to keep pursuing cars at bay.

If you encounter a hairpin turn, let off the gas for just a second or two as opposed to braking to save valuable time.

Looking back on recent gaming history, I can think of a good many games that simply didn't live up to expectations in the feature department. So many titles seem to be rushed through development these days, and very few actually come through on all fronts in terms of gameplay and replay value. Having said that, South Peak Interactive's new arcade racer *Breakneck* is one of the rare titles that doesn't seem hurried, and ships with just about every feature you could ask for in a racing title, and much more.

Truth be told, *Breakneck* definitely has all the pieces in place to stand with the elite in the racing genre. The game features a whopping 43 vehicles to choose from, and the selection isn't limited to just cars either. From the outset, you can choose to control everything from monster trucks and big rigs, to classic roadsters or even go-karts. There are also a plethora of exotic locales to test your driving skills in – ranging from the snowy passes in Belgium to the dusty terrain of Australia (and just about everything in between). There are a total of 24 different tracks, and even if you happen to master all of them, there are variations, complete with varying weather conditions, and mirrored versions to keep things interesting. As you might guess, the wide variety of vehicles and locales is *BreakNeck*'s biggest selling point and really adds an element of longevity to the game.

Game modes in *BreakNeck* are divided into two main categories: arcade and expert. In arcade mode, you simply choose your vehicle, a track and hit the road. As you progress and win races, you accumulate points and open up new cars and venues. The arcade mode also features the ability to outfit your vehicles with weapons and duke it out with other cars as you head for the finish line. Some of the more useful weapons include heat-seeking

missiles, proximity mines, grenades, nail guns, and oil slicks. The weapon mode is great fun and ensures that no lead is ever completely safe. My only gripe about this mode is the fact that all cars come fully equipped with abundant supplies of all weapons at the start of each race. This ultimately removes a great deal of challenge – especially when you're out to a lead. Savvy drivers will quickly realize that they can widen their lead significantly by dropping mines all around the road, and if you happen to run out of mines, you're sure to have a healthy supply of oil or nails to take care of business. Whether weapons mode is your forte or not, the arcade mode is easy to jump in and play, and all the options will keep you busy for quite some time.

The other mode of play, expert mode, is a whole new ball of wax. Here, you play in a career mode of sorts and are forced to contend with purchasing cars and parts, signing sponsorship deals, and scheduling race dates among other things. There are multiple achievement levels to attain, and you'll have to carefully manage your resources (not to mention win a lot of races) to have a successful season. I suppose that expert mode is the real meat and potatoes of the game, but the experience for me was severely hindered by the pages upon pages of menus you have to trudge through to accomplish anything. A decidedly thicker-than-average manual cleared things up a little bit, but after reading it through I was still clamoring for a "quick start" button of some sort. The complexity involved in managing your season is daunting enough—having to navigate through a sea of unintuitive menus just to get a race going is simply inexcusable. The main problem is that there is usually a bunch of information onscreen and often, it's extremely difficult to discern what is clickable and what isn't. With practice, you'll start to get the hang of things, and if you are able to do so, the expert mode makes *BreakNeck* one of the deepest racing sims available for PC.

Okay, so you know about the play modes and the options, but how does it play? Well, as an arcade game, pretty darn good. Races in both modes are usually fairly competitive, and your fellow competitors will stop at nothing to put you out of submission. The vehicles each have unique handling characteristics and with some practice, you'll be power sliding and out-maneuvering your opponents in no time. Be warned, however, that *BreakNeck* is an arcade game through-and-through—at least in terms of control and gameplay. As such, braking isn't all that necessary as the physics engine allows you to take hairpin turns at lightning speeds. In addition, many obstacles along the side of the road (trees, fences, etc.) are visible, but are apparently just illusions. What I mean by this is that your car will pass unscathed through most obstacles as if they aren't even there. There are some exceptions to this rule, most notably that pesky, two-foot fence post that inexplicably brings your vehicle traveling at 200 MPH to an immediate halt. Luckily, things like this won't bother you all that much because the game is just plain fun to play. Whether you stick to arcade mode or choose to tackle expert, you're sure to have a good time with *BreakNeck*, and to me, that's all that really matters.

Aesthetically, *BreakNeck* delivers a splendid performance graphically, but the audio is mediocre at best. With so much artistry necessary to create all the tracks and vehicles, you might think that graphics wouldn't be a main concern. This couldn't be further from the truth. Each of the cars and landscapes are highly detailed, and some snazzy lighting effects really add to the atmosphere. The best news is, even with all the detail cranked, I didn't experience any slowdown on my P2 450/Voodoo3 combination. The sound, however, is nothing to write home about. The environmental effects and the roar of the engines don't sound too bad, but they were sampled too loudly and grate on your nerves after a while.

When it comes down to it, *BreakNeck* is an above average arcade racer that perhaps tries to do a little too much. The expert mode is definitely befuddling for casual racing fans, but a little patience will pay off for diehard fans. Casual fans will still no doubt enjoy the entertaining arcade mode, and the addition of the weapons essentially adds a third play mode. If you're a racing fan, take *BreakNeck* for a spin. You won't be sorry.