

Dirt Track Racing Review – Windows

Developed by: Ratbag (<http://www.ratbaggames.com>)

Published by: WizardWorks (<http://www.wizardworks.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.wizardworks.com/dtr.htm>

Genre: Racing

System Requirements:

OPERATING SYSTEM:	Windows 95 or 98
CPU:	Pentium® 200 with hardware acceleration or Pentium 266 without hardware acceleration
VIDEO CARD:	DirectX® compatible video card (DirectX 7.0 included) (D3D or 3Dfx Glide recommended)
SOUND CARD:	DirectSound compatible sound card
CD-ROM DRIVE:	8X CD-ROM
MEMORY:	32MB RAM minimum
INPUT DEVICE:	Microsoft 100% compatible mouse required. Steering wheel and pedals or joystick highly recommended. Supports Force Feedback.
HARD DRIVE:	60MB hard disk space (minimum)
MULTI-PLAYER:	Internet connection or LAN required for multi-player gaming. Minimum modem speed of 28.8 required.

Supports: Joystick/Gamepad/Steering Wheel, Force Feedback

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 7.5

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 6/10

Documentation: 7/10

Getting Started: 8/10

Gameplay: 8/10

Value: 9/10

The Good Press: Nice graphics, tons of vehicle customization options; simple interface; a good value at only \$20.

The Bad Press: The audio track is nothing to write home about.

Overview: A simple, yet highly addictive racer that's well worth the 20-dollar price tag.

Tips:

Learning to power-slide effectively is one of the game's key skills. When approaching a turn, slow down slightly until you're facing the right direction, then accelerate.

Use the terrain and weather conditions to your advantage. In dry conditions, your vehicle has less traction and is more prone to spin out than in wet, muddy conditions.

It appears that WizardWorks, creators of such dust collecting titles as *Disc Golf* and *Swamp Buggy Racing* are finally learning their lesson. *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars* is yet another title in their ongoing list of obscurely titled racing games, but this time they've teamed with Ratbag Games (of *Powerslide* fame) to produce a straightforward, yet surprisingly addictive racer that will appeal to casual arcade or diehard simulation fans alike. Combine that with the fact that the whole experience can be had for under 20 bucks, and you've got the formula for a winner.

Racing fans looking to take a spin around Daytona as their favorite real-life racers will be disappointed with *Dirt Track Racing*. You won't find any familiar racers (unless you're an adamant follower of the Pennzoil "World of Outlaws" Series), tracks or vehicles—just piles of junk with four wheels and an engine, a makeshift selection of rural dirt tracks, and a group of mom-'n-pop drivers out to make a (very) few bucks so they can afford to continue their careers. You begin the game with only enough money to purchase one vehicle. As you win races, you'll slowly build up a cash flow to upgrade or purchase new cars. If you don't like the way your car is handling, you can always take it to the garage and tinker with the engine, suspension, and steering among others. Just about every possible characteristic of the vehicle is customizable, so real simulation fans will have a blast turning their scrap heaps into bona fide contenders in a matter of a few races.

In terms of visuals, *Dirt Track Racing* isn't exactly a feast for the eyes, but the gameplay is smooth, and the uncomplicated tracks and vehicles look as they should. The backdrops are also pretty clean, although a little more detail in the more distant objects and the spectators would be welcome. The cars seem to react to various handling situations as you would expect, and as the race wears on, track conditions will deteriorate making steering more difficult. It should also be noted that the cars really start to show it when they've hit the wall too many times. I'd really like to see some fiery crashes too, but I guess you can't have everything.

As for sound, this might be the game's weakest point, but it certainly doesn't detract from the overall experience. In fact, the lacking soundtrack might be a welcome addition to people like me who get annoyed by a constant onslaught of headache-inducing heavy metal riffs that you'd find in most racers. Still, the constant whine of the engines was enough to have me reaching for the Tylenol, and the infrequent announcer chime-ins didn't really add much variety. To be fair though, I can't remember the last racing game I played that had an aural performance worth mentioning.

Once you've set up all the options in the interface, it's time to hit the dirt. You can either choose to participate in a single race, or play through a whole season in career mode. The latter is obviously the real meat of the game and is actually quite entertaining. Before each race, you can survey the next venue with a practice run, earn your spot on the grid in qualification mode, or make adjustments to your vehicle. The tracks are all very short for the most part, so a good starting point is almost a necessity if you hope to come out on top. If you're having trouble keeping pace, there are sliders to adjust vehicle handling from lenient to realistic. If you choose lenient, you won't spin out as often, but your top speed won't be as high as with the realistic setting. You'll have to decide which selection best suits your playing style.

The real strong points in *Dirt Track Racing* would have to be the solid physics engine and the challenging, but definitely not unfair artificial intelligence. As you would expect from the company that created *Powerslide*, Ratbag games has done a great job of implementing the power slide maneuver into the game. Not only is a successful power slide beautiful to behold, but mastering this tricky skill is of utmost importance on such short, crowded tracks. Nothing is more satisfying than passing the leader on the inside while forcing him into a collision with a wall or another vehicle. The control in the game is top-notch, and whether you're using a steering wheel or a standard gamepad, the cars are very responsive and react just as the track conditions dictate.

I played through many a race in *Dirt Track Racing*, and I wouldn't consider a single one a walk in the park. The computer AI in the game is very well done, and although I lost a lot of races after being bumped off the track by aggressive opponents, I never felt cheated by the computer. In some cases, a good qualifying time is almost as important as winning the race itself. Although it can be done, it's really difficult to pull off a win if you begin the race in last place on such small venues. Such a small margin of error might frustrate some people, but to me, it made winning a race all the more gratifying.

Overall, I was very pleasantly surprised with how much fun I had with *Dirt Track Racing*. My expectations weren't too high, but a lot of much more advanced racers could learn a lot from this game. It has all the features and tweaks of games costing twice as much, a terrific physics engine, and a thoroughly enjoyable career mode that is sure to keep you busy for quite some time. If you find yourself a little short on cash and enjoy playing in the mud, *Dirt Track Racing* is for you.