

F1 Racing Championship – Sony PlayStation

Developed by: Ubi Soft (<http://www.ubisoft.com>)

Published by: Ubi Soft (<http://www.ubisoft.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: N/A

Genre: Formula 1 Racing

Number of Players: 1-2

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 5.5

Graphics: 6/10

Sound: 5/10

Documentation: 6/10

Getting Started: 7/10

Gameplay: 5/10

Value: 5/10

The Good Press: Lots of tracks and real F1 racers; some nice graphical effects; a wealth of gameplay modes and options; the school mode comes in handy.

The Bad Press: Boring, repetitive gameplay; loads of graphical pop-in; unreasonable computer AI; forgettable sound.

Supports: Dual Shock Analog Controller, memory card

Overview: *F1 Racing Championship* may appeal to diehard Formula 1 fans, but there are much more enjoyable racing titles available.

Tips:

Cornering is one of the most difficult skills to learn. Use the school mode to familiarize yourself with the nuances involved in successfully navigating turns.

Although it's cool to play from a view within your car, you won't have the ability to track other racers' stats or view the all-important tachometer unless you choose an outside angle.

The popularity and continued release of a constant stream of F1 racing games on all platforms seems sort of odd to me. I can understand how diehard F1 fans might enjoy the opportunity to race as their favorite pro drivers, or have the ability to tweak their vehicle's specifications, but seriously, I just don't see the fun in racing around the same flat, boring track a dozen times. With that in mind, unless you live and die with F1 racing, I can think of dozens of more enjoyable racing games than Ubi-Soft's *F1 Racing Championship*—or any F1 game for that matter.

This is not to say that *F1 Racing Championship* is necessarily a bad game. In fact, this is one of the deepest and most complex racing simulations I've played since *Gran Turismo*. For starters, you select between arcade or simulation mode. For those of you who prefer a more laid-back physics engine, the arcade mode is for you. Here, the walls are forgiving, braking is less important, and speed is the key. You simply pick a venue, a car, and hit the road. Performing well in the arcade races opens up new tracks. Things get much more complicated in simulation mode. Here, you can partake in a single race (a practice more or less), a duel (a split-screen showdown with a friend), time attack (for seasoned players to challenge track records), school mode (a handy way to practice the nuances of proper braking, acceleration, and cornering) or challenge your personal best times in ghost mode. Each mode also has its own set of options for difficulty and racing technique, so you're sure to find a game that suits your playing style.

Gaining expertise in all the other modes prepares you for the ultimate challenge: the world championship mode, where you compete in an exact replica of the 1999 F1 racing season. There are nearly two dozen real racers to choose from, including favorites like Mika Hakkinen, Michael Schumacher, or Jacques Villeneuve, and all the tracks are based on real-life venues. True F1 aficionados will also appreciate the great deal of customization involved in preparing your vehicle for a race. Not comfortable with how your car is handling those rainy conditions in Brazil? Simply head over to the garage and adjust your tires or brakes to compensate. All told, you can fine-tune your vehicle in eight distinct categories. In addition, you can then save up to three separate settings for varying conditions to your memory card, a useful feature.

Once you're ready to hit the track, you'll quickly realize that *F1 Racing Championship*, like all F1 racers, requires a great deal of patience, track study, and most of all, practice before you can hope to be successful. The driving model is fairly solid, although there are a few minor handling issues (steering seems to overcompensate for miniscule direction adjustments, which results in a lot unnecessary jerking). The various camera angles, which include several views from outside your car as well as a few inside, are all appropriate and playable. My real problem with the gameplay though has to be the tracks themselves. The sand, for example will practically halt your car immediately—regardless of your speed. So if you happen to take a turn a little too sharply and veer off into the sand just once, you can kiss your chances of seeing a checkered flag goodbye. In addition, it seems a little too easy to spin out of control, and in a game with such a small margin for error, things can get frustrating really quickly. Since this is the case, you'll definitely benefit from some quality time spent in the school mode taking practice laps before the actual competition begins.

Afterwards, your first order of business is to qualify. You get 12 laps around the track, and your best lap time is compared to the other racers' times to determine your starting position. The problem is, even if you manage a decent spot on the grid, the computer cars consistently demolish their qualification times in the actual races. Given the game's inherent challenge, this will obviously grate on your nerves. I personally felt more cheated than challenged as a result of this, but seasoned F1 racing fans may appreciate the added difficulty.

In terms of graphical performance, *F1 Racing Championship* is by no means groundbreaking, but solid nonetheless. Before each race if you have the camera positioned outside your vehicle, you're treated to a pretty cool haze effect as a result of the heat emanating from the cars in front of you. Other details include realistic weather conditions, and tires that smoke when you pound the brake pedal. My only complaint would be all the pop-in, which sometimes makes it hard to anticipate where to go next. Still, the framerate is smooth and doesn't seem to slow down unless there are many cars onscreen at once, so I'm able to look past this issue. The sound and music, however, is unspectacular at best. The engine sounds aren't bad, but when combined with the rock music blaring, you'll be reaching for the volume control in a hurry. Furthermore, in a game that has such a feature-packed interface, you'll quickly grow tired of the annoying sound of a racer whizzing by after every button click.

Overall, I have no doubt that fans of F1 racing will enjoy this game, but with all the other much more enjoyable racing titles available, I highly recommend a weekend rental before purchase. *F1 Racing Championship* has all the features to come away with a checkered flag, but the insane difficulty combined with ho-hum gameplay and cheap computer AI really ruined the experience for me. If F1 is the only style of racing you enjoy, this game is certainly worth a look. If not, you'll have much more fun with something in the *Gran Turismo* or *Ridge Racer* series.