

Title:	Hot Wheels Turbo Racing
Developed by:	Electronic Arts (http://www.ea.com)
Published by:	Electronic Arts (http://www.ea.com)
Reviewed By:	Tim Maxwell
Official Site:	(http://www.ea.com/hotwheelsgame/)
Overview:	Electronic Arts delivers a new twist to a tired genre.
Genre:	Racing
System Requirements:	Sony Playstation
Supports:	Dual Shock analog controller
ESRB Rating:	Everyone
The Good Press:	Death-defying stunts; lots of cars; creative track design.
The Bad Press:	Not much of a physics engine; annoying music, drab graphics.
Ratings:	Graphics: 6/10 Sound: 5/10 Getting Started: 8/10 Documentation: 7/10 Value: 6/10
Tips:	Don't get too cute with your stunts; trying to do too much will cost you valuable time. Using the brake is almost unnecessary, the invisible barriers will keep you from straying off-track.

Nowadays, since Playstation racing games are nearly as prevalent as Doom clones, if the name of your game doesn't have *Need For Speed* or *Gran Turismo* in it, your chance of success in such a competitive market is minimal. There are obvious exceptions to this rule, namely the *Wipeout* series among a few others, but they were successful because they brought some innovation to a tired genre. Electronic Arts, creators of the popular *Need for Speed* series, hopes to expand its racing horizons with *Hot Wheels Turbo Racing*, an interesting mix of white-knuckled racing action and *Jet Moto*-esque.

At first glance, *Turbo Racing* appears to be just another ho-hum racing game. Once the startup screen loads, you're greeted with the standard options. You first select whether you want to participate in a single race, challenge for the esteemed Hot Wheels Cup, take a few laps around the practice track, or exhibit your aerial skills in the Airtime Challenge. Once you've done this, you select your racer from a list of real Hot Wheels cars, choose your venue, and hit the pavement.

The obvious premise in the Hot Wheels Cup challenge is to finish races in first place. As you continue to win races in the tournament, you'll unlock new cars and tracks. In the Airtime Challenge, you're taken to the stunt course and points are awarded for the difficulty of the stunts you pull off. The Airtime challenge isn't the only place where stunts are important, though - completing stunts in regular races awards your car with turbo boosts. The more difficult the stunt, the more turbos you get. Much of the strategy in the game involves deciding what kind of stunt to perform at a given time. If you can nail an extra somersault, you might get three more turbos, if you land on your back, you get no turbos and lose valuable time. The ability to perform stunts is a truly innovative feature and fans of the *SF Rush* and *Jet Moto* series' should be pleased with the results.

Another aspect of *Turbo Racing* that makes it stand out is its over-the-top track design. Obviously, if you're going to be performing all these vehicle gymnastics, the venues need to be structured appropriately. Simply put, you won't find a zanier bunch of tracks than those in *Turbo Racing*. Loops and corkscrews abound and there are enough twists, turns, and daredevil drops to keep even the most advanced racers on their toes.

Apparently, Electronic Arts' best graphic and sound designers and engineers were assigned to something else because both of these areas are mediocre in *Turbo Racing*. Sure, the cars do look similar to many of their toy counterparts, and the tracks are varied and creative, but the color palette is bland and seems out of place in many areas. Luckily, pop-up is not an issue and the framerate is smooth so I was able to look past these minor problems. The musical score (if you can call it that) consists of popular cuts from the likes of Metallica and Primus. If this type of music is your thing, it will fit in quite nicely with the rough-'n-tumble racing action. If not, you had better either turn down the volume or have your Advil handy.

Unfortunately, one of *Turbo Racing's* best features for some is also its worst flaw for others. The game is remarkably easy to jump right into and play. Once you've gotten the hang of the basic controls, you'll have no trouble competing - even on the higher difficulty settings. Novice players will enjoy the non-existent learning curve, but advanced players will long for more of a challenge. Basically, if you can nail your stunts on occasion and find the turbo button, you'll have little trouble staying in first place. The tracks seem to have invisible barriers on each side in most places so if you're navigating a tight turn, there is no need to stay between the track's boundaries. Since your car doesn't sustain any damage, feel free to pound the turbos no matter how hairpin the curve is - you'll simply bounce off and be back on track in no time. Yes, the Airtime Challenge and stunt aspect of the regular races is enough to keep you entertained for a while, but once you've discovered all the secrets and tried all the cars, there won't be much more to do.

Overall, *Turbo Racing* is a good time while it lasts. The stunts are a blast to pull off and once you've got the hang of it, you'll be twisting and tumbling your way to victory in nothing flat. Unfortunately, the novelty wears off rather quickly and once you've got everything down to a science (which doesn't take long), you'll be ready to move on to something else. To be in the safe side, I suggest a weekend rental before purchase.