

Issue #1 - June 2004

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by Adam King

by Tonks

Over the next few issues I plan on giving my observations on the collecting scene here Australia and how it might differ from the US or the UK or from wherever you call home. I do not want to give the impression that I am an authority on everything to do with collecting classic consoles and games, but I

have been a very keen collector since 1991. What I will share is simply my observations.

Please feel free to send your comments, suggestions, questions or contradictions. They are always welcome. I will particularly be hoping that a few Aussie collectors will send me their own personal observations on the Australian Retro Gaming scene. So to all you Australian readers of RTM, please e-mail me.

The topics I hope to cover over the next few issues are...

- The popular systems in Australia during the early to mid 80's.
- The popular systems in Australia during the late 80's to early 90's.
- The popularity of home computers in Australia such as the Commodore range, Amstrad etc.
- What video game magazines have been popular in Australia.
- What arcades were like then and today.
- EBay - the Australian eBay scene as well as what it is like getting stuff from Overseas.
- Places collectors go to find their goods.

I hope this will be an interesting series of articles. There are a number of similarities the Australian scene has with other countries, but there are also a number of differences that make the Australian scene quite unique. I hope that I may be able to share these differences and help other collectors broaden their understanding of our great hobby.

The Many Faces of ... Ms Pac-Man

by Alan Hewston

Welcome back to the Many Faces reviews. Last time, in the "Retrogaming Times #80", I reviewed the many faces of "Pac-Man" and this month we take a look at its first sequel, "Ms. Pac-Man". RT #81 was planned for May, making it close to Mother's Day. Well OK, so it's not called "Mrs. Pac-Man" nor is it called "Mother Pac-Man", but the 2600 version was the video game that my mother played more than any other - ever. She kept pressing the fire button, but didn't know why, and didn't realize she was starting game, after game, after game. An hour later, mentally exhausted and with sore fingers she stopped playing and asked my sister & I "When does this game end?" After a laugh, we had to tell her the truth that she just played 30+ games and that she was under so much pressure to avoid the ghost, she didn't take her eyes off them to see the score (or it reset). For me, "Ms-Pac-Man" is at the top of the list (along with "Tron") for number of quarters/tokens spent by me at the arcades. One arcade at State College, PA had a machine set to hyperactive speed - allowing for an extremely fast paced game. Perfect for the college student needing a quick VG fix, and I mean quick. Faster speed means more quarters consumed for the arcade, fortunately I usually came armed with just one quarter and had to make it count.

The first working title to this game was "Crazy Otto", while under development by General Computer Corporation, who then sold it to Bally Midway. As the first "Pac-Man" sequel, it made sense to keep most of the "look" of the original, but change enough ingredients to make it stand alone as a new game. 3 significant changes were - a female character, multiple mazes (& 2 tunnels), and having the fruit/prizes bounce around each maze. The female lead was easily the most important, visually drawing in fans from across the room, and by word of mouth bringing in more women and older players in general. The new mazes were almost as appealing as the new intermissions that we all longed to see. You just had to put in one more quarter to get to that next IM and next maze. Would more than 4 mazes (and only 2 rounds per maze) have helped sales even more? Finally, the bouncing fruit/prize gives the sequel that extra gameplay element it badly needed. A challenge within a challenge, or the machine taunting you to go chase that fruit. So why didn't we ever see a "Ms. Frogger", "Ms. Galaga", or "Ms. Donkey Kong"? Anyhow, I digress, and as you all should know, the bulk of original "Pac-Man" gameplay is in tact, plus ghosts that now change directions often and randomly enough to defuse any pattern.

A sequel should change some from the original. Let's take a quick look at some of the deviations and enhancements on maze games in the early years. Yes, I'm sure there are plenty more, so feel free to tell me any more:

- + Larger than one screen mazes (Jr. Pac-Man, Rally X, Radar Rat Race)
- + Radar scope for enemies (Rally X/Radar Rat Race)
- + Enlarged dots (even slower to eat) if prize passes over them (Jr. Pac-Man)
- + Temporary locked doors (Lock 'n Chase)
- + Maze layout or openings constantly changing (Jawbreaker)
- + Super ability power pills (Super Pac-Man)

- + Enemies eventually tunnel through maze walls (Mr. Do! , Dig Dug)
- + Enemies that move across the screen without regard to maze walls (Shark Attack, Mouse Trap?)
- + Defend yourself by pumping up your enemies up until they explode (Dig Dug)
- + Go on the offensive and shoot your enemies in the maze (Mr. Do!)
- + Rotating doorways change room or maze geometry (Mouse Trap)
- + Main character gets larger (longer) as they eat/collect. (Serpentine)
- + 3-D maze with different height levels (Crystal Castles)
- + Maze scrolls faster and faster keep up or perish (2600 Entombed)
- + Destroy or manipulate maze walls (blocks) to alter maze shape or destroy enemies (Pengo)
- + Invisible maze walls (Gauntlet)
- + Fixed teleportation rooms/devices (Tutankham)
- + Multiple prizes (Pac-Boy)
- + Anchored or stationary main character (Anteater/Aardvark/Oil's Well)

Here are still other ideas from me, or maybe I've heard or seen somewhere. Did these ever make it into any commercial game?

Each maze has a theme or special feature, such as the above or below diversions in just that maze. Press fire button to teleport randomly or to some given location.

Press fire to send all ghosts back into their house.

Collect and save power ups early in the game (1 per maze) and use fire button to use them later.

Multiple screens to conquer at one time, but each time you tunnel a ghost follows you into the next room.

One tunnel L/R and one tunnel U/D would work great with a 4 room maze.

Touch object or press fire and Freeze enemies.

Tunnels doors open/close after an event like eating the "nth" dot, the 3rd power pill, or 2nd prize.

Prizes that add more dots back to the maze (like Sam from Q*Bert).

Part of maze become visible/invisible after so many dots, eat a power pill, or prize.

RPG type maze - starts unknown, becomes visible as you traverse its halls.

Maze walls & ghosts invisible except when you are within several dots, dots remaining are visible.

Maze visible, dots invisible.

Moving dot field.

Moving, invisible dot field (uh oh, I'm sounding like Atari 2600 Space Invaders)

Moving or invisible power pills.

Prizes keep moving faster.

Prizes decrease in value to the minimum value, but never leave maze.

Ghosts get to the prize first.

Move items from one spot to another . . . & many, many more. It was fun reminiscing these old ideas.

Arcade: 1981 Midway

All home versions by Atari or Atarisoft no programming credits: Apple II ('83), Atari 2600 ('82), Atari 5200 ('83), Atari 7800 ('84), Atari 8 bit ('83), Commodore 64 ('83), Commodore Vic-20 ('83), Sinclair Spectrum ('83), TI-99 ('84)

Rumor Mill: (Colecovision version by Atarisoft, Intellivision version by INTV)

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <>: all home versions have: all of the default game play & scoring from Pac-Man; plus 4 new mazes having multiple tunnels, and bouncing (with sound) fruits that enter and exit via the tunnels; have 7 or 8 starting level options <2600 (one, plus 3 child versions)> with all the fruits, cherry through banana; the first (& second) fruit/prize arrives after you've consumed about 1/3 (& 2/3) of the dots; each maze is almost exactly <2600, Vic 20> that of the arcade pattern, just squished from being portrait on an arcade monitor to landscape on a home screen; mazes have 90+% of the number of dots from the arcade <2600 (70%)>; there is startup music to each game, plus the 3 arcade intermissions, one before each new maze pattern; displays the current and high score, lives remaining and all the fruits seen through the current board/wave; and finally a pause <2600>. Nearly every version is well done, having all elements of the arcade with a few exceptions noted below. Only a couple versions have a demo, which reminds me - I'd like to write an article about demos in classic arcade style games.



Disqualified: Spectrum & MSX (N/A)

DQ is only because I do not have this system.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (37)

My first reaction was it plays better (3 pts) than Vic 20 Pac-Man, but I may not have been critical enough of some flaws. Gameplay is pretty good (7), all there plus a short demo, and mostly the same mazes from the arcade. But a frequent glitch occurs where a set of ghost eyes will bounce for quite a while before finding (if ever) the ghost cave. Their sound is already annoying even worse to have it

last the remainder of the round. This missing ghost makes it even easier to play and it's already the easiest version since those ghost graduated at the bottom of their class. The Addictiveness is hurt by the reduced difficulty (challenge), and a little by the slightly slower speed, but it is still fun to play (7). Pause via the space bar. Graphics are not missing anything, but perhaps by trying to add in too much detail, at some point things clash, making it harder to see. Despite having more dots than any other home version, the dots are not evenly spaced with poor symmetry and just plastered on the screen. Overall Graphics are still decent enough (6) to play the game. Sound is pretty good (7) with an audio-only IM before the new mazes. Absent are the power pill and ghost eating sounds. Controls are perfect (10).

Have Nots: TI-99 (39)

My First reaction was disappointment that this uncommon cart still eludes me. Fortunately, TI-99 enthusiast Bryan Roppolo Boulder lent me his cart last Fall along with several other TI-99 arcade ports. My review and scoring is based upon watching a videotape (with audio commentary like "it disappeared!") of me playing this game. Thus the evaluation is different, but I think I found everything about the game, in fact, perhaps too much see the glitches below. It earns the lowest Addictiveness score (6) due to the incredibly SLOW game speed, but take a break from the slowness by hitting the space bar. The Gameplay is quite complete & impressive (8). The Graphics are crisp (8), and at first glance would be a 9, but they're a step down from the medal winners due to some glitches that occur every maze. Dots near the bottom blink and fade when you and/or ghosts are in proximity. Ghosts partially or completely vanish from view (both when blue and regular colors). Fruit bouncing near the ghost cave disappears and then reappears, unless you eat it while invisible. Finally, the fruit exits before it is due, at least a body length before it enters the tunnel. Sound is effective (7) and all thee, but a limitation is the bouncing fruit sound precludes the sound of the ghosts being eaten. Controls are flawless (10). Thanks Bryan, for making sure your favorite home system gets noticed.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (39)

My First reaction was this first home version missed out by not having the 7/8 start levels. Instead, they added a unique option to play with a reduced number of (1, 2 or 3) ghosts making it much more fun to play and learn the game as a child. Gameplay is all there and very good (7), including a demo. The 4 mazes are smaller and not quite arcade-like, but are fun and present their own challenges. After all, the spirit of "Ms. Pac-Man" is having different mazes, which shined in the SNES/Genesis era and today has transformed into complete "Maze Madness". The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8), but would be better with a pause. Graphics are hurt by fewer dots and less detail, but still very good (7), and much improved over (the limited to 2K) 2600 "Pac-Man". Points for eating ghosts are not displayed on-screen. Sound is effective (7) with most of the effects, and some nice startup music. Controls are perfect (10), but be careful not to touch that fire button until after you've grabbed a snapshot of your high score.

Have Nots: Apple II (40)

My first reaction was that as one of the eldest systems from the era it does as good as can be expected. It is well done and is only lacking the benefit of a digital joystick, and external (always sounds better) audio. Gameplay is complete, very nice (8) with a sound toggle and abort . Addictiveness is fantastic (9) with intermissions and the pause . Graphics are all there, detailed & colorful, superb (9), but I almost dropped a point due to our leading lady being white. Sound is the weak spot, good enough (6), but the internal speakers and missing background noise. Controls are analog and only score an (8). But, a choice of Joystick or Keyboard may help. Available only on disk.

Gold Medal: Atari 5200, Commodore 64, Atari 7800, Atari 8 bit (44)

Just like last month with Pac-Man, we have another dead heat. This time, 4 versions are all pretty much the same quality.

Atari 5200

My first reaction was again surprised that the Controls hold up and are again perfect (10) . . . but you'd better have the Masterplay Interface or equivalent. Gameplay is complete (8) but the ghosts do not seem to chase you through the tunnels much. Also the speed and action on higher levels seems inconsistent - almost like the game speed is changing slightly, faster then slower. Reality, or illusion, over time you'll get used to it and it will not hurt your scores. The demo quickly cycles through each of the 4 mazes, then goes back to the main title screen. Note also that the child version here is useless - no where near as effective as on the 2600. Instead of 1, 2 and 3 Teddy Bear versions (meaning fewer ghosts like the 2600), this version simply starts one level lower (slower) than the cherry, but you still have all 4 ghosts. The "Teddy Bear" is the prize followed by the cherry level etc. So children would not benefit much here only gaining 1 slightly easier level to play instead of the entire game with fewer ghosts. Addictiveness is wonderful (9) with the pause being the button. The pause is not easy to use here, since it is probably on a controller not in your hands - so maybe there's a reason to bump this one outta the top 4. The Graphics are first class (9), with good detail, color and animation. The Sound is pleasant (8).

Commodore 64

My first reaction was the C64 Ms. Pac-Man banana (5K) is my favorite prize to collect of al-time. Start at the banana level, and 20 seconds later you were munching it down. If you were lucky enough to

keep earning a banana as your random prize, you'd be able to break your high score. Maybe there was some trick as the banana seemed to appear more often than its fair share (1/7th) of the time. The Gameplay is complete (8) with no bugs. Addictiveness is wonderful (9). Pause via the space bar. Graphics are great (9) with lots of detail, animation and color. Sound is sharp (8) but some effects are odd, giving me a reason for either a lower score which would knock it out of the top 4. Controls are perfect (10). The Cart and disk versions are the same.

Atari 7800

My first reaction is the 7800 always wins! Gameplay is complete (8) . . . well almost. One obvious element missing is that eating dots is supposed to make you slower. I double checked the manual and sure enough they omitted that portion of text as mentioned in the others. So Atari must have known about this, but didn't correct this feature. It's debatable, but I could not force myself to penalize it -1. Rather, I decided to not be too critical of any one element. Regardless, the Addictiveness is wonderful (9) with the 7800 . The Graphics are fantastic (9), probably just edging out the Atari 8 bit, but still not a 10. Likewise the Sound is sharp (8) & Controls are perfect (10) - but your best bet is to use a 2600 stick. Another trivial error in this version, scoring for Power Pills is only 40 points but should be 50.

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was there was nothing significantly wrong anywhere, is this the best version? I would expect that given time and opportunity, most players would chose this one to play the most. I could not bring myself to score it one point higher. Likewise, the 4 Ms. Pac-Man medal winners (scoring 44) are really better than the Pac-Man winners (scoring 44) from last month. There are more audio effects, better intermissions and deeper gameplay elements (bouncing, moving prizes). But it was hard to score them 45. OK, so where was I . . . The scores and notes here all match the 5200, but the pause is far easier to use than the 5200 with no concern about joysticks. Cart and disk versions are the same. So which 1 version is best? Although they have the same code, the Atari 8 bit version is easier to pause and to get running perfectly than the 5200. The C64 sounds odd/different, but it's really good enough. Is the 7800 version not slowing down to eat dots a significant enough part of the game? I dunno. Given more time, a larger point total, and more critical penalties I'd pick the 8 bit. But on a fifty point scale, they all deserve a piece of the prize.

Other notes: The Atari 8 bit, 5200 & 7800 random fruits are not "as" random on purpose. On other versions, once you pass the banana, you can get any fruit/prize. On the Atari ports, you can get only a fruit that appears from the level you begin the game at so if you start at Banana, then you only see bananas the entire game.

Here are the approximate number of dots per each maze (didn't double check my numbers)

System	(maze 1)	(maze 2)	(maze 3)	(maze 4)
Apple][(194)	(210)	(222)	(212)
Atari 2600	(146)	(146)	(154)	(150)
Atari 5200/8 bit	(194)	(218)	(216)	(208)
Atari 7800	(214)	(236)	(230)	(I forgot?)
Commodore 64	(194)	(222)	(214)	(206)
TI-99	(178)	(194)	(186)	(188)
Vic 20	(198)	(249)	(229)	(248)

Your Help Needed: I am in need of the following Many Faces of games if you have them: 7800 Summer Games, Atari 8 bit Summer Games II, Apple][Decathlon & Vic 20 Lode Runner.

Come back next month, as we start a Summer long tribute to the Olympic Games, while still focusing on classics from 1984, beginning with the Many Faces of "Track & Field" on the Apple][, Atari 2600, Atari 8 bit computer, 5200 and C64. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>

NEWSBYTES

Sources: AtariAge, Digital Press, Classicgaming.com, IGN.com.

• If you enjoyed Midway's Arcade Treasures, get ready for more arcade action. This fall Midway is releasing a second arcade compilation, Arcade Treasures II, featuring more games, this time from the late 80s to mid 90s. The game list includes:

APB, Arch Rivals, Championship Sprint, Cyberball 2072, Gauntlet II, Hard Drivin, Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat II, Mortal Kombat III, NARC, Pit Fighter, Primal Rage, Rampage World Tour, Spy Hunter 2, Steel Talons, STUN Runner, Timber, Total Carnage, Wizard of Wor, Xenophobe, and Xybots.

As you can see, it's a mixture of familiar favorites and rare gems. Definitely one to look out for. It is scheduled for all three systems, and looks to go for the budget price of \$20.

• This year marks the 25th anniversary of the arcade smash Space Invaders, and this summer PlayStation 2 owners can celebrate in style. That's when Taito Corporation and Empire Interactive are going to release Space Invaders Anniversary for the PS2. This game collection will have nine different versions of the classic title:

- + Space Invaders Tabletop in Cellophane, Monochrome, and Color versions
- + Space Invaders: Upright version
- + Space Invaders Part II in Upright and Color Tabletop versions
- + Space Invaders 3D Mode
- + Space Invaders Versus Mode
- + Space Invaders Doubles Mode

No price is set, but it's a good bet it'll retail for \$20. It's scheduled for release in July.

• More Atari games are headed to your TV. Jakks Pacific announced a new addition to their TV Games lineup. Get ready for Atari Paddle Games. This time the self-contained unit is done just like an Atari paddle controller, and it's powered by batteries. You simply hook it up to the TV and you're ready to go. This unit will feature 10 games, including Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Casino, Circus Atari, Demons to Diamonds, Night Driver, Steeplechase, Street Racer, Super Breakout, Warlords, and Video Olympics. Sorry, no Kaboom. The unit is expected to go for \$20, and will be released in 1 or 2 player versions this summer. Better tune up your paddle skills. To learn more, go to the Jakks TV Games website at www.jakkstvgames.com.

• Even those of you who grew up in the NES era aren't being left out. On June 7, Nintendo is releasing the Classic NES Series for the Game Boy Advance. First they're putting out a limited-edition GBA SP that looks like an NES controller. In addition, eight NES classic are going to be re-released for the system: Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda, Donkey Kong, Ice Climber, Excite Bike, Bomberman, Xevious, and Pac-Man. Each game is said to be a very faithful port of the original NES game pak. The GBA SP unit will retail for \$99.99, while the games will go for \$20 each.

Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

This was my most popular column in Retrogaming Times: The Retrogaming Commercial Vault. Each month I spotlight a pair video game commercials that ran on TV. I show off some screen grabs of the commercials as well as some commentary on them.

The Colecovision is the subject of this month's edition. Specifically, two of the accessories released for the system, the Roller Controller and the Super Action Controllers. Coleco decided that both controllers needed commercials that have special effects. When someone used one of the controllers, something flew out of the TV screen, and the game player was surrounded by the game's scenery.

Coleco Roller Controller

My first ad is for the Coleco Roller Controller, a trackball device Coleco released for the Colecovision. In this ad, we see a gameplayer using the Roller Controller to play Slither, the game that comes with the controller. Suddenly a pterodactyl flies out of the screen, and the young lad finds himself in the desert. The the ad shows the Roller Controller can be used for other games as well.

"Introducing the Colecovision Roller Controller. With it, your vision expands. Now, speed all over the screen. Fire up or down. it comes with Slither as a bonus. But it doesn't stop there. It makes arcade games like Pepper more peppy, spaceships travel at the speed of light, and apes go ape. Expand your vision with the Roller Controller. Because your vision is our vision! Colecovision!"

PICTURES:



This isn't just a trak-ball...



Coming at ya!



Bring the game into your living room.



Another shot of this amazing controller.



The eyes of a serious Coleco player.



"Cuse me, I need to go home now."

Gee, what happens if we pop in Space Fury? Will we suddenly find ourselves in the vacuum of space? Better not chance it.

Super Action Controller

On the other side of the Coleco Spectrum, we have an ad for the Super Action Contrrollers, Coleco's super-complicated controllers that try to do too much at once. This time we find two game players firing up Super Action Baseball, which came with the controllers. A baseball flies out of the screen, and they find themselves at a baseball stadium. The ad then runs down some of the sports games that use the controllers.

"Introducing the Colecovision Super Action Controller Set. With it, your vision expands. Now, play all Colecovision games, and new Super Action Baseball, Boxing, and Football. Plot strategies in advance, offense and defense. It's the first controller to move four individual players at once. And you get Super Action Baseball as a bonus. Expand your vision with the Super Action Controller Set. Because your vision is our vision! Colecovision!"

PICTURES:



These kids are about to try and have fun.



Hit one right out of the TV!



This isn't Yankee Stadium.



Check out this keypad that thinks we're playing an Intellivision.



And the buttons that require the whole hand to use.



The baseball does not want to be associated with the controllers.

I bet many of you still passed on the Super Action Controllers and the games that used them.

That's all for this month. If you want more commercial goodness, I recently released the Retrogaming Commercial Vault CD, a CD-Rom with 60 video clips you can play on your computer. If interested, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com for all the details.

For all you NES fans out there, you can find Nintendo commercials at my website, NES Times, which can be found at come.to/nestimes

Vic 20 Reviews - for the new RTM

by [Tonks](#)

Want to buy a Vic 20? Well let me give you a little advice on what to look for and how much you should be prepared to spend.

The Vic 20 was released in 1981 and ceased being manufactured in 1984, so no matter what model you find, it is going to be over 20 years old. I just think it is good to keep in mind that you are really buying an antique piece of electronics. Things can corrode. Dust can heat up and cause things to burn out. There are a number of problems that can happen to old computer systems.

With so many games and programs released on tape, it is also important that you understand that tape software can be notoriously unreliable. I have bought stacks of tapes that just will not load up. The main two problems seem to be that either heat has caused the tape to warp slightly, or that the actual tape itself has corroded.

Because the Vic 20 has never been as popular as many other systems, prices remain reasonably low, particularly for an unboxed system. On eBay, a fully boxed Vic 20 can fetch up to \$40US, but they usually sell for a lot less. Just watching auctions over the last couple of weeks, I have seen unboxed systems with a dozen or so games go for as little as \$9US. What you are prepared to pay for a Vic 20 will depend on whether you are keen on having the box or not.

Something to really be careful about is ensuring the Vic 20 you are thinking of buying comes with a working RF modulator. Unlike the C64, you cannot just plug in an RF lead from the computer to the TV. The Vic 20 has its own dedicated RF modulator, which can be very hard to replace or find one on its own. The Vic's RF modulator seems to be prone to breaking. Every Vic 20 I have ever bought has worked fine as far as the computer is concerned, but the RF modulator is another story all together. I currently have 14 Vic 20s, but only 6 working RF modulators.

The Vic 20's Dataset can also cause a few problems. Over time the heads can become out of alignment. This will cause many loading hassles. Often games saved on one Dataset won't load on another due to the different head alignment. This all can be fairly easy to fix if you know what you are doing, but I just wonder how many people have thrown away Datasets thinking they are busted when all they need is a little re-aligning.

It is good to know that the Vic 20 is fully compatible with the C64's Dataset. However, steer clear of Datasets made for the C16 or Plus 4. They look alike, but their connections are very different.

The Vic 20 has one joystick port on the right hand side of the machine. It is the same 9-pin D-plug used by computers and consoles such as the Commodore 64, Commodore Amiga, Atari 2600, Atari 8-bit and Atari ST.

If you are thinking of buying a Vic 20, I hope this basic information helps you in your search for a good system. And when you do find one, I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Now on to a few reviews. For this series of reviews I thought I would cover a few car racing games. There are not that many available, but are those that are, are they any good?????

POLE POSITION

You would almost expect Pole Position to be near impossible to do on the Vic 20. But what you actually have is a very good translation of the classic racing game. Graphically the game lacks a little colour, but overall it is fairly impressive. To help the speed of the game, some roadside graphics have been left out such as road signs and trees, but to be honest I never noticed for a long time. Speed therefore is good, and there is only a small amount of flicker when you overtake another car. Sound is good, maybe even very good considering the Vic's limited sound capabilities. All up this is a very good conversion, and one that I think may surprise many people.

My Score - 8/10

ROAD RACE

Road Race is said to be Commodore's clone of "Night Driver". Taking this into account, what you have is an excellent translation of the arcade classic, and it is certainly an improvement on the graphically poor Atari 2600 version. However, the game becomes quite boring as there is a lack of variation in the gameplay. You just drive down the road until you crash. Controls are interesting. Your car has four gears, and you use the four "Function" buttons to change gears. But pressing two buttons to steer left and right just doesn't feel right to me. I wonder how the game could have been improved if you could use the paddle controllers instead??

My Score - 6/10

DEATH RACE

Here is a great car racing game. When I was about 16 I got an 8k memory expansion for my Vic 20. I was wrapped and very excited about the potential games I could get. The very first game I bought was Death Race, and I was certainly not disappointed. Death Race has you racing against the clock to the finish line. But getting there can be very difficult. Your car can certainly go fast enough, but the many opponents you face make your job quite difficult. Graphics are very good. They are blocky, but they are nice and colourful and give a very nice 3D effect to the driving experience. There is also plenty of variety in the graphics as you drive through cities, the desert and the country side. Sound too is good, although most sounds are just simple white noise effects. All up, one of the better racing games available, but please note that this is a tape game and it is extremely hard to find.

My Score - 8/10

ROAD RACER

Road Racer is a very generic game. There were possibly hundreds of games just like this released for

the Vic 20, just with a different name and slightly different graphics. Your car sits at the bottom of the screen and can move left and right. Other cars scroll down the screen and you must dodge them. There are no gears, no speed acceleration, no variation in gameplay what so ever. As a kid a game like this was a bit of fun, but today I find this very boring. Sadly a lot of tape software was like this, cheap and shoddy, giving the Vic 20 a bad name.

My Score - 3/10



Death Race



Road Racer

8-bit Face Off

by Adam King

This was a new column I was starting when Retrogaming Times closed up shop. Here I take a look at a game title that was released for both the Nintendo Entertainment System and the Sega Master System, compare the two, and decide which system has the better version. This will mainly concentrate on arcade ports, though certain computer games made their way to both systems, so they'll be featured as well.

This is the third round to the Face Off. In the first round, I compared both system's versions of Double Dragon, and the NES version won out. In the second round, Ghostbusters was on the grill, and the Master System took the victory there. Let's see what happens in Round 3.

This month is a look at Ms. Pac-Man. Since Alan already covered the earlier versions for the Atari systems, I'll pick up with the NES and Sega carts. Tengen, the company that did the conversions, was nice enough to give both systems ports of the arcade games, and they both have the same features. And there are quite a few options, other than 1-or-2 players. You can select your difficulty, ranging from Easy to Crazy, and you can choose your starting level up to 7. Be warned; at level 7 the power dots WILL NOT WORK! Also, if you want more than just the standard Arcade levels, you can pick a set of big, small, and strange mazes. Finally there's a helpful ability you can toggle called the Pac Booster. Press or hold one of the buttons and Ms. Pac will get a burst of speed. This helps you outrun the ghosts, but be careful you don't fly out of control.

In case you're wondering, the Sega version of Ms. Pac-Man was not released in the US, only in Europe. Keep in mind that almost any Master System game in the world is compatible with any Master System console in the world. In other words most European games CAN be played on an American Master System. So this column will also be a service for all those importers out there, telling you whether it's worth your time or money.

Ms. Pac-Man NES (1990 Tengen)

This is one of the best arcade conversions I've ever seen for the NES. The graphics are nearly arcade perfect; most of the colors are off, but the characters and mazes still look the way they should. If you remember, the original arcade cabinet used a vertical monitor for the screen. Rather than squish the graphics to fit it on one screen, Tengen decided to have the maze be two screens long. The game scrolls up and down as you go from the upper and lower parts. While this helps keep the arcade look intact, it can also lead to a few problems. You may think you have all the dots, when there's one or two off screen. The sounds are also very close to the arcade version, and they never get annoying. The controls work very well in this version as well. The various options really add a lot of replayability to this game, and beside, Ms. Pac-Man is still fun to play today.

Ms. Pac-Man SMS (1991 Tengen)

As I mentioned, the gameplay is almost the same as the NES version. This port also uses the scrolling screen, with the same pluses and minuses. However, the graphics are another story. Thing is, you figure with the graphical prowess of the Master System, having arcade-perfect graphics should be no problem. For some reason Tengen decided to tweak the graphics, giving everything a 3D-ish look, but it doesn't come off so well. The sprites don't look very good, and the mazes don't look like the arcade game at all. The layout is the same. On the other hand you do get a good picture of Ms. Pac-Man on the title screens. Many of the sound effects don't match the arcade version either, but

aren't too bad. Again the controls are okay. This cart still features the same classic Ms. Pac-Man gameplay, and still turns out to be a great port.

Analysis

Another tough call. Both versions are first-rate conversions, especially since the same developer worked on both carts. However, I didn't go for the Sega's "updated" graphics. The NES version, on the other hand, has graphics that are very close to the original arcade game. Therefore the NES version gets the nod by a slight margin.

Winner: NES

MAME Reviews

by Brett "smsforce" Burnell

Hi! I'm the new guy around here and until I find my "niche" for this magazine (or Tom takes them back over), I'm going to do a few MAME reviews for you. To start things off, I'm going to review 3 of the known legal ROMs for MAME. They are Gridlee, Poly Play, and Robby Roto. You can find them by searching on Google or just going to this link where I found them (<http://www.mameworld.net/legal.html>). Also make sure you download the samples for Gridlee at this link: <http://www.mame.net/dwnsamples.html>. Now, on to business! This month I will focus on Gridlee.

Gridlee (copyright © 1983 Vide)



The original Gridlee arcade cabinet



"...and the rockets red glare..."

Gridlee is a 2D/3D game in which you exist on a plane that disappears into the horizon. Your character, Gridlee (an aardvark?), moves on a small grid, catching various colored balls while avoiding the bad guys (Yumperz, Fergies, Rainbow snails, charged squares, etc.) The track ball moves your character left, right, forward, and backward to catch bouncing balls on the grid. Use the fire button to blast bad guys coming towards you and entering the grid. HINT: Watch their shadows.

The object of the game is to shoot all the bad guys when they are directly overhead. Unfortunately, if you miss them and they land on you or "charge" the square you're on, you're dead. The level is completed when all the bad guys are terminated. On level 3, the Yumperz become Fergies (frogs) that can jump farther than the previous bad guys. They are also faster than the Yumperz. Yumperz are worth 200 points each and Fergies are worth 400 points each.

At various points during gameplay, tiny "rainbow snails" will move horizontally across the grid. They'll kill you if they touch you, so stay away from them as well. Igor (500 points) will also appear and "gum up" one of your squares unless you kill him first.

The red balls that appear are worth 100 points each and are pretty easy to "catch." After you catch 3 red balls, a green ball comes out and it's worth 500 points. The green balls speed things up and the bad guys now leave each square they jump on as permanently charged. If you don't hurry, you can easily paint yourself into a corner and be dead before you know it. The last "ball" looks like a spark. It's worth 1,000 points.

I actually found this game quite entertaining. The background graphics were a little generic (think Activision's "Beam Rider"), but the sprites are very colorful and "cartoon-like." The sounds are ample but can be annoying at times. As of MAME 0.82, the sound is still not 100% emulated properly, so that just may be the problem. The game reminds me a lot of "Q*Bert." The game is not hard, but not too easy on the early levels either. It quickly becomes more difficult as you progress. The gameplay can become a wee bit monotonous, but I guarantee that you won't be bored because the action is too

slow! Overall, I'd say it's a fun game to play if you are looking for something new to try. **FINAL SCORE: 7/10**

Gridlee Trivia:

Only one actual working Gridlee machine was ever produced and Dale Luck currently owns it.

Brett Burnell is an Applications Developer for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In his free time he can be seen programming video games, being a referee for Twin Galaxies, going to Retrogaming shows, or just playing with his kids. His official website is at www.smsforce.com. He can be reached at smsforce@smsforce.com

Sites of the Month

This is where we spotlight retrogaming-related websites that you definitely should check out.

Space Taxi 2

That's right, the Commodore 64 classic has received a modern sequel, thanks to Twilight Games. This new version features 24 new levels with updated graphics. They're selling it for \$20 US, but you can try out a demo version for FREE. Check out the details and some screenshots at:

http://www.twilightgames.com/spacetaxi/spacetaxi_info.htm

TI-99/4A Videogame House!

Now die-hards of the Texas Instruments 99/4 computers have a place to go online. At this site, created by Toucan - aka Bryan Roppolo Boulder, you can find some information on TI games, including screen shots, box art, and trivia. You can even help out in the project as well. You can find this site at:

<http://www.videogamehouse.net/>

If you have a website that you think should be considered for Sites of the Month, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com and I'll check it out.

Join the Elite - Atari 2600 Star Fire Elite Squadron
by Alan Hewston

Time is running out! Act now if you want to join the Elite Star Fire Squadron. Star Fire is a 1979 arcade game made by Exidy, ported to the 2600 as a homebrew in 2003 by Xype. This game is promoted and distributed exclusively by AtariAge.

See the members of the Elite Squadron at:
<http://www.atariage.com/2600/archives/StarFireEliteSquadron/index.html>

Hurry! There's only room for about 13 more members to join this elite high score list. Order your cartridge ASAP. Only the first 50 players to purchase this 2003 homebrew cartridge and then submit proof of their high score (3500 or more points) will earn the patch. Send in your score electronically (digital picture) and you may even get you patch and acceptance letter in the mail that same week. This is a great promotion, ala the Activision patches, but in this case, these patches will be much rarer.

Note that Xype spelled backwards is Epyx. And if you read some of the Retrogaming Times 2600 reviews in last month's issue, then you know that Xype programmers have made some pretty darn good homebrews.

To learn more about the game, and how to purchase 2600 Star Fire, visit AtariAge at:
http://www.atariage.com/software_page.html?SoftwareLabelID=2385

Manuel Rotschkar (Programmer), Thomas Jentzsch (Programmer), Paul Slocum (Music)

These guys did a great job as the arcade game would seem to be beyond the capabilities of the 2600 - but this is not so. This is a very well-programmed and challenging game for the 2600. If you have the game but have not submitted your score of 3500 points. Then try, try again. Yes, I know it is frustrating, but you've gotta try again. Play level 9 for about half an hour to practice then begin from level one and see how much better you are. But first, you need to figure out how the diamonds work - not told in the manual. If you can at least partially figure them out, then you'll surely improve your score. If you can reach 3200 points, then you are really close. It will only take one lucky streak or a little more skill and you'll crack 3500. Keep trying.



My personal best - possibly still a World Record.

PS: If you can score 3500 or more on an emulator, then what are you waiting for? Order the cart today and submit your score - get the FREE patch and recognition.

Alan Hewston, Elite Squadron member #35 can be reached at Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net If this article helps to motivate you to buying this great cartridge or to finally cracking the 3500 barrier, then drop me a line and tell me so. If you can beat my score, be sure to tell me that as well.

Conclusion

Well it's time to bring this newsletter to a close. I hope everyone enjoyed this first issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. We're not sure how long we're going to continue this. We're going to aim for 20 issues, and once there, we'll see what happens.

Before we go, we'd like to give a final shout out to Tom Zjaba, saying thanks for seven great years or Retrogaming goodness, and thanks for allowing us to continue your work. We hope to hear from you soon, Tom. I also hope to hear from you, the readers. If you've got questions, comments, submissions, and so on, click on my name below.

Until next month, keep on gaming!

- [Adam King](#), Head Editor

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