

Review

NASCAR SimRacing

SimHQ presents a week-long series on one of the most important simulations ever produced for Motorsports. Part 1 covers the manual, GUI, installation, menus, replay studio, graphics and sound.

by **Chunx** and **Jens "McGonigle" Lindblad**

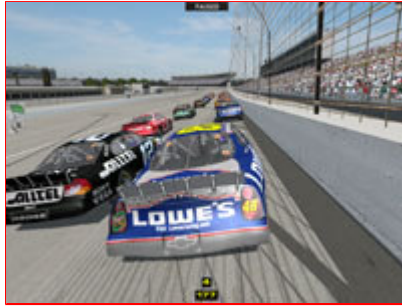


Introduction

NASCAR SimRacing (NSR) represents a benchmark event in the history of NASCAR motorsports simulation titles. Benchmark because it is EA's first attempt at a true "simulation" PC-only title since acquiring exclusive rights to NASCAR game titles, and benchmark because it represents the first NASCAR simulation title to emerge since the demise of revered NASCAR simulation developer Papyrus in 2004. As a result of EA's acquisition and Papy's demise, emotions will run high in the hearts of hard-core motorsports simulation fans as we explore this new title, to see if it is truly worthy of the title "simulation" and if it delivers on EA's promise — a promise built into the very title of the game.



Because this is such a landmark event for Motorsports fans, we wanted to do right by our readers when reviewing this title. So, we'll be looking long and hard at how this game works and feels and in the process try to give you a better understanding of just what this new title is all about and how it measures up to its predecessors — or redefines the genre. So, without further adieu, here goes Part I of SimHQ's in-depth review of NSR. As Darryl Waltrip would say, *"Boogity boogity boogity, boys. Let's go (virtual) racin'!"*



Background

The story made the news headlines at SimHQ and all the other Motorsport simulation web sites. It was the "buzz" at a plethora of racing forums... At the 24 April, 2004 Busch series race in Talladega, Martin Truex Jr.'s Crew Chief let the cat out of the bag — that Dale Earnhart Jr. and Martin Truex Jr. used "a racing game" with the "Talladega-BR mod" (one of **BrianRing's** 3rd party track mods), to practice driving before race day. In fact, it was leaked that Dale Jr. and Truex Jr. used this racing game a lot and that to a certain extent Dale Jr. "discovered" Truex Jr.'s talents through that same, unnamed racing game. Similarly, Kurt Busch admitted while doing color commentary for a Busch race last year that, to a very limited extent, he too used that certain racing game to re-familiarize himself with a track's layout before arriving to start race week. That "racing game" had to remain unnamed on national TV because EA held the exclusive rights to NASCAR games — and the game was not an EA product. But the hard-core simmers around the world all knew that "game" was Papyrus' NASCAR Racing 2003 Season.



While anyone familiar with simulators knows that there are obvious limits to how much value a simulator has in preparing someone for a real activity, the fact that some drivers used a PC simulation at all — specifically NR2003 (with some modifications) — added a lot of credibility to Papy's reputation, while taking the gloss out of EA's then current product, NASCAR Thunder 2004.

With all the hype from EA and the hiring of some former Papyrus team members, the Motorsports staff at SimHQ hoped that EA was hell-bent to increase the credibility of its NASCAR titles by setting a new standard of realism with NSR — not just with the rank and file consumer in mind, but with the actual drivers themselves.

Jens and Chunx have put their personal lives on hold for the past few weeks in order to thoroughly wring out NSR and see how it stacks up as NASCAR's latest and greatest racing simulation.



Product Packaging

Box Art and Contents

Nicely done, professional looking packaging art that fits within the theme of all EA Sports products. The box art features Ryan Newman's #12 Alltel Dodge Charger, which is something the game graphics can't claim. The box recommends 3GB of hard drive space to install game and the software comes contained on a 2 CD-ROM set.

Manual

A professionally produced game manual can add so much to the enjoyment, flavor and reputation of a simulation title. Of course, over the years we've seen game producers look for ways to maximize profits by cutting costs and one way to do that has been to trim the size of hard copy manuals and the research and production costs that go into making them. Possibly there's a pervasive stereotype in the game by marketing world that most gamers are not interested in reading. So it's not any surprise today when your hard-core simulation title ships with such a lackluster manual. While teenage console gamers might not care for a robust game manual, it is not so for hard-core simulation fans. We thoroughly enjoyed the 400 page manual for Falcon 4.0, the history filled manual for MiG Alley and found the strategy guide for GPL, "Four Wheel Drift" to be a very helpful and entertaining piece of literature in its own right. These publications were of such high quality that some of us brought them along on business travel or used them for bedtime reading, so we could still savor our hobby when away from the gaming PC. We also appreciate a hard copy manual because we don't like to read documents from a PC screen or print out reams of pages in PDF files. It can give you a headache and it's virtually impossible to quickly "flip pages" and scan around for facts when a manual is presented as a software document.

So, you could say our standards for hard-copy game manuals are pretty high. But we're also realistic about today's simulation marketplace and so we didn't expect a great manual from a new title like NSR. However, what we got was *far below* even our most meager expectations. The hard copy manual is, in a word, inadequate. Printed on low-weight paper stock in black and white, the skimpy 4½" x 7" manual is only 20 pages in length (including the front and back cover). Two of those pages are filled with fine print 'legalese' about the warranty. Pages 5-13 are filled with block charts barely explaining each configurable item in the Advanced Car Setup section of the game and how changing that setting may impact the handling of the car. This is the most helpful part of the manual since there are no "tool tips" in the game, allowing you to rest your mouse on (or right click on)

an item to gain more information about it. The manual is the only way to know how the advanced setup process works. The remainder of the manual guides you through installation, key commands and basic operation of the game's various modules. However, like EA's other recent racing sims, some key commands are left out of the printed documentation. One of these commands is an important one to hard core simmers — how to display the game's frame rate on the screen (Ctrl F).

Incredibly, no mention is made to playing TCP/IP multiplayer in the manual. Only LAN multiplayer — and that comprises a mere half-page content. That probably explains why EA has posted a download PDF [here](#) called *Online 101*. But even it leaves a bit to be desired. More on the multiplayer aspect of NSR later.

The Bottom Line: NSR's "manual" -- or should we say *pamphlet*? -- has only the absolute basics to get you started in the game and only mentions features or views without describing them or how to use them, or where certain features can be accessed. Shame on EA for producing such a poor excuse for a manual.

Game Interface

Installation

The installation guide recommends turning off all Anti-Virus software before installing. Just for the sake of argument, Chunx tried it with Norton AV Auto Protect running and had no problems with installation of the game. YMMV.

Surprisingly, the install process is a bit out-of-sequence from other titles we've tried over the years. Right off the bat, NSR insists you register the game with EA via the internet. In fact, you **MUST** register the game in order to play online. The registration process is very elaborate, with fancy GUI's, lots of glitzy animations and graphics and in our opinion a lot of intrusive questions that must be answered to complete the process. Included in the registration process was a 'hard sell' request to complete a survey, in order to have access to some 'free' EA goodies. For those at EA, we'll say this: We understand about the problems of software piracy in today's broadband, online world, but this registration process was excessive and intrusive and registering the game in this way actually diminished the enthusiasm for playing the game later on. To round off the picture, Jens got about halfway in this survey and was then informed that there was a problem with the server. Try again later... guod tells us he didn't get that far in registering the first three times he tried. He saw "server problems, try again later" for over two hours until finally connecting through. Hopefully EA has those issues resolved now.



The rest of the install was quite normal and the process finishes with an offer to start the game. When clicking on 'yes' the user is prompted to re-insert disk #1. Oddly, you need disk #1 in your optical drive in order to play the game. Chunx dutifully inserted Disk #1, let it spin up and clicked "OK." And then... nothing happened. The game didn't start. No big deal, as his Momo settings needed configuration, anyway. However, this poor performance of such a minor and simple feature of the installation process was surprising, coming from a company like EA. It looked a bit unprofessional.

When you pop the NSR CD #1 into your optical drive, you get a handy game start GUI, that offers options to

automatically check for updates (nope, there weren't any updates), uninstall the game, visit the EA Sports main web site, check the Readme.txt file, or do some Troubleshooting on your computer.

We checked out the Troubleshooting feature and discovered that it's actually a neat little tool to assess your computer.

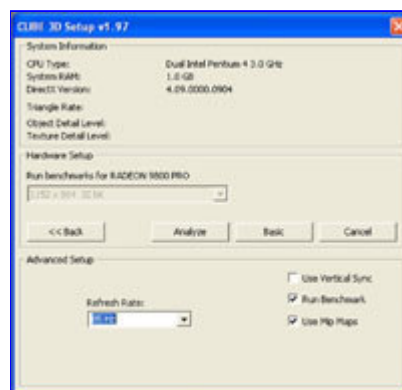


The "automatic update" button was certainly a nice touch and hopefully, someday soon it will take you to EA's web site for the latest patch. However, since there are no patches for this game currently available, we're unable to test the functionality of this feature.

Starting Up

After setting up your controller's profile for NSR (assuming you use profiling software), it's best to run the game's 3D Setup utility. Looking almost identical to F1C's utility, it also contains a handy benchmarking tool to evaluate your PC and its current settings for their ability to draw texture triangles as it calibrates the game. Performing the NSR benchmarking test at the above listed settings, Chunx' Dell / Radeon was able to deliver 51.0 million triangles per second. His homebuilt / GeForce was able to deliver 64.5 million triangles per second.

Jens did some additional tinkering with the 3D setup utility and found that the amount of triangles drawn varied by 1.5 Mtri/sec when trying all screen resolutions between 1024x768x16 and 1280x1024x32. For his system, the lowest score was 27.3 and highest was 28.8. This no doubt indicates that a new graphics card will be in Jens' future! For now, Jens found a fairly happy compromise between performance and graphical quality at 1152x84x32 @ 85MHz, no AA.



This tweaking disclosed a surprising fact: Jens found that starting out at 1280x1024x32 resulted in the in-game options for graphical detail was grayed out and inaccessible. Going down to 1152x86x32 meant that these settings were now accessible and suddenly the rather dull 2D wheel-rims became nice-looking 3D and car texture

detail could be bumped up.

Starting up the game, you are presented with the standard "EA Sports - It's In The Game" video clip, followed by a random selection of a host of brief videos featuring various Nextel Cup drivers endorsing the game while standing in front of their cars, a trio of young ladies and another character or two.

While glitzy, we'd have traded the budget money for these time-wasting video bites for a better manual. While we can't do that, it's easy to remove these files from the game's "movie" folder, thereby speeding up the game start process and slimming the install by almost 70MB.



NSR's Menu



My NASCAR

The first order of the day, like any racing simulation, is to build your driver profile for the game. This is typically where your setups, car skin preference and in-game video, audio and controller settings will be stored. Such is the case in NSR. One of the steps in this process is to select a car to drive. The game ships with the top three NASCAR series: Nextel Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck and you can select vehicles from each of these to build your driver profile. Something that'll jump out immediately to any knowledgeable NASCAR fan is that the 2005 Nextel series cars are, in fact, merely a rehash of the 2004 cars. A few 2005 drivers have been added to the roster, but the cars, numbers and team paint schemes for them are incorrect. In addition, driver/team pairings are still in their 2004 format such as Brendan Gaughn in the 77 Jasper car, instead of this year's Travis Kvapil. Most notably, the Dodge cars in the game's 2005 Nextel stable are all Intrepids versus the current Charger bodywork. This was more surprising than inaccurate paint schemes and driver pairings, because the Charger bodywork is significantly different from the Intrepid and was announced at the end of last season, long before this title went gold. In fact, for other NASCAR titles, 3rd party modders months ago produced new 3D models (and accurate paint schemes) for the Charger. No doubt the 3rd party folk made their Charger shape and skins in their free time, so one has to wonder why the EA modelers were unable to fulfill the 2005 season's car requirements.



Another minor annoyance in selecting a car for your profile is the selection format. You can only sequence through the cars available, not select from a list. This means that you have to *click, click, click, click* your way through the available cars in order to find the one you want, rather than just selecting it from a listing. This is fine if you're just browsing the cars, but tiresome if you're looking for a particular car. Since the entire field is represented, along with a handful of fictional cars, this can be a time consuming process.



Something we found again and again in NSR was a lack of explanation of what certain settings or functions within the GUIs do. EA could have provided details about game options and settings in the printed manual, or like some other games provided "Tool Tips." As you know, "Tool Tips" is software code that allows a user to hover their cursor over an option, which causes a text box to pop up and explain the feature. This would be very helpful feature in the game, but it's not provided. Although disappointed at the lack of tool tips in an EA game, we weren't that surprised - none of the F1 series games had it, either. But without tool tips or documentation in a manual, the first-time racer is left with a frustrating "hit or miss" process of figuring out what some of the more esoteric functions of the elaborate settings and modules are for, or how to use them. We'd love to see tool tips and a better manual appear in a future patch for this title. It needs it.

Settings

This is where you will set all of your options and preferences for graphics, controllers, sound, etc. You are also able to set the game's difficulty settings here and being the hard-core sim fans that we are, we typically drove in "Veteran" mode with all driving aids off. We knew you wouldn't have it any other way, either.



Controller Setup will look very similar to folks who've owned EA's F1C or F1 2002. Several pages of options on

**"New Replay Studio:
Replay entire races, your greatest
Hot Laps, or favorite racing moments,
then save 'em all to view later."
- EA Sports**

Controls are similar to your standard VCR/DVD player format, although in the case of NSR the replay editor is somewhat clunky and awkward in operation, and again there are no tool tips to explain what the less obvious buttons do, nor is there any explanation of the replay editor in the NSR game manual. Replay control options aren't exactly what you'd find on your VCR, so if you're looking for a traditional rewind button, forget it — there isn't any easy way to rewind other than grabbing a slider bar and pulling the replay back in time. Don't forget that when in a driving session, the Replay feature has two modes: LIVE, and Replay. Obviously, Replay is the mode wherein you can scroll back and review your laps.

You can save replays so you can study them at a later stage, or swap replays with your driving buddies.



As a former league CoC (Clerk of the Course), Jens noticed that the highest possible acceleration of the replays is 4 times normal speed and in his opinion that is not nearly fast enough. When you're responsible for looking through replays after a league event, you want to be able to fast forward to situations where you spot trouble on the track and a good way to do that is to accelerate the replay to 16x acceleration, sometimes even more, until you spot some smoke, a crash, or a yellow flag being thrown.

Replay setups are auto-saved (if you have selected that option) under a name containing information regarding the series that you ran (for example, CTS). If you saved a setup under another name, that means that one of the filtering options, that of filtering your replays by series, will fail to find the replay in question.

Speaking of replays, you can't see what lap-times you are running in the replay studio. Nor is the information available to you when you're anywhere in the testing or race weekend screens, except for a display of your fastest lap. Current and best lap time information was commonplace in Papy titles, both in the race GUI and in replay mode, and here we miss it *enormously*. It is available in the telemetry package, but we'll discuss that feature a bit further on.



Graphics

Car Skins

The cars have detailed skins with accurate paint schemes, although as we've noted the 2005 Nextel Cup cars are, incorrectly, the 2004 cars. After seeing the beautiful car skin lighting effects in F1C and NR2003, NSR's car skin effects look like a bit of a throwback to an earlier era of computer graphics. When light reflects off a car's skin in NSR, there is no "glossy" or "waxed" look to the sheen of the skin, either on paint or windows. The look is more like brushed metal than waxed paint or glass, like a hazy sheen that we see on cars in GPL, a sim with graphics code that's 7 years old.

It's quite possible that, because of earlier critique about cars looking unrealistically glossy and waxed, EA toned NSR's lighting effects down and by doing so went a bit too far.

First introduced in NASCAR Racing 2003 Season, windshields that get dirty as you drive have made a welcome comeback in NSR. With proper lighting effects at the track, dirty windshields add difficulty and drama to driving a car at high speed in tight traffic, real or virtual. We also enjoyed the way smoke and steam from the cars is portrayed on the track — when you spin, the smoke you create travels with the in-game breeze and blows over your car as a cloud — cool!

In addition, the tires and wheels look really nice on the cars, as do the skins and animations of the pit crews and NASCAR officials that you see while you're conducting a pit stop. What really impressed us was how these characters look and move during the pit stops. One neat feature is something that at first was thought to be a graphical glitch. We kept seeing a white 'flicker' on the treads of the opponent's tires at the start of a race. Then we realized — these fresh tires still had a manufacturer's sticker on the tread area — like real! (hence the nickname "stickers" for fresh rubber). In the game they wear off after a lap or so, which we thought was a neat bit of attention to detail.

Hopefully it will be easy to re-skin the cars in NSR, because having a variety of real and fictional skins was a neat feature to previous NASCAR simulations, particularly online in racing leagues. More about the paintshop later.

Car 3D Models



While there are some neat gimmicks in the graphics department of NSR, the shape of the cars isn't one of them. The overall body shapes look, well, weird. . It's hard to really put your finger on it, but something is "not kwite write" with the 3D shapes. The cars look like they're stunted in size. The bottom of the rear fender does not come down far enough (it's above rear axle line), the cars look too narrow and the ratio of length and / or width to roof height also seems a bit off. Compared with the real Nextel Cup cars, the look is clearly off-target. If anything, the cars' height-to-width / length ratio is more reminiscent of a Toyota Echo than of a Nextel Cup car. As we mentioned earlier, the Dodge cars in the NSR's 2005 season are Intrepids, when they should be Chargers. Less obvious is that the Ford Taurus' in the game are also incorrectly shaped — they have an incorrect, oval-shaped grille that hasn't been seen on that body style for a long time — long before even the 2004 season. Take a look [here](#) at this image from the web site **That's Racin'**. The difference isn't subtle, and it's disappointing that EA could produce such fine results on the tracks and cockpit graphics and yet get the car shapes so wrong and the lighting

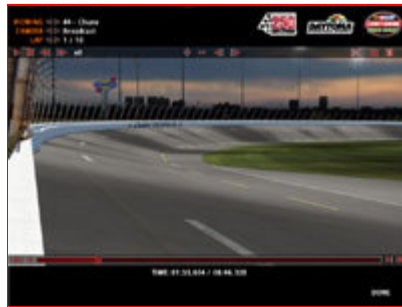
effects and skins so poorly done. The fact that the track graphics are so gorgeous makes the deficiencies of the cars all the more strikingly dramatic. Between the tracks and the cars, it almost looks like two different teams simultaneously built this game without knowing what criteria the other team was using.

Tracks

Once selected, a track loads slowly, in similar fashion to EA's F1 series of games. A track takes about 30 seconds for Chunx' two systems to load them up.

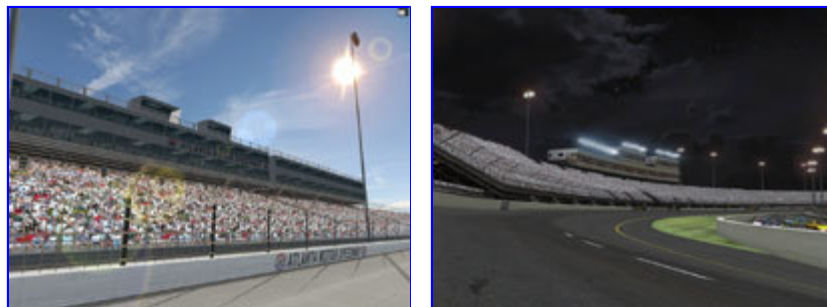
***"New High-Definition NASCAR:
29 high-resolution dynamic tracks..."
- EA Sports***

However, once the track is loaded, the look is simply gorgeous, just as touted by EA. These are really, really nice looking tracks with great graphics. And they drive really well, too. It seems like all the bumps and dips are replicated in the modeling process, and each can be 'felt' either through cockpit head shake or through Force Feedback inputs, depending on the size and severity of the dip / bump.

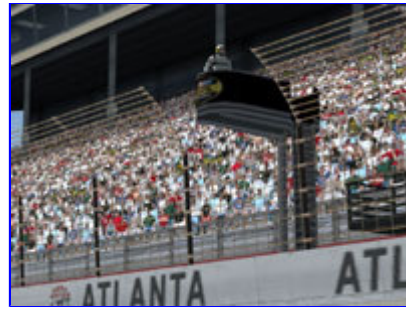


One thing Chunx noticed, however, was a lack of a large hiccup in the pavement at the end of the back straight at Lowe's Motor Speedway. It's there in NASCAR Racing 2003, and we've seen it on in-cockpit video on the real cars. It's enough to spike the rev limiter when the cars fly over it prior to entering Turn 3. The bump is noticeably absent in NSR, but it makes us wonder if the bump was 'shaved off' on the real track during the off season, or if this is one of the only "gotchas" on EA's great track recreation for this title.

On the other hand, EA picked-up Daytona's fourth turn surface irregularities that Papy missed. It's quite a surprise coming into 4 for the first time. Nice catch EA!



Shadow rendering is one of the few weak areas of the game's track graphics. Even with shadows set on "Full", track structures will cast detailed shadows on the ground, but not on the cars as they pass through them, making the cars look oddly bright as they pass a darkened area of track. That's a disappointment, since the flickering of fence pole shadows or the brief flash of darkness from a pedestrian bridge shadow in NR2003 or F1C was always a great immersion factor to recreate the sensation of speed in your virtual car. With the similarity in the overall code between NSR and F1C, this noticeable difference in shadow rendering was a surprise.



Other nice touches that add to the "gee whiz" factor in track graphics includes military plane fly-by's that the start of each race, 3D spectators that move and wave, busy pit boxes that have war wagons, pit signs and other details, and fully animated pit crews with NASCAR officials that look really nice. The only drawbacks to the pit box and crew details are that pit sign does not drop down to indicate your pit box when you come in for a stop (instead, with Full animations you get a transparent car # hanging in space where your pit sign should be), and you only get to see your animated pit crew in action during a race — during practice or testing, pulling into the pits ends that driving session, rather than watching your pit crew swap tires and put you back on the track. I also noted that my Busch team needs to buy the pit crew official team uniforms!



Views

The in-cockpit view is really well done, another beautiful piece of artwork by EA. It's the view you're likely to see the most of in NSR, and they have done the cockpit of a NASCAR racer in fine detail. And depending on your tastes, the player Field Of View can be adjusted in the Settings to angles up to 90 degrees. Chunx settled on an 85° FOV, while still retaining great frame rates, whereas Jens prefers about 78°. Brought over from F1C is head shake and "look ahead" which biases your view angle to move in the direction of steering wheel movement, a handy feature on the two road courses but of little use at the big ovals. And the cockpit components are used to add to the immersion — the dashboard cowl and vent tubes shake as you go faster, adding to the immersion level of the scene. Notice how the windshield stiffener bars cast in-cockpit shadows that play across the dashboard with the light angle (at daytime tracks only), and the cockpit instruments are in shadow or light depending on light source angle. This is nice, but when in shadow they are too dim, and you almost need instrument lights on to read them!



Other views include a "telecast" view that shifts automatically to follow your car around the track as though it were on TV, a "Chase" view that can be panned and zoomed via the keyboard's number pad, and a host of "onboard" camera views from the roof, front and rear bumper, in car, etc. All of these can be accessed either while driving or from the replay editor.

NaturalPoint's TrackIR

Regrettably, no one on the test team currently has a TrackIR system for their PC, so we were unable to test this functionality. Look for a report on the impact of TrackIR3 and Vector Expansion on NSR and other racing sims in the near future. However, the question was raised in our NSR Forum, and although EA did not provide them a Beta build of NSR to test, Jason from Natural Point reported: "Just a heads up. Vector Expansion works as advertised in NASCAR SimRacing." Although he does later mention that the official driver software for TrackIR with NSR will be version 4.0.22, others have reported that earlier version have some limited functionality in the game as well. And Jason — thanks for posting that in our forums!



Stackable Info Boxes

During a race, there's lots of info you'll want to keep track of to help "strategize" your next move or pit stop. Like other NASCAR sims before it, NSR offers a host of optional display information boxes that can be brought up on screen to help you work out your plans for the next lap.

One of the most versatile Info Boxes in NSR is the Pit Status box (F5 on your keyboard). The Pit status box allows you to adjust your pit strategy during a race, and the level of adjustments is quite extensive. Options for fuel onload, number of fresh tires and grill tape are all there, but you also have options to alter the air pressure of the next set of tires, as well as wedge and track bar settings. Scrolling through and setting these pit options is accomplished via the arrow keys on the keyboard. They can also easily be mapped to the various buttons on your steering wheel.



While we did like the large number of options available, noticed a limitation with the virtual crew chief, in that he made no 'suggestions' on pit strategy to the player. For example, in a 10 lap race, Chunx entered the pits for no reason — just to see what the pit strategy box would list for the pit stop. Even though the race was so short and tires and fuel load fresh, the pit strategy indicated a plan to add 2 cans of fuel and 4 fresh tires. In other words, the game makes no recommendations and is always at a default plan. What the game should do is adjust these

settings automatically to a recommended plan for that stop — in this case, 'no' or 'splash' of fuel, and 'no' or 'right side only' for tires. That way the player has a workable plan when he hits the F5 key, but could still override the plan if desired. Since the game defaults to a 2-can / 4 tire strategy, the player has to alter several lines of Pit Strategy inputs while driving on every pit stop.

Most of these display options are straight from NR2003, which is a good thing — if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But the added feature here is that you can have multiple info boxes up on the screen simultaneously, and that is a welcome addition to any racing sim. Just as we did with NR2003, you can put up the Tire Wear, Track Info and Leader Board boxes etc. while driving, with HOTAS functions to turn on / off the tires and track info, and one button that toggles through the three leader board functions (best lap, interval off leader, relative interval from you). Of course, in NSR you have the luxury of having all three display boxes (or more) up at the same time, which isn't always necessary but certainly a welcome option to work with.

One of the nicest features of NSR and one that every racing sim should adopt. This is great!

Weather

NSR has changing weather conditions — a feature that is very nicely done. On one occasion while Jens was racing at Watkins Glen, the skies gradually grew darker and darker until the session was brought to a stop by NASCAR officials due to rain falling! On another occasion, this time at Las Vegas, the change from clear skies to heavily overcast was so abrupt that it indicated some missing files or calculations to go in between the two extremes. Jens at first thought this might have been related to texture corruption, but apparently it's not.

One other very nice thing about the weather in NSR is that one side of the track can be in glorious sunshine while the other is in shadow or overcast. A further bonus is that unlike in previous EA titles where the weather changes could cause slight stuttering, this problem now seems to be a thing of the past.



On the other side of the coin, NSR offers no manual way to adjust wind, temperature and sky condition in order to emulate the actual conditions at a track. For example, during the 2004 season Chunx found it quite interesting to set NR2003's weather to match the actual track's weather during qualifying, and then crank up NR2003 and attempt to "qualify" in-game and see where he would have broken out in the real field. You can learn a lot about how the cars handle and what the real drivers are experiencing this way, and it can make watching real qualifying on TV a more exciting event (it made Chunx feel like more of a participant than mere spectator).

Furthermore, many on-line races fix their weather conditions to a common, set standard (clear, 70° F, no wind) so as to provide a common frame of reference when comparing lap times and set ups. This too is not possible in NSR, as track and air temperatures are out of the player's control.



Sound

Max simultaneous sounds selectable in the Sound Settings GUI are 48. Chunx tried setting the number of sounds at 44, and later at 16 as per some NSR tweak settings circulating on the Internet, but didn't notice a difference in sound quality or frame rate on his system with either setting.

GUI Music

Like EA's F1 series, NSR comes with a modern mix of music titles to entertain you while you are in the GUI screens. For NSR, the titles are mostly of the modern rock variety, with songs by Saliva, David Robidoux, Steven Wiser, Magna Fi, Papa Roach, Atomship, and even an a remix of Foghat's "Driving Wheel", all sounding vaguely reminiscent of the songs used as background for the Fox and NBC telecasts of NASCAR races (especially Robidoux' song, which is the FOX NASCAR theme). It's probably up to personal preferences if you find the titles to be a nice feature to the game, but with the age demographic of hard core simmers pushing the high end of the spectrum, some may find the alternative, "angry man rock" of some titles to be a bit grating on the ears.

***"New High-Definition NASCAR:
...3D audio delivers the roar of V8 engines."
- EA Sports***

Pre-race

TV commentator talks about the track, and walks you through the lineup for the race, although unlike F1C he only says "the number (xx) car," vice the driver's name.



Gentlemen, start your engines!

This call, which comes with all the cars lined up at the end of the pit road for the pace lap, is accompanied by crowds cheering, a military jet flyby, and the closing bars of the National Anthem, all of which are very convincingly done. The car engine and track sounds are really nice, very close to what you hear in the in-car

cameras on TV. The sound when all the engines start is awesome. When running at the restrictor plate tracks your in-car engine noises will sound very powerful and deep, although at the other tracks when your engine is running near its 9500rpm redline it tends to sound more like a band saw than an engine. When racing, the engine sounds from your opponents engines sound really good though, and add a strong level of immersive excitement to any race.

Spotter and Crew Chief

The spotter and crew chief sound captures are good in this game. The frequency, tone and wording used in their transmissions sounds a lot like what you hear on TV, although the spotter can be a bit late at times in his calls, and on occasion doesn't clearly enunciate your lap times. Overall I think the spotter and crew chief calls are an immersion enhancer for NSR, but remember to turn their volume up to 100% in the Sound Settings, because they can easily be drowned out by the other competing sounds in the game.

One humorous glitch with the spotter is his nasty habit of telling you on your first lap of any race session (practice, qualifying, happy hour, etc.) that it's the best lap you've done all day. *Gee, no kidding?!* He'll even say it when you come to a complete stop halfway round the track and complete the first lap after 10 minutes. Well, at least your spotter is optimistic! 😊

However, the spotter doesn't warn you about pit lane speed limits or blend lines. Jens says he has yet to manage not to get the warning message that a lap will not count due to some pit road infraction (although I we think what the game is telling you is that, when you cross the start / finish line on pit road, your lap time is invalid, not that you've had a rules violation). But the way it's worded, you can't be sure you haven't done something wrong.

Miscellaneous

Sometimes the smallest things can have a very strong impact. Such is the case with a little cursor noise provided with this game. As your passes over various menu options in the GUIs, or when you click to select various tabs or settings in the Garage GUI while altering your setup, or you get a little "jingle" noise that sounds like a cross between rattling coins and dropping BBs on a glass surface. After a few moves of the cursor, you'll come to rally hate the noise. It's aggravating and grating on the ears in almost no time. Luckily, I think it's easy to delete from the game's Audio / Options folder, so I highly recommend you avoid the pain and suffering this seemingly innocuous "_click_garage.wav" file can cause and either delete it or find a suitable replacement for it.

One SimHQ forum reader reports that 5.1 speaker support is not implemented in NSR. We only had access to 2.1 speakers at home, but if anyone has more on this we'd love to hear about it in our forums.

In **Part 2** of SimHQ's **NASCAR SimRacing** Review we will look at car handling, damage modeling and controllers.

Reviewer's System Specs

Chunx used two systems in testing NSR.

Dell Dimension 8300

- Operating System: Windows XP Home SP 1A
- CPU: Intel P4 3.0Ghz
- Motherboard: Intel 875
- HDD: 80 GB, 7,200 rpm Ultra ATA 133
- Optical Drives: DVD-ROM & CD-RW
- Video: Radeon 9800 128 MB (Catalyst v4.11)

- Settings: 4x FSAA, 4x AF, High Quality
- Monitor: Dell 19" CRT
- Resolution: 1152x864x32bit @ 85Hz
- Audio: Creative Audigy 2
- RAM: 1024MB DDR
- NIC: Integrated 3Com 100 MB/sec on DSL
- Controller: Logitech Momo Racing FF Wheel

Homebuilt

- Operating System: Windows XP Pro SP 2
- CPU: Intel P4 3.0GHz
- Motherboard: Asus P4C800 Deluxe
- HDD: Western Digital Raptor 74 GB, 10,000 rpm SATA
- Optical Drives: Sony 48x CD-ROM & Plextor 16x DVD+/-RW
- Video: PNY Verto GeForce 6800GT 256 MB (Forceware v66.93)
- Settings: 8xS FSAA, 8x AF, High Quality
- Monitor: Dell EH171 17" LCD
- Resolution: 1152x864x32bit @ 60Hz
- Audio: Creative Audigy 2 ZS
- RAM: 1024MB DDR Corsair PC3200
- NIC: Integrated 3Com 100MB/sec on DSL
- Power Supply: Antec TruePower 480W
- Controller: Logitech Momo Racing FF Wheel

Jens "McGonigle" Lindblad

Micromax

- Operating System: Windows XP Home SP1
- CPU: Intel P4 2.5GHz
- Optical Drive: Pioneer DVD-RW DVR-105
- Video: NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti 4200 128MB (Detonator v61.77)
- Settings: No FSAA, No AF, High Quality
- Monitor: Compaq 21" CRT
- Resolution: 1280x1024x32bit @ 85Hz
- Audio: On-board Realtek AC97 Audio (5.10.0000.4500)
- RAM: 512 MB DDR
- NIC: ISDN
- Controller: Logitech Driving Force Pro FF Wheel

guod

Homebuilt

- Operating System: Windows XP Professional SP 2
- CPU: AMD A64 3800
- MoBo: Asus A8V
- HDD: 40GB Western Digital - 8MB cache
- Optical Drive: Sony CRX225-E CD-RW
- Video: PNY Verto GeForce 6800GT 256 MB (Forceware v66.93)
- Settings: 4x FSAA, 8x AF High Quality

- Monitor: Sony E400 19"
 - Resolution: 1280x1024x32bit @ 85Hz
 - Audio: Realtek AC97 onboard
 - RAM: 1024MB DDR - 3200 Corsair LL
 - NIC: onboard w/ broadband cable
 - Power Supply: Antec TruePower 550W
 - Controller: Logitech Momo Racing FF Wheel
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