

Video Game Reviews: Off-road racing game is no stick-in-the-mud

by *Jeb_Haught*

Game: "MotorStorm"

Publisher: Sony

System: Sony PlayStation 3

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

Facing souped-up competition from rival Nintendo and Microsoft consoles, Sony needs exclusive, killer titles to lure gamers to the PlayStation 3. Sony's off-road racing game, "MotorStorm," may do it.

The game delivers more than enough high-speed, nail-biting controlled mayhem to satisfy any racing fan. This may very well be the dirtiest game ever created. Nearly every racing track has a short route to follow, but they include knee-deep mud. The slop favors larger vehicles such as trucks and big rigs. But there are alternate routes for mud-challenged vehicles, such as motorcycles and buggies.

'MOTORSTORM' - 'MotorStorm' is more than enough high-speed mayhem to satisfy any racing fan. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony.

RACING FUN - Part of the fun of 'MotorStorm' is racing different vehicle types against each other. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony.

'SSX BLUR' - 'SSX Blur' is a Wii-exclusive snowboarding game. This version adds the unique Wii controllers for everything from performing tricks to maintaining balance. CNS Photo courtesy of EA Big.

A NEW SPIN - In 'SSX Blur,' when you tilt the left controller, it steers the character left. Pushing up on the control stick increases speed. CNS Photo courtesy of EA Big.

While there are only a handful of courses in the game, using different vehicles and taking alternative routes on the same course creates new experiences. In addition, part of the fun of "MotorStorm" is racing different vehicle types against each other. Granted, a motorcycle racing a big rig may not seem fair, but a skilled player driving the smaller, speedier "prey" can easily outmaneuver any high-octane giant.

Taking this title online is even more fun than the single-player mode. Up to a dozen mud-caked lunatics can compete at once. Each game host is free to set up whichever rules, vehicles and levels they choose, so feel free to go wild.

On the downside, "MotorStorm" won't let players access options in the start menu during play. Even last-generation games let us adjust sound and game options without having to restart the game. Also, a freestyle level where players could experiment and even pull tricks would really enhance the replay value.

Game: "SSX Blur"

Publisher: EA Big

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: \$50

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

With the torrent of mini-game-oriented Wii titles subsiding, it was a nice surprise to receive a Wii-exclusive snowboarding game. "SSX Blur" is not only made by EA Big, which created the "SSX" series, but this version adds the unique Wii controllers for everything from performing tricks to maintaining balance.

Tilting the left controller steers the character left and right, while pushing up on the control stick increases speed. Snapping up on the left controller launches the snowboarder. When in the air, moving the right controller left or right performs a spin, while moving it up or down makes the snowboarder flip.

All of this may seem daunting at first, but the controls start to feel natural after a short while. Performing ubertricks is very difficult, because the player has to actually draw shapes in the air while holding down a specific button. (If they were easy to do, they wouldn't be uber, now, would they?) Because some ubertricks aren't listed, experimentation can yield rewarding hidden maneuvers.

Players are free to bust phat tricks all over the mountain in assorted races, slope-style, big-air and half-pipe competitions, as well as swishing through slalom courses, exploring the back country in free-ride and trying any of a wide variety of challenges.

Even though some of the characters and courses are recycled from past "SSX" titles and the game lacks online play, "SSX Blur" on the Wii is a blast.

RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

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