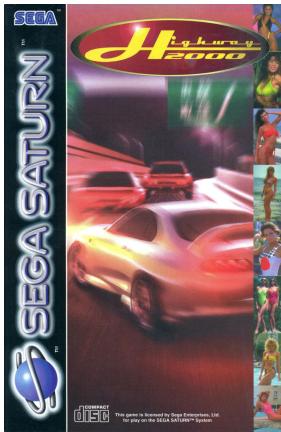


Highway 2000 Review

By Mark Ceccato

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Developer: Genki
Publisher: JVC
Platform: SEGA Saturn
Released: 1996

Highway 2000 is one of those games that just by looking at the cover, you can take a guess as to what it's actually like. The right-hand side of the front cover is littered with photos of girls in swimsuits and upon checking out the back to see what the screen shots are like, you are presented with 2 out of the 4 being of more girls, which only appear in the opening video.

Don't get excited though, these are only the same still shots that you see on the cover. They have even put more of these photos on the back (yes, the back) of the instruction manual, just in case you were looking there. The blurb on the back says you will have "loads of hot babes for co-drivers" and that if you win, you will get the girl and she will show you her appreciation...

Now that all sounds pretty exciting, and if the game turns out to be rubbish, then it might still be a good alternative to watching Baywatch. When you first start the game, you are presented with a bordered video of a Toyota Supra driving around with still photos of the girls every now and then. As far as presentation goes, the menus are pretty boring and don't have much detail, however they are at least easy to use. You have the usual selections such as Tournament, Time Trial, 2 Player Mode and Options, which are all pretty self-explanatory. There are 5 tracks in total and 3 cars to choose from initially, with 5 more that can be unlocked. However, there is no hint that this is actually possible anywhere in the game.



The title screen doesn't resemble the front cover at all. I'm shocked.

Highway 2000 is not licensed by any of the car manufacturers whose cars appear in the game, which is blatantly obvious by the ridiculous names they are given from the car select screen. Below is a list of the cars available:



Mad Viper – Toyota Supra
Dark Nebula – Nissan R33 Skyline
Rapid Fire – Nissan 300ZX
Night Mare – Lamborghini Diablo
Phenix – Ferrari Testarossa
Saber Tiger – 4WD
Road Buster – Truck
Over Lord – Some sort of Helicopter-looking Space Ship

*Remember the Viper that looked like a Supra?
Yeah, me neither.*

Rapid Fire? Dark Nebula? Those don't sound like cars at all! Anyway, the last 5 cars are only available after finishing the game. They all have *slightly* different performance and handling characteristics, however this is hardly noticeable as the 4WD and Truck both handle, drift and accelerate exactly the same as the other sports cars. Which brings me to another issue, all the engine noises sound exactly the same. There is no denying it, they have used the same sound for all 8 vehicles. What makes it worse is that all of them sound more like a food blender rather than an engine. I'm not joking!



As usual, there's no qualifying round, so you always start from the back of the pack.

Apart from that, there aren't really many sound effects in the game at all. The music isn't much to shout about either, but at least it's not as horrible as the engine noises. The next thing you'll notice is the huge black bars at the top and bottom of the screen, used for the PAL conversion I'm guessing, but their size is unacceptable. The tracks aren't very detailed at all and it's generally near impossible to tell the difference between them since they all look much the same. Some of the tracks have SEGA Saturn advertisements on them, which is something different.



I'm getting some serious Ridge Racer vibes here.

The way the cars control is very weird and quite confusing at first. I like the way you need to get your launch right with the right amount of revs in order to get a good start. Too low and you will crawl from the start line, too high and you will simply sit there spinning the wheels. If you get it just right though, you will accelerate to 200 km/h in just 100 meters! Totally unrealistic, I know, but it's better than most racers out there.

racing line possible, or you can tap the brakes mid-corner, which starts a sort of 'Drift Mode' and allows you to corner at very fast speeds. Now this is all good and all since the game requires you to counter-steer while doing this, which sounds realistic, however once you stop drifting, your car will spear off in whatever direction it's facing, even if that's into a wall.

Another issue with drifting is that it doesn't matter how fast you're going or the type of corner, the game carries you around perfectly without much input from the driver at all. That is, unless you're too close to the wall before a corner, in which case the tail might clip it and you'll slow down. This also makes it very irritating to race in any view other than the bumper cam, as you are basically looking at the side of your car most of the time and can't see where you are going.



Drifting is essential for winning races.



Ironically, there isn't any water to be seen on the Splash-Road Highway.

Otherwise, this does make the racing quite fun at times. Even if the drifting is unrealistic, the sense of entering a corner, counter-steering and then exiting at the right angle is still there, even if it does take a while to get used to. The game moves quite quickly, and apart from the fact that the tracks aren't very detailed, they still move along at a very smooth frame rate with no slowdown whatsoever and hardly any noticeable pop-up, which is more than can be said for some of the other Saturn racers.

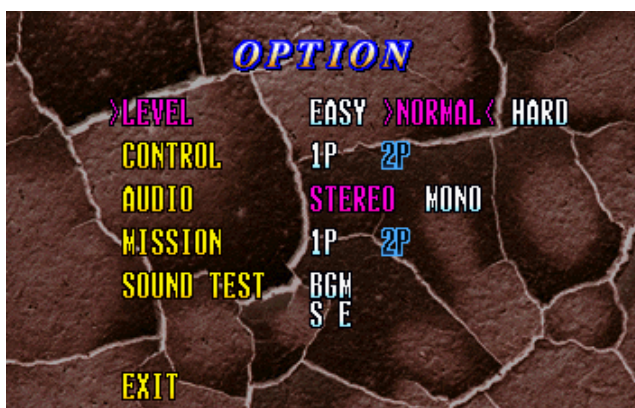
Tournament mode requires you to complete 10 races against 9 computer-controlled cars, placing in the top 3 in order to progress to the next round. The last 5 of these are simply mirrored versions of the original 5 tracks played at night.

Unfortunately, this isn't enough to save the game from being mostly boring and irritating. The

But wait a second... What about the girls? Well, there is no evidence at all that you have a co-driver in this game. No speech, pictures or anything. To put it simply, it's like they wrote about this feature and then just forgot to put it in. If in fact you do secretly have one, she must be sleeping the whole time in the passenger seat as she doesn't say anything during a race. And as for her 'showing you her appreciation', this is merely just a single shot of some moderately attractive girl that gets shown with the text "Congratulations!" for about 5 seconds after each race if you place in the top 3. And what do you get for finishing the game? Well, apart from the 5 cars that are unlocked, you get the option to race any of the 5 tracks mirrored or at night in Time Trial mode. Totally worth it.



This is one of your co-drivers, apparently, if the box art is to be believed.



The "Mission" option is actually the transmission select.

To wrap it up, I don't recommend Highway 2000. Even playing it for nostalgic value is a push. If you actually work out how to master the drifting in this game, you might have some fun winning a few races, but then you can finish the game in a few hours anyway. It's not even worth the mediocre pictures of all the 'babes' either. How hard would it have been to include some FMV of the girls? At least we would have something to look at, which would have made it 10 times better, or at least as entertaining as an episode of Baywatch.

In Summary:

Graphics: 5/10

Even though there isn't much detail, at least what is there looks solid and runs at a very smooth frame rate with almost no pop-up.

Sound: 2/10

Hardly any sound effects and the engine noises are horrible and damn irritating! The music isn't better either.

Gameplay: 3/10

Even if you do get used to the way the cars handle, the racing still isn't much fun and the game can be completed in only a few hours.

Better Than: Hang On '96

Worse Than: Baywatch

Update 24/6/2022: Since writing this review, I've discovered that Highway 2000 is the Western release of Wangan Dead Heat, which prominently featured Japanese ladies as co-drivers, complete with FMV!

