

Grip Shift Review

Contributed by Rocky
Monday, 19 December 2005
Last Updated Tuesday, 27 December 2005

Grip Shift is a puzzle racer from Ubisoft, or as the hype likes to put it...

"...the first video game for the PSP™ (Playstation® Portable) system to combine high-flying stunt driving and unique puzzle-solving action in an all-out, pedal-to-the-metal driving experience."

For any oldies out there that remember Stunt Car Racer, you'll feel right at home on the narrow cloud rubbing Grip Shift tracks. Lucky for us though, Grip Shift is not anywhere as infuriating or frustrating as the ancient Amiga title. In fact, we really like Grip Shift, read on to see why we rate this "built for the PSP" title right along side the fantastic Ridge Racer, although for different reasons....

Grip Shift Game Details

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Sidhe Interactive
Publisher : Platform Publishing | Red Mile Entertainment
Purchase From : Amazon.com

Red Mile are a successful games publisher with clients such as Sony, Ubisoft and Codemasters. they have produced successful titles across various platforms such as Aladdin Chess Adventures for the PC, and Heroes of the Pacific for consoles and PC.

Grip Shift Review

Grip Shift was identified early on as a cracking title, as during E3 2005 it won IGN's Best of E3 award - no mean feat considering some of the titles on show at E3 in 2005. It's easy to see why after only a brief playing session too - this game oozes slick.

The overall design is lifted from the hip hop and electronica / graffiti scene and it works quite well. The sharp angled visual design looks great on the sharp PSP screen, and the music is pretty cool. At some points I found myself just throwing my head back, closing my eyes and enjoying the toones! Even if you are not into hip hop or electronica sounds, it's not over bearing and you are bound to hear more than one tune that will get your feet tapping as you watch your latest and greatest replay. Replay? Yeh replays! This title has many features you'd expect to find only on full blown PC or console versions, but this is a full blown PSP only title and it's packing a fully featured arsenal of fun. More on those remarkable features later though, how about the all important gameplay?

"In GripShift, you will guide your stunt car through increasingly complex levels made up of free floating pieces of road, islands, fiendish traps and scenery. Driving, sliding, jumping, and bouncing will all be required to get from the start to the finish of each level, which is usually a puzzle in itself."

Gameplay

It's all about goals, unlockables and awards with Grip Shift, and it works a treat.

Every track in the game is locked until you complete the previous track, and you have to start on the Beginner Level too, no jumping straight in to the "I beat Ridge Racer" Intermediate mode for you! As you complete tracks, you gain credits, and as you gain credits, tracks start to unlock and bonus are won. You'll also unlock new designs for your car, and even brand new cars. More about the cars later though.

To beat a track does not just entail finishing in a decent time though, this is a puzzle racer remember? For every track you will have to complete 4 goals or challenges. There are 3 medals, Gold, Silver and Bronze which are awarded for your finish time. That's the ones to go for first. Forget the other challenges and concentrate on getting across the finish line as fast as possible. By the time you have achieved that you'll be familiar enough with the track to think about the next challenge - the stars. Along the duration of the track are a number of hovering stars, your next goal is to collect every single star and cross the finishing line before time runs out. This comes down to skill in acceleration and cornering - a skill which I am glad to see I found coming together after only a short period of playing - no frustratingly sloppy control system here.

The final challenge is really the puzzle element. Somewhere on the track, or more likely hovering away off to the side on a floating island, is a GripShift logo. Your task, should you accept it, is to find away to reach that logo, recover it, and get across the finishing line before time runs out on you. Before the starting whistle blows you get a nice fly by ariel view of the track, which gives you a chance to spot where the logo is hiding and start thinking about how the heck you can reach it.

Oh, and did I mention that every track is suspended in the cloud, with no barrier restraints to keep you from falling off? Fun!

Each of the objectives offers a different challenge and is fun to complete. Even the basic time challenge is cool, because some tracks have different ways of reaching the finishing line that might not be so obvious. On one of the tracks I thought I had a pretty good time down, then while watching the pre-start fly by, I noticed a very short as the crow flies route - except that there was no track, just a slight ramp in the track and some handy speed boosting nitrous speed up to hand. Remember I said there was no edge restraint on the track? With full acceleration and a carefully lined up jump, I managed to leave the track, fly through the air, and not rejoin it until I was actually flying through the finishing posts! Awesome.

Keeping track of which goals you have achieved is thankfully easy enough. After every race there is a recap displayed that shows what you have achieved, and what you still have to achieve. Also, back at the main menu track selection screen, you get a nice big chunky silver tick next to the tracks you have fully completed.

As you complete more of the game you'll also gradually unlock the 8 bonus games, like Penguin Bowling!

The Visuals

Grip Shift is visual stunning. Right from the main menu design to the track design, it all looks really great, and quite obviously designed from the ground up with the PSP in mind. It's colourful, sharp and fast. I also noticed it does not suffer from PSP smear, like Ridge Racer does occasionally. Full marks to the graphics team for this one - eye candy heaven. Dynamic visual effects like sun flare abound too.

The official blurb reads...

"Vibrant, high contrast 3D graphics with crystal clear clarity and full screen antialiasing "

... and I can't argue with that, the game just looks fantastic. I understand that Grip shift is actually the only game available

at this time that features full screen antialiasing which is very cool. Especially considering not many people even own a PC powerful enough to game with such a feature switched on.

The Tracks

As you'd expect from a puzzle racer, the tracks are of the devious variety, not the simple Nascar oval kind. There are all sorts of twists, jumps, elevations and floating islands - all produced in glorious 3d. They are quite short however, so at least you don't need a good memory to remember countless hairpin bends just waiting to throw you off the track. It also means very short loading times, which is a total blessing for Burst Gameplay (see conclusion below).

There is a lot of variety in the 100 odd tracks thanks to four different zones; Desert, Jungle, Ice and Horror. So in addition to the incentive of beating every track, gaining credits, and pimping out your ride, there's also the attraction of whole new worlds to seek out, and go where no man... oh wait, that's a different game...

The Cars

Right from the start, when you select your first car you'll start to see how detailed this game is. you can select from a few free cars to begin with, but even those you can customise with paint jobs, decals, and even different wheels.

The cars handle great and it doesn't take long to get the hang of skidding around bends, or hammering on the brakes as you came down to land after a huge jump. The physics involved is actually quite impressive, and on many early occasions I was sadly impressed with the level of realism my ride whipped of the edge of the track as I powered round bends a little too hard.

Multiplayer

Occasionally you'll unlock a challenge that pits you against another PSP controlled car, but if it is a real opponent you are seeking, Grip Shift caters for that too.

There are wireless and multiplayer modes, which allows you not only to race against up to 4 of your buddies, but to swap tracks too...

Modding

Yep, you can mod your own tracks in Grip Shift! Once you have designed your demon track using the included Track Editor, you can then share it with your buddies via the wireless link up and race each other on it! You get to use the exact same Track Editor that the design team used, so no holds barred! You really can include every tiny little detail into your tracks, and all for the price of less than 300Kb on your memory card!

You can even upload your tracks to the Grip Shift community and share your fiendish track designs with the world! There really is more content in this game than you could shake a very long stick at.

Conclusion

We like Grip Shift - a lot. One of the things I like most is what is termed Burst Gameplay. This means you can pick it up and play for 5 minutes, or a whole hour. In 5 minutes you may progress to the next track, or perhaps only achieve one of the goals towards reaching the next track, but you've still progressed. Some games languish in their boxes because you just know that the 10 minutes you have spare is not enough to make any progress - but with Grip Shift progress is measured in small chunks, that lead to big bonus pay offs. So if you are a multi-tasking demon (like me) and have only limited short notice time to test your self against the latest games, this is definitely a title to add to your collection.

This is one addictive, gorgeous, feature packed winner of a game. Get it, play it, mod it, enjoy it, post your best times in the Grip Shift forums, and I'll be there to beat it!

Website Resources

There are a number of resources for Grip shift worth bookmarking. Sony Station GripShift is Sony's official Grip Shift Site. The official Grip Shift Game site is also cool, and has a nice set of Grip Shift forums containing lots of help and advice and best times.

You can also download brand new tracks for Grip Shift - make sure you get these from here though, as it's the only place I found that has versions for both US and Europe.

For help with the Track Editor visit these forums. If you liked the music, visit the following sites for more! Misfits of Science and Shapeshifter.

Purchase From : Amazon.com