

SUZUKI ALSTARE EXTREME RACING
DREAMCAST
Shawnee Sequeira – Producer

Q : Who developed *SUZUKI ALSTARE EXTREME RACING* for the Dreamcast? Is it the same team that developed the Redline Racer PC version?

SUZUKI ALSTARE EXTREME RACING team is different from the core Redline Racer team. Tim Aidley is the only original SAER member on the Dreamcast team. We have all new shiny talent for Criterion's first console game!

Q : How many people worked on the game?

The team consists of 1 Game designer, 1 Producer, 3 Game Programmers, 2 Engine programmers, 2 Artists.

Q : When did development of *SUZUKI ALSTARE EXTREME RACING* begin ?

The original Redline Racer on PC launched in Europe in March and in the US in July last year respectively. Since then, we've been devising plans for porting RLR over to Dreamcast. There was quite a bit of work involved. Obviously the PC and Dreamcast are substantially different when you get down to it and the game has to make the most of the platform. A simple port was out of the question for us.

Q : How much SAER will take advantage of the Suzuki Alstare license ?

We've tried to incorporate the license from every possible angle from new bikes, riders, menus to ad boards in the game, you name it. The license can't look like it's just been slapped in to try and sell more games, it's got to work with the game in order to be successful. We think the license does work with the game, it's a coherent marriage between brand and good gameplay.

Q : Do you expect the license to be a real added value for the player ?

Absolutely. Without a doubt, the SAER license is a worthwhile addition to the game. It not only gives the player a chance to relate to the idea of being on the Alstare racing team, but also, it made us re-think what we were doing as a game and so the player also gets the added value of a better, well thought out game. I'd say it's a win-win situation for the player.

Q : What is the new synopsis of the game? Who are the competitors?

The new synopsis of the game is that the player is a rider trying to join the ranks of the Alstare team. Before the player can be inducted into the team, he or she has to win qualifying matches to move up the ranks from novice to reserve team to the official team.

And it isn't easy either. The player has to be really good to keep up because he or she will be competing against 7 good AI riders, including the official Alstare team.

Q : What did you improve compared to the Japanese version of the game?

Just about everything it seems. With the Japanese version of the game, we had a steep learning curve with the DC. Indeed, the situation was exasperated by the fact that we were one of the first developers outside of Japan to do a Dreamcast game. All of these obstacles we had to overcome when the platform was still a relatively new phenomena.

With this version, we had much more time to rip code out, create new tracks, and well, change almost everything beyond the basics of the game engine really. Our artists have either created all new tracks or have altered the track geometry and changed 99% of the textures of existing ones. In addition, the bikes are all brand new Suzuki Alstare bikes, with new riders, new menus, an additional championship, more record tables. Our programming team has also worked really hard on AI, lighting effects, rider animations, the new menu interface, and implementing authentic Suzuki Alstare bike engine sounds. And, of course, our game designer has had to change the whole premise of the game beyond just the functional racing element!

Q : How much are the bikes tunable? What does it change for the player?

The nice thing about having the basic game code available to you from the beginning is that you can spend more time thinking about what you can do to make the gameplay better. In SAER, we've included the ability for the player to tune bikes to his or her preference. This works on a sliding scale, so that a player can max out their acceleration, but he or she may lose something in the handling. It seemed the best way to give the player a chance to feel like he or she controls something in the game and as the bikes are essential to how well the player does then the bikes were the best candidates for this. It is tricky, though. The player has to make sound decisions on how to tune the bikes, otherwise, he or she may not make it through to the next round. Having said this, we have built in a safety mechanism, so to speak. The player is always allowed to set the bike back to the default setting if he or she has made a bad choice in tuning.

Q : What about sounds?

With new Suzuki Alstare bikes, we didn't have many options on sounds. We had to have real sounds or else what is the point of just replacing the bikes? This is one of the nice things about a license, you get real resources! Working with the Suzuki Alstare license also kept us from having to do all the sound legwork. In this scenario, Suzuki Alstare gave us engine sounds from the superbike range. It was relatively painless and is a big bonus for the game.

Q : What about the racing modes?

SAER has 3 racing modes like RLR -championship mode, single race, and split-screen 2 player versus. We found that this range worked really well with RLR and offered the most diversity in how the player could get the most out of the tracks and the bikes so we've stuck with it. Split screen 2 player is fantastic and really gives you a chance to take on your mates. It's fast and you can find yourself neck and neck until the very end of the race at terribly fast speeds. It can be quite a rush!

Q : How much work did you do on the riders animations?

Rider animations were the one large chunk of code that really needed work for this version because of the new riders and bikes introduced by the license. Rider animation systems can be complicated and time-consuming at the best of times. We knew from that last project that it could be a whole world of hurt, but we felt we had to make it better. We really wanted to achieve realistic rider movements like knee downs, body twisting, the rider being hunched down on the bike on the long stretch, etc. So, yes, it was a lot of work, but the rewards are worth it in the end.

Q : On the AI?

We had done lots of work on the AI for RLR DC in Japan, however, with the new bikes progression introduced by the license, the AI had to be thought through again. It is important that the AI bikes present an adequate challenge without leaving the player in the dust. The thing about racing games is that it has to feel like a race, like you're really competing with other riders and from the game progression perspective, it can be hard to get right sometimes. But at the end of the day AI is essential to the game play, so one has to allocate the time for it. One can never do too many AI tweaks!