



WRC 4™: The Official Game of the FIA World Rally Championship

Martin Kenwright, CEO Evolution Studios – Q&A

- **What is your main objective with the latest version of WRC**

Our main objective is to create the definitive rally experience and to make the fourth WRC in 4 years the best rally game ever!

There, I said it!

Bold words, but we really think we can provide both gamers and rally fans with a true recreation of the sport, without sacrificing accessibility. We have all the official teams, all the cars and drivers, not to mention all 16 official WRC rallies: that's over 100 unique stages. We've set the benchmark for environments, scale and size, and we've matched it with a game that flatters the novice and humbles the expert. An action packed, seat of your pants, genre defining racing game that we are really proud of.

- **What sort of research have you done for the game?**

R&D is second nature to us and we use it in all aspects of development. We really did our homework on the handling model, building a new car-simulation system from scratch using techniques from the automotive industry. For instance, our slip-angle tyre model provides a new level of depth to the WRC experience. There are no central pivots or fake forces. It is a true 4 point model, the car's motion comes entirely from the wheels, gravity and aerodynamics – so we needed to make sure our data was spot-on. That's why we've taken CAD and technical data directly from the manufacturers and simulated every car in the WRC, plus Super 1600's and even Group N4 cars as well.

Having said that, a good engineering model is only half the story. We enlisted the help of a top rally driver to make sure our physics system recreates the feel of a genuine rally car and then tuned it so that anyone can pick it up and look good driving a WRC car in a few minutes.

For the worlds, all our data comes from satellite imagery, and we're able to recreate stages with up to 1m accuracy. We've taken thousands of reference photographs from each of the countries and we've got a fantastic art team working towards making each stage feel just like the real-world WRC.

- **Are there any particularly tricky problems that you need to overcome with WRC4?**

We've pushed our code pretty much as far as it can go, from our breath taking distances – a hallmark of the series – to the way the cars sound. Everything has been maximised to really reinvent what is possible on a home console. It would have been tricky if we hadn't already had three previous WRC games to learn and understand what makes the PlayStation®2 tick. Our code team have been making some astonishing progress.

The trickiest problem we've had to overcome was convincing the publisher and customer alike, that 'simulation' does not mean 'difficult'. It's amazing how many people think that a hard game must therefore be a realistic game.

- **What new game features are there and which feature of the game are you the most proud of at the moment this time round?**

The biggest new features for WRC4 have to be the Handling, Audio, Graphics & Online mode.

As all three games so far in the series have been offline only, we've had to start from scratch on the online mode, learning as we go along. This is good though, because we went into the online mode with no preconceptions. We've recently had the game in a public beta phase. And the comments so far have been overwhelming – I think that's proof positive that we've taken the right approach with it. We didn't want to copy what anyone else was doing, so we really looked at what was needed from an online title and tried to almost redefine how online racing games should be played. Considering we'd never done any online code before, I felt very proud of how well this has been received and we can only go forwards as the game reaches release.

Where handling is concerned, we're sure we've made the right choices and we think the handling is the best of any rally game to date. The driving model is advanced, but it's easy to make a very complex simulation which isn't actually a correct model of how a rally car drives. It's often in the gaps between the measurable data that the challenges lie. There were those who felt that a proper simulation would be too difficult for the average player, but a real rally car should be easy to control – the drivers have so much else to worry about, they don't need a tough-to-handle car on top of it. We've tuned it with Race drivers and refined it with gamers. We are pretty sure this is the whole package and not just on a D-pad, with a force feedback wheel it becomes a whole new game. Give it a try and we think that you will be amazed!

- **The backgrounds and the vistas are even more real than in other versions, what technology enhancements have you employed to achieve this?**

Once again we've improved the rendering performance, allowing us to draw much further out. We've also dramatically increased the texture resolution for trackside objects, meaning things like buildings and trees are much sharper and effectively look much more real. We have more than doubled the number of objects trackside and doubled the texture resolution.

We also use a number of highly efficient rendering techniques to add effects like specular lighting, dense particle effects for kick-up – even reflective bodywork. In fact, one area that really shines is the number of windscreen effects we have. From things like rain and snow falling on the screen, the way the wiper blades smear and clean the glass, to the gradual build up of dust and dirt around the edges. We can even simulate impacts on the glass, with proper radial fractures for the in-car view.

Besides the technology we have also paid much attention to the look, feel and composition of the environments to make them as immersive and as real as possible.

- **In the making of WRC4, were you inspired in any way by your competitors?**

Whilst we do look at other racing games, we focus more on the real sport. WRC is our inspiration. Rally is the most adrenalin packed motor sport there is and we want it to capture its essence in a game.

- **Does any of the competition frighten you?**

No. Although, I believe that competition is very healthy and it makes us all work much harder

- **What do you think online play will add to the WRC experience?**

Players the world over have built up hobbies around the WRC series of games, creating their own online tournaments where people post their high scores. The community is there already – all we're doing is bringing them closer together and making it accessible to a much wider community of gamers.

- **What does having the official WRC licence mean to the game?**

From obtaining all the official reference data, to the name on the box, the license really helps us to create the ultimate simulation of the real-world WRC. Whilst other companies may claim creative freedom without the use of the license, this is the real thing.

- **What sort of assistance did the WRC teams and driver provide you with in the making of the game?**

Everyone has been excellent and I don't think we could have made the game as good as it is without them. We're always in contact with the teams and the drivers, as well as the ISC (International Sports Communicators); always feeding back to make sure the authenticity is there.

- **Are there any new FIA regulations this year that you have had to adhere to?**

There are a few concessions you have to make when creating a game like this, most notably the fact that there will always be certain rulings that you cannot include for reasons of practicality.

For example, we have no penalties for going over the repair time; this is largely due to not having a real-time countdown in the service area. The point is that players aren't rally mechanics and it's often a process of education so that they learn, after a few attempts, what components should be fixed first and what can be left over. If we were to penalise them for going over budget, it doesn't create a very compelling gaming experience for the player.

- **How do you see the future of driving games and rally games in particular?**

We have already started work on it, but if we told you, we would have to kill you! Watch this space 🙈

Seriously, we're lucky to be in a position where we help create the future and we have some truly unique ideas here that people would kill for. Suffice to say that over the coming years we will totally redefine the expectations of the genre.

WRC 4 will be available in autumn 2004.

For more information on SCEE titles, please visit our website

www.playstation.com

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Developer: Evolution Studios **Genre:** Rally Simulation **No. Of Players:** 1-4 (TBC online)

Platform: PlayStation®2

Peripherals: Analogue Controller (DUALSHOCK®2), Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation®2), Network Adaptor (Ethernet) (for PlayStation®2), Speedster™2, Driving Force USB Wheel.

Release Date: Autumn 2004