

Super Stardust by Team17/ Bloodhouse

It is a sad fact that most of the software for the 32 bit cd32 gaming machines has at its very best, been barely up to par with the 16 bit Sega CD machine - and most of the software isn't even that good. I don't know about you, but I didn't get my CD32 just to have pitiful 16 bit games running on a double speed drive with a few more colors added. Frankly, up until Super Stardust, there has not been anything that I know of for the CD32 that is, in any way, a truly 32 bit CD-ROM game.

Thank you Team17, from the bottom of my heart. Super Stardust is, to put it bluntly, incredible.

Of course, it is still essentially the A1200 version shunted over to a CD with some cool CD tunes and cinema sequences added. And, as some of you may know, Super Stardust is actually a sequel to the highly acclaimed A550 game, Stardust. Stardust is Asteroids, essentially, brought to the ultimate level. Stardust's graphics are completely 3D raytraced and the original was out long before Donkey Kong Country (which was generally touted as the first completely computer generated 3D graphics game).

Super Stardust totally utilizes the AGA chipset and the effects are nothing short of stunning. The CD version also sports a sometimes incredible soundtrack as well, in addition to top notch sound effects. The cinema sequences in the CD32 version are impressive, with excellent boss death scenes and a cool opening sequence as well. Super Stardust's cinemas also use a larger portion of the screen than Aline Breed: Tower Assault did, which is a relief. Of course, Tower Assault still has the best opening sequence ever created for a game, any game, any system, bar none.

The main part of the game is a revamp of the old Asteroid's theme. You are a lone fighter who must destroy an asteroid onslaught, along with menacing extraterrestrials. There is no screen scrolling on these scenes. Instead, when you hit the border of the screen your ship loops to the other side, as do the opponents when they reach the screen fringes. This system adds a new level of play strategy and is great fun to deal with. The game also takes things like inertia, impact and gravity into account which makes Stardust more than just another shooter.

Fortunately, aside from great presentation, Super Stardust has near perfect, smooth as silk control. To play, you have to master things like thrust use, braking, proper shield timing and learning to use the looping factor to your advantage when destroying opponents. In a lesser game from a lesser company, the control problem inherent with such a seemingly complex concept might have been irksome at best. With Super Stardust, however, the perfect control makes the game a joy to play.

Of course there is more than just shooting asteroids in this game. The 3D tunnel sequences are probably what received the most hype in Stardust and they are impressive. These hyperspeed, between world levels take place from behind the ship viewpoint and require you to avoid a total onslaught of rocks, razors, missiles and other devastating menaces. There are even boss-style aliens in the sequences at times. These scenes are similar to Microcosm, only with much more depth, cleaner larger graphics and better control. Personally, I would love to see a CD32 game that took these incredible sequences and expanded them into a full length game (similar to Microcosm, or 3DO's Total Eclipse).

Again, as with the asteroid style sequences, control is smooth and responsive, though the 3D perspective and tight evasive maneuvers necessary to escape unscathed make these tunnels a tough place to stay alive through. For all the game's sequences, Super Stardust makes excellent use of the CD32's control pad.

Similarly to Tower Assault, Super Stardust used a password system to save game positions, instead of utilizing the CD32's save RAM. While I do not mind passwords so much, an option to save the game to RAM would have been nice. Also, the game always starts you at the tunnel sequence to the next world and I wish that it would have given out another password after reaching a new world. The passwords remember how many lives you had and current weapons, which can be problematic if you barely survived the previous world.

Throughout the game's 30 levels of nonstop arcade action, Super Stardust packs in all the various advances that shooters have incurred through the years since Asteroids. There are power-ups to be gleaned from destroyed rocks. You have a finite, manual shield that must be recharged, in addition to your ship's energy which decreases with each hit. There are various weapons to be found and

powered up - a spread weapon, bouncing laser bolts, even a flame thrower and hunter missile, among others

And, of course, there are the aliens. Predator ships that stay invisible until just before they strike, worm creatures that follow you and must be destroyed segment by segment and other space terrors await. There are larger end bosses, which require quick thinking and even quicker action to evade and destroy.

The action level is near constant through the game and Super Stardust is extremely challenging. Thankfully, however, Super Stardust has an excellent learning curve. Each level has six asteroid segments and, while the missions are numerically ordered from left to right, you will not want to complete them in that order. Each mission has an approximate difficult level, so that you can go to a lower leveled mission and power up, then move on to a more challenging spot. Intelligent design and excellent execution, to say the least.

Super Stardust does, rather unfortunately, lack multiple difficulty levels and, more importantly, a two player simultaneous mode, which would have been (both literally and figuratively) a blast. Also, Super Stardust on the CD32 still does not use the entire screen. It has the traditional Amiga black border and I wish the developers would do away with that.

Super Stardust is available for both AGA computers and the CD32. The version has added cinemas and an excellent CD soundtrack, but is otherwise essentially the same game. Of course, the CD32 version also makes excellent use of the 6 button controller, which is a huge plus for playability. There is also a toned down, but still impressive ECS version called, Stardust Special Edition, which runs on any 1 meg Amiga. Also, Super Stardust autoboots itself into PAL mode, so it does not require a PAL booter. Of course, screen adjustment is, as usual, necessary.

Incredible graphics and presentation, unbelievable playability and constant action make Super Stardust a fully immersive gaming experience. It has a great diversity of opponents and challenges and can be a very addictive game. Virtually everything about this game is near perfect for its genre. Super Stardust is not just the only game that, in the least, comes close to being truly 32 bit, but it is also easily one of the very best games for the CD32 and Amiga, or any

other console system as well. No matter what Amiga system you have, if you love games, you have got to get Super Stardust.