

MARIO KART 64

GENRE(S): Racing

AVAILABLE ON: Nintendo 64

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

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The Nintendo 64's launch came with only three launch titles, but several quick announcements of games scheduled for the first six months into it. Among these, many completely new exclusive titles, then a surprise announcement: they were digging up good old *Super Mario Kart*. Nowadays, a new *Mario Kart*'s more of an expectation rather than a surprise, but in those times, we thought we'd seen the last of it. Racing game fans at the very least were lucky we didn't. Just as Charles Martinet leads us to the new generation in the very beginning of the game: welcome to *Mario Kart*, more specifically one of my personal favourites out of the whole series. At least the one I've played the most.

I'll address the audiovisual side first, which of course was never the Nintendo 64's strongest asset. However, during the five year cycle, there weren't many games that ran as smoothly as *Mario Kart 64*. As far as all of this goes, when we think of the original *Super Mario Kart* and how good it looked when it came out, I'll have to say *Mario Kart 64* is a disappointment in that department. But the rate it runs at, is incredible. You can decide for yourself which is more important – the quality or performance.

The core of the game hasn't changed at all, but there are a few notable tweaks to it. The courses aren't just flat, linear race tracks. There are shortcuts and secrets which will initially not make your victory any easier, on the contrary in fact since they are considered "hard routes", but merely finding and mastering them will most definitely give you an upper hand when you're playing with people who don't know the game as well as you. Might sound like *CTR*, but like I said the last time, *Mario Kart* sure as hell isn't *CTR*. Or the other way around. The core is still the absolute same. We still have eight drivers to choose from;

Donkey Kong Jr. is updated to his more recent incarnation in the *Donkey Kong Country* series, which partly explains his absence from next year's *Diddy Kong Racing*, and Koopa Troopa is replaced with Wario. I still play as Bowser and no-one else. Why? Because I'm badass.

There are more weapons in this game, and you have more control over their effective use. From the new weapons, my favourite has to be the Question Mark Mine – or something like that – which looks just like a regular power-up or weapon container, and therefore attracts ignorant bastards just to blow up in their face. Hilarious. Especially in multiplayer – HILARIOUS. The weapon trigger is the Z button instead of a face or camera button, which is great since it doesn't take any attention away from the game. It just comes naturally.

Speaking of multiplayer, this game just happens to be one of the greatest multiplayer titles of my pre-teens, something the Nintendo 64 excelled at altogether. The 64 was the first home entertainment system to make four-player games easy and cost-efficient without the need for expensive add-ons apart from the controllers themselves. Me and my two best friends used to play Battle Mode all the time, for days, back when the game came out. OK, I admit that we raced some in between, but whenever we took a break from the main game, we channeled some of our aggressions to Battle Mode and it honestly lasted for hours until we reached a conclusion that everyone was satisfied with. That took long, and actual satisfaction is debated to this day.

As for the GP, the tournaments are the same, with different tracks of course, but with a similar progression in difficulty. All of the four GP's are unlocked from the beginning, including Special Cup, and beating every track on 150 cc will award you with one more GP dubbed Extra, which is kind of a "mirror mode" of all the tracks available. Maybe the original game did have a more interesting and substantial offering for single players, but with multiple ready-to-go multiplayer modes for four players, who cares? I'm all in for *Mario Kart 64*, every aspect considered. I might not have the softest heart on racing games, and I might piss off a lot of people by putting it over the original by such a far shot, but *Mario Kart 64*

remains one of the best games I ever played on the Nintendo 64.

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