

MARIO KART 8

GENRE(S): Racing

AVAILABLE ON: Wii U

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: May 29, 2014

Cutting straight to the point with no in-betweens, *Mario Kart 8* was perhaps always imagined as the end of *Mario Kart* as we knew it. Developed at a critical point where the Wii U was suffering from a very early terminal disease, *Mario Kart 8* was received as a miracle cure that revived the system and its popularity for a few more years to come. Due to its versatility and accessibility to all ages, newcomers and veterans alike, it was hailed as the ultimate traditional *Mario Kart* experience. Like so many Wii U titles, it ended up suffering in the hands of its own creators when a fundamentally better version of the game eventually came along, but I would still very much like to address the base game before going to the "super turbo edition" more known to the general public, out of my respect for the Wii U and how the forgotten system played its part in completely renewing my personal faith in Nintendo.

Yes, while *Mario Kart 8* was eventually completely wiped off the table by its enhanced version on the Nintendo Switch, we'll take a small trip through time and imagine it's 2014 all over again. Nintendo worked on *Mario Kart 8* for at least two years, which I believe was the longest development cycle for any of the games in the series. During that time, they did everything their imagination allowed to create that one definitive *Mario Kart* experience, giving absolutely everyone the opportunity to enjoy *Mario Kart* without taking anything away from the thrill of the race, bringing in every element from every mainline game that came before at some capacity, allowing every individual player to customize their gameplay scheme, and finally, bringing in some notable new feature as per usual.

Let's start with the numbers: there are 16 drivers available to choose from in the beginning of the game,

and 14 unlockable ones, tallying up to a total of 30. Familiar racers from previous games in the series are joined by Baby Rosalina, Pink Gold Peach and all seven Koopalings, no one too interesting at this point to someone who's played the same character for ages. Once again, there's a total of 32 tracks – 16 new ones and 16 HEAVILY revamped retro tracks. The few SNES tracks are basically unrecognizable at this point for more or less obvious reasons, and I believe that there are so few 'cause the developers didn't want to mess around with them too much, to avoid pissing off certain types of stubborn people. It used to not stop here; *Mario Kart 8* came with tons of downloadable content, ranging from free updates to paid DLC, with new tracks, characters and even an additional difficulty setting (200 cc). Unfortunately, none of this content has been available for years, and I've got to admit I just recently started playing the game, though I've had it for over a decade. That's the main reason I bought the Switch version, but it has one specific problem I'll be sure to analyze once I get to it.

The controls are tweaked to the point 50 cc is an absolutely effortless, useless run for any veteran kart racer. Even 100 cc occasionally feels like a pushover difficulty after getting fully accommodated to whichever your preferred control type is, but 150 cc will most definitely give you a run for your money. You can either use the Wii U GamePad as an equivalent of the Wii Racing Wheel, or just stick to analog controls. Me, I like both ways, and I'm glad they gave us this option to switch the controls at any time, 'cause I didn't really like riding bikes in *Mario Kart Wii* using the wheel, and there was no better option available. The bikes here are much more comfortable to ride regardless of your preferred scheme; it doesn't really matter what you're driving, it's all about your personal preference, and the GP races are a constant mix of karts and bikes. And quads.

This game's new big thing is anti-gravity, which is also incorporated to the retro tracks, making them feel so different than their original versions and instead, solid parts of this game. Blue boost pads grant your vehicle a temporary anti-gravity hovering ability that allows you to drive along walls and ceilings; these are sometimes invaluable shortcuts, but require precise driving because they're usually very narrow and falling off 'em usually slows you down worse than any hit.

The single-player modes are a very welcome handful, especially on the higher difficulty levels, but to many, multiplayer is what makes *Mario Kart* so special, and unfortunately, that is where the original Wii U version fails on nearly every level – both at launch, and especially after the closure of all of Wii U's network services. Let's just talk about local multiplayer. First and foremost, you need to have the host player using the Wii U GamePad, 'cause the game won't work without it. Since one Wii U system supports only one GamePad, the rest of the players have to use other controllers. You can use old Wii Nunchuks, even the Racing Wheel, but these just don't work as good as the GamePad, period. You'd at least need the Wii U Pro Controller to reach near-par. From my personal view, the host has the unfair advantage here.

Battle Mode isn't a multiplayer-exclusive mode, but hey, who the hell has ever played or at least enjoyed Battle Mode in single-player? Ever since its conception in the original *Super Mario Kart*, Battle Mode has gone through numerous updates, usually for the better, all except for the handheld department, and since *Mario Kart 64*, I've had nothing new to say about it. Now, I unfortunately do. All of the different variations of Battle Mode that were introduced during the years leading into *Mario Kart 8* are completely trashed, I believe for technical reasons at the forefront, to have the game running as good as it does, but whatever the case, this doesn't look good. What we have here is basically just an HD remake of the very simple Battle Mode in *Mario Kart 64*, which was perhaps THE shit back then, but in this otherwise ultimate environment, it seems like nothing more than a wasted opportunity.

Apart from some games I've reviewed through the years that have very specific target audiences, I find the original *Mario Kart 8* that one game which is outright unfair to rate. Having played the "true" version of the game makes rating the game feel like murder. Once again, I have to go back in time to 2014, and imagine I'd be interested in the game altogether. What my 30-year old self has to say, is that *Mario Kart 8* is indeed the ultimate single-player *Mario Kart* experience; unlocking new stuff by just beating the shit out of everyone on the race track is so much fun, and having access to a hefty amount of decently priced DLC, not to mention free updates, makes it the most enduring *Mario Kart* in history. Yet, local multiplayer

just plainly sucks; simply starting up one quick session takes way too much effort.

All things considered, I think 8.2 is a fair sign of the base game's greatness in even this day and age, but also a reminder of the fact that even though it is clearly the best traditional *Mario Kart* game ever made, it's full of holes that were either always there or punched in post-release, and fixed by the "real" version.

8.2