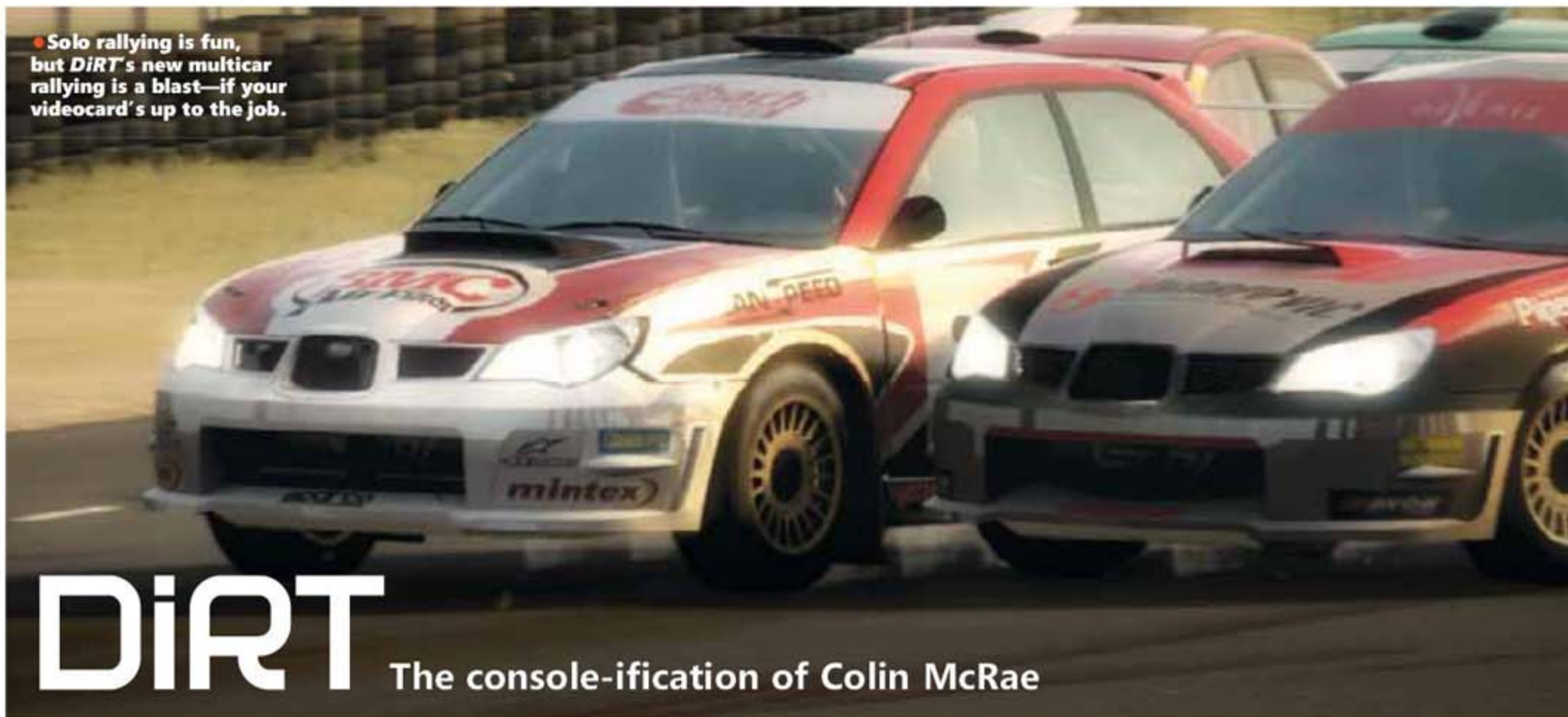


• Solo rallying is fun, but *DiRT*'s new multicar rallying is a blast—if your videocard's up to the job.



DiRT

The console-ification of Colin McRae

PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Codemasters GENRE: Racing AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Everyone MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 12.5GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard (gamepad recommended) MULTIPLAYER: 2-100 players...sort of VERSION REVIEWED: Retail Box

REVIEW

Y The latest edition of Codemasters' venerated *Colin McRae Rally*, uncleanly entitled *DiRT*, breaks out of the series' conventional single-player, time-trial boundaries for the very first time, delivering a sweeping account of both solo and multicar rallying disciplines...and more track types and real-world automobiles than a terrified co-driver sheds droplets of perspiration. *DiRT*'s also the prettiest, glossiest racer to date, and its complex physics engine is so perfectly optimized for analog gamepads (it seems specifically tuned to the Xbox 360 pad) that a steering wheel is almost rendered—dare we say—passé.

So, considering the PC version of *DiRT* is virtually identical to its console counterpart, it's gotta be at least as good, right? Er...not so fast there, Speed Racer.

ANY PORT IN A STORM?

DiRT is a prime example why die-hard PC drivers loathe the influence of the console generation. The game's an almost-unadulterated port: You can't use a mouse in menus; you can't modify a setting without incurring innumerable, irritatingly lengthy delays; and if you haven't recently dropped three or four bills on a videocard, you'd best prepare...for...a...slideshow.

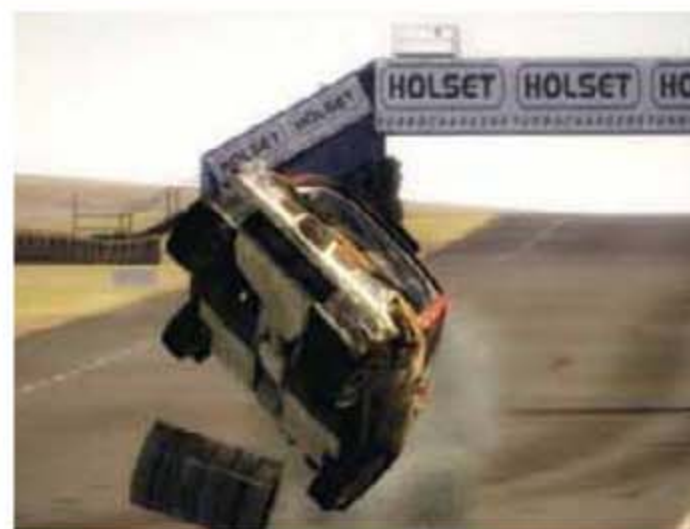
Though nothing short of groundbreaking when viewed on an Xbox 360 or via a megabuck card such as Nvidia's GeForce 8800—where its brain-bruising damage model, cinematic-grade lighting, and attention to meticulous detail make the game look like a finely crafted movie—*DiRT* nevertheless indiscriminately annihilates mid-range videocards. Don't believe the back of the game box: If you're not on the cutting edge, prepare to chop the detail levels as low as they go (thus sacrificing the visual subtlety that makes the game look so realistic) to achieve even a semismooth presentation...and a theoretically drivable framerate.

GET THEE TO THE COMPUTER STORE

Ah, but even then, the *DiRT* mobiles won't respond like you want them to. They'll seesaw back and forth, threatening to careen you into the nearest tree or guardrail. Seems the only way to ensure you're not constantly fighting the controls is to dump the old card and use an analog gamepad, rather than a steering wheel or joystick. If you manage to meet all those demands, you'll see the game in all its glory and experience the physics for what they are—challenging and complex, but also much more "floaty" than most dedicated sim-heads would prefer.

DiRT's career mode brazenly flaunts the game's exhilarating new head-to-head race options, its incredible versatility (dirt, gravel, and tarmac surfaces; cars, buggies, and trucks with front- and rear-wheel drive; point-to-point, closed course, and hill-climb events), and every creak and groan in its overflowing arsenal of audio goodies. Substantially less satisfying is the online component, where head-to-head play is strictly—and strangely—verboten. Though you can monitor your competitors' progress on a real-time leaderboard, you can't actually see or interact with other vehicles directly. To rub battery acid in the wound, Codemasters offers only two racing modes (Hill Climb and Rally) and restricts player communication to a series of goofy presets.

If you crack the vault for a killer rig, and if you're willing to confront the controller issues, *DiRT* mimics the excellence of its console sibling...and if you don't, it won't. •Gord Goble



• When a cutting-edge videocard runs the game, details such as windshield cracks become that much more finely detailed and authentic.

VERDICT

Looks beautiful on high-end videocards; most versatile *McRae* yet.

Absurd hardware demands; tepid online mode; little love for driving wheels.

7/10

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