



NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2



Developer: Black Box

Publisher: Electronic Arts

of Players: 1-2

Features: Can link up and race custom cars with pink slips at stake

MOST PEOPLE WILL AGREE THAT THE NEED FOR SPEED SERIES HAS been in a bit of a slump following its excellent third installment. That game added exhilarating cop chases to what was an already winning combination of cool cars, fast arcade racing and lush, sprawling tracks. Fast forward to the current generation of consoles, re-apply the successful aspects that made NFS3 so great, and you've got yourself Hot Pursuit 2.

Essentially the same game updated with new cars, tracks, and enhanced graphics, it proves that sometimes a good formula shouldn't be messed with. Luckily, the changes EA made are for the best. From the opening video to the start of the first race, one will notice that the PS2 presentation is slick and incredibly polished. Race modes include Championship, Hot Pursuit, and Challenge. Championship mode is simply a tree of events one must complete to unlock more cars and tracks to use in other game modes. Items may also be unlocked by earning driving style points while in either of the other modes. Events range from winning races to beating set lap times. The real fun comes by way of the game's namesake.

Need For Speed truly shines during a Hot Pursuit. As you speed through gorgeously rendered coastal towns and burning forests in your sports car of choice, you can use a multitude of shortcuts or traffic as ways to avoid the fuzz on your tail. The cops have new tricks up their sleeves this time around, including the ability to order blockades, road spikes, and even helicopters to stop you and your opponents, causing visible damage to your car model. This is an arcade racer, so don't expect damage to affect your car in any way. The game's AI plays an unbiased game, chasing after opponents nearly as much as they chase you, adding an enjoyable twist on strategy. Another new aesthetic added to play tactics comes by way of a Matrix-esque effect. A quick push of the shoulder buttons will momentarily pause the game for a second to either pan around the outside of your vehicle or zoom a short distance up the track. The effects actually add to the gameplay, allowing you to scout any upcoming shortcuts you may decide to use. Prepare to enter bullet-time when catching air. It's a cool effect, but you can turn it off if you please.

Control is excellent. Racing is fast and furious, not much of a change from the series' inception. Remember: this is a good thing. Graphics are tight with little to no slowdown, even when things get a bit cluttered on screen. My only real gripe is the music, which includes both original and instrumental tracks from the likes Bush, Rush, and (brace yourself!) Uncle Kracker. Luckily, you can set up your jukebox in the game's audio options.

If solid arcade racing or the idea of out-running a squad car ala COPS intrigues you, pick this game up today. |||



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