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Review: “Iridium Runners” Beats a Dead Horse

[PlayStation 2 Racing Review](#)



Iridium Runners features Iridium, a new technology that allows for virtually unlimited energy at an incredibly low cost. It's the fuel for these runners who race around futuristic tracks to be crowned the winner and to earn glory for their corporate sponsors. Sounds deep? It's not, and Iridium Runners does nothing that hasn't already been done by developers in 1999.

The game's mechanics are influenced by Mario Kart, an influence also seen in the PlayStation 2 title Speed Punks. The game pits you against other competitors in a race that you run instead of drive, but it still employs the same basics: you grab power-ups and weapons and use them to help you win the race. For

example, there are rockets (turtle shells?), walls that pop up behind you when you chose to place them that will stop a runner in his or her tracks (like a banana peel), a stretcher that cuts nearby players' size in half (the lightning bolt?), and boosters that boost your speed (mushroom?). Of course, there are other power ups also, such as a machinegun that guns down players and walls in front of you and a weapon called "Kill the first" (creative name, eh?) which shoots a red beam of laser down on the player in first place to give opposing players a chance to catch up.

The players are followed by "Pods," which are little flying boxes that store the runners' weapons and power-ups. Each pod has different stats that determine the chances of the style of power-up the player is most likely to get: shield power-ups, weapon power-ups, or speed power-ups. This, combined with individual runner's stats, which are the regular speed, acceleration and also stamina and agility, the players can strategically match up a character and a pod that will work together. That's about as far as the strategy goes in this game. The weapons are picked up in the same ways they are picked up in Mario Kart - you run over an object, in this case it's a metal ball, and you get a weapon at random. There's also a weapon that every player has at anytime: the elbow. You can elbow opposing players in the ribs if they get next to you and it will knock them down for a bit. There are booster arrows on the floor that when you run over them, you get a speed boost, and there are gaps in the track you have to jump over, though if you are running fast enough, some of these you can just run straight over. Players can also defy gravity as they run in full loops, going upside down.

Is there a difference in Iridium Runners from Mario Kart then?

A significant difference is the Iridium energy. You need it to be able to run, and you have to collect it in little blue vials that are scattered throughout the race tracks. Without it, you will run out of energy and end up losing the race, but if you have enough of it, you can get boosts, kind of like sprinting, when your energy

meter goes into the red by quickly tapping the X button (the same button for running).



Keep your energy meter up or your runner will bend over out of breath and lose the race.

The player can choose different game modes: single race, cup, and championship event. There are also three different racing modes: standard, which awards first place to whomever crosses the finish line first, Collect X-Tras Mode, which awards the first place to whomever performs best between running fast and collecting items known as "Collectibles," and lastly a Survival Mode in which the last player after every lap is eliminated until there is only one runner left. There are also two multiplayer modes: Death match which pits each player against everyone else in a standard race, and Team Mode where players work together to win a race. Team Mode can be played either two humans versus two

humans or two humans versus the computer. This co-operative option is good to have; not many games have a co-op scenario.

The graphics are purposely cartoony, and the scenery that the race tracks are placed in may catch your eye more than anything else, but even that isn't anything spectacular. The sight of all these characters running a race is, for the lack of a better word, silly. It's unusual. Imagine six Grand Theft Auto III characters lined up and racing along a bob-sled looking futuristic track (that looks sort of like the tracks found in the PC game Dethkarz). All the characters also have one static fall-down animation.



Play the co-op mode with friends or the computer.

The controls are simple and are quick to get used to, and the learning curve is really short. You'll figure this game out in about ten to fifteen minutes. It does, however, feel awkward to turn as the runners make wide arcs when turning. This

is odd, especially if you are used to racing games where the car will slide if you take a turn fast enough. In Iridium Runners, you will simply make a really wide arc and either run into the wall or fall off the track. There is also no way of restarting the race without first exiting the race and then re-selecting your race mode, character and pod, which can be frustrating if you mess up in the beginning and you want another shot. In this case, you have to either finish the race or quit out of it entirely and restart.

The sound track is a generic and repetitive techno beat and melody. That's about all there is to it. At the start of every race when all the runners are running for the most part alongside each other, you will also hear a constant clanking which is the sound of all their feet hitting the metal race track and it sounds kind of like the aliens in Aliens walking around the spaceship.

The game does nothing new and brings nothing to the futuristic race genre with the exception of having characters actually run instead of driving in hover cars or the like. By winning races, the player can unlock more characters to play as and also unlock the sound tracks that are featured on individual race tracks to listen to at the player's leisure (but who'd want to?) as well as unlock "wallpaper," which is nothing more than just a viewable image. Despite Iridium Runners' lack of variety and new gameplay, it's fun to pick up and play and share a few laughs with a few friends.

The developers have begun to create a somewhat intriguing cyber-punk or futuristic world where four corporations (Best Bet, All Talk, Xlo Foods, and GoGoGo) are the most powerful organizations on the planet, but the story ends there. Adding a story mode and developing this world out could've made Iridium Runners excellent, providing an in-depth plot and an actual experience, but it is essentially a Mario Kart/Speed Punks/Wipeout with different animations.

The Good: Iridium Runners uses game play that has been tested and proven to be fun and because of this, Iridium Runners is easy to get used to.

The Bad: Generic racing game with nothing really new to offer and bland graphics/setting.

Final Say: Iridium Runners is cyber-punk Mario Kart; fun to play, but offers nothing new.