

DONKEY KONG 64



Weapons such as Kong's coconut launcher are vital gameplay components, and form the focal point of the game's mostly successful multiplayer modes



The SNES *Donkey Kong Country's* barrel-firing activities are updated in fine form for *DK64* (above). They're often inordinately tricky to get the hang of, though

With *Perfect Dark's* release having slipped to April 2000 – allowing Rare breathing space to truly finish what is set to be its most accomplished title yet – it falls to *Donkey Kong 64* to give the N64 a yuletide bestseller.

While the playable demos at this year's E3 and ECTS pointed to further refinements in Rare's technical mastery of the N64, the game initially appeared to be a rehash of 1998's accomplished, yet curiously soulless *Banjo Kazooie*.

Thankfully, this is not the case. Although *DK64* shares much with Rare's previous attempt to provide a genre-defining 3D platformer, the game is more rounded and enjoyable, showing the Twycross-based developer inching ever closer to the ideal presented by *Super Mario 64*.

DK64 once again centres on the collection of various objects. Bananas of the golden and regular variety allow access to later levels and bosses. Coins are collected to procure special abilities; coconuts bestow magical powers, and so on.



Donkey Kong 64 is awash with splendid coloured lighting. It requires the use of an Expansion Pak, which comes bundled with the game

It's a system that's immediately familiar, but working in tandem with the five-character basis of the game, *DK64* presents a far more complex and lateral repeat of the 3D platformer than has been seen previously.

The five Kongs (Donkey and siblings Diddy, Tiny, Chunky and Lanky) possess, and can attain, a wealth of special abilities. These must be used to gain bananas and the like (and vice versa). Parallel use of available characters is paramount.

Each level contains areas that can only be accessed by certain Kongs, so switching between characters to gain objects and abilities is essential to progress through the game.

DK64, then, is fairly complicated for an N64 title – and colossal. Yet it hangs together beautifully. Rather than opting for sprawling levels, Rare has kept the game's playing fields compact and rammed with activities, keeping tedious backtracking to minimum.

Throw in a hefty stack of mini-games (such as mine-cart races, slot-car speedways, target ranges, herding beavers), Kong-specific weapons, *Zelda*-style musical instruments, jet packs and even the original *Donkey Kong* and *Jet Pac* games (the latter reproduced with a scary degree of authenticity, right down to colour clash and tinny sound effects), and *DK64*



Format: N64

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Rare

Price: £60

Release: December 3



The levels are varied and immaculately detailed. Rather than plumping for vast expanses, Rare has wisely opted for smaller areas that are packed with activities, secret areas and entrances to a variety of mini-games. *Jet Pac* (right) is a hidden bonus

couldn't try harder to impress.

The game is perfectly paced, too. From the training ground introduction and the amount of options available, to the ultimate emphasis on reducing aimless wandering and thus pitching the player headlong into what the game offers, *DK64* is the closest a thirdparty developer has come to emulating Nintendo's supreme understanding of game structure and the value of component parts.



Attention to detail is strong, as this panorama ably attests

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Admittedly, *DK64* is initially overwhelming in scope. It is hardly original, simply refining what has gone before, and expanding upon it.

The camera, meanwhile, is little improved over *Banjo Kazooie's*, which is a crime considering how much water has gone under the bridge since Rare's previous platformer.

And THE Games' decision to sell the game for £60, complete with Expansion Pak (which is an essential requirement for the game to run – witness the spectacular coloured lighting and medium-resolution graphics), with no unbundled alternative, seems simply unhinged.

But these faults can't besmirch a game so obviously geared towards

offering a thoughtful, intensely engrossing and all-round entertainment-packed experience.

Inceed, this is the nearest any codeshop has come to approaching the heady heights of *Super Mario 64*.

But the fundamental difference between the games of Rare and Nintendo has always concerned imagination, and *DK64* shows that the UK company still trails in this respect. So, ultimately this game does not offer the sheer freedom, flexibility and joy inherent in the plumber's premier 64bit outing. In its own right, however, it's a fine effort. **E**

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



It's possible to snipe at enemies via a well-implemented firstperson aiming mode, a vital component of the multiplayer 'Kong Bash'