



THE MAKING OF...

CARMAGEDDON

Gaming's poster boy for knee-jerk bans and moral outrage needs no introduction – but is it remembered for all the wrong reasons?

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If there's a single constant in the videogame industry, it's that one game gets mentioned during any argument about censorship. Or tastelessness. Or violence. Perhaps Britain's most notorious gaming son, *Carmageddon* is a game that – 11 years since its launch – has gained quite the reputation. Everyone remembers the headlines. But *Carmageddon* warrants remembering for something more than just selling newspapers.

"*Carmageddon* came from playing racing games for years and getting fed up with racing," begins Stainless Games co-founder and lead programmer **Patrick Buckland**. "And we always ended up just turning the car around and ramming the other cars out of the way. So why not make a game about that?" This became a rough banger-racing demo that Buckland and **Neil Barnden** (co-founder of Stainless and lead artist on *Carmageddon*) touted around various publishers – but in early 1994 there wasn't another racer where the idea was to hit other cars. The proposal found little support, with established companies proving unwilling to back the concept. It took SCI, then a recently founded company with few big titles, to see the potential. "They were quite forward-looking, and desperate," continues Buckland. "We were a great combination."

Barnden and Buckland began hiring, eventually ending up with a team of eight. They wouldn't be making *Banger Car Game*, though – SCI, understandably,

wanted a licence to guarantee some return on its investment. "That licence was originally Mad Max," says Buckland. "But they couldn't find who actually owned the rights to Mad Max. Then they found that *Deathrace 2020* was going to come out, a sequel to the original that never happened – right up until *Carmageddon* shipped the actual .exe file was called *Deathrace*." The initial idea morphed into a game that was about both destruction and pedestrians. Buckland: "Originally

"We didn't know the conventional way to make a game like this," recalls **Terry Lane**, an artist on *Carmageddon*, "so we made it up as we went along – or Patrick and Neil did mostly. We found novel solutions to problems that we came across and tried to do things that other games would not really repeat or enhance for five or ten years – the world physics, in-level action replay, the true dynamic mesh deformation." The common attitude among the team, whose experience levels and

"We found novel solutions to problems that we came across and tried to do things that other games would not really repeat"

the idea was that you would lose points for running people over, because we were worried about the controversy. Once the game was up and running, Rob Henderson from SCI made the decision: "Let's just go for it" – and so we gave you points for hitting people. *Deathrace* fell through and SCI could have canned the project, but they thought it looked good and we could try to create our own brand."



All in a day's work at Stainless – this was 'research' for *Carma*'s explosion effects



MOOSE



ED 101



AGENT BLACK



SAWBONES



BROTHERS GRIM



OK SIMPSON



PSYCHO PIT BULL



STIG O'SORE



STELLA STUNNA



THE CHEAT CODE

Carmageddon had an interesting set of cheat codes, its main one proving especially... charismatic. "We didn't tell SCI until afterwards and their marketing manager went apeshit," says Buckland.

"That was a gem," adds Hughes. "It was aimed at the magazines of the time, because Patrick didn't want the cheats in there."

"It was nothing to do with magazines, really," insists Buckland. "But if you want something to epitomise the entire *Carmageddon* attitude, that's it." It seems a little like, on this occasion, Mr Buckland doth protest too much. The code? IBETYOCANTPRINTCUNT.



Terry Lane: "Good taste lost out to humour every time – except for the pregnant pedestrian. I put my prissy foot down there"

abilities varied wildly – Buckland's background was in Apple II and Mac, Barnden's in graphic design – seems to have been simply trying things to see if they worked. "Patrick had an amazing attitude of 'if it sounds like fun, let's try and do it'," says Lane.

Because of this, the game had physics based on first principles, introduced destructible elements into its environments and, above all else, it proved you could make a racing game that wasn't simply about driving fastest. "In terms of physics I think our guys did a lot of great work, so it would only start to process things

when necessary," says Buckland. "So with lampposts, the game would only consider them when you got really close and just at the last millisecond it would turn into a physics object before collision. So you don't have an environment of physics objects just sitting there, because you couldn't process that."

"Tony asked if he could hit him harder so he could clear the roof. Neil hit him at about 35mph and he went through the windscreen"

There is a quality about *Carmageddon*, however, which is nothing to do with technological accomplishments. You can see it in things like the Prtcam; or the 40-odd powerups with increasingly bizarre effects; the constant swearwords, cringeworthy level names and profane cheat codes; creeping up behind pedestrians and honking to scare them; or simply ramming your car into a cow for the hell of it.

Carmageddon's origins are in the development environment as much as the development concept. It was an impressionable young team being lead by people with a very particular outlook: "Patrick and Neil were in their early 30s, the older gentlemen," says **Russell Hughes**, another *Carmageddon* artist. "I think I was the youngest at the time – I was 22 or 23. There were eight of us for a while and we ramped up to nine. It's amazing, looking back, the teams we're on now compared to then." This led to a great deal of experimentation, specifically with regard to blowing things

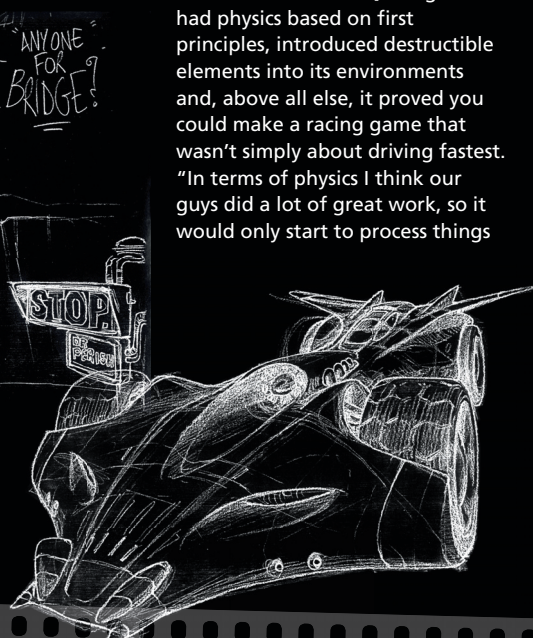
up in the name of research, and taking a practical approach to reference material.

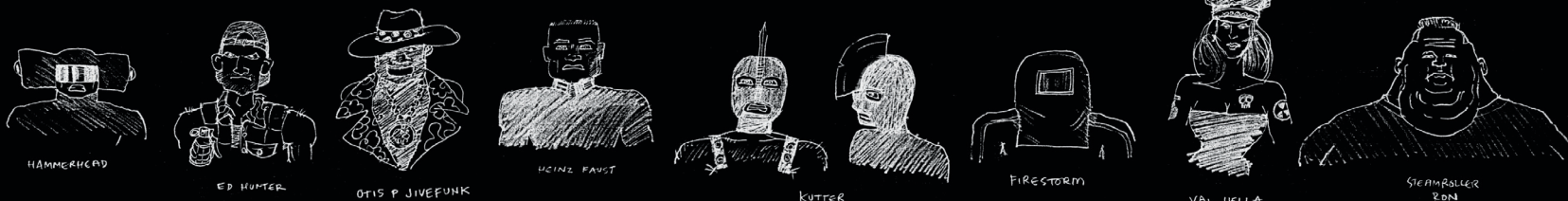
This is best seen in the story of Tony, the model for Max Damage and a willing victim of Stainless Games' research. He's the subject of an anecdote that deserves reproduction in its entirety: "Tony was a kind of general handyman

around, but also a nutter," begins Buckland, before Hughes helpfully adds: "Absolutely mental." Buckland continues: "We needed a reference for what someone getting run over looked like, so of course he was the volunteer nutcase and I was driving a half-tonne Chevy station wagon at the time. There was a car park outside the office, so we went out there and drove into him repeatedly: he had a piece of cardboard stuck up his shirt, as if that would help. At one stage, Neil was driving, and Tony asked if he could floor it and hit him harder so he could clear the roof. Neil hit him at about 35mph and he went clear through the windscreen! The police turned up because they'd had reports that someone was being run over in a car park, but when they saw the camera and stuff they headed off."

Lane was the man in the passenger seat that day, filming: "It was awesome, but the exposure was set wrong and it was unusable footage. We didn't ask him to do it again." Mr Tony was obviously a hardy type. "The Max Damage

The hirsute Buckland, below, rigging an old banger with a microwave full of aerosols, then running away quickly. This, you see, is research





footage as well, that was him," continues Buckland. "There's a whiplash action where his head jumped forward – that's because we smashed him across the back of the head with a pool cue. He had a crash helmet on, and said, 'Hit me as hard as you can!'"

These escapades aren't simply a sidestory to *Carmageddon* – they inform the entirety of the game's attitude. How else could you have a game in which the final level was called Beef Curtains? "Curtains for beef, you see, because it was full of cows," explains Hughes. "One of the names, I'm pretty sure, even ended up on Futurama – Roswell That Ends Well." But because of this attitude, for every tasteless level name there was an inspired power-up or joke – some of which backfired. "The team just had ideas they thought were funny and they'd go in," says Hughes. "Things like the blind pedestrians bonus. I think it got into trouble in Australia because of that – some blind pressure group got up in arms about it. It was just a joke – the people couldn't see you and you could honk the horn and scare them. Anything we thought was funny went in."

Of course, the upshot of all these machinations was grimly serious. On release, *Carmageddon* was refused classification by the BBFC, and would not be rated unless all the gore was removed. The most surprising aspect of this is that the game had never needed to be rated by the BBFC in the first place – Sci had sought the publicity, and "it backfired terribly," admits Buckland.



The press didn't mess about: 'Ban Death Game Now: Pope' (actually MP Greg Pope and not the pontiff, but why let that get in the way of a headline?), 'Ban Killer Car Game', etc. And lots of ridiculous bandwagon-jumping: "We got an official written complaint from Age Concern because we were running over little old ladies who'd say: 'I was in the war!'" remembers Buckland. Barnden recalls going up against someone from Road Peace on the radio: "At the time, I didn't realise his daughter had been run over, so... I was a little bullish in my defence. I thought I came out of it pretty well, but had I had that information I may have been a little less enthusiastic." When Princess Diana died, The Daily Mail picked up on

"There are no black people in the first *Carma*," says Hughes. "Patrick thought that people might single the sprites out in the game, so it was a bit of self-censorship. In *Carma 2* we redressed the balance"



It wasn't just about blowing things up – the effects of collisions had to be rigorously tested, too. For once, we take pity on estate agents



Next Generation Land Rover?

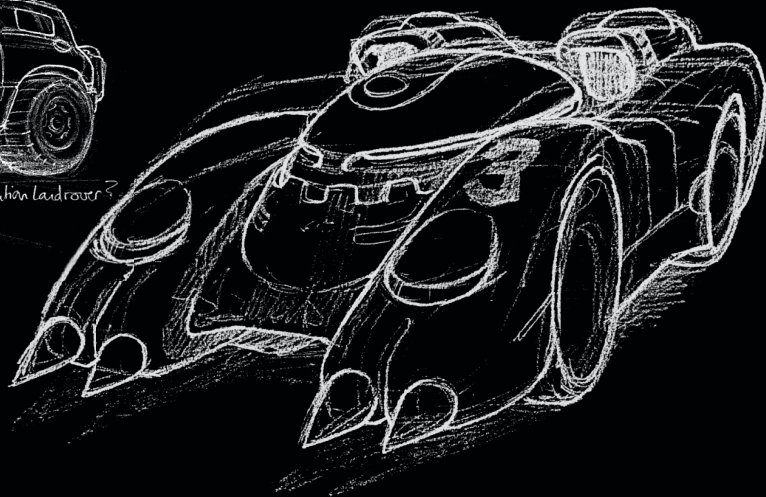


ONE FOR THE LADIES

For all that Max Damage is the iconic image, there's an unusual story behind the casting of Die Anna. "I had connections with local high schools," begins Barnden. "Well, you know... we needed a fresh young face as a female driver and so I was able to audition a few girls." Buckland interjects: "We thought she was a sixth-former! After spending the whole time leching after her we found out she was 14 and it was: 'Nooooo!'" "That was absolutely dodgy," agrees Hughes. "She had this makeup and I think it was the first time she'd worn makeup in her entire life. A lovely lass - she's married with children now. She was in the local paper quite a lot because she was so lovely, so we used to cut out a little clipping whenever we saw her."

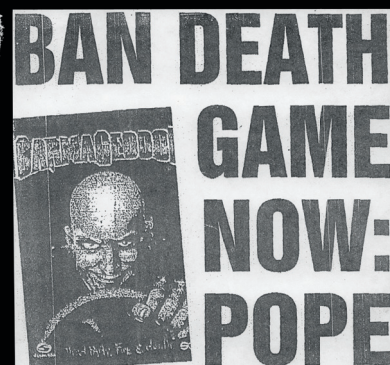


The admirable 'nutter' Tony demonstrates the results of a vehicle hitting a pedestrian, before throwing himself to the ground in the name of basic motion capture



Carmageddon's character Die Anna - despite the fact that the game had been released two months before her fatal crash. This actually saw a change to the startup screen which had flipped between Max Damage and Die Anna: "We were pissed off at having to do that because we were artists," laughs Buckland. "They wanted Mrs Damage or some shit instead."

The strangest thing about the entire affair is Stainless's account of its meeting with the BBFC. "It was very surreal - they sat and played the game hooting with laughter and remonstrating with themselves for enjoying it," recalls Barnden. "They enjoyed the splatting too much," adds **Matt Edmunds**, a programmer on the game. "They said it made them enjoy the experience of running people over." Although sanity didn't win the day on that occasion, no less than George Carman QC was employed to fight the judgement and triumphed - although Stainless's personal opposition was somewhat more personal. "There's a picture of me sticking the finger up to their sign in Soho Square," admits Barnden, "and the only thing I remember about the meeting was that my flies were completely undone."



MP brands it 'utterly horrific and appalling'

LANCASHIRE EVENING TELEGRAPH, Thursday, February 20, 1997

Ban death game call by Pope

FROM PAGE 1

for London-based SCI, said the game was merely intended to be "really good fun". The game was developed for SCI by his of while company Stainless Software.

"We don't think it's in bad taste - it's 100 over-the-top for people to take seriously," she said. The spokeswoman added: "The decision to stick the

likely to deter any young-sters getting hold of a copy. Mr. Graham Haxell of independent retailers, ST Electronics, Accrington said: "We have not heard of the game as yet but will seriously consider whether to stock it if we think it is unsuitable."

A spokesman for Blackburn software shop Game commented: "The decision to stick the

Ban killer car game!

A SICK computer game encouraging "car drivers" to mow down "pedestrians" has outraged MPs. Carmageddon, Murder On The Streets should be banned immediately, they say. Players are alerted to people who are about to be killed by a car. The game also features a "kill" button.

"Stop this sick computer game" has been asked to ban a computer game which encourages "car drivers" to mow down "pedestrians". The game, Carmageddon, has been banned by the BBFC.

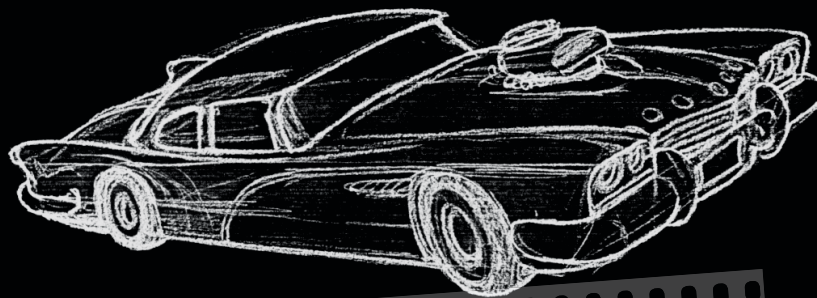
'Sick' computer car game causes outrage

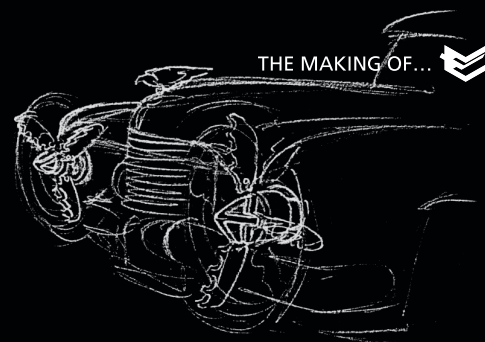
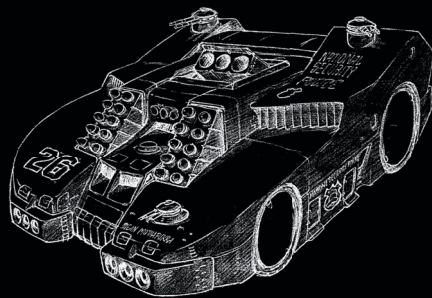
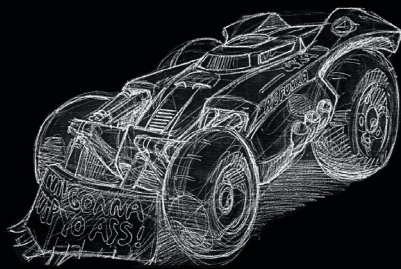
IT'S BEEN ASKED TO BAN A COMPUTER game which encourages "car drivers" to mow down "pedestrians". The game, Carmageddon, has been banned by the BBFC.

Outrage at car carnage 'fun'

OUTRAGE greeted a gory computer game which awards points to drivers who mow down children and pensioners on screen. MPs and relatives of road crash victims were fuming last night over Carmageddon - It's Murder on the Streets which is due out in May.

Russell Hughes: "One day one of the SCI guys brought down a load of press clippings from around the country. Some of those were hilarious. One said 'Ban Death Game: Pope' and it was just an MP called Pope! They all just cracked us up"





THE MAKING OF...

I spent the entire time trying to not look like I was deliberately flaunting my tackle at them. I imagine the BBFC's used to that sort of thing, though."

But SCI buffered Stainless from most of the onslaught, and the appeal was successful, with the game receiving a 15 rating. It's an insight into how different the industry was a decade ago that

"My flies were completely undone. I spent the entire time trying to not look like I was deliberately flaunting my tackle at them"

sitting on the appeals panel were Biddy Baxter (the editor of Blue Peter for over two decades) and Fay Weldon. "However, by 'passed' we mean 'reluctantly allowed it through with a gamut of associated horrified caveats because the high court held a gun to their heads'," adds Buckland.

There are two sides to the controversy. On the one hand, Stainless was undoubtedly aware that its game would court attention and benefited hugely from the exposure. "We weren't



Among the memorable powerups were 'jelly suspension', which set you a-bouncing, 'electro bastard ray' and 'wall climber'. None compared, however, to the simple beauty of a 'granite car'

known, the brand wasn't known, SCI wasn't known. The game had to stand on its own two feet and it might not have done that without the violence – though it did get fantastic reviews," says Buckland. There are no hard figures for the total sales of *Carmageddon* forthcoming from its makers, although they do go on the record saying that the total

series has sold around two million copies. As for any further probing, Buckland simply concludes with: "There are various issues we won't go into – let's say none of us are driving Ferraris."

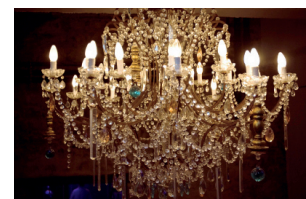
But the other side is that *Carmageddon* is remembered for the nonsense around its launch rather than its quality, and what it brought to the racing genre. "At the time it did frustrate us," says Buckland. "Much as we wanted the sick humour, some of the magazines concentrated just on the violence. But you're always going to get that, I think – people can't see beyond headline violence to the game and tech underneath. We did a lot of things games hadn't done before and it took a long time for other driving games to catch up, even in terms of stuff we did in *Carma 2*."

Carmageddon will always be remembered, first and foremost, for the bans and the headlines. But it holds another place in gaming history, not only as a



Hughes: "I assure you I put my ex-girlfriend in the game. She got a nice death – I did a student project and had footage of her, so she's quite prevalent. I told her about it later, though, and she was quite complimented, so it backfired completely"

forerunner to the *Burnouts* and *Twisted Metals*, but as a manifestation of a development philosophy that is rarer than ever. Do what you want. Muck around with your game. "Sounds fun." "Let's try it." "You can't do that." "Why not?" Stainless Games began as two men and a banger racing demo, but it grew into a remarkably close-knit team that built something special, went through the tabloid wringer and lived to tell the tale. And Lane's experience almost certainly stands for them all: "The phrase emitted so often by that old lady as she bounces off the bonnet still makes me chuckle some 11 years on. Having run a gauntlet of projects and adventures, I feel nothing has ever lived up to that time, nor have the new friends and colleagues I have encountered since been able to truly grasp what it was to be there, at Stainless, to build that game. I repeat, in wavering high-pitched cockney: 'I was in the war!'"



SOUP CAN ROCKET LAUNCHER

"We always had a reputation for blowing things up," recalls Buckland, "and not always in the name of research." A favourite target was a chandelier that hung in the lobby: "It was just so poncy. It had to go – air rifles, rocket launchers, bats, a lot of spare hardware, anything really – it was rather unfortunate it was next to a balcony, because you could shot-putt computer gadgets into it."

Hang on – rocket launchers? "Our business manager constructed a rocket launcher by drinking soup for about a month: it compressed the gas by having soup cans of various sizes along the barrel coming to a point where it fired out a coke can – he filled it with lighter fuel when he'd got all the cans." "It worked very well indeed," says Barnden. "It made the biggest mess of it yet." Unsurprisingly, when Stainless moved out, the new occupants were faced with the task of finding a replacement.

