

Title	Stunt Island
Publisher	Disney/Infogrames
Contact	(071) 738 8199
Price	£49.99

Found as we are of pigeon-holing games into categories, we were defeated by Stunt Island. It's a huge program that at first sight seems to be a hybrid between a flight simulator, a 3D Construction Set and an animation program. While the packaging declares Stunt Island to include "a first-rate flight simulator", in practice, arranging flight-based stunts is far more central to the action than flight *per se*. Stunt Island's UK publisher, Infogrames, is particularly keen for the program *not* to be seen as a flight simulation, mindful of the high technical expectations of many armchair pilots. It's also interesting to note that although Stunt Island has been produced by Disney Software, it was developed by our very own UK-based Assembly Line.

So Stunt Island is a stunt movie simulation, with the emphasis on aerobatics. You can take on any of the 32 stunts created by the program, or you can build your set from the mammoth list of available objects and scenarios — Stunt Island, the place, is a location manager's dream — and distribute props and scenery to add colour, which is where the program looks like a 3D Construction Kit. Then you can start flying through, above, or around the landscape you've just crafted, the flight sim side of the program. But the meaty part of Stunt Island is that you can 'film' your flight (ie, save this slice of action to disk). Having created this footage, you can then add other bits of footage to it, edit out any untidy bits, or parts where your flying looks less than expert, add music or sound effects from the program's sound library, and even type in some credits to introduce your cinematic efforts so that you end up with your very own home movie.

Given that the stunts are geared towards flying, and that there is an impressive list of planes to pilot, how accessible is the program to non-flight

Stunt

Is it a bird, is it a plane? Or is it a means to becoming rich and famous in the movie stunt business?

sim buffs? I always feel nervous when confronted with a flight sim, since it means many hours, if not days, to get the hang of those hundreds of new flight instructions and in the end I am still stuck on the runway while the only things I can manage right away are to bomb the nearest friendly hangar or to raise the landing gear, which means 'mission over' before I've even taxied a couple of feet. But saying, "I can't, so I won't"

isn't going to get me far in the movie business. I needn't have worried, though, the manual contains just a few concise instructions about joystick controls for flying the plane and then, believe it or not, it takes just a few keystrokes to get the machine airborne and to hold it there.

If you are a competent PC pilot, I would strongly advise you to rush to the airfield and to grab the first and best plane you can spot in the menu. If you

Not only do you get to act and direct your own movies, you're also the location manager, chief casting agent and properties buyer. This could be your big break ...



At the set creation screen, first choose your location from the overhead map of Stunt Island. Next you should choose your plane: this should always be the object in slot one of the 40 available slots for objects and props.



are not so sure about your flying skills, here is a summary of the few keystrokes you need to get up and away. Hit 0 (zero) to gain maximum engine power. Once you are at your machine's take-off speed, either pull back your joystick, draw back your mouse continuously or keep tapping the cursor-down key to get your nose up and into the wind successfully. Having reached your desired height, reverse the joystick/mouse/cursor movement until you fly horizontally (check artificial horizon if available). The only aircraft that don't really make sense to get off the ground by themselves are the hang-glider, paraglider and the pterodactyl. These would have to be dropped from a certain height and only remind you of a cow on a bicycle when you leave

them helplessly on the runway. And that is all that it takes to fly.

Infogrames is right. This is not an authentic, technical, 'being there' flying experience, and the program itself doesn't pretend to be, even if the blurb on the back of the box might lead you to think otherwise. What there is here is a cracking flying game, but the stunt creation is the really interesting bit ...

On with the plot

The very fact that you can play Stunt Island in so many ways is at the same time appealing and a tad confusing. You can fly pre-set stunts, or film pre-set stunts; you can fly pre-set stunts and film yourself doing so; you can design your own sets and stunts, and fly them, do all



that and film it too; or, finally, you can add a more competitive edge to the entire proceedings by entering Stunt Island's Stunt Pilot of the Year contest.

This sets you 32 stunts, such as flying up to and landing on the Golden Gate Bridge (a 'prop', which like the Eiffel Tower and Big Ben, has found its way

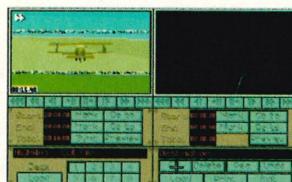
Two Minutes on location



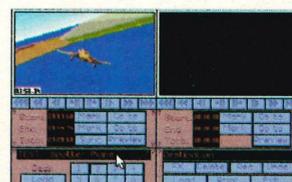
There are 800 objects and props in total to make a stunt more realistic or dangerous. Many have been used in the pre-set stunts, hence there are six different types of cloud! Here's Big Ben, but the Houses of Parliament is not on offer.



With your objects in place, you can try a test run of the stunt. This is the pilot's view of the start: I obviously chose a great place to put the aircraft. When placing objects, you can check on their position from set design screen.



Having wobbled through the course, I reckon there must be enough footage to create something half respectable. It's off to the post-production module and the editing suite. Here is the footage being viewed at twice the speed.



You can also switch camera angles, so that after a sequence from the pilot's viewpoint, you switch to the spotter plane camera. This camera is always in position; other camera angles must be defined at set design time.



Once you've edited and pasted your footage, you can add music, sound effects and credits, then show it in the Stunt Island theatre. However amateur the end results, you are always guaranteed a rapturous reception.

into Stunt Island's library of objects) flying down an aqueduct, or landing on a moving train. You will be awarded points for a successful stunt on the first 'take', and you lose points if you crash or exceed the maximum number of takes. Since you can practise these stunts to your heart's content without actually being in the contest, it's obviously advisable to get to know what's expected of you and do a fair few dry runs before you enter the contest proper. Stunt flying, whether competitively or not, is fun enough. Filming and editing your exploits requires a different set of skills altogether. Here, you can either set up your camera and fly around the existing landscape, looping the loop and generally looking brave, but for a true *auteur* feel, it's much more satisfying to build your own sets.

To start with, you can use the existing sets from the Stunt Contest and film yourself as you try them out. To build a set, or even load and change an existing one, you can either zoom into the 34 pre-set locations on the island, such as the mediaeval castle, or Los Angeles airport, and alter what you don't like or look for an open spot on this huge island. Stunt Island's natural habitat appears to contain the climates of the world in microcosm. It has rivers, lakes, waterfalls, mountains, deserts, towns and cities. Simply use the overhead map to spot the ideal location and zoom in.



Just one of the 45 aircraft on offer in Stunt Island; in addition to planes, you can also fly a duck, or hang-glide, or drift in a hot air balloon.

Then you can start furnishing and prettifying the scene with objects from a clip library of 800, which include vehicles, buildings, monuments, and some curious objets d'art which someone, somewhere will doubtless find a use for. You also need to choose a vehicle for yourself, and while the flight sim enthusiast will go for the planes on offer, there are some more exotic modes of transport: stunt flying by pterodactyl, anyone? Or hot air balloon perhaps?

Like 3D Construction Kit, there are technical aspects to determining how your props are going to 'behave'. If your film-set consists of inanimate, immobile objects, fine, but if you want to set up any special collision detection parameters, or animate, say, a vehicle other than the one you're controlling, you'll have to get your hands dirty with 'if' and 'and' statements. This is also true if you create a composite 'prop' from two separate objects and you want the two to move

Techspec As you might expect for a game of this complexity, Stunt Island is demanding. You'll need at least a 16MHz 386SX, and frankly, a 33MHz 386DX is a more realistic minimum for smooth playing. If you have extended memory, the program will make use of it. You also need 256-colour VGA and a good 13Mb hard disk space free before you install it. In addition to the soundboards below, it also supports Disney Sound Source, Thunderboard and Tandy Sound.

Disk requirements

High density	✓
Hard disk only	✓
Space taken on hard disk	13Mb

Graphic modes

CGA	x	EGA	x	Tandy	x
VGA	✓	SVGA	x		

Soundboards

Ad Lib	✓	Roland	✓	Sound Blaster	✓
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Control

Joystick	✓	Keyboard	✓	Mouse	✓
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Performance

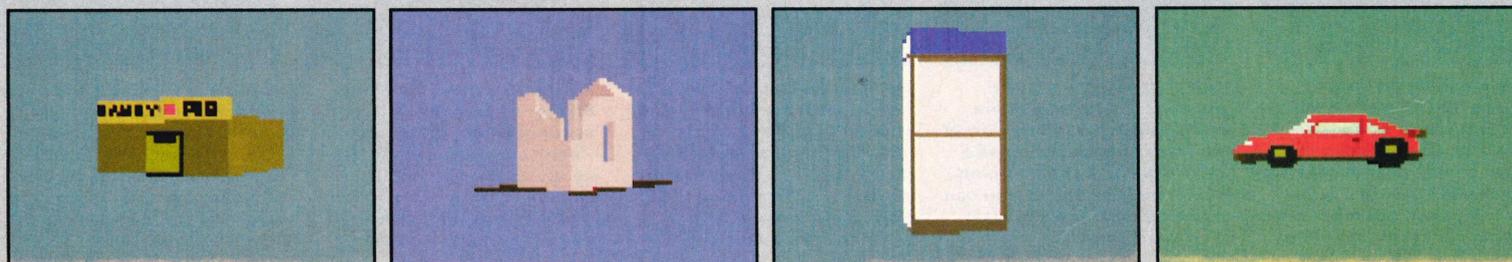
Optimum speed	33MHz
Minimum memory	640K
Free RAM required	570K

MENUS & OBJECTS

The introductory screens to the various modules. Left is the intro screen proper, with all the different options. The stunt coordinator offers you the pre-set stunts to take part, whether competitively or not. The surgeon will patch you up if you crash the plane; in post-production, you can either edit your own films, view successful completion of stunts, or edit the existing films on disk.



Some of the weird and wonderful objects and props you can use in your stunts, from left: English pub, ruins number four, phone box, and Porsche. Have the game designers ever set eyes on a real English pub? There are 800 of these altogether, including six different ruins in all, and three different types of beach towel!



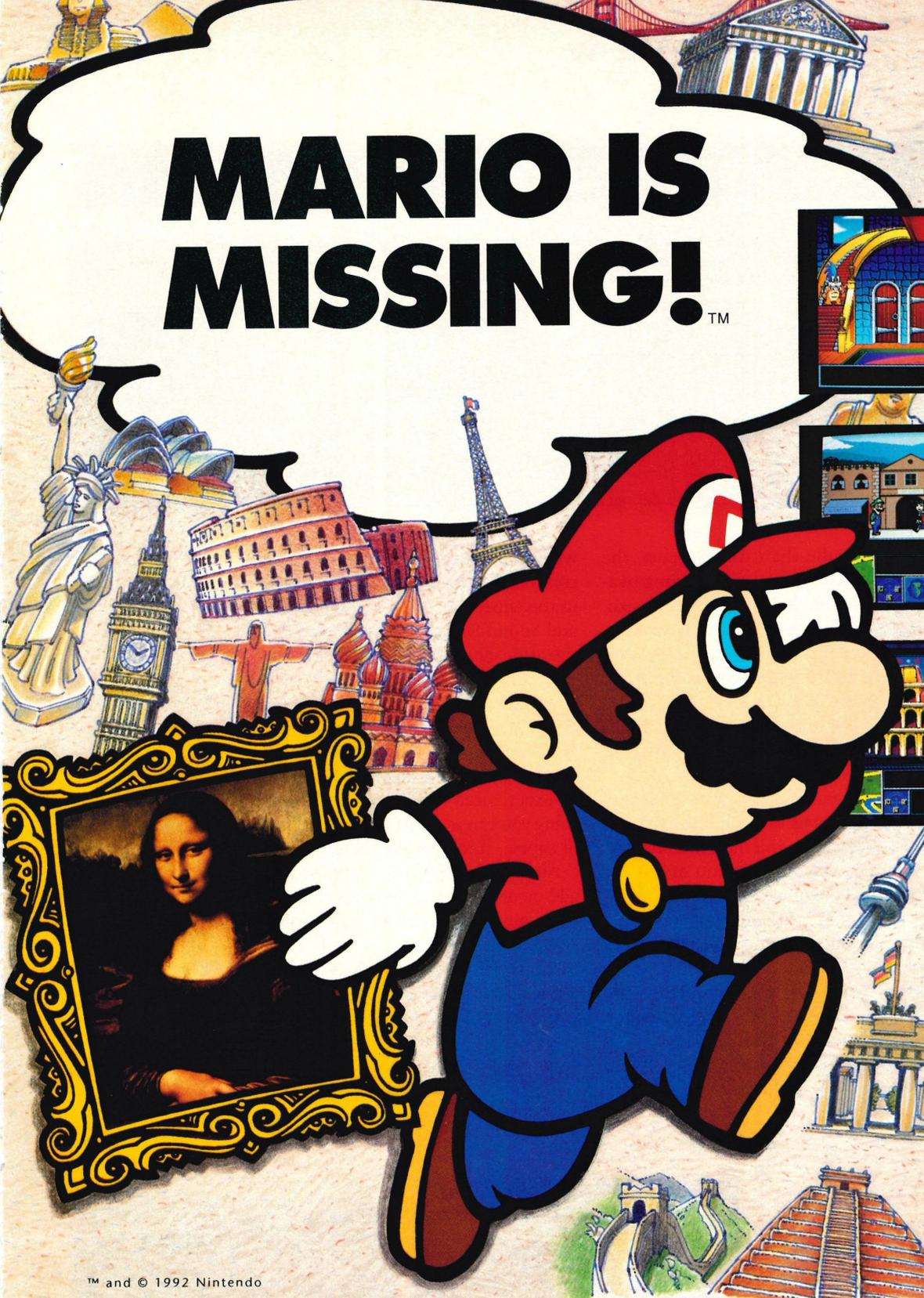
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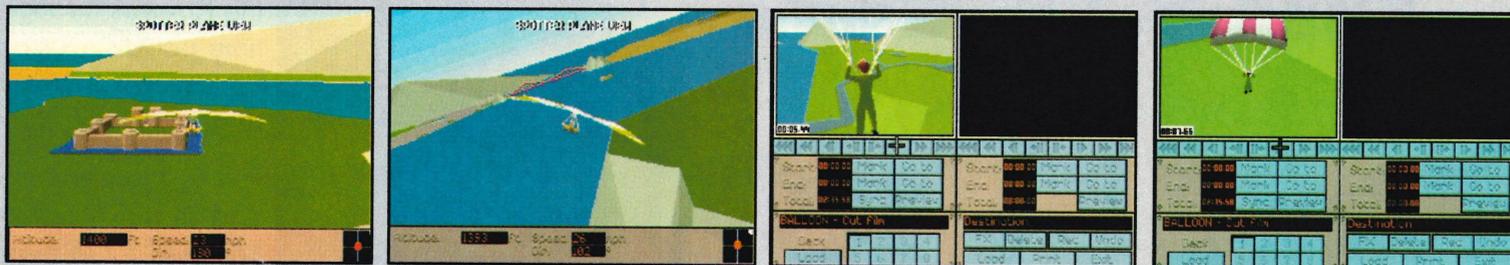
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STUNT FLYING

The pre-set stunts include Castlestorm, below left, in which you must hang-glide around the, er, mediaeval castle, and glide in through the front gates to land on the catapult. Apparently a stunt for a mediaeval farce. The two rightmost pictures are from Catch a Balloon; here you need to snag the red and white balloon which is carrying an explosive cargo and will blow the hot air balloon festival to smithereens if the guy's able to land. Political agitators, eh?



together or independently (for example, if you put a gun turret on top of a tank, you want the gun turret to spin round, but not to be left behind when the tank moves off). The program makes this aspect of things as clear as possible; it's not so much difficult as finicky and difficult to keep track of.

Filming, on the other hand, is comparatively easy. Choose 'fly stunt' from the 'set design' screen, and then select 'action-take'. Do your stuff as well as you can, and then save the take if you felt it was satisfactory (discard it if you crashed hideously, of course!). Now it's time to transform all this wonderful footage into your meaningful, action-packed, yet socially-aware movie.

Even if you start off with something fairly simple, it's surprising how pernickety you become in the post-production module, where you edit your footage and add sound and graphic effects. You wouldn't have thought that a simple 30 second video flying to the Golden Gate Bridge, describing a wide circle above it and then soaring off into the distance (my strikingly unambitious first attempt) would demand a lot in the way of editing, but, like the set design using the clip library objects, editing gets complicated.

In the editing suite you're presented with VCR-style controls for viewing your footage easily and options to mark the 'film' for editing or adding graphic and musical effects, and credits. Graphic effects include fading in or fading out images; sounds can include engine noise or explosions, or music — again from a library of tunes, most of which sound as though they had been first used on Miami Vice. Credits are simply typed in from the 'credits' option.

Finally, you can play your finished film in the Stunt Island cinema, where no matter if you prove to be more worthy of

Jeremy Beadle than Ridley Scott, the audience will give you a standing ovation. And after all that flying, set design, filming and editing, you'll deserve it.

Stunt Island is really two programs wrapped in one. There's the stunt flying, which is terrific fun so long as you regard it as a flying game rather than a flight simulation, and then there's the film direction side of things.

Building your own stunt scenes and editing the footage is a complex business, which the game's interface does its best to simplify. The main menu makes the screen look as much like a studio backlot as possible, with signposts directing you to production and post-production houses, your cabin, the airfield or the ferry on which you can leave Stunt Island (ie, quit to DOS). The polygonal action graphics are clear and fast-moving, so that you really do get the impression of flying by the seat of your pants at times,

while the editing suite functions are icon-controlled. Mention should also be made of the superb speech with SoundBlaster and Sound Source cards, which adds to the atmosphere of the game.

Stunt Island is limited only by the user's imagination and perseverance. While the idea of making films of your progress is fascinating there's a certain amount of learning and trial and error to be experienced before you create something you can really feel proud of (unless, of course, you *are* Ridley Scott).

Already, Infogrames is talking about add-on disks for later in the year with yet more aircraft, new stunts and probably some additional tools as well. This is assuming that you've milked the existing features dry of excitement by then, which is unlikely. Stunt Island is one of the freshest, most intriguing releases we've seen for a long time.

■ Tom Schmidt

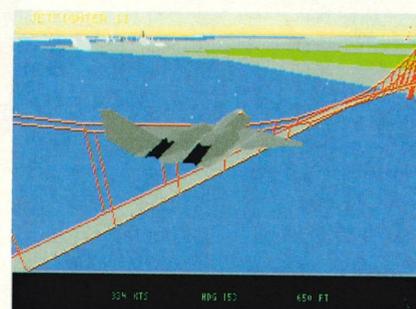
Alternatively...



3D Construction Kit 2.0
Domark, £49.99

Rated 6, Issue 16

There's nothing on the market directly comparable to Stunt Island, but if you like the sound of creating your own environments and animating objects within them, 3DCK 2.0 takes this a few stages further. It can be either a tool for devising your own 'virtual worlds', or a game designer for creating simple polygon-based games. Very technical, though.



Jetfighter 2
Velocity/US Gold, £45.99

The other part of Stunt Island is the stunt flying aspect, and if an easy to play flying game is more your idea of fun, Jetfighter 2 could well fit the bill. There's nothing too technical or manically authentic here: you can fly without too much learning to begin with, and of course, shoot down everything that moves on a range of missions. It's graphically impressive as well, in a style similar to Stunt Island.